



*Introduction to the
Short Story*

Reader

2022-2023

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THE GIFT OF THE MAGI

BY O. HENRY

ONE dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.

In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."

The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.

Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair

hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

"Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.

"I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

Down rippled the brown cascade.

"Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.

"Give it to me quick," said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.

When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.

Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.

"If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"

At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.

Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.

Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.

Della wriggled off the table and went for him.

"Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."

"You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.

"Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"

Jim looked about the room curiously.

"You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.

"You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"

Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.

Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.

“Don’t make any mistake, Dell,” he said, “about me. I don’t think there’s anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you’ll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first.”

White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.

For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: “My hair grows so fast, Jim!”

And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, “Oh, oh!”

Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.

“Isn’t it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You’ll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it.”

Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.

“Dell,” said he, “let’s put our Christmas presents away and keep ’em a while. They’re too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on.”

The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

THE LOTTERY

BY SHIRLEY JACKSON

The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. The people of the village began to gather in the square, between the post office and the bank, around ten o'clock; in some towns there were so many people that the lottery took two days and had to be started on June 26th, but in this village, where there were only about three hundred people, the whole lottery took less than two hours, so it could begin at ten o'clock in the morning and still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner.

The children assembled first, of course. School was recently over for the summer, and the feeling of liberty sat uneasily on most of them; they tended to gather together quietly for a while before they broke into boisterous play, and their talk was still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands. Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones; Bobby and Harry Jones and Dickie Delacroix-the villagers pronounced this name "Dellacroy" - eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square and guarded it against the raids of the other boys. The girls stood aside, talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders at the boys, and the very small children rolled in the dust or clung to the hands of their older brothers or sisters.

Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes. They stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed. The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk. They greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands. Soon the women, standing by their husbands, began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly, having to be called four or five times. Bobby Martin ducked under his mother's grasping hand and ran, laughing, back to the pile of stones. His father spoke up sharply, and Bobby came quickly and took his place between his father and his oldest brother.

The lottery was conducted-as were the square dances, the teen-age club, the Halloween program-by Mr. Summers, who had time and energy to devote to civic activities. He was a round-faced, jovial man and he ran the coal business, and people were sorry for him, because he had no children and his wife was a scold. When he arrived in the square, carrying the black wooden box, there was a murmur of conversation among the villagers, and he waved and called, "Little "late today, folks." The postmaster, Mr. Graves, followed him, carrying a three-legged stool, and the stool was put in the center of the square and Mr. Summers set the black box down on it. The villagers kept their distance, leaving a space between themselves and the stool, and when Mr. Summers said, "Some of you fellows want to give me a hand?" there was a hesitation before two men, Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, came forward to hold the box steady on the stool while Mr. Summers stirred up the papers inside it.

The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago, and the black box now resting on the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town, was born. Mr. Summers spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box. There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here.

Every year, after the lottery, Mr. Summers began talking again about a new box, but every year the subject was allowed to fade off without anything's being done. The black box grew shabbier each year;

by now it was no longer completely black but splintered badly along one side to show the original wood color, and in some places faded or stained.

Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, held the black box securely on the stool until Mr. Summers had stirred the papers thoroughly with his hand. Because so much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded, Mr. Summers had been successful in having slips of paper substituted for the chips of wood that had been used for generations. Chips of wood, Mr. Summers had argued, had been all very well when the village was tiny, but now that the population was more than three hundred and likely to keep on growing, it was necessary to use something that would fit more easily into the black box. The night before the lottery, Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves made up the slips of paper and put them in the box, and it was then taken to the safe of Mr. Summers' coal company and locked up until Mr. Summers was ready to take it to the square the next morning. The rest of the year, the box was put away, sometimes one place, sometimes another; it had spent one year in Mr. Graves' barn and another year underfoot in the post office, and sometimes it was set on a shelf in the Martin grocery and left there.

There was a great deal of fussing to be done before Mr. Summers declared the lottery open. There were the lists to make up of heads of families, heads of households in each family, members of each household in each family. There was the proper swearing in of Mr. Summers by the postmaster, as the official of the lottery; at one time, some people remembered, there had been a recital of some sort, performed by the official of the lottery, a perfunctory, tuneless chant that had been rattled off duly each year; some people believed that the official of the lottery used to stand just so when he said or sang it, others believed that he was supposed to walk among the people, but years and years ago this part of the ritual had been allowed to lapse. There had been, also, a ritual salute, which the official of the lottery had had to use in addressing each person who came up to draw from the box, but this also had changed with time, until now it was felt necessary only for the official to speak to each person approaching. Mr. Summers was very good at all this; in his clean white shirt and blue jeans, with one hand resting carelessly on the black box, he seemed very proper and important as he talked interminably to Mr. Graves and the Martins.

Just as Mr. Summers finally left off talking and turned to the assembled villagers, Mrs. Hutchinson came hurriedly along the path to the square, her sweater thrown over her shoulders, and slid into place in the back of the crowd. "Clean forget what day it 'Was," she said to Mrs. Delacroix, who stood next to her, and they both laughed softly. "Thought my old man was out back stacking wood," Mrs. Hutchinson went on, "and then I looked out the window and the kids were gone, and then I remembered it was the twenty-seventh and came a-running." She dried her hands on her apron, and Mrs. Delacroix said, "You're in time, though. They're still talking away up there."

Mrs. Hutchinson craned her neck to see through the crowd and found her husband and children standing near the front. She tapped Mrs. Delacroix on the arm as a farewell and began to make her way through the crowd. The people separated good-humoredly to let her through; two or three people said, in voices just loud enough to be heard across the crowd, "Here comes your Missus, Hutchinson," and "Bill, she made it after all." Mrs. Hutchinson reached her husband, and Mr. Summers, who had been waiting, said cheerfully, "Thought we were going to have to get on without you, Tessie." Mrs. Hutchinson said, grinning, "Wouldn't have me leave m'dishes in the sink, now, would you, Joe?" and soft laughter ran through the crowd as the people stirred back into position after Mrs. Hutchinson's arrival.

"Well, now," Mr. Summers said soberly, "guess we better get started, get this over with, so's we can go back to work. Anybody ain't here?"

"Dunbar," several people said. "Dunbar, Dunbar."

Mr. Summers consulted his list. "Clyde Dunbar," he said. "That's right. He's broke his leg, hasn't he? Who's drawing for him?"

"Me, I guess," a woman said, and Mr. Summers turned to look at her. "Wife draws for her husband," Mr. Summers said. "Don't you have a grown boy to do it for you, Janey?" Although Mr. Summers and everyone else in the village knew the answer perfectly well, it was the business of the official of the lottery to ask such questions formally. Mr. Summers waited with an expression of polite interest while Mrs. Dunbar answered.

"Horace's not but sixteen yet," Mrs. Dunbar said regretfully. "Guess I gotta fill in for the old man this year."

"Right," Mr. Summers said. He made a note on the list he was holding. Then he asked, "Watson boy drawing this year?"

A tall boy in the crowd raised his hand. "Here," he said. "I'm drawing for m' mother and me." He blinked his eyes nervously and ducked his head as several voices in the crowd said things like "Good fellow, Jack," and "Glad to see your mother's got a man to do it."

"Well," Mr. Summers said, "guess that's everyone. Old Man Warner make it?"

"Here," a voice said, and Mr. Summers nodded.

A sudden hush fell on the crowd as Mr. Summers cleared his throat and looked at the list. "All ready?" he called. "Now, I'll read the names-heads of families first-and the men come up and take a paper out of the box. Keep the paper folded in your hand without looking at it until everyone has had a turn. Everything clear?"

The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions; most of them were quiet, wetting their lips, not looking around. Then Mr. Summers raised one hand high and said, "Adams." A man disengaged himself from the crowd and came forward. "Hi, Steve," Mr. Summers said, and Mr. Adams said, "Hi, Joe." They grinned at one another humorlessly and nervously. Then Mr. Adams reached into the black box and took out a folded paper. He held it firmly by one corner as he turned and went hastily back to his place in the crowd, where he stood a little apart from his family, not looking down at his hand.

"Allen," Mr. Summers said. "Andrews . . . Bentham."

"Seems like there's no time at all between lotteries any more," Mrs. Delacroix said to Mrs. Graves in the back row. "Seems like we got through with the last one only last week."

"Time sure goes fast," Mrs. Graves said.

"Clark ... Delacroix."

"There goes m' yold man," Mrs. Delacroix said. She held her breath while her husband went forward.

"Dunbar," Mr. Summers said, and Mrs. Dunbar went steadily to the box while one of the women said, "Go on, Janey," and another said, "There she goes."

"We're next," Mrs. Graves said. She watched while Mr. Graves came around from the side of the box, greeted Mr. Summers gravely, and selected a slip of paper from the box. By now, all through the crowd there were men holding the small folded papers in their large hands, turning them over and over nervously. Mrs. Dunbar and her two sons stood together, Mrs. Dunbar holding the slip of paper.

"Harburt ... Hutchinson."

"Get up there, Bill," Mrs. Hutchinson said, and the people near her laughed.

"Jones."

"They do say," Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner, who stood next to him, "that over in the north village they're talking of giving up the lottery."

Old Man Warner snorted. "Pack of crazy fools," he said. "Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for *them*. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work any more, live *that* way for a while. Used to be a saying about 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.' First thing you know, we'd all be eating stewed chickweed and acorns. There's *always* been a lottery," he added petulantly. "Bad enough to see young Joe Summers up there joking with everybody."

"Some places have already quit lotteries," Mrs. Adams said.

"Nothing but trouble in *that*," Old Man Warner said stoutly. "Pack of young fools." ..

"Martin." And Bobby Martin watched his father go forward. "Overdyke ... Percy."

"I wish they'd hurry," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son. "I wish they'd hurry."

"They're almost through," her son said.

"You get ready to run tell Dad," Mrs. Dunbar said.

Mr. Summers called his own name and then stepped forward precisely and selected a slip from the box. Then he called, "Warner."

"Seventy-seventh year I been in the lottery," Old Man Warner said as he went through the crowd. "Seventy-seventh time."

"Watson." The tall boy came awkwardly fools," he said through the crowd. Someone said, "Don't be nervous, Jack," and Mr. Summers said, "Take your time, son."

"Zanini."

After that, there was a long pause, a breathless pause, until Mr. Summers, holding his slip of paper in the air, said, "All right, fellows." For a minute, no one moved, and then all the slips of paper were opened. Suddenly, all the women began to speak at once, saying, "Who is it?" "Who's got it?" "Is it the Dunbars?" "Is it the Watsons?" Then the voices began to say, "It's Hutchinson. It's Bill," "Bill Hutchinson's got it."

"Go tell your father," Mrs. Dunbar said to her older son.

People began to look around to see the Hutchinsons. Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand. Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, "You didn't give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn't fair."

"Be a good sport, Tessie," Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves said, "All of us took the same chance."

"Shut up, Tessie," Bill Hutchinson said.

"Well, everyone," Mr. Summers said, "that was done pretty fast, and now we've got to be hurrying a little more to get done in time." He consulted his next list. "Bill," he said, "you draw for the Hutchinson family. You got any other households in the Hutchinsons?"

"There's Don and Eva," Mrs. Hutchinson yelled. "Make them take their chance!"

"Daughters draw with their husbands' families, Tessie," Mr. Summers said gently. "You know that as well as anyone else."

"It wasn't *fair*," Tessie said.

"I guess not, Joe," Bill Hutchinson said regretfully. "My daughter draws with her husband's family, that's only fair. And I've got no other family except the kids."

"Then, as far as drawing for families is concerned, it's you," Mr. Summers said in explanation, "and as far as drawing for households is concerned, that's you, too. Right?"

"Right," Bill Hutchinson said.

"How many kids, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked formally.

"Three," Bill Hutchinson said. "There's Bill, Jr., and Nancy, and little Dave. And Tessie and me."

"All right, then," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you got their tickets back?"

Mr. Graves nodded and held up the slips of paper. "Put them in the box, then," Mr. Summers directed. "Take Bill's and put it in."

"I think we ought to start over," Mrs. Hutchinson said, as quietly as she could. "I tell you it wasn't *fair*. You didn't give him time enough to choose. *Everybody* saw that."

Mr. Graves had selected the five slips and put them in the box, and he dropped all the papers but those onto the ground, where the breeze caught them and lifted them off.

"Listen, everybody," Mrs. Hutchinson was saying to the people around her.

"Ready, Bill?" Mr. Summers asked, and Bill Hutchinson, with one quick glance around at his wife and children, nodded.

"Remember," Mr. Summers said, "take the slips and keep them folded until each person has taken one. Harry, you help little Dave." Mr. Graves took the hand of the little boy, who came willingly with him up to the box. "Take a paper out of the box, Davy," Mr. Summers said. Davy put his hand into the box and laughed. "Take just *one* paper," Mr. Summers said. "Harry you hold it for him." Mr. Graves took the child's hand and removed the folded paper from the tight fist and held it while little Dave stood next to him and looked up at him wonderingly.

"Nancy next," Mr. Summers said. Nancy was twelve, and her school friends breathed heavily as she went forward, switching her skirt, and took a slip daintily from the box. "Bill, Jr.," Mr. Summers said, and Billy, his face red and his feet over-large, nearly knocked the box over as he got a paper out. "Tessie," Mr. Summers said. She hesitated for a minute, looking around defiantly, and then set her lips and went up to the box. She snatched a paper out and held it behind her.

"Bill," Mr. Summers said, and Bill Hutchinson reached into the box and 'felt around, bringing his hand out at last with the slip of paper in it.

The crowd was quiet. A girl whispered, "I hope it's not Nancy," and the sound of the whisper reached the edges of the crowd.

"It's not the way it used to be," Old Man Warner said clearly. "People ain't the way they used to be."

"All right," Mr. Summers said. "Open the papers. Harry, you open little Dave's."

Mr. Graves opened the slip of paper and there was a general sigh through the crowd as he held it up and everyone could see that it was blank. Nancy and Bill, Jr., opened theirs at the same time, and both beamed and laughed, turning around to the crowd and holding their slips of paper above their heads.

"Tessie," Mr. Summers said. There was a pause, and then Mr. Summers looked at Bill Hutchinson, and Bill unfolded his paper and showed it. It was blank.

"It's Tessie," Mr. Summers said, and his voice was hushed. "Show us her paper, Bill."

Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal-company office. Bill Hutchinson held it up, and there was a stir in the crowd.

"All right, folks," Mr. Summers said. "Let's finish quickly."

Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones. The pile of stones the boys had made earlier was ready; there were stones on the ground with the blowing scraps of paper that had come out of the box. Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands and turned to Mrs. Dunbar. "Come on," she said. "Hurry up."

Mrs. Dunbar had small stones in both hands, and she said, gasping for breath, "I can't run at all. You'll have to go ahead and I'll catch up with you."

The children had stones already, and someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles.

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. "It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head.

Old Man Warner was saying, "Come on, come on, everyone." Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him.

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her.

TO BUILD A FIRE

BY JACK LONDON

Day had broken cold and grey, exceedingly cold and grey, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth-bank, where a dim and little-travelled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o'clock. There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun, and he knew that a few more days must pass before that cheerful orb, due south, would just peep above the sky-line and dip immediately from view.

The man flung a look back along the way he had come. The Yukon lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow. It was all pure white, rolling in gentle undulations where the ice-jams of the freeze-up had formed. North and south, as far as his eye could see, it was unbroken white, save for a dark hair-line that curved and twisted from around the spruce-covered island to the south, and that curved and twisted away into the north, where it disappeared behind another spruce-covered island. This dark hair-line was the trail—the main trail—that led south five hundred miles to the Chilcoot Pass, Dyea, and salt water; and that led north seventy miles to Dawson, and still on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael on Bering Sea, a thousand miles and half a thousand more.

But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hairline trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a new-comer in the land, a *chechaquo*, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe. Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear-flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that was a thought that never entered his head.

As he turned to go on, he spat speculatively. There was a sharp, explosive crackle that startled him. He spat again. And again, in the air, before it could fall to the snow, the spittle crackled. He knew that at fifty below spittle crackled on the snow, but this spittle had crackled in the air. Undoubtedly it was colder than fifty below—how much colder he did not know. But the temperature did not matter. He was bound for the old claim on the left fork of Henderson Creek, where the boys were already. They had come over across the divide from the Indian Creek country, while he had come the roundabout way to take a look at the possibilities of getting out logs in the spring from the islands in the Yukon. He would be in to camp by six o'clock; a bit after dark, it was true, but the boys would be there, a fire would be going, and a hot supper would be ready. As for lunch, he pressed his hand against the protruding bundle under his jacket. It was also under his shirt, wrapped up in a handkerchief and lying

against the naked skin. It was the only way to keep the biscuits from freezing. He smiled agreeably to himself as he thought of those biscuits, each cut open and sopped in bacon grease, and each enclosing a generous slice of fried bacon.

He plunged in among the big spruce trees. The trail was faint. A foot of snow had fallen since the last sled had passed over, and he was glad he was without a sled, travelling light. In fact, he carried nothing but the lunch wrapped in the handkerchief. He was surprised, however, at the cold. It certainly was cold, he concluded, as he rubbed his numbed nose and cheek-bones with his mittened hand. He was a warm-whiskered man, but the hair on his face did not protect the high cheek-bones and the eager nose that thrust itself aggressively into the frosty air.

At the man's heels trotted a dog, a big native husky, the proper wolf-dog, grey-coated and without any visible or temperamental difference from its brother, the wild wolf. The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew that it was no time for travelling. Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man's judgment. In reality, it was not merely colder than fifty below zero; it was colder than sixty below, than seventy below. It was seventy-five below zero. Since the freezing-point is thirty-two above zero, it meant that one hundred and seven degrees of frost obtained. The dog did not know anything about thermometers. Possibly in its brain there was no sharp consciousness of a condition of very cold such as was in the man's brain. But the brute had its instinct. It experienced a vague but menacing apprehension that subdued it and made it slink along at the man's heels, and that made it question eagerly every unwonted movement of the man as if expecting him to go into camp or to seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned fire, and it wanted fire, or else to burrow under the snow and cuddle its warmth away from the air.

