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“MOTHER!” came the startled whisper, “Mother! Oh, woman, waken and speak to me!”

No comforting answer came from the darkness to tell of a human being close at hand: the girl, intently listening, was alone with her fear. All was silent in the room and the terror deepened. Then the far-off sound in the house was heard once more.

“Mother—mother, what’s that?”

“What is it, Janet?” came a feebly complaining voice, “what’s wrong wi’ ye, lassie?”

Janet and her mother were sleeping in the big bedroom, Janet in the place that had been her father’s. He had been buried through the day, the second day after his murder. Mrs. Gourlay had shown a feverish anxiety to get the corpse out the house as soon as possible. And there had been nothing to prevent it. “Oh,” said Doctor Dandy to the gossips, “it would have killed any man to fall from such a height on to the sharp edge of yon fender.—No; he was not quite dead when I got to him. He opened his eyes on me, once—a terrible look—and then life went out of him with a great quiver.”

Ere Janet could answer her mother, she was seized with a racking cough, and her hoarse bark sounded hollow in the silence. At last she sat up and gasped fearfully, “I thoct—I thoct I heard something moving!”

“It would be the wind,” plained her mother; “it

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would just be the wind. John's asleep this stricken hour and mair. I sat by his bed for a lang while, and he prigged and prayed for a dose o' the whiskey ere he won away. He wouldna let go my hand till he slept, pair fallow. There's an unco fear on him—an unco fear. But try and fa' owre," she soothed her daughter. "That would just be the wind ye heard."

"There's nae wind!" said Janet.

The stair creaked. The two women clung to each other, gripping tight fingers, and their hearts throbbed like big separate beings in their breasts. There was a rustle, as of something coming, then the door opened, and John flitted to the bedside with a candle in his hand. Above his night shirt his bloodless face looked gray.

"Mother!" he panted, "there's something in my room!"

"What is it, John?" said his mother in surprise and fear.

"I—I thocht it was himsell! Oh, mother, I'm feared, I'm feared! Oh, mother, I'm *feared!*" He sang the words in a hysterical chant, his voice rising at the end.

The door of the bedroom clicked. It was not a slamming sound, only the door went to gently, as if someone closed it. John dropped the candle from his shaking hand, and was left standing in the living darkness.

"*Save me!*" he screamed, and leaped into the bed, burrowing down between the women till his head was covered by the bed clothes. He trembled so violently that the bed shook beneath them.

"Let me bide wi' ye!" he pleaded with chattering

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jaws. "Oh, let me bide wi' ye! I daurna gang back to that room by mysell again."

His mother put her thin arm round him. "Yes, dear," she said; "you may bide wi' us. Janet and me wouldna let anything harm you." She placed her hand on his brow caressingly. His hair was damp with a cold sweat. He reeked of alcohol.

Someone went through the Square playing a concertina. That sound of the careless world came strangely in upon their lonely tragedy. By contrast the cheerful silly noise, out there, seemed to intensify their darkness and isolation here. Occasional far-off shouts were heard from roysterers going home.

Mrs. Gourlay lay staring at the darkness with intent eyes. What horror might assail her she did not know, but she was ready to meet it for the sake of John. "Ye brought it on yoursell," she breathed once, as if defying an unseen accuser.

It was hours ere he slept, but at last a heavy sough told her he had found oblivion. "He's won owre," she murmured thankfully. At times he muttered in his sleep. And, at times, Janet coughed hoarsely at his ear.

"Janet, dinna hoast sae loud, woman! You'll waken your brotther."

Janet was silent. Then she choked—trying to stifle another cough.

"Woman!" said her mother complainingly, "that's surely an unco hoast ye hae!"

"Aye," said Janet, "it's a gey hoast."

Next morning Postie came clattering through the paved yard in his tacketty boots, and handed in a blue envelope at the back door with a business-like air, his

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ferretty eyes searching Mrs. Gourlay's face, as she took the letter from his hand. But she betrayed nothing to his curiosity since she knew nothing of her husband's affairs, and had no fear, therefore, of what the letter might portend. She received the missive with a vacant unconcern. It was addressed to "John Gourlay, Esquire." She turned it over in a silly puzzlement, and, "Janet!" she cried, "what am I to do wi' this?"

