

E.F.
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A dark, atmospheric photograph of a hallway. In the foreground, several figures are silhouetted against a bright, hazy light source. The figures appear to be carrying bags or equipment, suggesting they might be travelers or workers. In the background, two windows with blinds are visible, through which some light and foliage can be seen. The overall mood is mysterious and slightly unsettling, fitting the 'spook stories' theme.

SPOOK
STORIES
COLLECTION

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Spook Stories Collection

25 Supernatural, Mystery, Ghost and Haunting Tales

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Spook Stories

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Reconciliation

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Garth Place lies low in a dip of the hills which, north, east, and west, enclose its sequestered valley, as in the palm of a hollowed hand. To the south the valley broadens out and the encompassing hills merge themselves into the wide strip of flat country once reclaimed from the sea, and now, with intersections of drainage dykes, forming the fat pasture of the scattered farms. Thick woods of beech and oak, which climb the hillsides above the house up to the top of the ridge, give it further shelter, and it dozes in a soft and sundered climate of its own when the bleak uplands above it are swept by the east winds of spring or the northerly blasts of winter; and, sitting in its terraced garden in the mild sunshine of a clear December day, you may hear the gale roaring through the tree-tops on the upper slopes, and see the clouds scudding high above you, yet never feel a breath of the wind that shreds them seawards. The clearings in these woods are thick with anemones and full-blown clumps of primroses a month before the tiniest bud has appeared in the copses of the upland, and its gardens are still bright with the red blossoms of the autumn long after the flower-borders in the village that huddles on the hill-top to the west have been blackened by the frosts. Only when the south wind blows is its tranquillity disturbed, and then the sound of the waves is heard, and the wind is salt with the sea.

The house itself dates from the beginning of the seventeenth century, and has miraculously escaped the destructive hand of the restorer. Its three low storeys are built of the grey stone of the district, the roof is made of thin

slabs of the same, between which the blown seeds have found anchorage, and the broad mullioned windows are many-paned. Never a creak comes from its oaken floors, solid and broad are its staircases, its panelling is as firm as the walls in which it is laid. A faint odour of wood smoke from the centuries of fires that have burned on its open hearths pervades it, that and an extraordinary silence. A man who lay awake all night in one of its chambers would hear no whisper of cracking wood-work, or rattling pane, and all night long there would come to his listening ears no sound from outside but the hoot of the tawny owl, or in June the music of the nightingale. At the back a strip of garden has been anciently levelled out of the hillside, in front the slope has been built up to form a couple of terraces. Below, a spring feeds a small sheet of water, bordered by marshy ground set with tufts of rushes, and out of it a stream much stifled in herbage wanders exiguously past the kitchen garden, and joins the slow-flowing little river which, after a couple of miles of lazy travel, debouches through broadening mud-flats into the English Channel. Along the further margin of the stream a footpath with right-of-way leads from the village of Garth on the hill above to the main road across the plain. Just below the house a small stone bridge with a gate crosses the stream and gives access to this footpath.

I first saw the house to which now for so many years I have been a constant visitor when I was an undergraduate at Cambridge. Hugh Verrall, the only son of its widowed owner, was a friend of mine, and he proposed to me one August that we should have a month there together. His father, he explained, was spending the next six weeks at a foreign health resort. Mine, so he understood, was tied in London, and this really seemed a more agreeable way of getting through August than that he should inhabit his house in melancholy solitude, and that I should stew in town. So if the notion at all appealed to me, I had but to get

the parental permission; it had already received his father's sanction. Hugh, in fact, produced Mr. Verrall's letter in which he stated his views as to his son's disposal of his time with great lucidity.

"I won't have you hanging about at Marienbad all August," he said, "for you'll only get into mischief, and spend the rest of your allowance for the year. Besides, there's your work to think of; you didn't do a stroke, so your tutor informed me, all last term, so you'd better make up for it now. Go down to Garth, and get some pleasant, idle scamp like yourself to stay with you, and then you'll have to work, for you won't find anything else to do! Besides, nobody wants to do anything at Garth."

"All right, the idle scamp will come," said I. I knew my father didn't want me to be in London, either.

"Mark you, the idle scamp has to be pleasant," said Hugh. "Well, you'll come anyhow; that's ripping. You'll see what my father means by not wanting to do anything. That's Garth."

