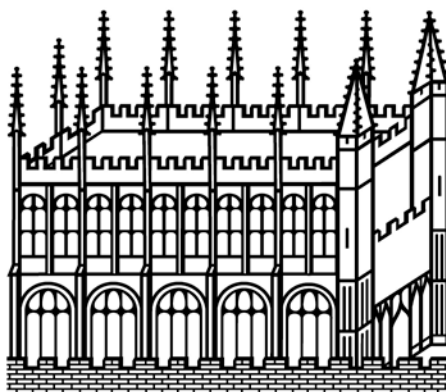




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GLAD GHOSTS

By

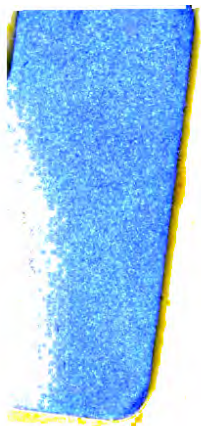
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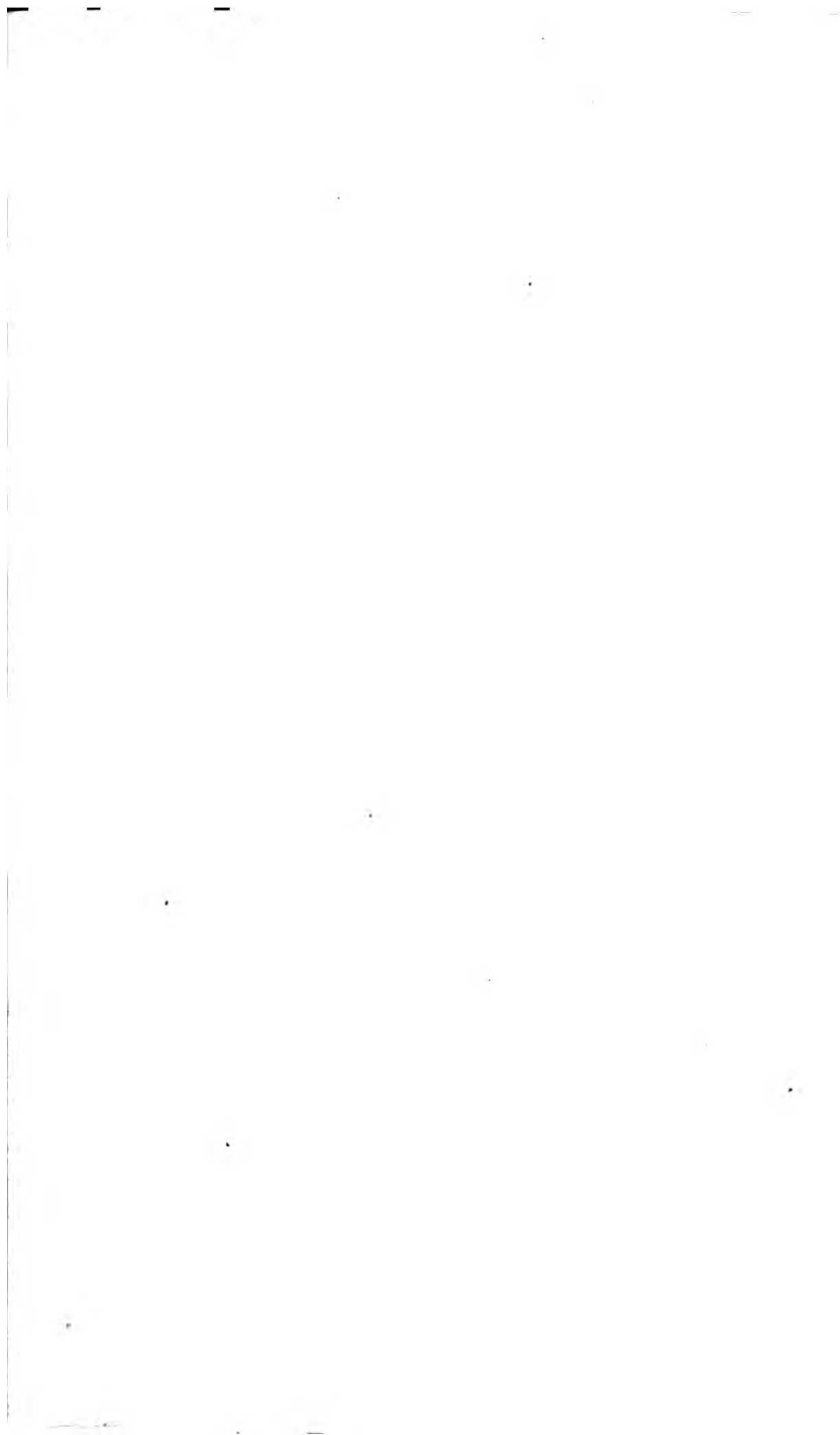
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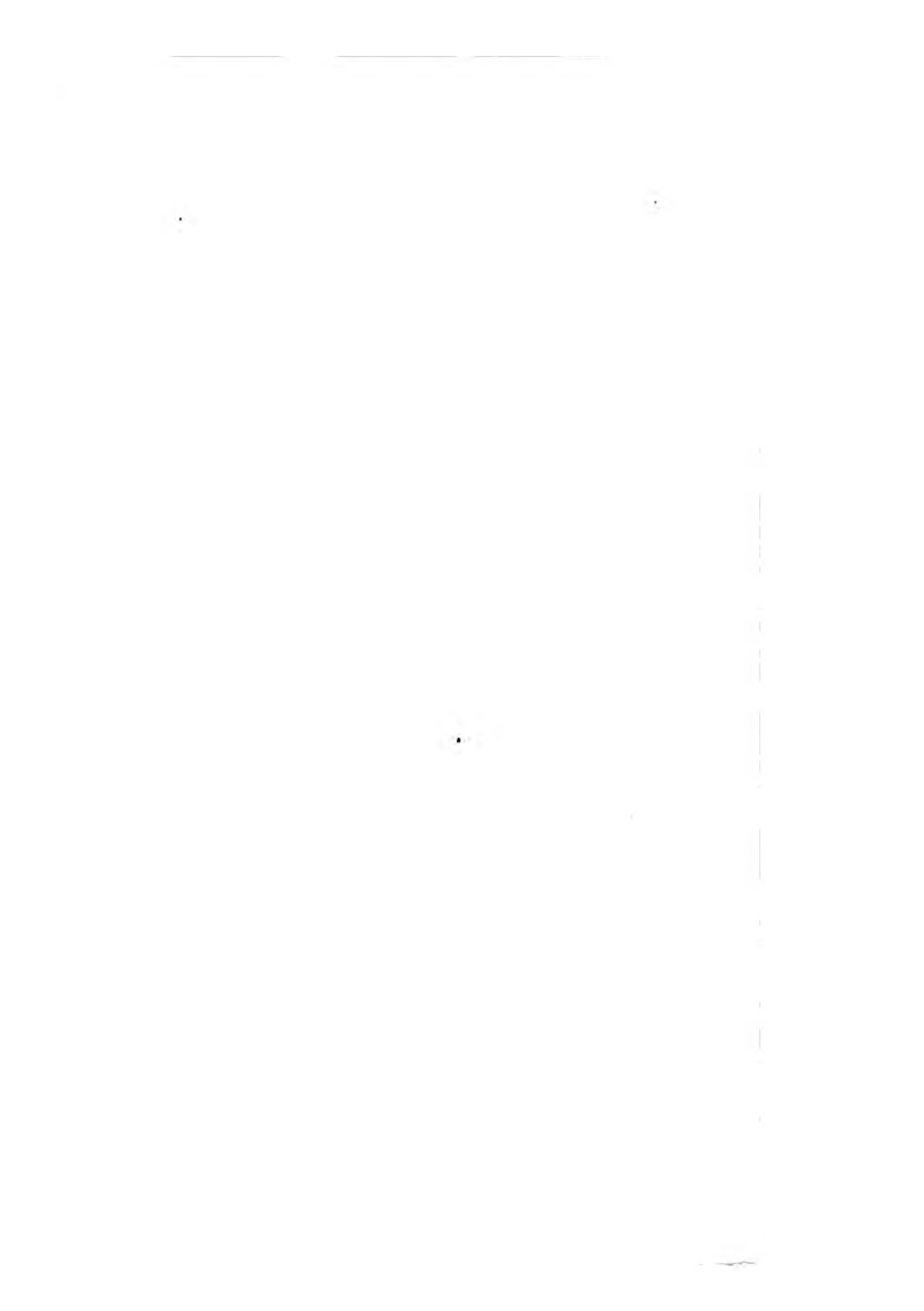