The frozen moisture of its breathing had settled on its fur in a fine powder of frost, and especially were its jowls, muzzle, and eyelashes whitened by its crystallized breath. The man's red beard and moustache were likewise frosted, but more solidly, the deposit taking the form of ice and increasing with every warm, moist breath he exhaled. Also, the man was chewing tobacco, and the muzzle of ice held his lips so rigidly that he was unable to clear his chin when he expelled the juice. The result was that a crystal beard of the colour and solidity of amber was increasing its length on his chin. If he fell down it would shatter itself, like glass, into brittle fragments. But he did not mind the appendage. It was the penalty all tobacco-chewers paid in that country, and he had been out before in two cold snaps. They had not been so cold as this, he knew, but by the spirit thermometer at Sixty Mile he knew they had been registered at fifty below and at fifty-five.

He held on through the level stretch of woods for several miles, crossed a wide flat of nigger-heads, and dropped down a bank to the frozen bed of a small stream. This was Henderson Creek, and he knew he was ten miles from the forks. He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He was making four miles an hour, and he calculated that he would arrive at the forks at half-past twelve. He decided to celebrate that event by eating his lunch there.

The dog dropped in again at his heels, with a tail drooping discouragement, as the man swung along the creek-bed. The furrow of the old sled-trail was plainly visible, but a dozen inches of snow covered the marks of the last runners. In a month no man had come up or down that silent creek. The man held steadily on. He was not much given to thinking, and just then particularly he had nothing to think about save that he would eat lunch at the forks and that at six o'clock he would be in camp with the boys. There was nobody to talk to and, had there been, speech would have been impossible.

because of the ice-muzzle on his mouth. So he continued monotonously to chew tobacco and to increase the length of his amber beard.

Once in a while the thought reiterated itself that it was very cold and that he had never experienced such cold. As he walked along he rubbed his cheek-bones and nose with the back of his mittened hand. He did this automatically, now and again changing hands. But rub as he would, the instant he stopped his cheek-bones went numb, and the following instant the end of his nose went numb. He was sure to frost his cheeks; he knew that, and experienced a pang of regret that he had not devised a nose-strap of the sort Bud wore in cold snaps. Such a strap passed across the cheeks, as well, and saved them. But it didn't matter much, after all. What were frosted cheeks? A bit painful, that was all; they were never serious.

Empty as the man's mind was of thoughts, he was keenly observant, and he noticed the changes in the creek, the curves and bends and timber-jams, and always he sharply noted where he placed his feet. Once, coming around a bend, he shied abruptly, like a startled horse, curved away from the place where he had been walking, and retreated several paces back along the trail. The creek he knew was frozen clear to the bottom—no creek could contain water in that arctic winter—but he knew also that there were springs that bubbled out from the hillsides and ran along under the snow and on top the ice of the creek. He knew that the coldest snaps never froze these springs, and he knew likewise their danger. They were traps. They hid pools of water under the snow that might be three inches deep, or three feet. Sometimes a skin of ice half an inch thick covered them, and in turn was covered by the snow. Sometimes there were alternate layers of water and ice-skin, so that when one broke through he kept on breaking through for a while, sometimes wetting himself to the waist.

That was why he had shied in such panic. He had felt the give under his feet and heard the crackle of a snow-hidden ice-skin. And to get his feet wet in such a temperature meant trouble and danger. At the very least it meant delay, for he would be forced to stop and build a fire, and under its protection to bare his feet while he dried his socks and moccasins. He stood and studied the creek-bed and its banks, and decided that the flow of water came from the right. He reflected awhile, rubbing his nose and cheeks, then skirted to the left, stepping gingerly and testing the footing for each step. Once clear of the danger, he took a fresh chew of tobacco and swung along at his four-mile gait.

In the course of the next two hours he came upon several similar traps. Usually the snow above the hidden pools had a sunken, candied appearance that advertised the danger. Once again, however, he had a close call; and once, suspecting danger, he compelled the dog to go on in front. The dog did not want to go. It hung back until the man shoved it forward, and then it went quickly across the white, unbroken surface. Suddenly it broke through, floundered to one side, and got away to firmer footing. It had wet its forefeet and legs, and almost immediately the water that clung to it turned to ice. It made quick efforts to lick the ice off its legs, then dropped down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. This was a matter of instinct. To permit the ice to remain would mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the mysterious prompting that arose from the deep crypts of its being. But the man knew, having achieved a judgment on the subject, and he removed the mitten from his right hand and helped tear out the ice-particles. He did not expose his fingers more than a minute, and was astonished at the swift numbness that smote them. It certainly was cold. He pulled on the mitten hastily, and beat the hand savagely across his chest.

At twelve o'clock the day was at its brightest. Yet the sun was too far south on its winter journey to clear the horizon. The bulge of the earth intervened between it and Henderson Creek, where

the man walked under a clear sky at noon and cast no shadow. At half-past twelve, to the minute, he arrived at the forks of the creek. He was pleased at the speed he had made. If he kept it up, he would certainly be with the boys by six. He unbuttoned his jacket and shirt and drew forth his lunch. The action consumed no more than a quarter of a minute, yet in that brief moment the numbness laid hold of the exposed fingers. He did not put the mitten on, but, instead, struck the fingers a dozen sharp smashes against his leg. Then he sat down on a snow-covered log to eat. The sting that followed upon the striking of his fingers against his leg ceased so quickly that he was startled, he had had no chance to take a bite of biscuit. He struck the fingers repeatedly and returned them to the mitten, baring the other hand for the purpose of eating. He tried to take a mouthful, but the ice-muzzle prevented. He had forgotten to build a fire and thaw out. He chuckled at his foolishness, and as he chuckled he noted the numbness creeping into the exposed fingers. Also, he noted that the stinging which had first come to his toes when he sat down was already passing away. He wondered whether the toes were warm or numbed. He moved them inside the moccasins and decided that they were numbed.

He pulled the mitten on hurriedly and stood up. He was a bit frightened. He stamped up and down until the stinging returned into the feet. It certainly was cold, was his thought. That man from Sulphur Creek had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in the country. And he had laughed at him at the time! That showed one must not be too sure of things. There was no mistake about it, it was cold. He strode up and down, stamping his feet and thrashing his arms, until reassured by the returning warmth. Then he got out matches and proceeded to make a fire. From the undergrowth, where high water of the previous spring had lodged a supply of seasoned twigs, he got his firewood. Working carefully from a small beginning, he soon had a roaring fire, over which he thawed the ice from his face and in the protection of which he ate his biscuits. For the moment the cold of space was outwitted. The dog took satisfaction in the fire, stretching out close enough for warmth and far enough away to escape being singed.

When the man had finished, he filled his pipe and took his comfortable time over a smoke. Then he pulled on his mittens, settled the ear-flaps of his cap firmly about his ears, and took the creek trail up the left fork. The dog was disappointed and yearned back toward the fire. This man did not know cold. Possibly all the generations of his ancestry had been ignorant of cold, of real cold, of cold one hundred and seven degrees below freezing-point. But the dog knew; all its ancestry knew, and it had inherited the knowledge. And it knew that it was not good to walk abroad in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie snug in a hole in the snow and wait for a curtain of cloud to be drawn across the face of outer space whence this cold came. On the other hand, there was keen intimacy between the dog and the man. The one was the toil-slave of the other, and the only caresses it had ever received were the caresses of the whip-lash and of harsh and menacing throat-sounds that threatened the whip-lash. So the dog made no effort to communicate its apprehension to the man. It was not concerned in the welfare of the man; it was for its own sake that it yearned back toward the fire. But the man whistled, and spoke to it with the sound of whip-lashes, and the dog swung in at the man's heels and followed after.

The man took a chew of tobacco and proceeded to start a new amber beard. Also, his moist breath quickly powdered with white his moustache, eyebrows, and lashes. There did not seem to be so many springs on the left fork of the Henderson, and for half an hour the man saw no signs of any. And then it happened. At a place where there were no signs, where the soft, unbroken snow seemed to advertise solidity beneath, the man broke through. It was not deep. He wetted himself half-way to the knees before he floundered out to the firm crust.

He was angry, and cursed his luck aloud. He had hoped to get into camp with the boys at six o'clock, and this would delay him an hour, for he would have to build a fire and dry out his foot-gear. This was imperative at that low temperature—he knew that much; and he turned aside to the bank, which he climbed. On top, tangled in the underbrush about the trunks of several small spruce trees, was a high-water deposit of dry firewood—sticks and twigs principally, but also larger portions of seasoned branches and fine, dry, last-year's grasses. He threw down several large pieces on top of the snow. This served for a foundation and prevented the young flame from drowning itself in the snow it otherwise would melt. The flame he got by touching a match to a small shred of birch-bark that he took from his pocket. This burned even more readily than paper. Placing it on the foundation, he fed the young flame with wisps of dry grass and with the tiniest dry twigs.

He worked slowly and carefully, keenly aware of his danger. Gradually, as the flame grew stronger, he increased the size of the twigs with which he fed it. He squatted in the snow, pulling the twigs out from their entanglement in the brush and feeding directly to the flame. He knew there must be no failure. When it is seventy-five below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire—that is, if his feet are wet. If his feet are dry, and he fails, he can run along the trail for half a mile and restore his circulation. But the circulation of wet and freezing feet cannot be restored by running when it is seventy-five below. No matter how fast he runs, the wet feet will freeze the harder.

All this the man knew. The old-timer on Sulphur Creek had told him about it the previous fall, and now he was appreciating the advice. Already all sensation had gone out of his feet. To build the fire he had been forced to remove his mittens, and the fingers had quickly gone numb. His pace of four miles an hour had kept his heart pumping blood to the surface of his body and to all the extremities. But the instant he stopped, the action of the pump eased down. The cold of space smote the unprotected tip of the planet, and he, being on that unprotected tip, received the full force of the blow. The blood of his body recoiled before it. The blood was alive, like the dog, and like the dog it wanted to hide away and cover itself up from the fearful cold. So long as he walked four miles an hour, he pumped that blood, willy-nilly, to the surface; but now it ebbed away and sank down into the recesses of his body. The extremities were the first to feel its absence. His wet feet froze the faster, and his exposed fingers numbed the faster, though they had not yet begun to freeze. Nose and cheeks were already freezing, while the skin of all his body chilled as it lost its blood.

But he was safe. Toes and nose and cheeks would be only touched by the frost, for the fire was beginning to burn with strength. He was feeding it with twigs the size of his finger. In another minute he would be able to feed it with branches the size of his wrist, and then he could remove his wet foot-gear, and, while it dried, he could keep his naked feet warm by the fire, rubbing them at first, of course, with snow. The fire was a success. He was safe. He remembered the advice of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought. All a man had to do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone. But it was surprising, the rapidity with which his cheeks and nose were freezing. And he had not thought his fingers could go lifeless in so short a time. Lifeless they were, for he could scarcely make them move together to grip a twig, and they seemed remote from his body and from him. When he touched a twig, he had to look and see whether or not he had hold of it. The wires were pretty well down between him and his finger-ends.

All of which counted for little. There was the fire, snapping and crackling and promising life with every dancing flame. He started to untie his moccasins. They were coated with ice; the thick German socks were like sheaths of iron half-way to the knees; and the moccasin strings were like rods of steel all twisted and knotted as by some conflagration. For a moment he tugged with his numbed fingers, then, realizing the folly of it, he drew his sheath-knife.

But before he could cut the strings, it happened. It was his own fault or, rather, his mistake. He should not have built the fire under the spruce tree. He should have built it in the open. But it had been easier to pull the twigs from the brush and drop them directly on the fire. Now the tree under which he had done this carried a weight of snow on its boughs. No wind had blown for weeks, and each bough was fully freighted. Each time he had pulled a twig he had communicated a slight agitation to the tree—an imperceptible agitation, so far as he was concerned, but an agitation sufficient to bring about the disaster. High up in the tree one bough capsized its load of snow. This fell on the boughs beneath, capsizing them. This process continued, spreading out and involving the whole tree. It grew like an avalanche, and it descended without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was blotted out! Where it had burned was a mantle of fresh and disordered snow.

The man was shocked. It was as though he had just heard his own sentence of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right. If he had only had a trail-mate he would have been in no danger now. The trail-mate could have built the fire. Well, it was up to him to build the fire over again, and this second time there must be no failure. Even if he succeeded, he would most likely lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

Such were his thoughts, but he did not sit and think them. He was busy all the time they were passing through his mind, he made a new foundation for a fire, this time in the open; where no treacherous tree could blot it out. Next, he gathered dry grasses and tiny twigs from the high-water flotsam. He could not bring his fingers together to pull them out, but he was able to gather them by the handful. In this way he got many rotten twigs and bits of green moss that were undesirable, but it was the best he could do. He worked methodically, even collecting an armful of the larger branches to be used later when the fire gathered strength. And all the while the dog sat and watched him, a certain yearning wistfulness in its eyes, for it looked upon him as the fire-provider, and the fire was slow in coming.

When all was ready, the man reached in his pocket for a second piece of birch-bark. He knew the bark was there, and, though he could not feel it with his fingers, he could hear its crisp rustling as he fumbled for it. Try as he would, he could not clutch hold of it. And all the time, in his consciousness, was the knowledge that each instant his feet were freezing. This thought tended to put him in a panic, but he fought against it and kept calm. He pulled on his mittens with his teeth, and threshed his arms back and forth, beating his hands with all his might against his sides. He did this sitting down, and he stood up to do it; and all the while the dog sat in the snow, its wolf-brush of a tail curled around warmly over its forefeet, its sharp wolf-ears pricked forward intently as it watched the man. And the man as he beat and threshed with his arms and hands, felt a great surge of envy as he regarded the creature that was warm and secure in its natural covering.

After a time he was aware of the first far-away signals of sensation in his beaten fingers. The faint tingling grew stronger till it evolved into a stinging ache that was excruciating, but which the man hailed with satisfaction. He stripped the mitten from his right hand and fetched forth the birch-

bark. The exposed fingers were quickly going numb again. Next he brought out his bunch of sulphur matches. But the tremendous cold had already driven the life out of his fingers. In his effort to separate one match from the others, the whole bunch fell in the snow. He tried to pick it out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither touch nor clutch. He was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet; and nose, and cheeks, out of his mind, devoting his whole soul to the matches. He watched, using the sense of vision in place of that of touch, and when he saw his fingers on each side the bunch, he closed them—that is, he willed to close them, for the wires were drawn, and the fingers did not obey. He pulled the mitten on the right hand, and beat it fiercely against his knee. Then, with both mittened hands, he scooped the bunch of matches, along with much snow, into his lap. Yet he was no better off.

After some manipulation he managed to get the bunch between the heels of his mittened hands. In this fashion he carried it to his mouth. The ice crackled and snapped when by a violent effort he opened his mouth. He drew the lower jaw in, curled the upper lip out of the way, and scraped the bunch with his upper teeth in order to separate a match. He succeeded in getting one, which he dropped on his lap. He was no better off. He could not pick it up. Then he devised a way. He picked it up in his teeth and scratched it on his leg. Twenty times he scratched before he succeeded in lighting it. As it flamed he held it with his teeth to the birch-bark. But the burning brimstone went up his nostrils and into his lungs, causing him to cough spasmodically. The match fell into the snow and went out.

The old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that ensued: after fifty below, a man should travel with a partner. He beat his hands, but failed in exciting any sensation. Suddenly he bared both hands, removing the mittens with his teeth. He caught the whole bunch between the heels of his hands. His arm-muscles not being frozen enabled him to press the hand-heels tightly against the matches. Then he scratched the bunch along his leg. It flared into flame, seventy sulphur matches at once! There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the strangling fumes, and held the blazing bunch to the birch-bark. As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. Deep down below the surface he could feel it. The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. And still he endured it, holding the flame of the matches clumsily to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were in the way, absorbing most of the flame.

At last, when he could endure no more, he jerked his hands apart. The blazing matches fell sizzling into the snow, but the birch-bark was alight. He began laying dry grasses and the tiniest twigs on the flame. He could not pick and choose, for he had to lift the fuel between the heels of his hands. Small pieces of rotten wood and green moss clung to the twigs, and he bit them off as well as he could with his teeth. He cherished the flame carefully and awkwardly. It meant life, and it must not perish. The withdrawal of blood from the surface of his body now made him begin to shiver, and he grew more awkward. A large piece of green moss fell squarely on the little fire. He tried to poke it out with his fingers, but his shivering frame made him poke too far, and he disrupted the nucleus of the little fire, the burning grasses and tiny twigs separating and scattering. He tried to poke them together again, but in spite of the tenseness of the effort, his shivering got away with him, and the twigs were hopelessly scattered. Each twig gushed a puff of smoke and went out. The fire-provider had failed. As he looked apathetically about him, his eyes chanced on the dog, sitting across the ruins of the fire from him, in the snow, making restless, hunching movements, slightly lifting one forefoot and then the other, shifting its weight back and forth on them with wistful eagerness.

The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the tale of the man, caught in a blizzard, who killed a steer and crawled inside the carcass, and so was saved. He would kill the dog and bury his hands in the warm body until the numbness went out of them. Then he could build another fire. He spoke to the dog, calling it to him; but in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal, who had never known the man to speak in such way before. Something was the matter, and its suspicious nature sensed danger,—it knew not what danger but somewhere, somehow, in its brain arose an apprehension of the man. It flattened its ears down at the sound of the man's voice, and its restless, hunching movements and the liftings and shiftings of its forefeet became more pronounced but it would not come to the man. He got on his hands and knees and crawled toward the dog. This unusual posture again excited suspicion, and the animal sidled mincingly away.

The man sat up in the snow for a moment and struggled for calmness. Then he pulled on his mittens, by means of his teeth, and got upon his feet. He glanced down at first in order to assure himself that he was really standing up, for the absence of sensation in his feet left him unrelated to the earth. His erect position in itself started to drive the webs of suspicion from the dog's mind; and when he spoke peremptorily, with the sound of whip-lashes in his voice, the dog rendered its customary allegiance and came to him. As it came within reaching distance, the man lost his control. His arms flashed out to the dog, and he experienced genuine surprise when he discovered that his hands could not clutch, that there was neither bend nor feeling in the fingers. He had forgotten for the moment that they were frozen and that they were freezing more and more. All this happened quickly, and before the animal could get away, he encircled its body with his arms. He sat down in the snow, and in this fashion held the dog, while it snarled and whined and struggled.