The end of the next week saw us installed there, and never in all the first sights of the various splendours of the world that have since then been accorded to me, have I felt so magical and potent a spell as that which caught the breath in my throat when on the evening of that hot August day I first saw Garth. For a mile before the road had lain through the woods that clothe the slope above it; from there my cab emerged as from a tunnel, and there in the clear twilight, with sunset flaming overhead, was the long grey façade, with the green lawns about it, and its air of antique and native tranquillity. It seemed an incarnation of the very soul and spirit of England: there in the south was the line of sea, and all round it the immemorial woods. Like its oaks, like the velvet of its lawns, the house had grown from the very soil, and the life of the soil still richly nurtured it. Venice was not more authentically born from the sea, nor Egypt

from the mystery of the Nile, than Garth was born from the woods of England.

There was time for a stroll round before dinner, and Hugh casually recounted the history of it. His forebears had owned it since the time of Queen Anne.

"But we're interlopers," he said, "and not very creditable ones. Before that, my people had been tenants of the farm you passed at the top of the hill, and the Garths were in possession. It was a Garth who built the house in the reign of Elizabeth."

"Ah, then you've got a ghost," I said. "That makes it quite complete. Don't tell me that there isn't a Garth who haunts the house?"

"Anything to oblige," said he, "but that I am afraid I can't manage for you. You're too late: a hundred years ago it certainly was supposed to be haunted by a Garth."

"And then?" I asked.

"Well, I know nothing about spooks, but it looks as if the haunt wore itself out. It must be tiresome, you know, for a spirit to be chained to a place, and have to walk about the garden in the evening, and patrol the passages and bedrooms at night, if nobody pays any attention to it. My forebears didn't care the least, it appears, whether the ghost haunted the place or not. In consequence, it evaporated."

"And whose ghost was it supposed to be?" I asked.

"The ghost of the last Garth, who lived here in the time of Queen Anne. What happened was this. A younger son of my family, Hugh Verrall—same name as me—went up to London to seek his fortune. He made a lot of money in a very short time, and when he was a middle-aged man he retired, and took it into his head that he would like to be a country gentleman with an estate of his own. He was always fond of this country, and came to live at a house in the village up there, while he looked about, and no doubt he had ulterior purposes. For Garth Place was at that time in the hands of a

wild fellow called Francis Garth, a drunkard and a great gambler, and Hugh Verrall used to come down here night after night and thoroughly fleece him. Francis had one daughter, who of course was heiress to the place; and at first Hugh made up to her with the idea of marrying her, but when that was no use, he took to the other way of getting hold of it. Eventually, in the fine traditional manner, Francis Garth, who by that time owed my ancestor something like thirty thousand pounds, staked the Garth property against his debt and lost. There was a tremendous excitement over it, with stories of loaded dice and marked cards, but nothing could be proved, and Hugh evicted Francis and took possession. Francis lived for some years yet, in a labourer's cottage in the village, and every evening he used to walk down the path there, and standing opposite the house, curse the inhabitants. At his death, the haunt began, and then, simply it died out."

"Perhaps it's storing force," I suggested. "Perhaps it's intending to come out strong again. You ought to have a ghost here, you know."

"Not a trace of one, I'm afraid," said Hugh; "or I wonder if you'll think there is still a trace of it. But it's such a silly trace that I'm almost ashamed to tell you about it."

"Go on quickly," said I.

He pointed up to the gable above the front door. Underneath it, in an angle formed by the roof, there was a big square stone, evidently of later date than the wall. The surface of it was in contrast to the rest of the wall, much crumbled, but it had evidently been carved, and the shape of a heraldic shield could be seen on it, though of the arms it carried there was nothing left.

"It's too silly," said Hugh, "but it is a fact that my father remembers that stone being placed there. His father put it up, and it bore our coat of arms: you can just see the shape of the shield. But, though it was of the stone of the district, exactly like the rest of the house, it had hardly been put up

when the surface began to decay, and in ten years our arms were absolutely obliterated. Odd, that just that one stone should have perished so quickly, when all the rest really seems to have defied time."

I laughed.

"That's Francis Garth's work beyond a doubt," I said. "There's life in the old dog yet."

"Sometimes I think there is," he said. "Mind you, I've never seen or heard anything here which is in the smallest way suggestive of spooks, but constantly I feel that there is something here that waits and watches. It never manifests itself, but it's there."

As he spoke, I caught some faint psychical glimpse of what he meant. There was something there, something sinister and malevolent. But the impression was of the most momentary sort; hardly had it conveyed itself to me when it vanished again, and the amazing beauty and friendliness of the house overwhelmingly reasserted itself. If ever there was an abode of ancient peace, it was here.