She shrank from opening a letter addressed to her dead tyrant, unless she had Janet by her side. It was so many years since he had allowed her to take an active interest in their common life (indeed he never had) that she was as helpless as a child.

"It's to faither," said Janet, "shall I waken John?"

"No, puir fellow, let him sleep," said his mother. "I stole in to look at him enow, and his face was unco wan-lying down on the pillow. I'll open the letter mysell, though, as your faither used to tell me, I never had a heid for business."

She broke the seal and Janet, looking over her shoulder, read aloud to her slower mind:

"Glasgow,

"March 12th 18—

"Sir,

"We desire once more to call your attention to the fact that the arrears of interest on the mortgage of your house have not been paid. Our client is unwilling to proceed to extremities, but unless you make some arrangement within a week, he will be forced to take the necessary steps to safeguard his interests.

"Yours faithfully,

"Brodie, Gurney & Yarrowby."

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Mrs. Gourlay sank into a chair, and the letter slipped from her upturned palm, lying slack upon her knee.

“Janet,” she said appealingly; “what’s this that has come on us? Does the house we live in, the House with the Green Shutters, not belong to us ainy more? Tell me, lassie. What does it mean?”

“I don’t ken,” whispered Janet with big eyes. “Did faither never tell ye of the bond?”

“He never telled me about anything,” cried Mrs. Gourlay with a sudden passion. “I was aye the one to be keepit in the dark—to be keepit in the dark and sore hadden doon. Oh! are we left destitute, Janet—and us was aye sae muckle thocht o’! And me, too, that’s come of decent folk, and brought him a gey pickle baw-bees! Am I to be on the parish in my auld age?—Oh, *my faither, my faither!*”

Her mind flashed back to the jocose and well-to-do father who had been but a blurred thought to her for twenty years. That his daughter should come to a pass like this was enough to make him turn in his grave. Janet was astonished by her sudden passion in feebleness. Even the murder of her husband had been met by her weak mind with a dazed resignation. For her natural horror at the deed was swallowed by her anxiety to shield the murderer; and she experienced a vague relief—felt, but not considered—at being freed from the incubus of Gourlay’s tyranny. It seemed, too, as if she was incapable of feeling anything poignantly, deadened now by these quick calamities. But that *she*, that Tenshillingland’s daughter, should come to be an object of common charity, touched some hidden nerve of pride, and made her writhe in agony.

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“It mayna be sae bad,” Janet tried to comfort her.

“Waken John,” said her mother feverishly, “waken John and we’ll gang through his faither’s dask. There may be something gude amang his papers. There may be something gude!” she gabbled nervously; “yes, there may be something gude! In the dask; in the dask; there may be something gude in the dask!”

John staggered into the kitchen five minutes later. Half way to the table where his mother sat, he reeled and fell over on a chair, where he lay with an ashen face, his eyes mere slits in his head, the upturned whites shewing through. They brought him whiskey, and he drank and was recovered. And then they went through to the parlour, and opened the great desk that stood in the corner. It was the first time they had ever dared to raise its lid. John took up a letter lying loosely on the top of the other papers, and, after a hasty glance, “This settles it!” said he. It was the note from Gourlay’s banker, warning him that his account was overdrawn.

“God help us!” cried Mrs. Gourlay, and Janet began to whimper. John slipped out of the room. He was still in his stocking-feet, and the women, dazed by this sudden and appalling news, were scarcely aware of his departure.

He passed through the kitchen, and stood on the step of the back door, looking out on the quiet little paved yard. Everything there was remarkably still and bright. It was an early spring that year, and the hot March sun beat down on him, paining his bleared and puffy eyes. The contrast between his own lump of a body, drink-dazed, dull-throbbing, and the warm bright day, came in on him with a sudden sinking of the heart, a sense

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of degradation and personal abasement. He realised, however obscurely, that he was an eyesore in nature, a blotch on the surface of the world, an offence to the sweet-breathing heavens. And that bright silence was so strange and still. He could have screamed to escape it.

The slow ticking of the kitchen clock seemed to beat upon his raw brain. Damn the thing, why didn't it stop—with its monotonous tick-tack; tick-tack; tick-tack?—he could feel it inside his head where it seemed to strike innumerable little blows, on a strained chord it was bent on snapping.