But it was all he could do, hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his helpless hands he could neither draw nor hold his sheath-knife nor throttle the animal. He released it, and it plunged wildly away, with tail between its legs, and still snarling. It halted forty feet away and surveyed him curiously, with ears sharply pricked forward. The man looked down at his hands in order to locate them, and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. It struck him as curious that one should have to use his eyes in order to find out where his hands were. He began threshing his arms back and forth, beating the mittened hands against his sides. He did this for five minutes, violently, and his heart pumped enough blood up to the surface to put a stop to his shivering. But no sensation was aroused in the hands. He had an impression that they hung like weights on the ends of his arms, but when he tried to run the impression down, he could not find it.

A certain fear of death, dull and oppressive, came to him. This fear quickly became poignant as he realized that it was no longer a mere matter of freezing his fingers and toes, or of losing his hands and feet, but that it was a matter of life and death with the chances against him. This threw him into a panic, and he turned and ran up the creek-bed along the old, dim trail. The dog joined in behind and kept up with him. He ran blindly, without intention, in fear such as he had never known in his life. Slowly, as he ploughed and floundered through the snow, he began to see things again—the banks of the creek, the old timber-jams, the leafless aspens, and the sky. The running made him feel better. He did not shiver. Maybe, if he ran on, his feet would thaw out; and, anyway, if he ran far enough, he would reach camp and the boys. Without doubt he would lose some fingers and toes and some of his face; but the boys would take care of him, and save the rest of him when he got there. And at the same time there was another thought in his mind that said he would never get to the camp and the boys; that it was too many miles away, that the freezing had too great a start on him, and that he would soon be stiff and dead. This thought he kept in the background and refused to

consider. Sometimes it pushed itself forward and demanded to be heard, but he thrust it back and strove to think of other things.

It struck him as curious that he could run at all on feet so frozen that he could not feel them when they struck the earth and took the weight of his body. He seemed to himself to skim along above the surface and to have no connection with the earth. Somewhere he had once seen a winged Mercury, and he wondered if Mercury felt as he felt when skimming over the earth.

His theory of running until he reached camp and the boys had one flaw in it: he lacked the endurance. Several times he stumbled, and finally he tottered, crumpled up, and fell. When he tried to rise, he failed. He must sit and rest, he decided, and next time he would merely walk and keep on going. As he sat and regained his breath, he noted that he was feeling quite warm and comfortable. He was not shivering, and it even seemed that a warm glow had come to his chest and trunk. And yet, when he touched his nose or cheeks, there was no sensation. Running would not thaw them out. Nor would it thaw out his hands and feet. Then the thought came to him that the frozen portions of his body must be extending. He tried to keep this thought down, to forget it, to think of something else; he was aware of the panicky feeling that it caused, and he was afraid of the panic. But the thought asserted itself, and persisted, until it produced a vision of his body totally frozen. This was too much, and he made another wild run along the trail. Once he slowed down to a walk, but the thought of the freezing extending itself made him run again.

And all the time the dog ran with him, at his heels. When he fell down a second time, it curled its tail over its forefeet and sat in front of him facing him curiously eager and intent. The warmth and security of the animal angered him, and he cursed it till it flattened down its ears appeasingly. This time the shivering came more quickly upon the man. He was losing in his battle with the frost. It was creeping into his body from all sides. The thought of it drove him on, but he ran no more than a hundred feet, when he staggered and pitched headlong. It was his last panic. When he had recovered his breath and control, he sat up and entertained in his mind the conception of meeting death with dignity. However, the conception did not come to him in such terms. His idea of it was that he had been making a fool of himself, running around like a chicken with its head cut off—such was the simile that occurred to him. Well, he was bound to freeze anyway, and he might as well take it decently. With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.

He pictured the boys finding his body next day. Suddenly he found himself with them, coming along the trail and looking for himself. And, still with them, he came around a turn in the trail and found himself lying in the snow. He did not belong with himself any more, for even then he was out of himself, standing with the boys and looking at himself in the snow. It certainly was cold, was his thought. When he got back to the States he could tell the folks what real cold was. He drifted on from this to a vision of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek. He could see him quite clearly, warm and comfortable, and smoking a pipe.

“You were right, old hoss; you were right,” the man mumbled to the old-timer of Sulphur Creek.

Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known. The dog sat facing him and waiting. The brief day drew to a close in a long, slow twilight. There were no signs of a fire to be made, and, besides, never in the dog’s experience had it

known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire. As the twilight drew on, its eager yearning for the fire mastered it, and with a great lifting and shifting of forefeet, it whined softly, then flattened its ears down in anticipation of being chidden by the man. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food-providers and fire-providers.

TELL TALE HEART

BY EDGAR ALLEN POE

TRUE!—nervous—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily—how calmly I can tell you the whole story.

It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! He had the eye of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.

Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded—with what caution—with what foresight—with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him. And every night, about midnight, I turned the latch of his door and opened it—oh so gently! And then, when I had made an opening sufficient for my head, I put in a dark lantern, all closed, closed, that no light shone out, and then I thrust in my head. Oh, you would have laughed to see how cunningly I thrust it in! I moved it slowly—very, very slowly, so that I might not disturb the old man's sleep. It took me an hour to place my whole head within the opening so far that I could see him as he lay upon his bed. Ha! would a madman have been so wise as this? And then, when my head was well in the room, I undid the lantern cautiously—oh, so cautiously—cautiously (for the hinges creaked)—I undid it just so much that a single thin ray fell upon the vulture eye. And this I did for seven long nights—every night just at midnight—but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who vexed me, but his Evil Eye. And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he has passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.

Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers—of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back—but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness, (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers,) and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing it on steadily, steadily.

I had my head in, and was about to open the lantern, when my thumb slipped upon the tin fastening, and the old man sprang up in bed, crying out—"Who's there?"

I kept quite still and said nothing. For a whole hour I did not move a muscle, and in the meantime I did not hear him lie down. He was still sitting up in the bed listening;—just as I have done, night after night, hearkening to the death watches in the wall.

Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or of grief—oh, no!—it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well. I knew what the old man felt, and pitied him, although I chuckled at heart. I knew that he had been lying awake ever since the first slight noise, when he had turned in the bed. His fears had been ever since growing upon him. He had been trying to fancy them causeless, but could not. He had been saying to himself—"It is nothing but the wind in the chimney—it is only a mouse crossing the floor," or "It is merely a cricket which has made a single chirp." Yes, he had been trying to comfort himself with these suppositions: but he had found all in vain. All in vain; because Death, in approaching him had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim. And it was the mournful influence of the unperceived shadow that caused him to feel—although he neither saw nor heard—to feel the presence of my head within the room.

When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little—a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it—you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily—until, at length a simple dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and fell full upon the vulture eye.

It was open—wide, wide open—and I grew furious as I gazed upon it. I saw it with perfect distinctness—all a dull blue, with a hideous veil over it that chilled the very marrow in my bones; but I could see nothing else of the old man's face or person: for I had directed the ray as if by instinct, precisely upon the damned spot.

And have I not told you that what you mistake for madness is but over-acuteness of the sense?—now, I say, there came to my ears a low, dull, quick sound, such as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I knew that sound well, too. It was the beating of the old man's heart. It increased my fury, as the beating of a drum stimulates the soldier into courage.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment!—do you mark me well I have told you that I am nervous: so I am. And now at the dead hour of the night, amid the dreadful silence of that old house, so strange a noise as this excited me to uncontrollable terror. Yet, for some minutes longer I refrained and stood still. But the beating grew louder, louder! I thought the heart must burst. And now a new anxiety seized me—the sound would be heard by a neighbour! The old man's hour had come! With a loud yell, I threw open the lantern and leaped into the room. He shrieked once—once only. In an instant I dragged him to the floor, and pulled the heavy bed over him. I then smiled gaily, to find the deed so far done. But, for many minutes, the heart beat on with a muffled sound. This, however, did not vex me; it would not be heard through the wall. At length it ceased. The old man was dead. I removed the bed and examined the corpse. Yes, he was stone, stone dead. I placed my hand upon the heart and held it there many minutes. There was no pulsation. He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more.

If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs.

I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber, and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye—not even his—could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind—no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all—ha! ha!

When I had made an end of these labors, it was four o'clock—still dark as midnight. As the bell sounded the hour, there came a knocking at the street door. I went down to open it with a light heart,—for what had I now to fear? There entered three men, who introduced themselves, with perfect suavity, as officers of the police. A shriek had been heard by a neighbour during the night; suspicion of foul play had been aroused; information had been lodged at the police office, and they (the officers) had been deputed to search the premises.

I smiled,—for what had I to fear? I bade the gentlemen welcome. The shriek, I said, was my own in a dream. The old man, I mentioned, was absent in the country. I took my visitors all over the house. I bade them search—search well. I led them, at length, to his chamber. I showed them his treasures, secure, undisturbed. In the enthusiasm of my confidence, I brought chairs into the room, and desired them here to rest from their fatigues, while I myself, in the wild audacity of my perfect triumph, placed my own seat upon the very spot beneath which reposed the corpse of the victim.

The officers were satisfied. My manner had convinced them. I was singularly at ease. They sat, and while I answered cheerily, they chatted of familiar things. But, ere long, I felt myself getting pale and wished them gone. My head ached, and I fancied a ringing in my ears: but still they sat and still chatted. The ringing became more distinct:—It continued and became more distinct: I talked more freely to get rid of the feeling: but it continued and gained definiteness—until, at length, I found that the noise was not within my ears.

No doubt I now grew *very* pale;—but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased—and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound—much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. I gasped for breath—and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly—more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I arose and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations; but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observations of the men—but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! what could I do? I foamed—I raved—I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder—louder—louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God!—no, no! They heard!—they suspected!—they knew!—they were making a mockery of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Anything was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! and now—again!—hark! louder! louder! louder! louder!

"Villains!" I shrieked, "dissemble no more! I admit the deed!—tear up the planks! here, here!—It is the beating of his hideous heart!"

THE SEMPLICA-GIRL DIARIES

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

SEPTEMBER 3RD

Having just turned forty, have resolved to embark on grand project of writing every day in this new black book just got at OfficeMax. Exciting to think how in one year, at rate of one page/day, will have written three hundred and sixty-five pages, and what a picture of life and times then available for kids & grandkids, even greatgrandkids, whoever, all are welcome (!) to see how life really was/is now. Because what do we know of other times really? How clothes smelled and carriages sounded? Will future people know, for example, about sound of airplanes going over at night, since airplanes by that time passé? Will future people know sometimes cats fought in night? Because by that time some chemical invented to make cats not fight? Last night dreamed of two demons having sex and found it was only two cats fighting outside window. Will future people be aware of concept of "demons"? Will they find our belief in "demons" quaint? Will "windows" even exist? Interesting to future generations that even sophisticated college grad like me sometimes woke in cold sweat, thinking of demons, believing one possibly under bed? Anyway, what the heck, am not planning on writing encyclopedia, if any future person is reading this, if you want to know what a "demon" was, go look it up, in something called an encyclopedia, if you even still have those!

Am getting off track, due to tired, due to those fighting cats.

Hereby resolve to write in this book at least twenty minutes a night, no matter how tired. (If discouraged, just think how much will have been recorded for posterity after one mere year!)

SEPTEMBER 5TH

Oops. Missed a day. Things hectic. Will summarize yesterday. Yesterday a bit rough. While picking kids up at school, bumper fell off Park Avenue. Note to future generations: Park Avenue = type of car. Ours not new. Ours oldish. Bit rusty. Kids got in, Eva (middle child) asked what was meaning of "junkorama." At that moment, bumper fell off. Mr. Renn, history teacher, quite helpful, retrieved bumper (note: write letter of commendation to principal), saying he too once had car whose bumper fell off, when poor, in college. Eva assured me it was all right bumper had fallen off. I replied of course it was all right, why wouldn't it be all right, it was just something that had happened, I certainly hadn't caused. Image that stays in mind is of three sweet kids in back seat, chastened expressions on little faces, timidly holding bumper across laps. One end of bumper had to hang out Eva's window and today she has sniffles, plus small cut on hand from place where bumper was sharp.

Lilly (oldest, nearly thirteen!), as always, put all in perspective, by saying, Who cares about stupid bumper, we're going to get a new car soon anyway, when rich, right?

Upon arriving home, put bumper in garage. In garage, found dead large mouse or small squirrel crawling with maggots. Used shovel to transfer majority of squirrel/mouse to Hefty bag. Smudge of squirrel/mouse still on garage floor, like oil stain w/ embedded fur tufts.

Stood looking up at house, sad. Thought: Why sad? Don't be sad. If sad, will make everyone sad. Went in happy, not mentioning bumper, squirrel/mouse smudge, maggots, then gave Eva extra ice cream, due to I had spoken harshly to her.

Have to do better! Be kinder. Start now. Soon they will be grown and how sad, if only memory of you is testy, stressed guy in bad car.

When will I have sufficient leisure/wealth to sit on hay bale watching moon rise, while in luxurious mansion family sleeps? At that time, will have chance to reflect deeply on meaning of life, etc., etc. Have a feeling and have always had a feeling that this and other good things will happen for us!

SEPTEMBER 6TH

Very depressing birthday party today at home of Lilly's friend Leslie Torrini.

House is mansion where Lafayette once stayed. Torrini's showed us Lafayette's room: now their "Fun Den." Plasma TV, pinball game, foot massager. Thirty acres, six garages (they call them "outbuildings"): one for Ferraris (three), one for Porsches (two, plus one he is rebuilding), one for historical merry-go-round they are restoring as family (!). Across trout-stocked stream, red Oriental bridge flown in from China. Showed us hoofmark from some dynasty. In front room, near Steinway, plaster cast of hoofmark from even earlier dynasty, in wood of different bridge. Picasso autograph, Disney autograph, dress Greta Garbo once wore, all displayed in massive mahogany cabinet.

Vegetable garden tended by guy named Karl.

Lilly: Wow, this garden is like ten times bigger than our whole yard.

Flower garden tended by separate guy, weirdly also named Karl.

Lilly: Wouldn't you love to live here?

Me: Lilly, ha-ha, don't ah . . .

Pam (my wife, very sweet, love of life!): What, what is she saying wrong? Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you love to live here? I know I would.

In front of house, on sweeping lawn, largest SG arrangement ever seen, all in white, white smocks blowing in breeze, and Lilly says, Can we go closer?

Leslie Torrini: We can but we don't, usually.

Leslie's mother, dressed in Indonesian sarong: We don't, as we already have, many times, dear, but you perhaps would like to? Perhaps this is all very new and exciting to you?

Lilly, shyly: It is, yes.

Leslie's mom: Please, go, enjoy.

Lilly races away.

Leslie's mom, to Eva: And you, dear?

Eva stands timidly against my leg, shakes head no.

Just then father (Emmett) appears, says time for dinner, hopes we like sailfish flown in fresh from Guatemala, prepared with a rare spice found only in one tiny region of Burma, which had to be bribed out.

The kids can eat later, in the tree house, Leslie's mom says.

She indicates the tree house, which is painted Victorian and has a gabled roof and a telescope sticking out and what looks like a small solar panel.

Thomas: Wow, that tree house is like twice the size of our actual house.

(Thomas, as usual, exaggerating: tree house is more like one-third size of our house. Still, yes: big tree house.)

Our gift not the very worst. Although possibly the least expensive—someone brought a mini DVD-player; someone brought a lock of hair from an actual mummy (!)—it was, in my opinion, the most heartfelt. Because Leslie (who appeared disappointed by the lock of mummy hair, and said so, because she already had one (!)) was, it seemed to me, touched by the simplicity of our paper-doll set. And although we did not view it as kitsch at the time we bought it, when Leslie's mom said, Les, check it out, kitsch or what, don't you love it?, I thought, Yes, well, maybe it is kitsch, maybe we did intend. In any event, this eased the blow when the next gift was a ticket to the Preakness (!), as Leslie has recently become interested in horses, and has begun getting up early to feed their nine horses, whereas previously she had categorically refused to feed the six llamas.

Leslie's mom: So guess who ended up feeding the llamas?

Leslie, sharply: Mom, don't you remember back then I always had yoga?

Leslie's mom: Although actually, honestly? It was a blessing, a chance for me to rediscover what terrific animals they are, after school, on days on which Les had yoga.

Leslie: Like every day, yoga?

Leslie's mom: I guess you just have to trust your kids, trust that their innate interest in life will win out in the end, don't you think? Which is what is happening now, with Les and horses. God, she loves them.

Pam: Our kids, we can't even get them to pick up what Ferber does in the front yard.

Leslie's mom: And Ferber is?

Me: Dog.

Leslie's mom: Ha-ha, yes, well, everything poops, isn't that just *it*?

After dinner, strolled grounds with Emmett, who is surgeon, does something two days a week with brain inserts, small electronic devices? Or possibly biotronic? They are very small. Hundreds can fit on head of pin? Or dime? Did not totally follow. He asked about my work, I told. He said, Well, huh, amazing the strange, arcane things our culture requires some of us to do, degrading things, things that offer no tangible benefit to anyone, how do they expect people to continue to even hold their heads up?

Could not think of response. Note to self: Think of response, send on card, thus striking up friendship with Emmett?

Returned to Torrini's house, sat on special star-watching platform as stars came out. Our kids sat watching stars, fascinated. What, I said, no stars in our neighborhood? No response. From anyone. Actually, stars there did seem brighter. On star platform, had too much to drink, and suddenly everything I thought of seemed stupid. So just went quiet, like in stupor.

Pam drove home. I sat sullen and drunk in passenger seat of Park Avenue. Kids babbling about what a great party it was, Lilly especially. Thomas spouting all these boring llama facts, per Emmett.

Lilly: I can't wait till my party. My party is in two weeks, right?

Pam: What do you want to do for your party, sweetie?

Long silence in car.

Lilly, finally, sadly: Oh, I don't know. Nothing, I guess.

Pulled up to house. Another silence as we regarded blank, empty yard. That is, mostly crabgrass and no red Oriental bridge w/ ancient hoofprints and no outbuildings and not a single SG, but only Ferber, who we'd kind of forgotten about, and who, as usual, had circled round and round the tree until nearly strangling to death on his gradually shortening leash and was looking up at us with begging eyes in which desperation was combined with a sort of low-boiling anger.

Let him off leash, he shot me hostile look, took dump extremely close to porch.

Watched to see if kids would take initiative and pick up. But no. Kids only slumped past and stood exhausted by front door. Knew I should take initiative and pick up. But was tired and had to come in and write in this stupid book.

Do not really like rich people, as they make us poor people feel dopey and inadequate. Not that we are poor. I would say we are middle. We are very, very lucky. I know that. But still, it is not right that rich people make us middle people feel dopey and inadequate.