We settled down at once into a delightful existence. Being very great friends, we were completely at ease with each other; we talked as we felt disposed but if a silence fell there was no constraint about it, and it would continue, perfectly happily, till one of us was moved to speak again. In the morning for three hours or so we applied ourselves very studiously to our books, but by lunch-time they were closed for the day, and we would walk across the marsh for a swim in the sea or stray through the woods, or play bowls on the lawn behind the house. The weather, blazing hot, predisposed to laziness, and in that cupped hollow of the hills, where the house stood, it was almost impossible to remember what it felt like to be energetic. But, as Hugh's father had indicated, that was the proper state of body and mind to be in when you resided at Garth. You must be sleepy and hungry and well, but without desires or energies; life moved along there as on some lotus-eater's shore, very

softly and quietly without disturbance. To be lazy without scruple or compunction but with a purring content was to act in accordance with the spirit of Garth. But, as the days went on, I knew that below this content there was something in us both that grew ever more alert and watchful for that which was watching us.

We had been there about a week when on an afternoon of still and sultry heat, we went down to the sea for a dip before dinner. There was clearly a storm coming up, but it seemed possible to get a bathe and return before it broke. It came up, however, more quickly than we had thought, and we were still a mile from home when the rain began, heavy and windless. The clouds, which had spread right across the sky, made a darkness as of late twilight, and when we struck the little public footpath on the far side of the stream in front of the house, we were both drenched to the skin. Just as we got to the bridge I saw the figure of a man standing there, and it struck me at once as odd that he should wait out in this deluge and not seek shelter. He stood quite still looking towards the house, and as I passed him I had one good stare at his face and instantly knew that I had seen a face very like it before, though I could not localise my memory. He was of middle-age, clean-shaven, and there was something curiously sinister about that lean, dark-skinned profile.

However, it was no business of mine if a stranger chose to stand out in the rain and look at Garth Place, and I went on a dozen steps, and then spoke to Hugh in a low voice.

"I wonder what that man's doing there," I said.

"Man? What man?" said Hugh.

"The man by the bridge whom we passed just now," I said.

He turned round to look.

"There's no one there," he said.

Now it seemed quite impossible that this stranger who had certainly been there so few seconds ago, could have

vanished into the darkness, thick as it was, and at that moment for the first time it occurred to me that this was no creature of flesh and blood into whose face I had looked. But Hugh had hardly spoken when he pointed to the path up which we had come.

"Yes, there is someone there," he said. "Odd that I didn't see him as we passed. But if he likes to stand about in the rain, I suppose he can."

We went on quickly up to the house, and as I changed I cudgelled my brain to think when and where I had seen that face before. I knew it was quite lately, and I knew I had looked with interest at it. And then suddenly the solution came to me. I had never seen the man before, but only a picture of him, and that picture hung in the long gallery at the front of the house, into which Hugh had taken me the first day that I was here, but I had not been there since. Portraits of Verralls and Garths hung on the walls, and the portrait in question was that of Francis Garth. Before going downstairs I verified this, and there was no doubt whatever about it. The man whom I had passed on the bridge was the living image of him who, in the time of Anne, had forfeited the house to Hugh's ancestral namesake.

I said nothing about this identification to Hugh, for I did not want to put any suggestion into his mind. For his part, he made no further allusion to our encounter; it had evidently made no particular impression on him, and we spent the evening as usual. Next morning, we sat at our books in the parlour overlooking the bowling-green. After an hour's work, Hugh got up for a few minutes' relaxation, and strolled whistling, to the window. I was not following his movements with any attention, but I noticed that his whistling stopped in the middle of a phrase. Presently he spoke in rather a queer voice.

"Come here a minute," he said.

I joined him, and he pointed out of the window.

"Is that the man you saw yesterday by the bridge?" he said. There he was at the far end of the bowling-green looking straight at us.

"Yes, that's he," I said.

"I shall go and ask him what he's doing here," said Hugh. "Come with me!"

We went together out of the room and down the short passage to the garden door. The quiet sunlight slept on the grass, but there was no one there.

"That's queer," said Hugh. "That's very queer. Come up to the picture gallery a minute."

"There's no need," said I.

"So you've seen the likeness, too," he said. "I say—is it a likeness only, or is it Francis Garth? Whatever it is, it's that which is watching us."