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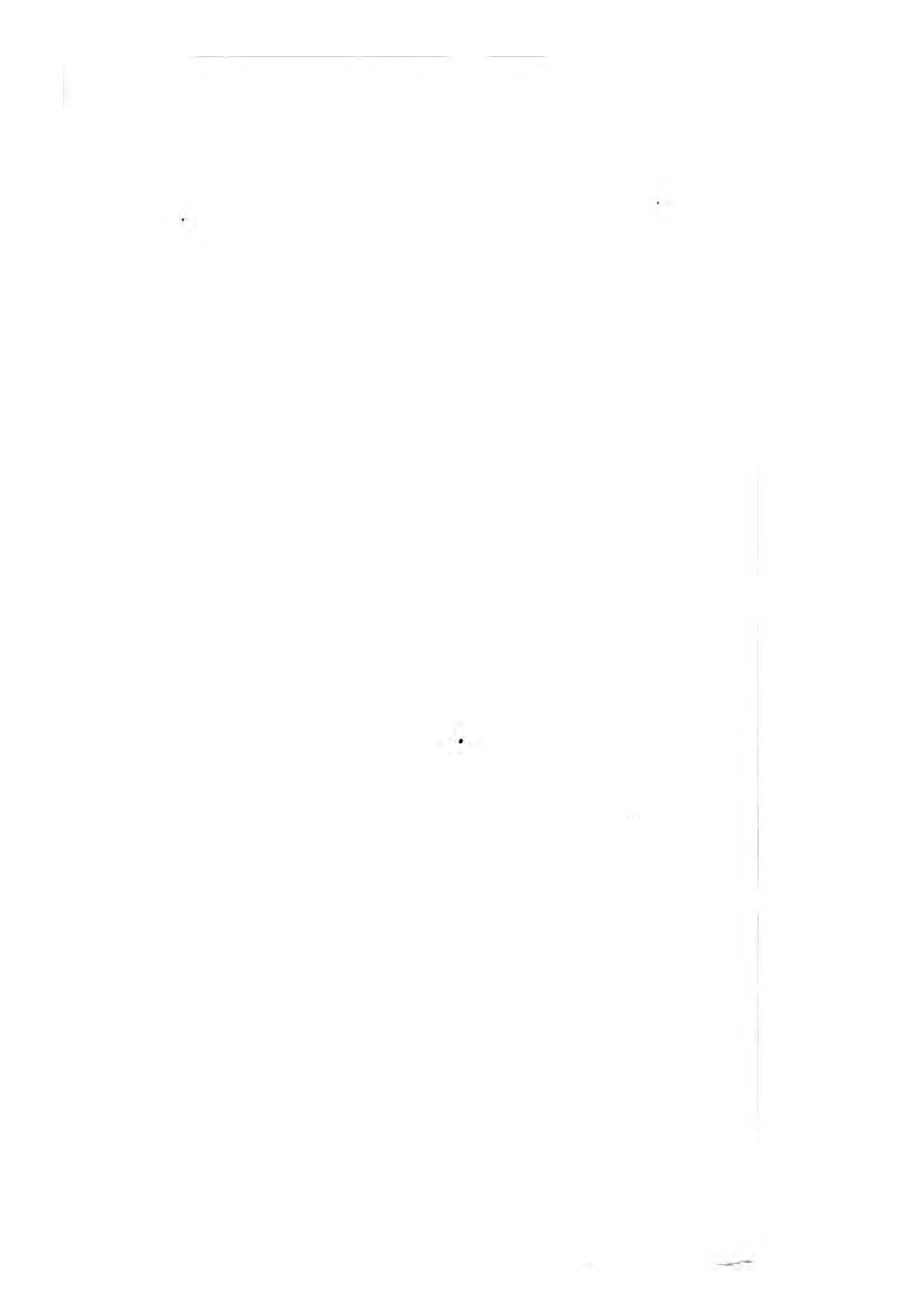
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GLAD GHOSTS