Am writing this still drunk and it is getting late and tomorrow is Monday, which means work.

Work, work, work. Stupid work. Am so tired of work.

Good night.

SEPTEMBER 7TH

Just reread that last entry and should clarify.

Am not tired of work. It is a privilege to work. I do not hate the rich. I aspire to be rich myself. And when we finally do get our own bridge, trout, tree house, SGs, etc., at least will know we really earned them, unlike, say, the Torrinis, who, I feel, must have family money.

Last night, after party, found Eva sad in her room. Asked why. She said no reason. But in sketch pad: crayon pic of row of sad SGs. Could tell were meant to be sad, due to frowns went down off faces like Fu Manchus and tears were dropping in arcs, flowers springing up where tears hit ground. Note to self: Talk to her, explain that it does not hurt, they are not sad but actually happy, given what their prior conditions were like: they chose, are glad, etc.

Very moving piece on NPR re Bangladeshi SG sending money home: hence her parents able to build small shack. (Note to self: Find online, download, play for Eva. First fix computer. Computer super slow. Possibly delete "CircusLoser"? Acrobats run all jerky, due to low memory + elephants do not hop = no fun.)

SEPTEMBER 12TH

Nine days to Lilly's b-day. Kind of dread this. Too much pressure. Do not want to have bad party.

Had asked Lilly for list of b-day gift ideas. Today came home to envelope labelled "POSSIBLE GIFT LIST." Inside, clippings from some catalogue: *"Resting Fierceness." A pair of fierce porcelain jungle cats are tamed (at least for now!) on highly detailed ornamental pillows, but their wildness is not to be underestimated. Left-facing cheetah: \$350. Right-facing tiger: \$325.* Then, on Post-it: "DAD, SECOND CHOICE." *"Girl Reading to Little Sister" figurine: This childhood study by Nevada artist Dani will recall in porcelain the joys of "story time" and the tender moments shared by all. Girl and little girl reading on polished rock: \$280.*

Discouraging, I felt. Because (1) why does young girl of thirteen want such old-lady gift, and (2) where does girl of thirteen get idea that \$300 = appropriate amount for b-day gift? When I was kid, it was one shirt, one shirt I didn't want, usually homemade.

However, do not want to break Lilly's heart or harshly remind her of our limitations. God knows, she is already reminded often enough. For "My Yard" project at school, Leslie Torrini brought in pics of Oriental bridge, plus background info on SGs (age, place of origin, etc.), as did "every other kid in class," whereas Lilly brought in nineteen-forties condom box found last year during aborted attempt to start vegetable garden. Perhaps was bad call re letting her bring condom box? Thought, being historical, it would be good, plus perhaps kids would not notice it was condom box. But teacher noticed, pointed out, kids had big hoot, teacher used opportunity to discuss safe sex, which was good for class but maybe not so good for Lilly.

As for party, Lilly said she would rather not have one. I asked, Why not, sweetie? She said, Oh, no reason. I said, Is it because of our yard, our house? Is it because you are afraid that, given our small house and bare yard, party might be boring or embarrassing?

At which she burst into tears and said, Oh, Daddy.

Actually, one figurine might not be excessive. Or, rather, might be excess worth indulging in, due to sad look on her face when she came in on "My Yard" day and dropped condom box on table with sigh.

Maybe "Girl Reading to Little Sister," as that is cheapest? Although maybe giving cheapest sends bad signal? Signals frugality even in midst of attempt to be generous? Maybe best to go big? Go for "Resting Fierceness"? Put cheetah on Visa, hope she is happily surprised?

SEPTEMBER 14TH

Observed Mel Redden at work today. He did fine. I did fine. He committed minor errors, I caught them all. He made one Recycling Error: threw Tab can in wrong bucket. When throwing Tab in wrong bucket, made Ergonomic Error, by throwing from far away, missing, having to get up and rethrow. Then made second Ergonomic Error: did not squat when picking up Tab to rethrow, but bent at waist, thereby increasing risk of back injury. Mel signed off on my Observations, then asked me to re-Observe. Very smart. During re-Observation, Mel made no errors. Threw no cans in bucket, just sat very still at desk. So was able to append that to his Record. Parted friends, etc., etc.

One week until L's birthday.

Note to self: Order cheetah.

However, not that simple. Some recent problems with Visa. Full. Past full. Found out at YourItalianKitchen, when Visa declined. Left Pam and kids there, walked rapidly out with big fake smile, drove to ATM. Then scary moment as ATM card also declined. Nearby wino said ATM was broken, directed me to different ATM. Thanked wino with friendly wave as I drove past. Wino gave me finger. Second ATM, thank God, not broken, did not decline. Arrived, winded, back at YourItalianKitchen to find Pam on third cup of coffee and kids falling off chairs and tapping aquarium with dimes, wait staff looking peeved. Paid cash, w/ big apologetic tip. Considered collecting dimes from kids (!). Still, over all nice night. Really fun. Kids showed good manners, until aquarium bit.

But problem remains: Visa full. Also AmEx full and Discover nearly full. Called Discover: \$200 avail. If we transfer \$200 from checking (once paycheck comes in), would then have \$400 avail. on Discover, could get cheetah. Although timing problematic. Currently, checking at zero. Paycheck must come, must put paycheck in checking pronto, hope paycheck clears quickly. And then, when doing bills, pick bills totalling \$200 to not pay. To defer paying.

Stretched a bit thin these days.

Note to future generations: In our time are such things as credit cards. Company loans money, you pay back at high interest rate. Is nice for when you do not actually have money to do thing you want to do (for example, buy extravagant cheetah). You may say, safe in your future time, Wouldn't it be better to

simply not do thing you can't afford to do? Easy for you to say! You are not here, in our world, with kids, kids you love, while other people are doing good things for their kids, such as a Heritage Journey to Nice, if you are the Mancinis, or three weeks wreck-diving off the Bahamas, if you are Gary Gold and his tan, sleek son, Byron.

There is so much I want to do and experience and give to kids. Time going by so quickly, kids growing up so fast. If not now, when? When will we give them largesse and sense of generosity? Have never been to Hawaii or parasailed or eaten lunch at café by ocean, wearing floppy straw hats just purchased on whim. So I worry: Growing up in paucity, won't they become too cautious? Not that they are growing up in paucity. Still, there are things we want but cannot have. If kids raised too cautious, due to paucity, will not world chew them up and spit out?

Still, must fight good fight! Think of Dad. When Mom left Dad, Dad kept going to job. When laid off from job, got paper route. When laid off from paper route, got lesser paper route. In time, got better route back. By time Dad died, had job almost as good as original job. And had paid off most debt incurred after demotion to lesser route.

Note to self: Visit Dad's grave. Bring flowers. Have talk with Dad re certain things said by me at time of paper routes, due to, could not afford rental tux for prom but had to wear Dad's old tux, which did not fit. Still, no need to be rude. Was not Dad's fault he was good foot taller than me and therefore pant legs dragged, hiding Dad's borrowed shoes, which pinched, because Dad, though tall, had tiny feet.

SEPTEMBER 15TH

Damn it. Plan will not work. Cannot get check to Discover in time. Needs time to clear.

So no cheetah.

Must think of something else to give to Lilly at small family-only party in kitchen. Or may have to do what Mom sometimes did, which was, when thing not available, wrap picture of thing with note promising thing. However, note to self: Do not do other thing Mom did, which was, when child tries to redeem, roll eyes, act exasperated, ask if child thinks money grows on trees.

Note to self: Find ad with pic of cheetah, for I.O.U. coupon. Was on desk but not anymore. Possibly used to record phone message on? Possibly used to pick up little thing cat threw up?

Poor Lilly. Her sweet hopeful face when toddler, wearing Burger King crown, and now this? She did not know she was destined to be not princess but poor girl. Poorish girl. Girl not-the-richest.

No party, no present. Possibly no pic of cheetah in I.O.U. Could draw cheetah but Lilly might then think she was getting camel. Or not getting camel, rather. Am not best drawer. Ha-ha! Must keep spirits up. Laughter best medicine, etc., etc.

Someday, I'm sure, dreams will come true. But when? Why not now? Why not?

SEPTEMBER 20TH

Sorry for silence but wow!

Was too happy/busy to write!

Friday most incredible day ever! Do not need to even write down, as will never forget this awesome day! But will record for future generations. Nice for them to know that good luck and happiness real and possible! In America of my time, want them to know, anything possible!

Wow wow wow is all I can say! Remember how I always buy lunchtime Scratch-Off ticket? Have I said? Maybe did not say? Well, every Friday, to reward self for good week, I stop at store near home, treat self to Butterfinger, plus Scratch-Off ticket. Sometimes, if hard week, two Butterfingers. Sometimes, if very hard week, three Butterfingers. But, if three Butterfingers, no Scratch-Off. But Friday won TEN GRAND!! On Scratch-Off! Dropped both Butterfingers, stood there holding dime used to scratch, mouth hanging open. Kind of reeled into magazine rack. Guy at register took ticket, read ticket, said, Winner! Guy righted magazine rack, shook my hand.

Then said we would get check, check for TEN GRAND, within week.

Raced home on foot, forgetting car. Raced back for car. Halfway back, thought, What the heck, raced home on foot. Pam raced out, said, Where is car? Showed her Scratch-Off ticket. She stood stunned in yard.

Are we rich now? Thomas said, racing out, dragging Ferber by collar.

Not rich, Pam said.

Richer, I said.

Richer, Pam said. Damn.

All began dancing around yard, Ferber looking witless at sudden dancing, then doing dance of own, by chasing own tail.

Then, of course, had to decide how to use. That night in bed, Pam said, Partially pay off credit cards? My feeling was yes, O.K., could. But did not seem exciting to me and also did not seem all that exciting to her.

Pam: It would be nice to do something special for Lilly's birthday.

Me: Me, too, exactly, yes!

Pam: She could use something. She has really been down.

Me: You know what? Let's do it.

Because Lilly our oldest, we have soft spot for her, soft spot that is also like worry spot.

So we hatched up scheme, then did.

Which was: Went to Greenway Landscaping, had them do total new yard design, incl. ten rosebushes + cedar pathway + pond + small hot tub + four-SG arrangement! Big fun part was, how soon could it be done? Plus, could it be done in secret? Greenway said, for price, could do in one day, while kids at school. (Note to self: Write letter praising Melanie, Greenway gal—super facilitator.)

Step two was: send out secret invites to surprise party to be held on evening of day of yard completion, i.e., tomorrow, i.e., that is why so silent in terms of this book for last week. Sorry, sorry, have just been super busy!

Pam and I worked so well together, like in old days, so nice and close, total agreement. That night, when arrangements all made, went to bed early (!!)(masseur scenario—do not ask!).

Sorry if corny.

Am just happy.

Note to future generations: Happiness possible. And happy so much better than opposite, i.e., sad. Hopefully you know! I knew, but forgot. Got used to being slightly sad! Slightly sad, due to stress, due to worry vis-à-vis limitations. But now, wow, no: happy!

SEPTEMBER 21ST! LILLY B-DAY(!)

There are days so perfect you feel: This is what life about. When old, will feel whole life worth it, because I got to experience this perfect day.

Today that kind of day.

In morning, kids go off to school per usual. Greenway comes at ten. Yard done by two (!). Roses in, fountain in, pathway in. SG truck arrives at three. SGs exit truck, stand shyly near fence while rack installed. Rack nice. Opted for “Lexington” (midrange in terms of price): bronze uprights w/ Colonial caps, EzyRelease levers.

SGs already in white smocks. Microline strung through. SGs holding microline slack in hands, like mountain climbers holding rope. Only no mountain (!). One squatting, others standing polite/nervous, one sniffing new roses. She gives timid wave. Other says something to her, like, Hey, not supposed to wave. But I wave back, like, In this household, is O.K. to wave.

Doctor monitors installation by law. So young! Looks like should be working at Wendy’s. Says we can watch hoist or not. Gives me meaningful look, cuts eyes at Pam, as in, Wife squeamish? Pam somewhat squeamish. Sometimes does not like to handle raw chicken. I say, Let’s go inside, put candles on cake.

Soon, knock on door: doctor says hoist all done.

Me: So can we have a look?

Him: Totally.

We step out. SGs up now, approx. three feet off ground, smiling, swaying in slight breeze. Order, left to right: Tami (Laos), Gwen (Moldova), Lisa (Somalia), Betty (Philippines). Effect amazing. Having so often seen similar configuration in yards of others more affluent makes own yard seem suddenly affluent, you feel different about self, as if at last in step with peers and time in which living.

Pond great. Roses great. Path, hot tub great.

Everything set.

Could not believe we had pulled this off.

Picked kids up at school. Lilly all hangdog because her b-day and no one said Happy B-day at breakfast, and no party and no gifts so far.

Meanwhile, at home: Pam scrambling to decorate. Food delivered (BBQ from Snakey's). Friends arrive. So when Lilly gets out of car what does she see but whole new yard full of friends from school sitting at new picnic table near new hot tub, and new line of four SGs, and Lilly literally bursts into tears of happiness!

Then more tears as shiny pink packages unwrapped, "Resting Fierceness" plus "Girl Reading to Little Sister" revealed. Lilly touched I remembered exact figurines. Plus "Summer Daze" (hobo-clown fishing (\$380)), which she hadn't even requested (just to prove largesse). Several more waves of happy tears, hugs, right in front of friends, as if gratitude/affection for us greater than fear of rebuke from friends.

Party guests played usual games, Crack the Whip, etc., etc., in beautiful new yard. Kids joyful, thanked us for inviting. Several said they loved yard. Several parents lingered after, saying they loved yard.

And, my God, the look on Lilly's face as all left!

Know she will always remember today.

Only one slight negative: After party, during cleanup, Eva stomps away, picks up cat too roughly, the way she sometimes does when mad. Cat scratches her, runs over to Ferber, claws Ferber. Ferber dashes away, stumbles into table, roses bought for Lilly crash down on Ferber.

We find Eva in closet.

Pam: Sweetie, sweetie, what is it?

Eva: I don't like it. It's not nice.

Thomas (rushing over with cat to show he is master of cat): They want to, Eva. They like applied for it.

Pam: Where they're from, the opportunities are not so good.

Me: It helps them take care of the people they love.

Eva facing wall, lower lip out in her pre-crying way.

Then I get idea: Go to kitchen, page through Personal Statements. Yikes. Worse than I thought: Laotian (Tami) applied due to two sisters already in brothels. Moldovan (Gwen) has cousin who thought she was becoming window-washer in Germany, but no: sex slave in Kuwait (!). Somali (Lisa) watched father + little sister die of AIDS, same tiny thatch hut, same year. Filipina (Betty) has little brother “very skilled for computer,” parents cannot afford high school, have lived in tiny lean-to with three other families since their own tiny lean-to slid down hillside in earthquake.

I opt for “Betty,” go back to closet, read “Betty” aloud.

Me: Does that help? Do you understand now? Can you kind of imagine her little brother in a good school, because of her, because of us?

Eva: If we want to help them, why can't we just give them the money?

Me: Oh, sweetie.

Pam: Let's go look. Let's see do they look sad.

(Do not look sad. Are in fact quietly chatting in moonlight.)

At window, Eva quiet. Deep well. So sensitive. Even when tiny, Eva sensitive. Kindest kid. Biggest heart. Once, when little, found dead bird in yard and placed on swing-set slide, so it could “see him fambly.” Cried when we threw out old rocking chair, claiming it told her it wanted to live out rest of life in basement.

But I worry, Pam worries: if kid too sensitive, kid goes out in world, world rips kid's guts out, i.e., some toughness req'd?

Lilly, on other hand, wrote all thank-you notes tonight in one sitting, mopped kitchen without being asked, then was out in yard w/ flashlight, picking up Ferber area with new poop-scoop she apparently rode on bike to buy w/ own money at Fas Mart (!).

SEPTEMBER 22ND

Happy period continues.

Everyone at work curious re Scratch-Off win. Brought pics of yard into work, posted in cubicle, folks came by, admired. Steve Z. asked could he drop by house sometime, see yard in person. This a first: Steve Z. has never previously given me time of day. Even asked my advice: where did I buy winning Scratch-Off, how many Scratch-Offs do I typically buy, Greenway = reputable company?

Embarrassed to admit how happy this made me.

At lunch, went to mall, bought four new shirts. Running joke in department vis-à-vis I have only two shirts. Not so. But have three similar blue shirts and two identical yellow shirts. Hence confusion. Do not generally buy new clothes for self. Have always felt it more important for kids to have new clothes, i.e., do not want other kids saying my kids have only two shirts etc., etc. As for Pam, Pam very beautiful, raised w/ money. Do not want former wealthy beauty wearing same clothes over and over, feeling, When young, had so many clothes, but now, due to him (i.e., me), badly dressed.

Correction: Pam not raised wealthy. Pam's father = farmer in small town. Had biggest farm on edge of small town. So, relative to girls on smaller farms, Pam = rich girl. If same farm near bigger town, farm only average, but no: town so small, modest farm = estate.

Anyway, Pam deserves best.

Came home, took detour around side of house to peek at yard: fish hovering near lily pads, bees buzzing around roses, SGs in fresh white smocks, shaft of sun falling across lawn, dust motes rising up w/ sleepy late-summer feeling, LifeStyleServices team (i.e., Greenway folks who come by 3x/day to give SGs meals/water, take SGs to SmallJon in back of van, deal with feminine issues, etc., etc.) hard at work.

Inside, found Leslie Torrini over (!). This = huge. Leslie never over solo before. Says she likes the way our SGs hang close to pond, are thus reflected in pond. Calls home, demands pond. Leslie's mother calls Leslie spoiled brat, says no pond. This = big score for Lilly. Not that we are glad when someone else not glad. But Leslie so often glad when Lilly not glad, maybe is O.K. if, just once, Leslie = little bit sad while Lilly = riding high?

Girls go into yard, stay in yard for long time. Pam and I peek out. Girls getting along? Girls have heads together in shade of trees, exchanging girlish intimacies, cementing Lilly's status as pal of Leslie?

Leslie's mother arrives (in BMW). Leslie, Leslie's mother bicker briefly re pond.

Leslie's mom: But, Les, love, you already have three streams.

Leslie (caustic): Is a stream a pond, *Maman*?

Lilly gives me grateful peck on cheek, runs upstairs singing happy tune.