The apparition which, from that time, we both thought and spoke of as Francis Garth, had now been seen twice. During the next week it seemed to be drawing nearer to the house that had once been its haunt, for Hugh saw it just outside the porch by the front door, and a day or two afterwards, as I sat at twilight in the room overlooking the bowling-alley waiting for him to come down to dinner, I saw it close outside the window looking narrowly into the room with malevolent scrutiny. Finally, a few days only before my visit here came to an end, as we returned one evening from a ramble in the woods, we saw it together, standing by the big open fireplace in the hall. This time its appearance was not momentary, for on our entry it remained where it was, taking no notice of us for perhaps ten seconds, and then moved away towards the far doorway. There it stopped and turned, looking directly at Hugh. At that he spoke to it, and without answer it passed out through the door. It had now definitely come inside; and from that time onwards was seen only within the house. Francis Garth had taken possession again.

Now I do not pretend that the sight of this apparition did not affect my nerves. It affected them very unpleasantly; fright, perhaps, is too superficial a word with which to describe the effect it had on me. It was rather some still, dark horror of the spirit that closed over me, not (to be precise) at the moment when I actually saw it, but some few seconds before, so that I knew by this dire terror that invaded me that the apparition was about to manifest itself. But mingled with that was an intense interest and curiosity as to the nature of this strange visitant, who, though long dead, still wore the semblance of the living, and clothed itself in the body which had long crumbled to dust. Hugh, however, felt nothing of this; the spectre alarmed him as little now on its second inhabiting of the house, as it had alarmed those who lived here when first it appeared.

"And it's so interesting," he said, as he saw me off on the conclusion of my visit. "It's got some business here, but what can that business be? I'll let you know if there's any further development."

From that time onwards the ghost was constantly seen. It alarmed some people, it interested others, but it harmed none. Often during the next five years or so, I stayed there, and I do not think that any visit passed without my seeing it once or twice. But always to me its appearance was heralded by that terror of which I have spoken, in which neither Hugh nor his father shared. And then quite suddenly Hugh's father died. After the funeral, Hugh came up to London for interviews with lawyers and for the settlement of affairs connected with the will, and told me that his father was not nearly so well-off as had been supposed, and that he hardly knew if he could afford to live at Garth Place at all. He intended, however, to shut up part of the house, and with a greatly reduced household to attempt to continue there.

"I don't want to let it," he said; "in fact, I should hate to let it. And I don't really believe that there's much chance of

my being able to do so. The story of its being haunted is widely known now, and I don't fancy it would be very easy to get a tenant for it. However, I hope it won't be necessary."

But six months later he found that in spite of all economies it was no longer possible to live there, and one June I went down for a final visit, after which, unless he succeeded in getting a tenant, the house would be shut up.

"I can't tell you how I dislike having to go," he said, "but there's no help for it. And what are the ethics of letting a haunted house, do you think? Ought one to tell an intending tenant? I advertised the house last week in Country Life, and there's been an enquirer already. In fact, he's coming down with his daughter to see the house to-morrow morning. Name of Francis Jameson."

"I hope he'll hit it off with the other Francis," I said. "Have you seen him much lately?"

Hugh jumped up.

"Yes, fairly often," he said. "But there's an odd thing I want to show you. Come out of doors a minute."

He took me out to the front of the house, and pointed to the gable below which was the shield containing his obliterated arms.

"I'll give you no hint," he said. "But look at it and make any comment."

"There's something appearing there," said I. "I can see two bends crossing the shield, and some device between them."

"And you're sure you didn't see them there before?" he asked.

"I certainly thought the surface had quite perished," I said. "Of course, it can't have. Or have you had it restored?"

He laughed.

"I certainly haven't," he said. "In fact, what you see there isn't part of my arms at all, but the Garth arms."

"Nonsense. It's some chance cracks and weatherings that have come on the stone, rather regular, certainly, but accidental."

He laughed again.

"You don't really believe that," he said. "Nor do I, for that matter. It's Francis: Francis is busy."

I had gone up to the village next morning, over some small business, and as I came back down the footpath opposite the house saw a motor drive up to the door, and concluded that this was Mr. Jameson who had just arrived. I went indoors, and into the hall, and next moment was standing there with staring eyes and open mouth. For just inside were three people talking together: there was Hugh, there was a very charming-looking girl, obviously Miss Jameson, and the third, so my eyes told me, was Francis Garth. As surely as I had recognised the spectre as him whose portrait hung in the gallery, so surely was this man the living and human incarnation of the spectre itself. You could not say it was a likeness: it was an identity.

Hugh introduced me to his two visitors, and I saw in his glance that he had been through much the same experience as I. The interview and the inquiries had evidently only just begun, for after this little ceremony Mr. Jameson turned to Hugh again.

"But before we see the house or garden," he said, "there is one most important question I have to ask, and if your answer to that is unsatisfactory, I shall but waste your time in asking you to show me over."