By

D. H. LAWRENCE

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I KNEW Carlotta Fell in the early days before the war. Then she was escaping into art, and was just "Fell." That was at our famous but uninspired school of art, the Thwaite, where I myself was diligently murdering my talent. At the Thwaite they always gave Carlotta the Still-life prizes. She accepted them calmly, as one of our conquerors, but the rest of the students felt vicious about it. They called it buttering the laurels, because Carlotta was Hon., and her father a well-known peer.

She was by way of being a beauty, too. Her family was not rich, yet she had come into five hundred a year of her own, when she was eighteen; and that, to us, was an enormity. Then she appeared in the fashionable papers, affecting to be wistful, with pearls, slanting her eyes. Then she went and did another of her beastly still-lives, a cactus-in-a-pot.

At the Thwaite, being snobs, we were proud of her too. She showed off a bit, it is true, playing bird of paradise among the pigeons. At the same time, she *was* thrilled to be with us, and out of her own set. Her wistfulness and yearning "for something else" was absolutely genuine. Yet she was not going to hobnob with us either, at least not indiscriminately.

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She was ambitious, in a vague way. She wanted to coruscate, somehow or other. She had a family of clever and "distinguished" uncles, who had flattered her. What then?

Her cactuses-in-a-pot were admirable. But even she didn't expect them to start a revolution. Perhaps she would rather glow in the wide if dirty skies of life, than in the somewhat remote and unsatisfactory ether of Art.

She and I were "friends" in a bare, stark, but real sense. I was poor, but I didn't really care. She didn't really care either. Whereas I did care about some passionate vision which, I could feel, lay embedded in the half-dead body of this life. The quick body within the dead. I could *feel* it. And I wanted to get at it, if only for myself.

She didn't know what I was after. Yet she could feel that I was It, and being an aristocrat of the Kingdom of It, as well as the realm of Great Britain, she was loyal—loyal to me because of It, the quick body which I imagined within the dead.

Still, we never had much to do with one another. I had no money. She never wanted to introduce me to her own people. I didn't want it either. Sometimes we had lunch together, sometimes we went to a theatre, or we

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drove in the country, in some car that belonged to neither of us. We never flirted or talked love. I don't think she wanted it, any more than I did. She wanted to marry into her own surroundings, and I knew she was of too frail a paste to face my future.

Now I come to think of it, she was always a bit sad when we were together. Perhaps she looked over seas she would never cross. She belonged finally, fatally, to her own class. Yet I think she hated them. When she was in a group of people who talked "smart," titles and *beau monde* and all that, her rather short nose would turn up, her wide mouth press into discontent, and a languor of bored irritation come even over her broad shoulders. Bored irritation, and a loathing of climbers, a loathing of the ladder altogether. She hated her own class: yet it was also sacrosanct to her. She disliked, even to me, mentioning the title of her friends. Yet the very hurried resentment with which she said, when I asked her, Who is it?—

"Lady Nithsdale, Lord Staines—old friends of my mother," proved that the coronet was wedged into her brow, like a ring of iron grown into a tree.

She had another kind of reverence for a true artist: perhaps more genuine, perhaps not; anyhow, more free and easy.

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She and I had a curious understanding in common: an inkling, perhaps, of the unborn body of life hidden within the body of this half-death which we call life; and hence a tacit hostility to the commonplace world, its inert laws. We were rather like two soldiers on a secret mission in an enemy country. Life, and people, was an enemy country to us both. But she would never declare herself.