Note to self: Try to extend positive feelings associated with Scratch-Off win into all areas of life. Be bigger presence at work. Race up ladder (joyfully, w/ smile on face), get raise. Get in best shape of life, start dressing nicer. Learn guitar? Make point of noticing beauty of world? Why not educate self re birds, flowers, trees, constellations, become true citizen of natural world, walk around neighborhood w/ kids, patiently teaching kids names of birds, flowers, etc., etc.? Why not take kids to Europe? Kids have never been. Have never, in Alps, had hot chocolate in mountain café, served by kindly white-haired innkeeper, who finds them so sophisticated/friendly relative to usual snotty/rich American kids (who always ignore his pretty but crippled daughter w/ braids) that he shows them secret hiking path to incredible glade, kids frolic in glade, sit with crippled pretty girl on grass, later say it was most beautiful day of their lives, keep in touch with crippled girl via e-mail, we arrange surgery for her here, surgeon so touched he agrees to do for free, she is on front page of our paper, we are on front page of their paper in Alps?

Ha-ha.

(Actually have never been to Europe myself. Dad felt portions there too small. Then Dad lost job, got paper route, portion size = moot point.)

Have been sleepwalking through life, future reader. Can see that now. ScratchOff win was like wakeup call. In rush to graduate college, win Pam, get job, make babies, move ahead in job, forgot former presentiment of special destiny I used to have when tiny, sitting in cedar-smelling bedroom closet, looking up at blowing trees through high windows, feeling I would someday do something great.

Hereby resolve to live life in new and more powerful way, starting THIS MOMENT (!).

SEPTEMBER 23RD

Eva being a pain.

As I may have mentioned above, Eva = sensitive. This = good, Pam and I feel. This = sign of intelligence. But Eva seems to have somehow gotten idea that sensitivity = effective way to get attention, i.e., has developed tendency to set herself apart from others, possibly as way of distinguishing self, i.e., casting self as better, more refined than others? Has, in past, refused to eat meat, sit on leather seats, use plastic forks made in China. Is endearing enough in little kid. But Eva getting older now, this tendency to object on principle starting to feel a bit precious + becoming fundamental to how she views self?

Family life in our time sometimes seems like game of Whac-a-Mole, future reader. Future generations still have? Plastic mole emerges, you whack with hammer, he dies, falls, another emerges, you whack, kill? Sometimes seems that, as soon as one kid happy, another kid “pops up,” i.e., registers complaint, requiring parent to “whack” kid, i.e., address complaint.

Today Eva’s teacher, Ms. Ross, sent home note: Eva acting out. Eva grouchy. Eva stamped foot. Eva threw fish-food container at John M. when John M. said it was his turn to feed fish. This not like Eva, Ms. R. says: Eva sweetest kid in class.

Also, Eva’s art work has recently gone odd. Sample odd art work enclosed:

Typical house. (Can tell is meant to be our house by mock-cherry tree = swirl of pink.) In yard, SGs frowning. One (Betty) having thought in cartoon balloon: “OUCH! THIS SURE HERTS.” Second (Gwen), pointing long bony finger at house: “THANKS LODES.” Third (Lisa), tears rolling down cheeks: “WHAT IF I AM YOUR DAUGHTER?”

Pam: Well. This doesn’t seem to be going away.

Me: No, it does not.

Took Eva for drive. Drove through Eastridge, Lemon Hills. Pointed out houses w/ SGs. Had Eva keep count. In end, of approx. fifty houses, thirty-nine had.

Eva: So, just because everyone is doing it, that makes it right.

This cute. Eva parroting me, Pam.

Stopped at Fritz's Chillhouse, had banana split. Eva had SnowMelt. We sat on big wooden crocodile, watched sun go down.

Eva: I don't even—I don't even get it how they're not dead.

Suddenly occurred to me, w/ little gust of relief: Eva resisting in part because she does not understand basic science of thing. Asked Eva if she even knew what Semplica Pathway was. Did not. Drew human head on napkin, explained: Lawrence Semplica = doctor + smart cookie. Found way to route microline through brain that does no damage, causes no pain. Technique uses lasers to make pilot route. Microline then threaded through w/ silk leader. Microline goes in here (touched Eva's temple), comes out here (touched other). Is very gentle, does not hurt, SGs asleep during whole deal.

Then decided to level w/ Eva.

Explained: Lilly at critical juncture. Next year, Lilly will start high school. Mommy and Daddy want Lilly to enter high school as confident young woman, feeling her family as good/affluent as any other family, her yard approx. in ballpark of yards of peers, i.e., not overt source of embarrassment.

This too much to ask?

Eva quiet.

Could see wheels turning.

Eva wild about Lilly, would walk in front of train for Lilly.

Then shared story w/ Eva re summer job I had in high school, at Señor Tasty's (taco place). Was hot, was greasy, boss mean, boss always goosing us with tongs. By time I went home, hair + shirt always stank of grease. No way I could do that job now. But back then? Actually enjoyed: flirted with countergirls, participated in pranks with other employees (hid tongs of mean boss, slipped magazine down own pants so that, when mean boss tong-goosed me, did not hurt, mean boss = baffled).

Point is, I said, everything relative. SGs have lived very different lives from us. Their lives brutal, harsh, unpromising. What looks scary/unpleasant to us may not be so scary/unpleasant to them, i.e., they have seen worse.

Eva: You flirted with girls?

Me: I did. Don't tell Mom.

That got little smile.

Believe I somewhat broke through with Eva. Hope so.

Discussed situation w/ Pam tonight. Pam, as usual, offered sound counsel: Go slow, be patient, Eva bright, savvy. In another month, Eva will have adjusted, forgotten, will once again be usual happy self.

Love Pam.

Pam my rock.

SEPTEMBER 25TH

Shit.

Fuck.

Family hit by absolute thunderclap, future reader.

Will explain.

This morning, kids sitting sleepily at table, Pam making eggs, Ferber under her feet, hoping scrap of food will drop. Thomas, eating bagel, drifts to window.

Thomas: Wow. What the heck. Dad? You better get over here.

Go to window.

SGs gone.

Totally gone (!).

Race out. Rack empty. Microline gone. Gate open. Take somewhat frantic run up block, to see if any sign of them.

Is not.

Race back inside. Call Greenway, call police. Cops arrive, scour yard. Cop shows me microline drag mark in mud near gate. Says this actually good news: with microline still in, will be easier to locate SGs, as microline limits how fast they can walk, since, fleeing in group, they are forced to take baby steps, so one does not get too far behind/ahead of others, hence causing yank on microline, yank that could damage brain of one yanked.

Other cop says yes, that would be case if SGs on foot. But come on, he says, SGs not on foot, SGs off in activist van somewhere, laughing butts off.

Me: Activists.

First cop: Yeah, you know: Women4Women, Citizens for Economic Parity, Semplica Rots in Hell.

Second cop: Fourth incident this month.

First cop: Those gals didn't get down by themselves.

Me: Why would they do that? They chose to be here. Why would they go off with some total—

Cops laugh.

First cop: Smelling that American dream, baby.

Kids beyond freaked. Kids huddled near fence.

School bus comes and goes.

Greenway field rep (Rob) arrives. Rob = tall, thin, bent. Looks like archery bow, if archery bow had pierced ear + long hair like pirate, was wearing short leather vest.

Rob immediately drops bombshell: says he is sorry to have to be more or less a hardass in our time of trial, but is legally obligated to inform us that, per our agreement w/ Greenway, if SGs not located within three weeks, we will, at that time, become responsible for full payment of the required Replacement Debit.

Pam: Wait, the what?

Per Rob, Replacement Debit = \$100/month, per individual, per each month still remaining on their Greenway contracts at time of loss (!). Betty (21 months remaining) = \$2,100; Tami (13 months) = \$1,300; Gwen (18 months) = \$1,800; Lisa (34 months (!)) = \$3,400.

Total: \$2,100 + \$1,300 + \$1,800 + \$3,400 = \$8,600.

Pam: Fucksake.

Rob: Believe me, I know, that's a lot of money, right? But our take on it is—or, you know, their take on it, Greenway's take—is that we—or they—made an initial investment, and, I mean, obviously, that was not cheap, just in terms of like visas and airfares and all?

Pam: No one said anything to us about this.

Me: At all.

Rob: Huh. Who was on your account again?

Me: Melanie?

Rob: Right, yeah, I had a feeling. With Melanie, Melanie was sometimes rushing through things to close the deal. Especially with Package A folks, who were going chintzy in the first place? No offense. Anyway, which is why she's gone. If you want to yell at her, go to Home Depot. She's second in charge of Paint, probably lying her butt off about which color is which.

Feel angry, violated: someone came into our yard in dark of night, while kids sleeping nearby, stole? Stole from us? Stole \$8,600, plus initial cost of SGs (approx. \$7,400)?

Pam (to cop): How often do you find them?

First cop: Honestly? I'd have to say rarely.

Second cop: More like never.

First cop: Well, never yet.

Second cop: Right. There's always a first time.

Cops leave.

Pam (to Rob): So what happens if we don't pay?

Me: Can't pay.

Rob (uncomfortable, blushing): Well, that would be more of an issue for Legal.

Pam: You'd sue us?

Rob: I wouldn't. They would. I mean, that's what they do. They—what's that word? They garner your—

Pam (harshly): Garnish.

Rob: Sorry. Sorry about all this. Melanie, wow, I am going to snap your head back using that stupid braid of yours. Just kidding! I never even talk to her. But the thing is: all this is in your contract. You guys read your contract, right?

Silence.

Me: Well, we were kind of in a hurry. We were throwing a party.

Rob: Oh, sure, I remember that party. That was some party. We were all discussing that.

Rob leaves.

Pam (livid): You know what? Fuck 'em. Let 'em sue. I'm not paying. That's obscene. They can have the stupid house.

Lilly: Are we losing the house?

Me: We're not losing the—

Pam: You don't think? What do you think happens if you owe someone nine grand and can't pay?

Me: Look, let's calm down, no need to get all—

Eva's lower lip out in pre-crying way. Think, Oh, great, nice parenting, arguing + swearing + raising spectre of loss of house in front of tightly wound kid already upset by troubling events of day.

Then Eva bursts into tears, starts mumbling, Sorry sorry sorry.

Pam: Oh, sweetie, I was just being silly. We're not going to lose the house. Mommy and Daddy would never let that—

Light goes on in my head.

Me: Eva. You didn't.

Look in Eva's eyes says, I did.

Pam: Did what?

Thomas: Eva did it?

Lilly: How could Eva do it? She's only eight. I couldn't even—

Eva leads us outside, shows us how she did: Dragged out stepladder, stood on stepladder at end of microline, released left-hand EzyRelease lever, then dragged stepladder to other end, released right-hand EzyRelease. At that point, microline completely loose, SGs standing on ground.

SGs briefly confer.

And off they go.

Am so mad. Eva has made huge mess here. Huge mess for us, yes, but also for SGs. Where are SGs now? In good place? Is it good when illegal fugitives in strange land have no money, no food, no water, are forced to hide in woods, swamp, etc., connected via microline, like chain gang?

Note to future generations: Sometimes, in our time, families get into dark place. Family feels: we are losers, everything we do is wrong. Parents fight at high volume, blaming each other for disastrous situation. Father kicks wall, puts hole in wall near fridge. Family skips lunch. Tension too high for all to sit at same table. This unbearable. This makes person (Father) doubt value of whole enterprise, i.e., makes Father (me) wonder if humans would not be better off living alone, individually, in woods, minding own beeswax, not loving anyone.

Today like that for us.

Stormed out to garage. Stupid squirrel/mouse stain still there after all these weeks. Used bleach + hose to eradicate. In resulting calm, sat on wheelbarrow, had to laugh at situation. Won ScratchOff, greatest luck of life, quickly converted greatest luck of life into greatest fiasco of life.

Laughter turned to tears.

Pam came out, asked had I been crying? I said no, just got dust in eyes from cleaning garage. Pam not buying. Pam gave me little side hug + hip nudge, to say, You were crying, is O.K., is difficult time, I know.

Pam: Come on inside. Let's get things back to normal. We'll get through this. The kids are dying in there, they feel so bad.

Went inside.

Kids at kitchen table.

Opened arms. Thomas and Lilly rushed over.

Eva stayed sitting.

When Eva tiny, had big head of black curls. Would stand on couch, eating cereal from coffee mug, dancing to song in head, flicking around cord from window blinds.

Now this: Eva sitting w/ head in hands like heartbroken old lady mourning loss of vigorous flower of youth, etc., etc.

Went over, scooped Eva up.

Poor thing shaking in my arms.

Eva (in whisper): I didn't know we would lose the house.

Me: We're not—we're not going to lose the house. Mommy and I are going to figure this out.

Sent kids off to watch TV.

Pam: So. You want me to call Dad?

Did not want Pam calling Pam's dad.

Pam's dad's first name = Rich. Actually calls self "Farmer Rich." Is funny because he is rich farmer. In terms of me, does not like me. Has said at various times that I (1) am not hard worker, and (2) had better watch self in terms of weight, and (3) had better watch self in terms of credit cards.

Farmer Rich in very good shape, with no credit cards.

Farmer Rich not fan of SGs. Feels having SGs = "showoffy move." Thinks anything fun = showoffy move. Even going to movie = showoffy move. Going to car wash, i.e., not doing self, in driveway = showoffy move. Once, when visiting, looked dubiously at me when I said I had to get root canal. What, I was thinking, root canal = showoffy move? But no: just disapproved of dentist I had chosen, due to he had seen dentist's TV ad, felt dentist having TV ad = showoffy move.

So did not want Pam calling Farmer Rich.

Told Pam we must try our best to handle this ourselves.

Got out bills, did mock payment exercise: If we pay mortgage, heat bill, AmEx, plus \$200 in bills we deferred last time, would be down near zero (\$12.78 remaining). If we defer AmEx + Visa, that would free up \$880. If, in addition, we skip mortgage payment, heat bill, life-insurance premium, that would still only free up measly total of \$3,100.

Me: Shit.

Pam: Maybe I'll e-mail him. You know. Just see what he says.

Pam upstairs e-mailing Farmer Rich as I write.

SEPTEMBER 26TH

When I got home, Pam standing in doorway w/ e-mail from Farmer Rich.

Farmer Rich = bastard.

Will quote in part:

Let us now speak of what you intend to do with the requested money. Will you be putting it aside for a college fund? You will not. Investing in real estate? No. Given a chance to plant some seeds, you flushed those valuable seeds (dollars) away. And for what? A display some find pretty. Well, I do not find it pretty. Since when are people on display a desirable sight? Do-gooders in our church cite conditions of poverty. O.K., that is fine. But it appears you will soon have a situation of poverty within your own walls. And physician heal thyself is a motto I have oft remembered when tempted to put my oar in relative to some social cause or another. So am going to say no. You people have walked yourselves into some deep water and must now walk yourselves out, teaching your kids (and selves) a valuable lesson from which, in the long term, you and yours will benefit.

Long silence.

Pam: Jesus. Isn't this just like us?

Do not know what she means. Or, rather, do know but do not agree. Or, rather, agree but wish she would not say. Why say? Saying is negative, makes us feel bad about selves.

I say maybe we should just confess what Eva did, hope for mercy from Greenway.

Pam says no, no: Went online today. Releasing SGs = felony (!). Does not feel they would prosecute eight-year-old, but still. If we confess, this goes on Eva's record? Eva required to get counselling? Eva feels: I am bad kid? Starts erring on side of bad, hanging out with rough crowd, looking askance at whole notion of achievement? Fails to live up to full potential, all because of one mistake she made when little girl?

No.

Cannot take chance.

When kids born, Pam and I dropped everything (youthful dreams of travel, adventure, etc.) to be good parents. Has not been exciting life. Has been much drudgery. Many nights, tasks undone, have stayed up late, exhausted, doing tasks. On many occasions, dishevelled + tired, baby poop and/or vomit on our shirt or blouse, one of us has stood smiling wearily/angrily at camera being held by other, hair shaggy because haircuts expensive, unfashionable glasses slipping down noses because never was time to get glasses tightened.

And now, after all that, our youngest to start out life w/ potential black mark on record?

That not happening.

Pam and I discuss, agree: must be like sin-eaters who, in ancient times, ate sin. Or bodies of sinners? Ate meals off bodies of sinners who had died? Cannot exactly recall what sin-eaters did. But Pam and I agree: are going to be like sin-eaters in sense of, will err on side of protecting Eva, keep cops in dark at all cost, break law as req'd (!).

Just now went down hall to check on kids. Thomas sleeping w/ Ferber. This not allowed. Eva in bed w/ Lilly. This not allowed. Eva, source of all mayhem, sleeping like baby.

Felt like waking Eva, giving Eva hug, telling Eva that, though we do not approve of what she did, she will always be our girl, will always be apple of our eye(s).

Did not do.

Eva needs rest.

On Lilly's desk: poster Lilly was working on for "Favorite Things Day" at school. Poster = photo of each SG, plus map of home country, plus stories Lilly apparently got during interview (!) with each. Gwen (Moldova) = very tough, due to Moldovan youth: used bloody sheets found in trash + duct tape to make soccer ball, then, after much practice with bloody-sheet ball, nearly made Olympic team (!). Betty (Philippines) has daughter, who, when swimming, will sometimes hitch ride on shell of sea turtle. Lisa (Somalia) once saw lion on roof of her uncle's "mini-lorry." Tami (Laos) had pet water buffalo, water buffalo stepped on her foot, now Tami must wear special shoe. "Fun Fact": their names (Betty, Tami, et al.) not their real names. These = SG names, given by Greenway at time of arrival. "Tami" = Januka = "happy ray of sun." "Betty" = Nenita = "blessed-beloved." "Gwen" = Evgenia. (Does not know what her name means.) "Lisa" = Ayan = "happy traveller."

SGs very much on my mind tonight, future reader.

Where are they now? Why did they leave?

Just do not get.

Letter comes, family celebrates, girl sheds tears, stoically packs bag, thinks, Must go, am family's only hope. Puts on brave face, promises she will return as soon as contract complete. Her mother feels, father feels: We cannot let her go. But they do. They must.

Whole town walks girl to train station/bus station/ferry stop? More tears, more vows. As train/bus/ferry pulls away, she takes last fond look at surrounding hills/river/quarry/shacks, whatever, i.e., all she has ever known of world, saying to self, Be not afraid, you will return, + return in victory, w/ big bag of gifts, etc., etc.

And now?