I thought that some inquiry about the ghost was sure to follow, but was quite wrong. This paramount consideration was climate, and Mr. Jameson began explaining to Hugh with all the ardour of the invalid, his requirements. A warm, soft air, with an absence of easterly and northerly winds in winter, was what he was seeking for, a sheltered and sunny situation.

The replies to these questions were sufficiently satisfactory to warrant an inspection of the house, and presently all four of us were starting on our tour.

"Go on first, my dear Peggy, with Mr. Verrall," said Mr. Jameson to his daughter, "and leave me to follow a little more leisurely with this gentleman, if he will kindly give me his escort. We will receive our impressions independently, too, in that way."

It occurred to me once again that he wanted to make some inquiry about the house, and preferred to get his information not from the owner, but from someone who knew the place, but was in no way connected with the business of letting it. And again I waited to hear some questions about the ghost. But what came surprised me much more.

He waited, evidently with purpose, till the other two had passed some distance on, and then turned to me.

"Now a most extraordinary thing has happened," he said. "I have never set eyes on this house before, and yet I know it intimately. As soon as we came to the front door I knew what this room would be like, and I can tell you what we shall see when we follow the others. At the end of the passage up which they have gone there are two rooms, of which the one looks out on to a bowling-green behind the house, the other on to a path close below the windows, from which you can look into the room. A broad staircase ascends from there in two short flights to the first floor, there are bedrooms at the back, along the front runs a long panelled room with pictures. Beyond that again are two bedrooms with a bathroom in between. A smaller staircase, rather dark, ascends from there to the second floor. Is that correct?"

"Absolutely," said I.

"Now you mustn't think I've dreamed these things," he said. "They are in my consciousness, not as a dream at all, but as actual things I knew in my own life. And they are

accompanied by a feeling of hostility in my mind. I can tell you this also, that about two hundred years ago my ancestor in the direct line married a daughter of Francis Garth and assumed her arms. This is Garth Place. Was a family of Garth ever here, or is the house simply named after the village?"

"Francis Garth was the last of the Garths who lived here," said I. "He gambled the place away, losing it to the direct ancestor of the present owner; his name also was Hugh Verrall."

He looked at me a moment with a puzzled air, that gave his face a curiously sharp and malevolent expression.

"What does it all mean?" he said. "Are we dreaming or awake? And there's another thing I wanted to ask you. I have heard—it may be mere gossip—that the house is haunted. Can you tell me anything about that? Have you ever seen anything of the sort here? Let us call it a ghost, though I don't believe in the existence of such a thing. But have you ever seen any inexplicable appearance?"

"Yes, frequently," I said.

"And may I ask what it was?"

"Certainly. It was the apparition of the man of whom we have been speaking. At least, the first time I saw it I at once recognised it as the ghost—if I may use the word—of Francis Garth, whose portrait hangs in the gallery you have correctly described."

I hesitated a moment, wondering if I had better tell him that not only had I recognised the apparition from the portrait, but that I had recognised him from the apparition. He saw my hesitation.

"There is something more," he said.

I made up my mind.

"There is something more," I said, "but I think it would be better if you saw the portrait for yourself. Possibly it will tell you more directly and convincingly what that is."

We went up the stairs which he had described without first visiting the other rooms on the ground floor, from which I heard the voice of Hugh and his companion. There was no need for me to point out to Mr. Jameson the portrait of Francis Garth, for he went straight to it, and looked at it for a long while in silence. Then he turned to me.

"So it's I who ought to be able to tell you about the ghost," he said, "instead of your telling me."

The others joined us at this moment, and Miss Jameson came up to her father.

"Oh, Daddy, it's the most delicious home-like house," she said. "If you won't take it, I shall."

"Have a look at my portrait, Peggy," said he.

We changed partners after that, and presently Miss Peggy and I were strolling round the outside of the house while the others lingered within. Opposite the front door she stopped and looked up at the gable.

"Those arms," she said. "It's hard to make them out, and I suppose they're Mr. Verrall's? But they're wonderfully like my father's."

After we had lunched, Hugh and his proposed tenant had a private talk together, and soon after his visitors left.

"It's practically settled," he said as we turned back into the hall again after seeing them off. "Mr. Jameson wants a year's lease with option to renew. And now what do you make of it all?"

We talked it out lengthways and sideways and right way up, and upside down, and theory after theory was tried and found wanting, for some pieces seemed to fit together, but we could not dovetail them in with others. Eventually, after hours of talk, we reasoned it out, granting that it was all inexplicable, in a manner that may or may not commend itself to the reader, but seems to cover the facts and to present what I may perhaps call a uniform surface of inexplicability.