He tiptoed back to the kitchen on noiseless feet, and cocking his ear to listen, he heard the murmur of women's voices in the parlour. There was a look of slyness and cunning in his face; and his eyes glittered with desire. The whiskey was still on the table. He seized the bottle greedily, and, tilting it up, let the raw liquid gurgle into him like cooling water. It seemed to flood his parched being with a new vitality.

“Oh, I doubt we'll be gey ill-off!” he heard his mother's whine, and, at that reminder of her nearness, he checked the great satisfied breath he had begun to blow. He set the bottle on the table, bringing the glass noiselessly down upon the wood, with a tense, unnatural precision possible only to drink-steadied nerves—a steadiness like the humming top's whirled to its fastest. Then he sped silently through the courtyard and locked himself into the stable, chuckling in drunken triumph as he turned the key. He pitched forward on a litter of dirty straw, and in a moment, sleep came over his mind in a huge wave of darkness.



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An hour later he woke from a terrible dream, flinging his arms up, to ward off a face that had been pressing on his own. Were the eyes that had burned his brain still glaring above him? He looked about him in drunken wonder. From a sky-window a shaft of golden light came slanting into the loose-box, living with yellow notes in the dimness. The world seemed dead; he was alone in the silent building, and from without there was no sound. Then a panic terror flashed on his mind, that those eyes had actually been here—and were here with him still—where he was locked up with them alone. He strained his eyeballs in a horrified stare at vacancy. Then he shut them in terror, for why did he look? If he looked, the eyes might burn on him out of nothingness. The innocent air had become his enemy—pregnant with unseen terrors to glare at him. To breathe it stifled him; each draught of it was full of menace. With a shrill cry he dashed at the door, and felt in the clutch of his ghostly enemy when he failed to open it at once, breaking his nails on the baffling lock. He mowed and chattered and stamped, and tore at the lock, frustrate in fear. At last he was free! He broke into the kitchen where his mother sat weeping—she raised her eyes to see a dishevelled thing, with bits of straw scattered on his clothes and hair.

“Mother!” he screamed, “Mother!” and stopped suddenly, his starting eyes seeming to follow something in the room.

“What are ye glowering at, John?” she wailed.

“Thae damned e’en,” he said slowly, “they’re burning my soul! Look, look!” he cried, clutching her thin wrist, “see, there, there!—coming round by the dresser!



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A-ah!" he screamed in hoarse execration. "Would ye, then?"—and he hurled a great jug from the table at the pursuing unseen.

The jug struck the yellow face of the clock, and the glass jangled on the floor.

Mrs. Gourlay raised her arms, like a gaunt sibyl, and spoke to her Maker, quietly, as if He were a man before her in the room. "Ruin and murder," she said slowly; "and madness; and death at my nipple like a child! When will Ye be satisfied?"

Drucken Wabster's wife spread the news, of course, and that night it went humming through the town that young Gourlay had the horrors, and was throwing tumblers at his mother!

"Puir body!" said the baker, in the long-drawn tones of an infinite compassion; "puir body!"

"Aye," said Toddle drily, "he'll be wanting to put an end to *her* next, after killing his faither."

"Killing his faither?" said the baker with a quick look, "what do you mean?"

"Mean? Ou, I just mean what the doctor says! Gourlay was that mad at the drucken young swine that he got the 'plexies, fell aff the ladder, and felled himself deid! That's what I mean, no less!" said Toddle, nettled at the sharp question.

"Aye man! That accounts for't," said Tam Wylie. "It did seem queer Gourlay's dying the verra nicht the prodigal cam hame. He was a heavy man, too; he would come down with an infernal thud. It seems uncanny, though, it seems uncanny."

"Strange!" murmured another, and they looked at each other in silent wonder.

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“But will this be true, think ye?” said Brodie. “About the horrors, I mean. *Did* he throw the tumbler at his mother?”

“Lord, it’s true!” said Sandy Toddle. “I gaed into the kitchen, on purpose, to make sure o’ the matter with my own eyes. I let on I wanted to borrow auld Gourlay’s key-hole saw—I can tell ye he had a’ his orders—his tool-chest’s the finest I ever saw in my life! I mean to bid for some o’ yon when the rowp comes. Weel, as I was saying, I let on I wanted the wee saw, and went into the kitchen one end’s errand. The tumbler (Johnny Coe says it was a bottle, however; but I’m no avised o’ that—I spiered Webster’s wife, and I think my details are correct)—the tumbler went flying past his mother, and smashed the face o’ the eight-day. It happened about the mid-hour o’ the day. The clock had stoppit, I observed, at three and a half minutes to the twelve.”