No money, no papers. Who will remove microline? Who will give her job? When going for job, must fix hair so as to hide scars at Insertion Points. When will she ever see her home + family again? Why would she do this? Why would she ruin all, leave our yard? Could have had nice long run w/ us. What in the world was she seeking? What could she want so much, that would make her pull such desperate stunt?

Just now went to window.

Empty rack in yard, looking strange in moonlight.

Note to self: Call Greenway, have them take ugly thing away.

THIS WEEK IN FICTION: GEORGE SAUNDERS

BY DEBORAH TREISMAN

“The Semplica-Girl Diaries” deals with a family in a not-too-distant future (or perhaps an alternate present or past?) that is struggling to keep up with the Joneses—which, in this society, means leasing some unusual garden ornaments. How did the idea of the Semplica Girls come to you?

Well, it’s embarrassing. Somewhere around 1998, I had this incredibly vivid dream in which I went (in my underwear) to a (non-existent) window in the bedroom of our house in Syracuse and looked down into our backyard. Balmy summer night, beautiful full moon, etc., etc. I was looking at something, and it wasn’t clear what, but I was getting this incredible feeling of happiness and well-being and deep satisfaction, as in, Wow, I finally was able to really step up for our family. I am such a lucky guy—to have this amazing wife and kids and now, at last, to be able to do justice to them in this super way. Then the yard came into focus, and what was out there was ... as I describe in the story. And the weird(er) part was that, even having seen that, the “I” in the dream continued to be happy: “Jeez, just look at that, it’s so beautiful, and I was able to do that—man, I have really arrived.” And so on—this lush feeling of gratitude (which I was actually feeling, those days, in real life) but grafted onto this strange vision.

Now, there have been lots of times when I’ve had a dream and woken up thinking, Hey, great story idea! But most of those fizzle out as soon as I realize that, for example, a chess-playing penguin with the voice of Marlene Dietrich may not “signify.” This one was different—it just lingered. So I thought, O.K., let’s start with that image and see if we can figure out who that guy is, and what world he’s living in. That is, what conditions pertain in his world that make those feelings possible, natural, and reasonable? What intrigued me was not so much the image in the yard, but his delight about it. In all other respects, the guy in the dream was me.

I hate to be so black-and-white about your work, but it’s easy to read the SGs as a metaphor for all the underprivileged immigrants and refugees who come to this country and work menial jobs in order to survive and to support families back home. Was that at least part of what you wanted to explore here?

Sure, yes, I think anybody would have that interpretation of it. The minute I woke up, I knew that the women in the yard were symbols for, you know, “the oppressed,” and that the whole story, as I was imagining it at that moment, would be “about” the way that people of means use and abuse people without. So that was the danger—that the story might turn out to be (merely) about that. In which case, who needs it, you know? If the only thing the story did was say, “Hey, it’s really wrong to hang up living women in your backyards, you capitalist-pig oppressors,” that wasn’t going to be enough. We kind of know that already. It had to be about that plus something else.

I find this is often the case. Early on, a story’s meaning and rationale seem pretty obvious, but then, as I write it, I realize that I know the meaning/rationale too well, which means that the reader will also know it—and so things have to be ramped up. Einstein said (or, at least, I am always quoting him as having said), “No worthy problem is ever solved within the plane of its original conception.” So this was an

example of that: my “original conception” (i.e., the dream and its associated meaning) had to be outgrown—or built upon.

These sorts of thematic challenges are, for me, anyway, only answerable via the line-by-line progress through the story. Trying to figure out what happens next, and in what language. So, in this case, I just started out by trying to get the guy to that window, in his underwear, having that same feeling.

A twist in your story is that, instead of being virtually invisible to the middle-class and the rich, these immigrants are given pride of place as decorative elements. Is this job worse—or better—than doing back-breaking labor harvesting crops or cleaning bathrooms? Or even, say, reporting on one’s coworkers’ recycling and ergonomic errors?

Well, I think their job is worse. They’ve got holes in their heads, for one thing; the surgery is risky; they’re away from their families for years at a time; it’s incredibly boring; and all the while, they have to watch this other family happily living right over there, in that warm, cozy house. Although at least they’ve got health insurance, ha ha ha.

But it was kind of interesting. As I said above, I first got the germ of the story in 1998 and started plunking away at it. Then, in 2003, I got sent to Dubai for a writing assignment, and it was like being surrounded by real-life SGs. The whole city was built and run by people who were contracted to be away from home for years at a time, were very low-paid, and were housed in horrific conditions (or, at least, the most poorly paid laborers were). I went into that non-fiction assignment imagining I’d write that story—the story of the rich crapping down on the poor in the name of luxury—and I sort of did, but, once there, also found that (1) yes, this was true, and yet (2) there was another side to it, namely that a lot of the workers were wildly happy to be there, because, even given the hardships, they (and their families, to whom they were often sending their entire salaries) were far better off than they had been back home.

So that made me think, Well, as weird as my story is, it isn’t entirely without corollary in the real world. And it also suggested a possible complication that might get me out of the too-easy-metaphor dilemma described above: make the SGs happy to be doing this “work.” Suddenly, anyone who was “against” it (i.e., the reader, Eva) was sort of out of step with everyone else in the fictive world, including the SGs themselves.

Why the microline through the brain, instead of a less invasive harness?

The honest answer is because it was that way in the dream. Part of what moved me about the dream was the extremity of it—it was very unreasonable. And since I was interested in writing the story because of the lingering power of the dream, I was loathe to change the basic terms of the dream—especially in the direction of softening them.

To look at that choice as a reader, instead of a writer: If we imagine two cultures, one in which the residents harness poor foreign women and hang them in their yards, and another one in which they surgically put wires through the heads of poor foreign women in order to hang them up—well, those are

two different cultures, and the second one is, I think, more interesting. Why? Because that second culture is more intense. It's more direct in enacting its desires. It has to be richer (to afford the surgeries); its taste is more refined and strange and perverse/decadent. It is a more demanding, narcissistic culture. It doesn't like the harness idea because the harnesses would look baggy, the SGs would hang at strange angles—something like that. But another (nastier) difference is that there is an element of complete physical domination/subjugation in the surgical approach that this culture (subconsciously) likes and wants; and that, in turn, says something deep about the lengths to which this (imaginary, I assure you!) culture is willing to go to optimize its aesthetic landscaping choice, i.e., its "pleasure."

But actually, I just thought all that up. The real reason is that the "through-the-head" thing was what came to me in my dream, and I continued to find it interesting, and whenever I thought of softening it, I went, "Bleh." Or, as the kids say, "Meh."

Where do your sympathies lie here? Is Eva right to deplore the practice? Is her father right to think of it as a potential step up for the women and their families?

My answer is YES. "Yes" to both questions. You've put your finger on the essential energy of the story. It felt like the more I could get the reader to answer "yes" to both of those questions, the more powerful the story would be.

The artist's job, I think, is to be a conduit for mystery. To intuit it, and recognize that the story-germ has some inherent mystery in it, and sort of midwife that mystery into the story in such a way that it isn't damaged in the process, and may even get heightened or refined.

So the job here was to push the story in the direction of "more mystery" (i.e., make it less reducible to a simple reading), which (it turned out, after all those years of work) meant: make Eva's decision more problematic. If, in the world of the story, Eva's decision is a no-brainer, and she is a complete hero, then the energy goes down. The story becomes (merely) a Demonstrative Moral Tale, which rings hollow, because it's been rigged. So I spent a lot of time trying to find ways to make it more of a close call at the end. My loyalties are with Eva, completely—I mean, I think she's sort of a moral giant. She does this thing with everyone against her—the culture, her family, even (at first) the SGs themselves. And then her family's reaction is pretty harsh: they'll forgive her. But nobody says, you know, "Honey, you were right, thanks for being so good and saving us from ourselves." But, at the same time, if I were her father, and I lived in this world (where nobody I knew had an ethical problem with the SGs), I'd be worried: Why is Eva so impulsive? Why so rash? So heedless? Is my kid delusional? Why does she seem so unaware of, and unconcerned about, the effects of her actions on us, her dear family? This level of disengagement and narcissism and self-righteousness may not bode well for her future. Etc, etc.

Through this well-intentioned, sad-sack diarist, you also get at some crucial and universal things about aspiration and envy and the conflicting impulses of parenthood. As a mother, I can definitely identify with the Whac-a Mole analogy. Is there some of your own experience in there?

Oh, sure. I think anyone who is raising kids and doesn't have infinite money will identify with the pressure he's under. You love them so much and, especially in our culture, you don't want to come up short. You don't want to be that parent—the one who dresses his kid in a cloth sack when all the other kids are in Armani cloth sacks—especially in a time like ours, when materialism is not only rampant and ascendant but is fast becoming the only game in town.

When our kids were small, we were always overextended on our credit cards and, at the same time (recognizing that the period during which they would be small and at home and influenceable, etc. etc., was very brief), were always trying to put together the best life possible for them, cash on hand be damned.

I always keenly felt the fear that we might be running materially behind other families. I knew this wasn't ultimately important—that morality and love and art were the most important things, of course, of course—but, still, I sort of wanted to do all of that PLUS be able to run with the pack, or even slightly ahead of the pack, if it could be arranged. To be morally correct AND eternally blamelessly gleaming and beautifully dressed, somehow.

In thinking about this guy, who was mostly but not entirely me, and trying to understand how "I" might come to not only tolerate but even crave having four SGs in my yard, I thought a good bit about our slavery days here in the U.S., and also about the Holocaust, especially as presented in that amazing book by Victor Klemperer, "I Will Bear Witness." When something really bad is going on in a culture, the average guy doesn't see it. He can't. He's average. And is surrounded by and immersed in the cant and discourse of the status quo. The average person in the U.S., in, say, 1820, assumed white superiority, and, if he happened to be against slavery, was for a gradual solution, which probably involved sending all the slaves back to Africa, notwithstanding the fact that most of them had never been there and were Americans in every respect. And this would be the nice, moderate, urbane, educated person of that time, who fancied himself "progressive." Likewise, even Klemperer, a Jew who would end up losing everything to the Nazis, didn't seem to see it coming. He would note things about Hitler and the Nazis very peripherally in his diary, but his main focus was on the minutiae of his life—his wife was being difficult, he'd hit the fence with the car, he was having panic attacks, etc. etc. (Whenever his colleagues or his neighbors took something away from him because he was a Jew, they would always explain it to him à la "Those dopes in Berlin are making us do this," and he would accept this gracefully—"I know, I know it's not you, it's Berlin.") Also, interestingly, he was a professor who wrote about French literature, often from the perspective of "the French personality." So even the idea that there was some sort of Jewish personality—i.e., an innate national or ethnic personality—seemed O.K. to him. I'm guessing that when the Nazis started talking about "Jewish tendencies" he objected to the mischaracterization of those "tendencies" but not necessarily to the idea that a "race" had "tendencies."

Anyway—it's interesting when you realize that, whatever your (our) culture is doing that will have future generations laughing at you, or hating you, you are, by definition, blind to it at the moment. Or most of us are. I'm guessing I am, for example.

So that was who I imagined the narrator to be: a loving, kind guy, who is just like us (me) in his concerns and his basic values and his love for his family—except he’s got this one blind spot, which I might have, too, if I were living in his world.

Another thing the story ended up being about, at least for me, was this notion that you can do everything right and still bring the whole house down with just one such blind spot. Life, in other words, can be a very harsh affair, morally. It exploits/punishes even a very small defect in a person.

Where did the word “Semplica” come from? Does it have some special meaning for you?

That was what they were called in the dream. I think I woke up knowing that. There’s nothing symbolic or secret about it. And I somehow knew from the beginning that “Semplica” was the name of the guy who had “pioneered this innovative technology.”

One thing I always feel in the midst of trying to talk coherently about a story I’ve finished is that, you know, ninety per cent of it was intuitive, done at-speed, for reasons I can’t quite articulate, except in the “A felt better than B” way. All these choices add up, and make the surface of the story, and, of course, the thematics and all that—but I’m not usually thinking about any of that too much, or too overtly. It’s more feeling than thinking—or a combination of the two, with feeling being in charge, and thinking sort of running around behind, making overly literal suggestions, and those feelings being sounded out and exercised and manifested via heavy editing and rewriting (as opposed to, say, planning and deciding). The important part of the writing process, for me, is trying to make choices that push the story in the most interesting direction, by which I mean the direction that causes the story to give off the most light. The story’s goal is to be fascinating and stimulating and irreducible; the writer’s job is to micromanage the text to make this happen.

Here, it felt to me that what made the light come off the story was (1) the language (the way the truncated diary syntax produced strange little textual moments) and (2) anything that heightened the ambiguity of Eva’s actions.

What I realized very late in the game was that the narrator has something deeply in common with the SGs, which is *aspiration*—he can’t see it, even at the end, but it’s true. Or maybe he’s just starting to see it, there at the end of the story. When he starts thinking about the SGs’ families back in their home countries, I imagine him getting a bit of a red face and not knowing (or pretending not to know) why. Through the whole story he’s been keeping himself apart from the SGs, physically and emotionally, but, at the end there, he might be starting to see that he’s actually quite similar to them, in his love for his family and in how far he’s willing to go to satisfy his family’s needs. The only difference is that he was born here, and his job affords him (a little) more dignity. The reason he hasn’t felt more sympathy for the SGs, or really thought directly about them in a simple human way, is that he’s been blocking. They remind him too much of himself.

ME TALK PRETTY ONE DAY

BY DAVID SEDARIS

AT THE AGE OF FORTY-ONE, I am returning to school and have to think of myself as what my French textbook calls "a true debutant." After paying my tuition, I was issued a student ID, which allows me a discounted entry fee at movie theaters, puppet shows, and Festyland, a far-flung amusement park that advertises with billboards picturing a cartoon stegosaurus sitting in a canoe and eating what appears to be a ham sandwich.

I've moved to Paris with hopes of learning the language. My school is an easy ten-minute walk from my apartment, and on the first day of class I arrived early, watching as the returning students greeted one another in the school lobby. Vacations were recounted, and questions were raised concerning mutual mends with names like Kang and Vlatnya. Regardless of their nationalities, everyone spoke in what sounded to me like excellent French. Some accents were better than others, but the students exhibited an ease and confidence I found intimidating. As an added discomfort, they were all young, attractive, and well dressed, causing me to feel not unlike Pa Kettle trapped backstage after a fashion show.

The first day of class was nerve-racking because I knew I'd be expected to perform. That's the way they do it here - it's everybody into the language pool, sink or swim. The teacher marched in, deeply tanned from a recent vacation, and proceeded to rattle off a series of administrative announcements. I've spent quite a few summers in Normandy, and I took a monthlong French class before leaving New York. I'm not completely in the dark, yet I understood only half of what this woman was saying.

"If you have not *meimslxp* or *lgpdmurct* by this time, then you should not be in this room; Has everyone *apzkiubjxow*? Everyone? Good, we shall begin." She spread out her lesson plan and sighed, saying, All right, then, who knows the alphabet?"

It was startling because (a) I hadn't been asked that question in a while and (b) I realized, while laughing, that I myself did *not* know the alphabet. They're the same letters, but in France they're pronounced differently. I know the shape of the alphabet but had no idea what it actually sounded like.

"Ahh." The teacher went to the board and sketched the letter *a*, "Do we have anyone in the room whose first name commences with an *ahh*?"

Two Polish Annas raised their hands, and the teacher instructed them to present themselves by stating their names, nationalities, occupations, and a brief list of things they liked and disliked in this world. The first Anna hailed from an industrial town outside of Warsaw and had front teeth the size of tombstones, She worked as a seamstress, enjoyed quiet times with friends, and hated the mosquito,

"Oh, really;" the teacher said, "How very interesting, I thought that everyone loved the mosquito, but here, in front of all the world, you claim to detest him, How is it that we've been blessed with someone as unique and original as you? Tell us, please,"

The seamstress did not understand what was being said but knew that this was an occasion for shame, Her rabbit mouth huffed for breath, and she stared down at her lap as though the appropriate comeback were stitched somewhere alongside the zipper of her slacks.

The second Anna learned from the first and claimed to love sunshine and detest lies, It sounded like a translation of one of those Playmate of the Month data sheets, the answers always written in the same loopy handwriting: "Turn-ons: Mom's famous five-alarm chili! Turnoffs: insecurity and guys who come on too strong!!!!"

The two Polish Annas surely had clear notions of what they loved and hated, but like the rest of us, they were limited in terms of vocabulary; and this made them appear less than sophisticated, The

teacher forged on, and we learned that Carlos, the Argentine bandonion player, loved wine, music, and, in his words, "making sex with the womens of the world." Next came a beautiful young Yugoslav who identified herself as an optimist, saying that she loved everything that life had to offer,

The teacher licked her lips, revealing a hint of the saucebox we would later come to know. She crouched low for her attack, placed her hands on the young woman's desk, and leaned close, saying, "Oh yeah? And do you love your little, war?"

While the optimist struggled to defend herself, I scrambled to think of an answer to what had obviously become a trick question, How often is one asked what he loves in this world? More to the point, how often is one asked and then publicly ridiculed for his answer? I recalled my mother, flushed with wine, pounding the tabletop late one night, saying, "Love? I love a good steak cooked rare, I love my cat, and I love, , , " My sisters and I leaned forward, waiting to hear our names, "Tums," our mother said, "I love Tums."

The teacher killed some time accusing the Yugoslavian girl of masterminding a program of genocide, and I jotted frantic notes in the margins of my pad, While I can honestly say that I love leafing through medical textbooks devoted to severe dermatological conditions, the hobby is beyond the reach of my French vocabulary; and acting it out would only have invited controversy.

When called upon, I delivered an effortless list of things that I detest: blood sausage, intestinal pates, brain pudding. I'd learned these words the hard way. Having given it some thought, I then declared my love for IBM typewriters, the French word for *bruise*, and my electric floor waxer. It was a short list, but still I managed to mispronounce IBM and assign the wrong gender to both the floor waxer and the typewriter. The teacher's reaction led me to believe that these mistakes were capital crimes in the country of France.

"Were you always this *palicmkrexis*?" she asked. "Even a *fiuscrzsa ticiwelmun* knows that a typewriter is feminine."

I absorbed as much of her abuse as I could understand, thinking - but not saying - that I find it ridiculous to assign a gender to an inanimate object incapable of disrobing and making an occasional fool of itself. Why refer to Lady Crack Pipe or Good Sir Dishrag when these things could never live up to all that their sex implied?