To start then at the beginning, shortly summing up the facts, Francis Garth, dispossessed, possibly with fraud, of his estate, had cursed the incomers and apparently haunted it after his death. Then came a long intermission from any ghostly visitant, and once more the haunt began again at the time when I first stayed here with Hugh. Then to-day there had come to the house a direct descendant of Francis Garth, who was the living image of the apparition we had both so constantly seen, which, by the portrait, was also identified with Francis Garth himself. And already, before Mr. Jameson had entered the house, he was familiar with it and knew what was within, its staircases and rooms and corridors, and remembered that he had often been here with hostility in his soul, even as we had seen hostility on the face of the apparition. What, then (here is the theory that slowly emerged), if we see in Francis Jameson some reincarnation of Francis Garth, purged, so to speak, of his ancient hostility, and coming back to the house which two hundred years ago was his home, and finding a home there once more? Certainly from that day no apparition, hostile and malevolent, has looked in through its windows, or walked in its bowling-alley.

In the sequel, too, I cannot help seeing some correspondence between what happened now and what happened when in the time of Anne Hugh Verrall took possession: here was what we may think of as the reverse of the coin that was hot-minted then. For now another Hugh Verrall, unwilling, for reasons that soon became very manifest, to leave the place altogether, established himself in a house in the village, even as his ancestor had done, and amazingly frequent were his visits to the home of his fathers, which was for the present the house of those whose family had owned it before the first of his forefathers came there. I see, too, a correspondence, which Hugh certainly would be the last to pass lightly over, in the fact that Francis Jameson, like Francis Garth, had a daughter. At that point,

however, I am bound to say that strict correspondence is rudely broken, for whereas Hugh Verrall the first had no luck when he went a-wooing the daughter of Francis Garth, a much better fortune attended the venture of Hugh Verrall the second. In fact, I have just returned from their marriage.

II

The Face

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Hester Ward, sitting by the open window on this hot afternoon in June, began seriously to argue with herself about the cloud of foreboding and depression which had encompassed her all day, and, very sensibly, she enumerated to herself the manifold causes for happiness in the fortunate circumstances of her life. She was young, she was extremely good-looking, she was well-off, she enjoyed excellent health, and above all, she had an adorable husband and two small, adorable children. There was no break, indeed, anywhere in the circle of prosperity which surrounded her, and had the wishing-cap been handed to her that moment by some beneficent fairy, she would have hesitated to put it on her head, for there was positively nothing that she could think of which would have been worthy of such solemnity. Moreover, she could not accuse herself of a want of appreciation of her blessings; she appreciated enormously, she enjoyed enormously, and she thoroughly wanted all those who so munificently contributed to her happiness to share in it.

She made a very deliberate review of these things, for she was really anxious, more anxious, indeed, than she admitted to herself, to find anything tangible which could possibly warrant this ominous feeling of approaching disaster. Then there was the weather to consider; for the last week London had been stiflingly hot, but if that was the cause, why had she not felt it before? Perhaps the effect of these broiling, airless days had been cumulative. That was an idea, but, frankly, it did not seem a very good one, for, as

a matter of fact, she loved the heat; Dick, who hated it, said that it was odd he should have fallen in love with a salamander.

She shifted her position, sitting up straight in this low window-seat, for she was intending to make a call on her courage. She had known from the moment she awoke this morning what it was that lay so heavy on her, and now, having done her best to shift the reason of her depression on to anything else, and having completely failed, she meant to look the thing in the face. She was ashamed of doing so, for the cause of this leaden mood of fear which held her in its grip, was so trivial, so fantastic, so excessively silly.

"Yes, there never was anything so silly," she said to herself. "I must look at it straight, and convince myself how silly it is." She paused a moment, clenching her hands.

"Now for it," she said.

She had had a dream the previous night, which, years ago, used to be familiar to her, for again and again when she was a child she had dreamed it. In itself the dream was nothing, but in those childish days, whenever she had this dream which had visited her last night, it was followed on the next night by another, which contained the source and the core of the horror, and she would awake screaming and struggling in the grip of overwhelming nightmare. For some ten years now she had not experienced it, and would have said that, though she remembered it, it had become dim and distant to her. But last night she had had that warning dream, which used to herald the visitation of the nightmare, and now that whole store-house of memory crammed as it was with bright things and beautiful contained nothing so vivid.