“Hi!” cried the Deacon, “it’th a pity auld Gourlay wathna alive thith day!”

“Faith, aye,” cried Wylie. “*He* would have sorted him! *He* would have trimmed the young ruffian!”

“No doubt,” said the Deacon gravely; “no doubt. But it wath scarcely that I wath thinking of. Yah!” he grinned, “thith would have been a thlap in the face till him!”

Wylie looked at him for awhile with a white scunner in his face. He wore the musing and disgusted look of a man whose wounded mind retires within itself, to brood over a sight of unnatural cruelty. The Deacon grew uncomfortable beneath his sideward, estimating eye.

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“Deacon Allardyce, your heart’s black-rotten,” he said at last.

The Deacon blinked and was silent. Tam had summed him up. There was no appeal.

“John, dear,” said his mother that evening, “we’ll take the big sofa into our bedroom, and make up a grand bed for ye, and then we’ll be company to one another. Eh, dear?” she pleaded. “Winna that be a fine way? When you have Janet and me beside you, you winna be feared o’ ainything coming near you. You should gang to bed early, dear. A sleep would restore your mind.”

“I don’t mean to go to bed,” he said slowly. He spoke starily, with the same fixity in his voice and gaze. There was neither rise nor fall in his voice, only a dull level of intensity.

“You don’t mean to go to bed, John! What for, dear? Man, a sleep would calm your mind for ye.”

“Na-a-a!” he smiled, and shook his head like a cunning madman, who had detected her trying to get round him. “Na-a-a! No sleep for me—no sleep for me! I’m feared I would see the red e’en,” he whispered, “the red e’en; coming at me out o’ the darkness—the darkness!” he nodded, staring at her and breathing the word, “the darkness! the darkness! The darkness is the warst, mother,” he added in his natural voice, leaning forward as if he explained some simple curious thing of every day. “The darkness is the warst, you know. I’ve seen them in the broad licht, but in the lobby,” he whispered hoarsely; “in the lobby when it was dark; in the lobby they were terrible. Just twa e’en, and they aye

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keep thegither, though they're aye moving. That's why I canna pin them. And it's because I ken they're aye watching me, watching me, watching me, that I get so feared. They're red," he nodded and whispered, "they're red . . . they're red." His mouth gaped in horror, and he stared as if he saw them now.

He had boasted long ago of being able to see things inside his head; in his drunken hysteria he was to see them always. The vision he beheld against the darkness of his mind, projected itself, and glared at him. He was pursued by a spectre in his own brain, and for that reason there was no escape. Wherever he went it followed him.

"Oh man, John," wailed his mother, "what are ye feared for your faither's e'en for? He wouldna persecute his boy."

"Would he no?" he said slowly. "You ken yourself that he never liked me! And naebody could stand his glower. Oh, he was a terrible man, *my* faither! You could feel the passion in him when he stood still. He could throw himsel at ye without moving. And he's throwing himsel at *me* frae beyond the grave."

Mrs. Gourlay beat her desperate hands. Her feeble remonstrance was a snowflake on a hill, to the dull intensity of this conviction. So colossal was it that it gripped herself, and she glanced dreadfully across her shoulder. But, in spite of her fears, she must plead with him to save.

"Johnnie dear," she wept passionately, "there's no e'en! It's just the drink gars you think sae."

"No," he said dully; "the drink's my refuge. It's a kind thing, drink. It helps a body."

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“But, John, nobody believes in these things now-a-days. It’s just fancy in you. I wonder at a college-bred man like you giving heed to a when nonsense!”

“Ye ken yourself it was a by-word in the place that he would haunt the House with the Green Shutters.”

“God help me!” cried Mrs. Gourlay; “what am I to do?”

She piled up a great fire in the parlour, and the three poor creatures gathered round it for the night. (They were afraid to sit in the kitchen of an evening, for even the silent furniture seemed to talk of the murder it had witnessed.) John was on a carpet stool by his mother’s feet, his head resting on her knee.