The teacher proceeded to belittle everyone from German Eva, who hated laziness, to Japanese Yukari, who loved paintbrushes and soap. Italian, Thai, Dutch, Korean, and Chinese—we all left class foolishly believing that the worst was over. She'd shaken us up a little, but surely that was just an act designed to weed out the deadweight. We didn't know it then, but the coming months would teach us what it was like to spend time in the presence of a wild animal, something completely unpredictable. Her temperament was not based on a series of good and bad days but, rather, good and bad moments. We soon learned to dodge chalk and protect our heads and stomachs whenever she approached us with a question. She hadn't yet punched anyone, but it seemed wise to protect ourselves against the inevitable.

Though we were forbidden to speak anything but French, the teacher would occasionally use us to practice any of her five fluent languages.

"I hate you," she said to me one afternoon. Her English was flawless. "I really, really hate you." Call me sensitive, but I couldn't help but take it personally.

After being Singled out as a lazy *kfdtinvm*, I took to spending four hours a night on my homework, putting in even more time whenever we were assigned an essay. I suppose I could have gotten by with less, but I was determined create some sort of identity for myself: David the hard worker, David the cut-up. We'd have one of those "complete this sentence" exercises, and I'd fool with the thing for hours, invariably settling on something like "A quick run around the lake? I'd love to! Just give me a moment while I strap on my wooden leg." The teacher, through word and action, conveyed the message that if this was my idea of an identity. she wanted nothing to do with it.

My fear and discomfort crept beyond the borders of the classroom and accompanied me out onto the wide boulevards. Stopping for a coffee, asking directions, depositing money in my bank account: these things were out of the question, as they involved having to speak. Before beginning school, there'd been no shutting me up, but now I was convinced that everything I said was wrong. When the phone rang, I ignored it. If someone asked me a question, I pretended to be deaf. I knew my fear was getting the best of me when I started wondering why they don't sell cuts of meat in vending machines.

My only comfort was the knowledge that I was not alone. Huddled in the hallways and making the most of our pathetic French, my fellow students and I engaged in the sort of conversation commonly overheard in refugee camps.

"Sometime me cry alone at night."

"That be common for I, also, but be more strong, you. Much work and someday you talk pretty. People start love you soon. Maybe tomorrow, okay."

Unlike the French class I had taken in New York, here there was no sense of competition. When the teacher poked a shy Korean in the eyelid with a freshly sharpened pencil, we took no comfort in the fact that, unlike Hyeyoon Cho, we all knew the irregular past tense of the verb *to defeat*. In all fairness, the teacher hadn't meant to stab the girl, but neither did she spend much time apologizing, saying only, "Well, you should have been *vkkdyo* more *kdeynfolh*."

Over time it became impossible to believe that any of us would ever improve. Fall arrived and it rained every day, meaning we would now be scolded for the water dripping from our coats and umbrellas. It was mid-October when the teacher singled me out, saying, "Every day spent with you is like having a cesarean section." And it struck me that, for the first time since arriving in France, I could understand every word that someone was saying.

Understanding doesn't mean that you can suddenly speak the language. Far from it. It's a small step, nothing more, yet its rewards are intoxicating and deceptive. The teacher continued her diatribe and I settled back, bathing in the subtle beauty of each new curse and insult.

"You exhaust me with your foolishness and reward my efforts with nothing but pain, do you understand me)"

The world opened up, and it was with great joy that I responded, "I know the thing that you speak exact now. Talk me more, you, plus, please, plus."

DRACULA'S GUEST

BY BRAM STOKER

When we started for our drive the sun was shining brightly on Munich, and the air was full of the joyousness of early summer. Just as we were about to depart, Herr Delbrück (the maître d'hôtel of the Quatre Saisons, where I was staying) came down, bareheaded, to the carriage and, after wishing me a pleasant drive, said to the coachman, still holding his hand on the handle of the carriage door:

'Remember you are back by nightfall. The sky looks bright but there is a shiver in the north wind that says there may be a sudden storm. But I am sure you will not be late.' Here he smiled, and added, 'for you know what night it is.'

Johann answered with an emphatic, 'Ja, mein Herr,' and, touching his hat, drove off quickly. When we had cleared the town, I said, after signalling to him to stop:

'Tell me, Johann, what is tonight?'

He crossed himself, as he answered laconically: 'Walpurgis nacht.' Then he took out his watch, a great, old-fashioned German silver thing as big as a turnip, and looked at it, with his eyebrows gathered together and a little impatient shrug of his shoulders. I realised that this was his way of respectfully protesting against the unnecessary delay, and sank back in the carriage, merely motioning him to proceed. He started off rapidly, as if to make up for lost time. Every now and then the horses seemed to throw up their heads and sniffed the air suspiciously. On such occasions I often looked round in alarm. The road was pretty bleak, for we were traversing a sort of high, wind-swept plateau. As we drove, I saw a road that looked but little used, and which seemed to dip through a little, winding valley. It looked so inviting that, even at the risk of offending him, I called Johann to stop—and when he had pulled up, I told him I would like to drive down that road. He made all sorts of excuses, and frequently crossed himself as he spoke. This somewhat piqued my curiosity, so I asked him various questions. He answered fencingly, and repeatedly looked at his watch in protest. Finally I said:

'Well, Johann, I want to go down this road. I shall not ask you to come unless you like; but tell me why you do not like to go, that is all I ask.' For answer he seemed to throw himself off the box, so quickly did he reach the ground. Then he stretched out his hands appealingly to me, and implored me not to go. There was just enough of English mixed with the German for me to understand the drift of his talk. He seemed always just about to tell me something—the very idea of which evidently frightened him; but each time he pulled himself up, saying, as he crossed himself: 'Walpurgis-Nacht!'

I tried to argue with him, but it was difficult to argue with a man when I did not know his language. The advantage certainly rested with him, for although he began to speak in English, of a very crude and broken kind, he always got excited and broke into his native tongue—and every time he did so, he looked at his watch. Then the horses became restless and sniffed the air. At this he grew very pale, and, looking around in a frightened way, he suddenly jumped forward, took them by the bridles and led them on some twenty feet. I followed, and asked why he had done this. For answer he crossed himself, pointed to the spot we had left and drew his carriage in the direction of the other road, indicating a cross, and said, first in German, then in English: 'Buried him—him what killed themselves.'

I remembered the old custom of burying suicides at cross-roads: 'Ah! I see, a suicide. How interesting!' But for the life of me I could not make out why the horses were frightened.

Whilst we were talking, we heard a sort of sound between a yelp and a bark. It was far away; but the horses got very restless, and it took Johann all his time to quiet them. He was pale, and said, 'It sounds like a wolf—but yet there are no wolves here now.'

'No?' I said, questioning him; 'isn't it long since the wolves were so near the city?'

'Long, long,' he answered, 'in the spring and summer; but with the snow the wolves have been here not so long.'

Whilst he was petting the horses and trying to quiet them, dark clouds drifted rapidly across the sky. The sunshine passed away, and a breath of cold wind seemed to drift past us. It was only a breath, however, and more in the nature of a warning than a fact, for the sun came out brightly again. Johann looked under his lifted hand at the horizon and said:

'The storm of snow, he comes before long time.' Then he looked at his watch again, and, straightway holding his reins firmly—for the horses were still pawing the ground restlessly and shaking their heads—he climbed to his box as though the time had come for proceeding on our journey.

I felt a little obstinate and did not at once get into the carriage.

'Tell me,' I said, 'about this place where the road leads,' and I pointed down.

Again he crossed himself and mumbled a prayer, before he answered, 'It is unholy.'

'What is unholy?' I enquired.

'The village.'

'Then there is a village?'

'No, no. No one lives there hundreds of years.' My curiosity was piqued, 'But you said there was a village.'

'There was.'

'Where is it now?'

Whereupon he burst out into a long story in German and English, so mixed up that I could not quite understand exactly what he said, but roughly I gathered that long ago, hundreds of years, men had died there and been buried in their graves; and sounds were heard under the clay, and when the graves were opened, men and women were found rosy with life, and their mouths red with blood. And so, in haste to save their lives (aye, and their souls!—and here he crossed himself) those who were left fled away to other places, where the living lived, and the dead were dead and not—not something. He was evidently afraid to speak the last words. As he proceeded with his narration, he grew more and more

excited. It seemed as if his imagination had got hold of him, and he ended in a perfect paroxysm of fear—white-faced, perspiring, trembling and looking round him, as if expecting that some dreadful presence would manifest itself there in the bright sunshine on the open plain. Finally, in an agony of desperation, he cried:

'Walpurgis nacht!' and pointed to the carriage for me to get in. All my English blood rose at this, and, standing back, I said:

'You are afraid, Johann—you are afraid. Go home; I shall return alone; the walk will do me good.' The carriage door was open. I took from the seat my oak walking-stick—which I always carry on my holiday excursions—and closed the door, pointing back to Munich, and said, 'Go home, Johann—Walpurgis-nacht doesn't concern Englishmen.'

The horses were now more restive than ever, and Johann was trying to hold them in, while excitedly imploring me not to do anything so foolish. I pitied the poor fellow, he was deeply in earnest; but all the same I could not help laughing. His English was quite gone now. In his anxiety he had forgotten that his only means of making me understand was to talk my language, so he jabbered away in his native German. It began to be a little tedious. After giving the direction, 'Home!' I turned to go down the cross-road into the valley.

With a despairing gesture, Johann turned his horses towards Munich. I leaned on my stick and looked after him. He went slowly along the road for a while: then there came over the crest of the hill a man tall and thin. I could see so much in the distance. When he drew near the horses, they began to jump and kick about, then to scream with terror. Johann could not hold them in; they bolted down the road, running away madly. I watched them out of sight, then looked for the stranger, but I found that he, too, was gone.

With a light heart I turned down the side road through the deepening valley to which Johann had objected. There was not the slightest reason, that I could see, for his objection; and I daresay I tramped for a couple of hours without thinking of time or distance, and certainly without seeing a person or a house. So far as the place was concerned, it was desolation itself. But I did not notice this particularly till, on turning a bend in the road, I came upon a scattered fringe of wood; then I recognised that I had been impressed unconsciously by the desolation of the region through which I had passed.

I sat down to rest myself, and began to look around. It struck me that it was considerably colder than it had been at the commencement of my walk—a sort of sighing sound seemed to be around me, with, now and then, high overhead, a sort of muffled roar. Looking upwards I noticed that great thick clouds were drifting rapidly across the sky from North to South at a great height. There were signs of coming storm in some lofty stratum of the air. I was a little chilly, and, thinking that it was the sitting still after the exercise of walking, I resumed my journey.

The ground I passed over was now much more picturesque. There were no striking objects that the eye might single out; but in all there was a charm of beauty. I took little heed of time and it was only when the deepening twilight forced itself upon me that I began to think of how I should find my way home. The brightness of the day had gone. The air was cold, and the drifting of clouds high overhead was more marked. They were accompanied by a sort of far-away rushing sound, through which seemed to come at intervals that mysterious cry which the driver had said came from a wolf. For a while I

hesitated. I had said I would see the deserted village, so on I went, and presently came on a wide stretch of open country, shut in by hills all around. Their sides were covered with trees which spread down to the plain, dotting, in clumps, the gentler slopes and hollows which showed here and there. I followed with my eye the winding of the road, and saw that it curved close to one of the densest of these clumps and was lost behind it.

As I looked there came a cold shiver in the air, and the snow began to fall. I thought of the miles and miles of bleak country I had passed, and then hurried on to seek the shelter of the wood in front. Darker and darker grew the sky, and faster and heavier fell the snow, till the earth before and around me was a glistening white carpet the further edge of which was lost in misty vagueness. The road was here but crude, and when on the level its boundaries were not so marked, as when it passed through the cuttings; and in a little while I found that I must have strayed from it, for I missed underfoot the hard surface, and my feet sank deeper in the grass and moss. Then the wind grew stronger and blew with ever increasing force, till I was fain to run before it. The air became icy-cold, and in spite of my exercise I began to suffer. The snow was now falling so thickly and whirling around me in such rapid eddies that I could hardly keep my eyes open. Every now and then the heavens were torn asunder by vivid lightning, and in the flashes I could see ahead of me a great mass of trees, chiefly yew and cypress all heavily coated with snow.

I was soon amongst the shelter of the trees, and there, in comparative silence, I could hear the rush of the wind high overhead. Presently the blackness of the storm had become merged in the darkness of the night. By-and-by the storm seemed to be passing away: it now only came in fierce puffs or blasts. At such moments the weird sound of the wolf appeared to be echoed by many similar sounds around me.

Now and again, through the black mass of drifting cloud, came a straggling ray of moonlight, which lit up the expanse, and showed me that I was at the edge of a dense mass of cypress and yew trees. As the snow had ceased to fall, I walked out from the shelter and began to investigate more closely. It appeared to me that, amongst so many old foundations as I had passed, there might be still standing a house in which, though in ruins, I could find some sort of shelter for a while. As I skirted the edge of the copse, I found that a low wall encircled it, and following this I presently found an opening. Here the cypresses formed an alley leading up to a square mass of some kind of building. Just as I caught sight of this, however, the drifting clouds obscured the moon, and I passed up the path in darkness. The wind must have grown colder, for I felt myself shiver as I walked; but there was hope of shelter, and I groped my way blindly on.

I stopped, for there was a sudden stillness. The storm had passed; and, perhaps in sympathy with nature's silence, my heart seemed to cease to beat. But this was only momentarily; for suddenly the moonlight broke through the clouds, showing me that I was in a graveyard, and that the square object before me was a great massive tomb of marble, as white as the snow that lay on and all around it. With the moonlight there came a fierce sigh of the storm, which appeared to resume its course with a long, low howl, as of many dogs or wolves. I was awed and shocked, and felt the cold perceptibly grow upon me till it seemed to grip me by the heart. Then while the flood of moonlight still fell on the marble tomb, the storm gave further evidence of renewing, as though it was returning on its track. Impelled by some sort of fascination, I approached the sepulchre to see what it was, and why such a thing stood alone in such a place. I walked around it, and read, over the Doric door, in German:

COUNTESS DOLINGEN OF GRATZ
IN STYRIA
SOUGHT AND FOUND DEATH
1801

On the top of the tomb, seemingly driven through the solid marble—for the structure was composed of a few vast blocks of stone—was a great iron spike or stake. On going to the back I saw, graven in great Russian letters:

'The dead travel fast.'

There was something so weird and uncanny about the whole thing that it gave me a turn and made me feel quite faint. I began to wish, for the first time, that I had taken Johann's advice. Here a thought struck me, which came under almost mysterious circumstances and with a terrible shock. This was Walpurgis Night!

Walpurgis Night, when, according to the belief of millions of people, the devil was abroad—when the graves were opened and the dead came forth and walked. When all evil things of earth and air and water held revel. This very place the driver had specially shunned. This was the depopulated village of centuries ago. This was where the suicide lay; and this was the place where I was alone—unmanned, shivering with cold in a shroud of snow with a wild storm gathering again upon me! It took all my philosophy, all the religion I had been taught, all my courage, not to collapse in a paroxysm of fright.

And now a perfect tornado burst upon me. The ground shook as though thousands of horses thundered across it; and this time the storm bore on its icy wings, not snow, but great hailstones which drove with such violence that they might have come from the thongs of Balearic slingers—hailstones that beat down leaf and branch and made the shelter of the cypresses of no more avail than though their stems were standing-corn. At the first I had rushed to the nearest tree; but I was soon fain to leave it and seek the only spot that seemed to afford refuge, the deep Doric doorway of the marble tomb. There, crouching against the massive bronze door, I gained a certain amount of protection from the beating of the hailstones, for now they only drove against me as they ricocheted from the ground and the side of the marble.

As I leaned against the door, it moved slightly and opened inwards. The shelter of even a tomb was welcome in that pitiless tempest, and I was about to enter it when there came a flash of forked-lightning that lit up the whole expanse of the heavens. In the instant, as I am a living man, I saw, as my eyes were turned into the darkness of the tomb, a beautiful woman, with rounded cheeks and red lips, seemingly sleeping on a bier. As the thunder broke overhead, I was grasped as by the hand of a giant and hurled out into the storm. The whole thing was so sudden that, before I could realise the shock, moral as well as physical, I found the hailstones beating me down. At the same time I had a strange, dominating feeling that I was not alone. I looked towards the tomb. Just then there came another blinding flash, which seemed to strike the iron stake that surmounted the tomb and to pour through to the earth, blasting and crumbling the marble, as in a burst of flame. The dead woman rose for a moment of agony, while she was lapped in the flame, and her bitter scream of pain was drowned in the thundercrash. The last thing I heard was this mingling of dreadful sound, as again I was seized in the giant-grasp and dragged away, while the hailstones beat on me, and the air around seemed reverberant with the howling of wolves. The last sight that I remembered was a vague, white, moving mass, as if all

the graves around me had sent out the phantoms of their sheeted-dead, and that they were closing in on me through the white cloudiness of the driving hail.

Gradually there came a sort of vague beginning of consciousness; then a sense of weariness that was dreadful. For a time I remembered nothing; but slowly my senses returned. My feet seemed positively racked with pain, yet I could not move them. They seemed to be numbed. There was an icy feeling at the back of my neck and all down my spine, and my ears, like my feet, were dead, yet in torment; but there was in my breast a sense of warmth which was, by comparison, delicious. It was as a nightmare—a physical nightmare, if one may use such an expression; for some heavy weight on my chest made it difficult for me to breathe.

This period of semi-lethargy seemed to remain a long time, and as it faded away I must have slept or swooned. Then came a sort of loathing, like the first stage of sea-sickness, and a wild desire to be free from something—I knew not what. A vast stillness enveloped me, as though all the world were asleep or dead—only broken by the low panting as of some animal close to me. I felt a warm rasping at my throat, then came a consciousness of the awful truth, which chilled me to the heart and sent the blood surging up through my brain. Some great animal was lying on me and now licking my throat. I feared to stir, for some instinct of prudence bade me lie still; but the brute seemed to realise that there was now some change in me, for it raised its head. Through my eyelashes I saw above me the two great flaming eyes of a gigantic wolf. Its sharp white teeth gleamed in the gaping red mouth, and I could feel its hot breath fierce and acrid upon me.