The warning dream, the curtain that was drawn up on the succeeding night, and disclosed the vision she dreaded, was simple and harmless enough in itself. She seemed to be walking on a high sandy cliff covered with short down-grass;

twenty yards to the left came the edge of this cliff, which sloped steeply down to the sea that lay at its foot. The path she followed led through fields bounded by low hedges, and mounted gradually upwards. She went through some half-dozen of these, climbing over the wooden stiles that gave communication; sheep grazed there, but she never saw another human being, and always it was dusk, as if evening was falling, and she had to hurry on, because someone (she knew not whom) was waiting for her, and had been waiting not a few minutes only, but for many years. Presently, as she mounted this slope, she saw in front of her a copse of stunted trees, growing crookedly under the continual pressure of the wind that blew from the sea, and when she saw those she knew her journey was nearly done, and that the nameless one, who had been waiting for her so long was somewhere close at hand. The path she followed was cut through this wood, and the slanting boughs of the trees on the sea-ward side almost roofed it in; it was like walking through a tunnel. Soon the trees in front began to grow thin, and she saw through them the grey tower of a lonely church. It stood in a graveyard, apparently long disused, and the body of the church, which lay between the tower and the edge of the cliff, was in ruins, roofless, and with gaping windows, round which ivy grew thickly.

At that point this prefatory dream always stopped. It was a troubled, uneasy dream, for there was over it the sense of dusk and of the man who had been waiting for her so long, but it was not of the order of nightmare. Many times in childhood had she experienced it, and perhaps it was the subconscious knowledge of the night that so surely followed it, which gave it its disquiet. And now last night it had come again, identical in every particular but one. For last night it seemed to her that in the course of these ten years which had intervened since last it had visited her, the glimpse of the church and churchyard was changed. The edge of the cliff had come nearer to the tower, so that it now was within

a yard or two of it, and the ruined body of the church, but for one broken arch that remained, had vanished. The sea had encroached, and for ten years had been busily eating at the cliff.

Hester knew well that it was this dream and this alone which had darkened the day for her, by reason of the nightmares that used to follow it, and, like a sensible woman, having looked it once in the face, she refused to admit into her mind any conscious calling-up of the sequel. If she let herself contemplate that, as likely or not the very thinking about it would be sufficient to ensure its return, and of one thing she was very certain, namely, that she didn't at all want it to do so. It was not like the confused jumble and jangle of ordinary nightmare, it was very simple, and she felt it concerned the nameless one who waited for her.... But she must not think of it; her whole will and intention was set on not thinking of it, and to aid her resolution, there was the rattle of Dick's latch-key in the front-door, and his voice calling her.

She went out into the little square front hall; there he was, strong and large, and wonderfully undreamlike.

"This heat's a scandal, it's an outrage, it's an abomination of desolation," he cried, vigorously mopping. "What have we done that Providence should place us in this frying-pan? Let us thwart him, Hester! Let us drive out of this inferno and have our dinner at—I'll whisper it so that he shan't overhear—at Hampton Court!"

She laughed: this plan suited her excellently. They would return late, after the distraction of a fresh scene; and dining out at night was both delicious and stupefying.

"The very thing," she said, "and I'm sure Providence didn't hear. Let's start now!"

"Rather. Any letters for me?"

He walked to the table where there were a few rather uninteresting-looking envelopes with half penny stamps.

"Ah, receipted bill," he said. "Just a reminder of one's folly in paying it. Circular ... unasked advice to invest in German marks.... Circular begging letter, beginning 'Dear Sir or Madam.' Such impertinence to ask one to subscribe to something without ascertaining one's sex.... Private view, portraits at the Walton Gallery.... Can't go: business meetings all day. You might like to have a look in, Hester. Some one told me there were some fine Vandycks. That's all: let's be off."

Hester spent a thoroughly reassuring evening, and though she thought of telling Dick about the dream that had so deeply imprinted itself on her consciousness all day, in order to hear the great laugh he would have given her for being such a goose, she refrained from doing so, since nothing that he could say would be so tonic to these fantastic fears as his general robustness. Besides, she would have to account for its disturbing effect, tell him that it was once familiar to her, and recount the sequel of the nightmares that followed. She would neither think of them, nor mention them: it was wiser by far just to soak herself in his extraordinary sanity, and wrap herself in his affection.... They dined out-of-doors at a river-side restaurant and strolled about afterwards, and it was very nearly midnight when, soothed with coolness and fresh air, and the vigour of his strong companionship, she let herself into the house, while he took the car back to the garage. And now she marvelled at the mood which had beset her all day, so distant and unreal had it become. She felt as if she had dreamed of shipwreck, and had awoke to find herself in some secure and sheltered garden where no tempest raged nor waves beat. But was there, ever so remotely, ever so dimly, the noise of far-off breakers somewhere?