She always came to me to find out what I thought, particularly in a moral issue. Profoundly, fretfully discontented with the conventional moral standards, she didn't know how to take a stand of her own. So she came to me. She had to try to get her own feelings straightened out. In that she showed her old British fibre. I told her what, as a young man, I thought: and usually she was resentful. She did so want to be conventional. She would even act quite perversely, in her determination to be conventional. But she always had to come back to me, to ask me again. She depended on me morally. Even when she disagreed with me, it soothed her, and restored her to know my point of view. Yet she disagreed with me.

We had then a curious abstract intimacy, that went very deep, yet showed no obvious contact. Perhaps I was the only person in the world with

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whom she felt, in her uneasy self, at home, at peace. And to me, she was always of my own *intrinsic* sort, of my own species. Most people are just another species to me. They might as well be turkeys.

But she would always *act* according to the conventions of her class, even perversely. And I knew it.

So, just before the war she married Lord Lathkill. She was twenty-one. I did not see her till war was declared; then she asked me to lunch with her and her husband, in town. He was an officer in a Guards regiment, and happened to be in uniform, looking very handsome and well-set-up, as if he expected to find the best of life served up to him for ever. He was very dark, with dark eyes and fine black hair, and a very beautiful, diffident voice, almost womanish in its slow, delicate inflections. He seemed pleased and flattered at having Carlotta for a wife.

To me he was beautifully attentive, almost deferential, because I was poor, and of the other world, those poor devils of outsiders. I laughed at him a little, and laughed at Carlotta, who was a bit irritated by the gentle delicacy with which he treated me.

She was elated too. I remember her saying,

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"We need war, don't you think? Don't you think men need the fight, to keep life chivalrous and put martial glamour into it?"

And I remember saying, "I think we need some sort of fight; but my sort isn't the war sort." It was August, we could take it lightly.

"What's your sort?" she asked quickly.

"I don't know: single-handed, anyhow," I said, with a grin. Lord Lathkill made me feel like a lonely sansculotte; he was so completely unostentatious, so very willing to pay all the attention to me, and yet so subtly complacent, so unquestioningly sure of his position. Whereas I was not a very sound earthenware pitcher which had already gone many times to the well.

He was not conceited, not half as *conceited* as I was. He was willing to leave me all the front of the stage, even with Carlotta. He felt so sure of some things, like a tortoise in a glittering, polished tortoiseshell that mirrors eternity. Yet he was not quite easy with me.

"You are Derbyshire?" I said to him, looking into his face. "So am I! I was born in Derbyshire."

He asked me with a gentle, uneasy sort of politeness, where? But he was a bit taken aback. And his dark eyes, brooding over me, had a sort of fear in them. At the centre they

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were hollow with a certain misgiving. He was so sure of *circumstances*, and not by any means sure of the man in the middle of the circumstances. Himself! Himself! That was already a ghost.

I felt that he saw in me something crude but real, and saw himself as something in its own way perfect, but quite unreal. Even his love for Carlotta, and his marriage, was a circumstance that was inwardly unreal to him. One could tell by the curious way in which he waited, before he spoke. And by the hollow look, almost a touch of madness, in his dark eyes, and in his soft, melancholy voice.

I could understand that she was fascinated by him. But God help him if ever circumstances went against him!

She had to see me again, a week later, to talk about him. So she asked me to the opera. She had a box, and we were alone, and the notorious Lady Perth was two boxes away. But this was one of Carlotta's conventional perverse little acts, with her husband in France. She only wanted to talk to me about him.

So she sat in the front of her box, leaning a little to the audience and talking sideways to me. Anyone would have known at once there was a *liaison* between us, how *dangéreuse* they would

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never have guessed. For there, in the full view of the world—her world at least, not mine—she was talking sideways to me, saying in a hurried, yet stony voice :

“What do you think of Luke?”

She looked up at me heavily, with her sea-coloured eyes, waiting for my answer.

“He’s tremendously charming,” I said, above the theatreful of faces.

“Yes, he’s that!” she replied, in the flat, plangent voice she had when she was serious, like metal ringing flat, with a strange far-reaching vibration. “Do you think he’ll be happy?”

“*Be* happy!” I ejaculated. “When, *be* happy?”

“With me,” she said, giving a sudden little snirt of laughter, like a schoolgirl, and looking up at me shyly, mischievously, anxiously.