For another spell of time I remembered no more. Then I became conscious of a low growl, followed by a yelp, renewed again and again. Then, seemingly very far away, I heard a 'Holloa! holloa!' as of many voices calling in unison. Cautiously I raised my head and looked in the direction whence the sound came; but the cemetery blocked my view. The wolf still continued to yelp in a strange way, and a red glare began to move round the grove of cypresses, as though following the sound. As the voices drew closer, the wolf yelped faster and louder. I feared to make either sound or motion. Nearer came the red glow, over the white pall which stretched into the darkness around me. Then all at once from beyond the trees there came at a trot a troop of horsemen bearing torches. The wolf rose from my breast and made for the cemetery. I saw one of the horsemen (soldiers by their caps and their long military cloaks) raise his carbine and take aim. A companion knocked up his arm, and I heard the ball whizz over my head. He had evidently taken my body for that of the wolf. Another sighted the animal as it slunk away, and a shot followed. Then, at a gallop, the troop rode forward—some towards me, others following the wolf as it disappeared amongst the snow-clad cypresses.

As they drew nearer I tried to move, but was powerless, although I could see and hear all that went on around me. Two or three of the soldiers jumped from their horses and knelt beside me. One of them raised my head, and placed his hand over my heart.

'Good news, comrades!' he cried. 'His heart still beats!'

Then some brandy was poured down my throat; it put vigour into me, and I was able to open my eyes fully and look around. Lights and shadows were moving among the trees, and I heard men call to one another. They drew together, uttering frightened exclamations; and the lights flashed as the others

came pouring out of the cemetery pell-mell, like men possessed. When the further ones came close to us, those who were around me asked them eagerly:

'Well, have you found him?'

The reply rang out hurriedly:

'No! no! Come away quick—quick! This is no place to stay, and on this of all nights!'

'What was it?' was the question, asked in all manner of keys. The answer came variously and all indefinitely as though the men were moved by some common impulse to speak, yet were restrained by some common fear from giving their thoughts.

'It—it—indeed!' gibbered one, whose wits had plainly given out for the moment.

'A wolf—and yet not a wolf!' another put in shudderingly.

'No use trying for him without the sacred bullet,' a third remarked in a more ordinary manner.

'Serve us right for coming out on this night! Truly we have earned our thousand marks!' were the ejaculations of a fourth.

'There was blood on the broken marble,' another said after a pause—'the lightning never brought that there. And for him—is he safe? Look at his throat! See, comrades, the wolf has been lying on him and keeping his blood warm.'

The officer looked at my throat and replied:

'He is all right; the skin is not pierced. What does it all mean? We should never have found him but for the yelping of the wolf.'

'What became of it?' asked the man who was holding up my head, and who seemed the least panic-stricken of the party, for his hands were steady and without tremor. On his sleeve was the chevron of a petty officer.

'It went to its home,' answered the man, whose long face was pallid, and who actually shook with terror as he glanced around him fearfully. 'There are graves enough there in which it may lie. Come, comrades—come quickly! Let us leave this cursed spot.'

The officer raised me to a sitting posture, as he uttered a word of command; then several men placed me upon a horse. He sprang to the saddle behind me, took me in his arms, gave the word to advance; and, turning our faces away from the cypresses, we rode away in swift, military order.

As yet my tongue refused its office, and I was perforce silent. I must have fallen asleep; for the next thing I remembered was finding myself standing up, supported by a soldier on each side of me. It was almost broad daylight, and to the north a red streak of sunlight was reflected, like a path of blood,

over the waste of snow. The officer was telling the men to say nothing of what they had seen, except that they found an English stranger, guarded by a large dog.

'Dog! that was no dog,' cut in the man who had exhibited such fear. 'I think I know a wolf when I see one.'

The young officer answered calmly: 'I said a dog.'

'Dog!' reiterated the other ironically. It was evident that his courage was rising with the sun; and, pointing to me, he said, 'Look at his throat. Is that the work of a dog, master?'

Instinctively I raised my hand to my throat, and as I touched it I cried out in pain. The men crowded round to look, some stooping down from their saddles; and again there came the calm voice of the young officer:

'A dog, as I said. If aught else were said we should only be laughed at.'

I was then mounted behind a trooper, and we rode on into the suburbs of Munich. Here we came across a stray carriage, into which I was lifted, and it was driven off to the Quatre Saisons—the young officer accompanying me, whilst a trooper followed with his horse, and the others rode off to their barracks.

When we arrived, Herr Delbrück rushed so quickly down the steps to meet me, that it was apparent he had been watching within. Taking me by both hands he solicitously led me in. The officer saluted me and was turning to withdraw, when I recognised his purpose, and insisted that he should come to my rooms. Over a glass of wine I warmly thanked him and his brave comrades for saving me. He replied simply that he was more than glad, and that Herr Delbrück had at the first taken steps to make all the searching party pleased; at which ambiguous utterance the maître d'hôtel smiled, while the officer pleaded duty and withdrew.

'But Herr Delbrück,' I enquired, 'how and why was it that the soldiers searched for me?'

He shrugged his shoulders, as if in depreciation of his own deed, as he replied:

'I was so fortunate as to obtain leave from the commander of the regiment in which I served, to ask for volunteers.'

'But how did you know I was lost?' I asked.

'The driver came hither with the remains of his carriage, which had been upset when the horses ran away.'

'But surely you would not send a search-party of soldiers merely on this account?'

'Oh, no!' he answered; 'but even before the coachman arrived, I had this telegram from the Boyar whose guest you are,' and he took from his pocket a telegram which he handed to me, and I read:

Bistritz.

Be careful of my guest—his safety is most precious to me. Should aught happen to him, or if he be missed, spare nothing to find him and ensure his safety. He is English and therefore adventurous. There are often dangers from snow and wolves and night. Lose not a moment if you suspect harm to him. I answer your zeal with my fortune.—*Dracula.*

As I held the telegram in my hand, the room seemed to whirl around me; and, if the attentive maître d'hôtel had not caught me, I think I should have fallen. There was something so strange in all this, something so weird and impossible to imagine, that there grew on me a sense of my being in some way the sport of opposite forces—the mere vague idea of which seemed in a way to paralyse me. I was certainly under some form of mysterious protection. From a distant country had come, in the very nick of time, a message that took me out of the danger of the snow-sleep and the jaws of the wolf.

The Happy Prince

BY OSCAR WILDE

High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large red ruby glowed on his sword-hilt.

He was very much admired indeed. "He is as beautiful as a weathercock," remarked one of the Town Councillors who wished to gain a reputation for having artistic tastes; "only not quite so useful," he added, fearing lest people should think him unpractical, which he really was not.

"Why can't you be like the Happy Prince?" asked a sensible mother of her little boy who was crying for the moon. "The Happy Prince never dreams of crying for anything."

"I am glad there is some one in the world who is quite happy," muttered a disappointed man as he gazed at the wonderful statue.

"He looks just like an angel," said the Charity Children as they came out of the cathedral in their bright scarlet cloaks and their clean white pinafores.

"How do you know?" said the Mathematical Master, "you have never seen one."

"Ah! but we have, in our dreams," answered the children; and the Mathematical Master frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming.

One night there flew over the city a little Swallow. His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful Reed. He had met her early in the spring as he was flying down the river after a big yellow moth, and had been so attracted by her slender waist that he had stopped to talk to her.

"Shall I love you?" said the Swallow, who liked to come to the point at once, and the Reed made him a low bow. So he flew round and round her, touching the water with his wings, and making silver ripples. This was his courtship, and it lasted all through the summer.

"It is a ridiculous attachment," twittered the other Swallows; "she has no money, and far too many relations"; and indeed the river was quite full of Reeds. Then, when the autumn came they all flew away.

After they had gone he felt lonely, and began to tire of his lady-love. "She has no conversation," he said, "and I am afraid that she is a coquette, for she is always flirting with the wind." And certainly, whenever the wind blew, the Reed made the most graceful curtseys. "I admit that she is domestic," he continued, "but I love travelling, and my wife, consequently, should love travelling also."

"Will you come away with me?" he said finally to her; but the Reed shook her head, she was so attached to her home.

“You have been trifling with me,” he cried. “I am off to the Pyramids. Good-bye!” and he flew away.

All day long he flew, and at night-time he arrived at the city. “Where shall I put up?” he said; “I hope the town has made preparations.”

Then he saw the statue on the tall column.

“I will put up there,” he cried; “it is a fine position, with plenty of fresh air.” So he alighted just between the feet of the Happy Prince.

“I have a golden bedroom,” he said softly to himself as he looked round, and he prepared to go to sleep; but just as he was putting his head under his wing a large drop of water fell on him. “What a curious thing!” he cried; “there is not a single cloud in the sky, the stars are quite clear and bright, and yet it is raining. The climate in the north of Europe is really dreadful. The Reed used to like the rain, but that was merely her selfishness.”

Then another drop fell.

“What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off?” he said; “I must look for a good chimney-pot,” and he determined to fly away.

But before he had opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw—Ah! what did he see?

The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears were running down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little Swallow was filled with pity.

“Who are you?” he said.

“I am the Happy Prince.”

“Why are you weeping then?” asked the Swallow; “you have quite drenched me.”

“When I was alive and had a human heart,” answered the statue, “I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the daytime I played with my companions in the garden, and in the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. Round the garden ran a very lofty wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here so high that I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of lead yet I cannot choose but weep.”

“What! is he not solid gold?” said the Swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks out loud.

“Far away,” continued the statue in a low musical voice, “far away in a little street there is a poor house. One of the windows is open, and through it I can see a woman seated at a table. Her face is thin and worn, and she has coarse, red hands, all pricked by the needle, for she is a seamstress. She is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen’s maids-of-honour to wear at the next Court-ball. In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking for oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but river water, so he is crying. Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, will you not bring her the ruby out of my sword-hilt? My feet are fastened to this pedestal and I cannot move.”

“I am waited for in Egypt,” said the Swallow. “My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus-flowers. Soon they will go to sleep in the tomb of the great King. The King is there himself in his painted coffin. He is wrapped in yellow linen, and embalmed with spices. Round his neck is a chain of pale green jade, and his hands are like withered leaves.”

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me for one night, and be my messenger? The boy is so thirsty, and the mother so sad.”

“I don’t think I like boys,” answered the Swallow. “Last summer, when I was staying on the river, there were two rude boys, the miller’s sons, who were always throwing stones at me. They never hit me, of course; we swallows fly far too well for that, and besides, I come of a family famous for its agility; but still, it was a mark of disrespect.”

But the Happy Prince looked so sad that the little Swallow was sorry. “It is very cold here,” he said; “but I will stay with you for one night, and be your messenger.”

“Thank you, little Swallow,” said the Prince.

So the Swallow picked out the great ruby from the Prince’s sword, and flew away with it in his beak over the roofs of the town.

He passed by the cathedral tower, where the white marble angels were sculptured. He passed by the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl came out on the balcony with her lover. “How wonderful the stars are,” he said to her, “and how wonderful is the power of love!”

“I hope my dress will be ready in time for the State-ball,” she answered; “I have ordered passion-flowers to be embroidered on it; but the seamstresses are so lazy.”

He passed over the river, and saw the lanterns hanging to the masts of the ships. He passed over the Ghetto, and saw the old Jews bargaining with each other, and weighing out money in copper scales. At last he came to the poor house and looked in. The boy was tossing feverishly on his bed, and the mother had fallen asleep, she was so tired. In he hopped, and laid the great ruby on the table beside the woman’s thimble. Then he flew gently round the bed, fanning the boy’s forehead with his wings. “How cool I feel,” said the boy, “I must be getting better”; and he sank into a delicious slumber.

Then the Swallow flew back to the Happy Prince, and told him what he had done. “It is curious,” he remarked, “but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold.”

“That is because you have done a good action,” said the Prince. And the little Swallow began to think, and then he fell asleep. Thinking always made him sleepy.

When day broke he flew down to the river and had a bath. “What a remarkable phenomenon,” said the Professor of Ornithology as he was passing over the bridge. “A swallow in winter!” And he wrote a long letter about it to the local newspaper. Every one quoted it, it was full of so many words that they could not understand.

“To-night I go to Egypt,” said the Swallow, and he was in high spirits at the prospect. He visited all the public monuments, and sat a long time on top of the church steeple. Wherever he went the Sparrows chirruped, and said to each other, “What a distinguished stranger!” so he enjoyed himself very much.

When the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince. “Have you any commissions for Egypt?” he cried; “I am just starting.”

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me one night longer?”

“I am waited for in Egypt,” answered the Swallow. “To-morrow my friends will fly up to the Second Cataract. The river-horse couches there among the bulrushes, and on a great granite throne sits the God Memnon. All night long he watches the stars, and when the morning star shines he utters one cry of joy, and then he is silent. At noon the yellow lions come down to the water’s edge to drink. They have eyes like green beryls, and their roar is louder than the roar of the cataract.

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “far away across the city I see a young man in a garret. He is leaning over a desk covered with papers, and in a tumbler by his side there is a bunch of withered violets. His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. He is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he is too cold to write any more. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him faint.”

“I will wait with you one night longer,” said the Swallow, who really had a good heart. “Shall I take him another ruby?”

“Alas! I have no ruby now,” said the Prince; “my eyes are all that I have left. They are made of rare sapphires, which were brought out of India a thousand years ago. Pluck out one of them and take it to him. He will sell it to the jeweller, and buy food and firewood, and finish his play.”

“Dear Prince,” said the Swallow, “I cannot do that”; and he began to weep.

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “do as I command you.”

So the Swallow plucked out the Prince’s eye, and flew away to the student’s garret. It was easy enough to get in, as there was a hole in the roof. Through this he darted, and came into the room. The young man had his head buried in his hands, so he did not hear the flutter of the bird’s wings, and when he looked up he found the beautiful sapphire lying on the withered violets.

“I am beginning to be appreciated,” he cried; “this is from some great admirer. Now I can finish my play,” and he looked quite happy.

The next day the Swallow flew down to the harbour. He sat on the mast of a large vessel and watched the sailors hauling big chests out of the hold with ropes. "Heave a-hoy!" they shouted as each chest came up. "I am going to Egypt!" cried the Swallow, but nobody minded, and when the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince.

"I am come to bid you good-bye," he cried.

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "will you not stay with me one night longer?"

"It is winter," answered the Swallow, "and the chill snow will soon be here. In Egypt the sun is warm on the green palm-trees, and the crocodiles lie in the mud and look lazily about them. My companions are building a nest in the Temple of Baalbec, and the pink and white doves are watching them, and cooing to each other. Dear Prince, I must leave you, but I will never forget you, and next spring I will bring you back two beautiful jewels in place of those you have given away. The ruby shall be redder than a red rose, and the sapphire shall be as blue as the great sea."

"In the square below," said the Happy Prince, "there stands a little match-girl. She has let her matches fall in the gutter, and they are all spoiled. Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money, and she is crying. She has no shoes or stockings, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her."

"I will stay with you one night longer," said the Swallow, "but I cannot pluck out your eye. You would be quite blind then."

"Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow," said the Prince, "do as I command you."

So he plucked out the Prince's other eye, and darted down with it. He swooped past the match-girl, and slipped the jewel into the palm of her hand. "What a lovely bit of glass," cried the little girl; and she ran home, laughing.

Then the Swallow came back to the Prince. "You are blind now," he said, "so I will stay with you always."

"No, little Swallow," said the poor Prince, "you must go away to Egypt."

"I will stay with you always," said the Swallow, and he slept at the Prince's feet.

All the next day he sat on the Prince's shoulder, and told him stories of what he had seen in strange lands. He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch gold-fish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself, and lives in the desert, and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber beads in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal; of the great green snake that sleeps in a palm-tree, and has twenty priests to feed it with honey-cakes; and of the pygmies who sail over a big lake on large flat leaves, and are always at war with the butterflies.

“Dear little Swallow,” said the Prince, “you tell me of marvellous things, but more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women. There is no Mystery so great as Misery. Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see there.”

So the Swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark lanes, and saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets. Under the archway of a bridge two little boys were lying in one another’s arms to try and keep themselves warm. “How hungry we are!” they said. “You must not lie here,” shouted the Watchman, and they wandered out into the rain.

Then he flew back and told the Prince what he had seen.

“I am covered with fine gold,” said the Prince, “you must take it off, leaf by leaf, and give it to my poor; the living always think that gold can make them happy.”

Leaf after leaf of the fine gold the Swallow picked off, till the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey. Leaf after leaf of the fine gold he brought to the poor, and the children’s faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played games in the street. “We have bread now!” they cried.

Then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost. The streets looked as if they were made of silver, they were so bright and glistening; long icicles like crystal daggers hung down from the eaves of the houses, everybody went about in furs, and the little boys wore scarlet caps and skated on the ice.

The poor little Swallow grew colder and colder, but he would not leave the Prince, he loved him too well. He picked up crumbs outside the baker’s door when the baker was not looking and tried to keep himself warm by flapping his wings.

But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just strength to fly up to the Prince’s shoulder once more. “Good-bye, dear Prince!” he murmured, “will you let me kiss your hand?”

“I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you.”

“It is not to Egypt that I am going,” said the Swallow. “I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?”

And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two. It certainly was a dreadfully hard frost.

Early the next morning the Mayor was walking in the square below in company with the Town Councillors. As they passed the column he looked up at the statue: “Dear me! how shabby the Happy Prince looks!” he said.

“How shabby indeed!” cried the Town Councillors, who always agreed with the Mayor; and they went up to look at it.

“The ruby has fallen out of his sword, his eyes are gone, and he is golden no longer,” said the Mayor in fact, “he is little better than a beggar!”

“Little better than a beggar,” said the Town Councillors.

“And here is actually a dead bird at his feet!” continued the Mayor. “We must really issue a proclamation that birds are not to be allowed to die here.” And the Town Clerk made a note of the suggestion.

So they pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince. “As he is no longer beautiful he is no longer useful,” said the Art Professor at the University.

Then they melted the statue in a furnace, and the Mayor held a meeting of the Corporation to decide what was to be done with the metal. “We must have another statue, of course,” he said, “and it shall be a statue of myself.”

“Of myself,” said each of the Town Councillors, and they quarrelled. When I last heard of them they were quarrelling still.

“What a strange thing!” said the overseer of the workmen at the foundry. “This broken lead heart will not melt in the furnace. We must throw it away.” So they threw it on a dust-heap where the dead Swallow was also lying.

“Bring me the two most precious things in the city,” said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.

“You have rightly chosen,” said God, “for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise me.”