He slept in the dressing-room which communicated with her bedroom, the door of which was left open for the sake of air and coolness, and she fell asleep almost as soon as her

light was out, and while his was still burning. And immediately she began to dream.

She was standing on the sea-shore; the tide was out, for level sands strewn with stranded jetsam glimmered in a dusk that was deepening into night. Though she had never seen the place it was awfully familiar to her. At the head of the beach there was a steep cliff of sand, and perched on the edge of it was a grey church tower. The sea must have encroached and undermined the body of the church, for tumbled blocks of masonry lay close to her at the bottom of the cliff, and there were gravestones there, while others still in place were silhouetted whitely against the sky. To the right of the church tower there was a wood of stunted trees, combed sideways by the prevalent sea-wind, and she knew that along the top of the cliff a few yards inland there lay a path through fields, with wooden stiles to climb, which led through a tunnel of trees and so out into the churchyard. All this she saw in a glance, and waited, looking at the sand-cliff crowned by the church tower, for the terror that was going to reveal itself. Already she knew what it was, and, as so many times before, she tried to run away. But the catalepsy of nightmare was already on her; frantically she strove to move, but her utmost endeavour could not raise a foot from the sand. Frantically she tried to look away from the sand-cliffs close in front of her, where in a moment now the horror would be manifested....

It came. There formed a pale oval light, the size of a man's face, dimly luminous in front of her and a few inches above the level of her eyes. It outlined itself, short reddish hair grew low on the forehead, below were two grey eyes, set very close together, which steadily and fixedly regarded her. On each side the ears stood noticeably away from the head, and the lines of the jaw met in a short pointed chin. The nose was straight and rather long, below it came a hairless lip, and last of all the mouth took shape and colour, and there lay the crowning terror. One side of it, soft-curved

and beautiful, trembled into a smile, the other side, thick and gathered together as by some physical deformity, sneered and lusted.

The whole face, dim at first, gradually focused itself into clear outline: it was pale and rather lean, the face of a young man. And then the lower lip dropped a little, showing the glint of teeth, and there was the sound of speech. "I shall soon come for you now," it said, and on the words it drew a little nearer to her, and the smile broadened. At that the full hot blast of nightmare poured in upon her. Again she tried to run, again she tried to scream, and now she could feel the breath of that terrible mouth upon her. Then with a crash and a rending like the tearing asunder of soul and body she broke the spell, and heard her own voice yelling, and felt with her fingers for the switch of her light. And then she saw that the room was not dark, for Dick's door was open, and the next moment, not yet undressed, he was with her.

"My darling, what is it?" he said. "What's the matter?"

She clung desperately to him, still distraught with terror.

"Ah, he has been here again," she cried. "He says he will soon come to me. Keep him away, Dick."

For one moment her fear infected him, and he found himself glancing round the room.

"But what do you mean?" he said. "No one has been here."

She raised her head from his shoulder.

"No, it was just a dream," she said. "But it was the old dream, and I was terrified. Why, you've not undressed yet. What time is it?"

"You haven't been in bed ten minutes, dear," he said. "You had hardly put out your light when I heard you screaming."

She shuddered.

"Ah, it's awful," she said. "And he will come again...."

He sat down by her.

"Now tell me all about it," he said.

She shook her head.

"No, it will never do to talk about it," she said, "it will only make it more real. I suppose the children are all right, are they?"

"Of course they are. I looked in on my way upstairs."

"That's good. But I'm better now, Dick. A dream hasn't anything real about it, has it? It doesn't mean anything?"

He was quite reassuring on this point, and soon she quieted down. Before he went to bed he looked in again on her, and she was asleep.

Hester had a stern interview with herself when Dick had gone down to his office next morning. She told herself that what she was afraid of was nothing more than her own fear. How many times had that ill-omened face come to her in dreams, and what significance had it ever proved to possess? Absolutely none at all, except to make her afraid. She was afraid where no fear was: she was guarded, sheltered, prosperous, and what if a nightmare of childhood returned? It had no more meaning now than it had then, and all those visitations of her childhood had passed away without trace.... And then, despite herself, she began thinking over that vision again. It was grimly identical with all its previous occurrences, except.... And then, with a sudden shrinking of the heart, she remembered that in earlier years those terrible lips had said: "I shall come for you when you are older," and last night they had said: "I shall soon come for you now." She remembered, too, that in the warning dream the sea had encroached, and it had now demolished the body of the church. There was an awful consistency about these two changes in the otherwise identical visions. The years had brought their change to them, for in the one the encroaching sea had brought down the body of the church, in the other the time was now near....