They heard the rattle of Wilson’s brake as it swung over the town-head from Auchterwheeze, and the laughter of its jovial crew. They heard the town clock chiming the lonesome passage of the hours. A dog was barking in the street.

Gradually all other sounds died away.

“Mother,” said John, “lay your hand along my shouther, touching my neck. I want to be sure that you’re near me.”

“I’ll do that, my bairn,” said his mother. And soon he was asleep.

Janet was reading a novel. The children had their mother’s silly gift, a gift of the weak-minded, of forgetting their own duties and their own sorrows, in a vacant interest which they found in books. She had wrapped a piece of coarse red flannel round her head to comfort a swollen jaw, and her face appeared from within like a tallowy oval.

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"I didna get that story finished," said Mrs. Gourlay vacantly, staring at the fire open-mouthed, her mutch-strings dangling. It was the remark of a stricken mind that speaks vacantly of anything. "Does Herbert Montgomery marry Sir James's niece?"

"No," said Janet, "he's killed at the war. It's a gey pity of him, isn't it?—Oh, what's that?"

It was John talking in his sleep.

"I have killed my faither," he said slowly, pausing long between every phrase: "I have killed my faither . . . I have killed my faither. And he's foll-owing me, . . . he's foll-owing me . . . he's foll-owing me." It was the voice of a thing, not a man. It swelled and dwelt on the "follow," as if the horror of the pursuit made it moan. "He's foll-owing me . . . he's foll-owing me . . . he's foll-owing me. A face like a dark mist—and e'en like hell. Oh, they're foll-owing me . . . they're foll-owing me . . . they're foll-owing me!" His voice seemed to come from an infinite distance. It was like a lost soul moaning in a solitude.

The dog was barking in the street. A cry of the night came from far away.

That voice was as if a corpse opened its lips, and told of horrors beyond the grave. It brought the other world into the homely room, and made it all demoniac. The women felt the presence of the unknown. It was their own flesh and blood that spoke the words, and by their own quiet hearth. But hell seemed with them in the room.

Mrs. Gourlay drew back from John's head on her lap, as from something monstrous and unholy. But he moaned in deprivation, craving her support, and she

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edged nearer to supply his need. Possessed with a devil or no, he was her son.

“Mother!” gasped Janet suddenly, the white circles of her eyes staring from the red flannel, her voice hoarse with a new fear, “Mother, suppose—suppose he said that before anybody else!”

“Don’t mention’t,” cried her mother with sudden passion; “how daur ye, how daur ye? My God!” she broke down and wept, “they would hang him, so they would; they would hang *my* boy; they would take and hang *my* boy!”

They stared at each other wildly. John slept, his head twisted over on his mother’s knee, his eyes sunken, his mouth wide open.

“Mother,” Janet whispered, “you must send him away.”

“I have only three pounds in the world,” said Mrs. Gourlay—and she put her hand to her breast where it was, but winced as if a pain had bitten her.

“Send him away wi’t,” said Janet. “The furniture may bring something. And you and me can aye thole.”

In the morning Mrs. Gourlay brought two greasy notes to the table, and placed them in her son’s slack hand. He was saner now; he had slept off his drunken madness through the night.

“John,” she said in pitiful appeal, “you maunna stay here, laddie. Ye’ll gie up the drink when you’re away—will ye na?—and then thae e’en ye’re sae feared of ’ll no trouble you ony mair. Gang to Glasgow and see the lawyer folk about the bond. And, John dear,” she pleaded, “if there’s nothing left for us, you’ll try to work for Janet and me, will ye no? You’ve a grand edu-



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cation, and you'll surely get a place as a teacher or something; I'm sure you would make a grand teacher. Ye wouldna like to think of your mother trailing every week to the like of Wilson for an awmous, streaking out her auld hand for charity. The folk would stand in their doors to look at me, man—they would that—they would cry ben to each other to come oot and see Gourlay's wife gaun slinkin doon the brae. Doon the brae it would be," she repeated, "doon the brae it would be"—and her mind drifted away on the sorrowful future which her fear made so vivid and real. It was only John's going that roused her.

Thomas Brodie, glowering abroad from a shop door festooned in boots, his leather apron in front, and his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, as befitted an important man, saw young Gourlay pass the Cross with his bag in his hand, and dwindle up the road to the station.

"Where's *he* off to now?" he muttered, "there's something at the boddom o' this, if a body could find it out!"