“If you make him,” I said, still casual.

“How can I make him?”

She said it with flat, plangent earnestness. She was always like that, pushing me deeper in than I wanted to go.

“Be happy yourself, I suppose: and quite sure about it. And then *tell* him you’re happy, and tell him he is too, and he’ll be it.”

“Must I do all that?” she said rapidly.

“Not otherwise?”

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I knew I was frowning at her, and she was watching my frown.

"Probably not," I said roughly. "He'll never make up his mind about it himself."

"How did you know?" she asked, as if it had been a mystery.

"I didn't. It only seems to me like that."

"Seems to you like that," she re-echoed, in that sad, clean monotone of finality, always like metal. I appreciate it in her, that she does not murmur or whisper. But I wished she left me alone, in that beastly theatre.

She was wearing emeralds, on her snow-white skin, and leaning forward gazing fixedly down into the auditorium, as a crystal-gazer into a crystal. Heaven knows if she saw all those little facets of faces and plastrons. As for me, I knew that, like a sansculotte, I should never be king till breeches were off.

"I had terrible work to make him marry me," she said, in her swift, clear low tones.

"Why?"

"He was frightfully in love with me. He *is* ! But he thinks he's unlucky . . ."

"Unlucky, how? In cards or in love?" I mocked.

"In both," she said briefly, with sudden cold

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resentment at my flippancy. There was over her eyes a glaze of fear. "It's in their family."

"What did you say to him?" I asked, rather laboured, feeling the dead weight.

"I promised to have luck for two," she said. "And war was declared a fortnight later."

"Ah, well!" I said. "That's the world's luck, not yours."

"Quite!" she said.

There was a pause.

"Is his family supposed to be unlucky?" I asked.

"The Worths? Terribly! They really are!"

It was interval, and the box door had opened. Carlotta always had her eye, a good half of it at least, on the external happenings. She rose, like a reigning beauty—which she wasn't, and never became—to speak to Lady Perth, and, out of spite, did not introduce me.

Carlotta and Lord Lathkill came, perhaps a year later, to visit us when we were in a cottage in Derbyshire, and he was home on leave. She was going to have a child, and was slow, and seemed depressed. He was vague, charming, talking about the country and the history of the lead mines. But the two of them seemed vague, as if they never got anywhere.

The last time I saw them was when the war

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was over, and I was leaving England. They were alone at dinner, save for me. He was still haggard, with a wound in the throat. But he said he would soon be well. His slow, beautiful voice was a bit husky now. And his velvety eyes were hardened, haggard, but there was weariness, emptiness in the hardness.

I was poorer than ever, and felt a little weary myself. Carlotta was struggling with his silent emptiness. Since the war, the melancholy fixity of his eyes was more noticeable, the fear at the centre was almost monomania. She was wilting and losing her beauty.

There were twins in the house. After dinner, we went straight up to look at them, to the night nursery. They were two boys, with their father's fine dark hair, both of them.

He had put out his cigar, and leaned over the cots, gazing in silence. The nurse, dark-faced and faithful, drew back. Carlotta glanced at her children; but more helplessly, she gazed at him.

"Bonny children! Bonny boys, aren't they, nurse?" I said softly.

"Yes, sir!" she said quickly. "They are!"

"Ever think I'd have twins, roistering twins?" said Carlotta, looking at me.

"I never did," said I.

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"Ask Luke whether it's bad luck or bad management," she said, with that schoolgirl's snirt of laughter, looking up apprehensively at her husband.

"Oh, I!" he said, turning suddenly and speaking loud, in his wounded voice. "I call it amazing good luck, myself! Don't know what other people think about it." Yet he had the fine, wincing fear in his body, of an injured dog.

After that, for years I did not see her again. I heard she had a baby girl. Then a catastrophe happened: both the twins were killed in a motor-car accident in America, motoring with their aunt.

I learned the news late, and did not write to Carlotta. What could I say?

A few months later, crowning disaster, the baby girl died of some sudden illness. The Lathkill ill-luck seemed to be working surely.

Poor Carlotta! I had no further news of her, only I heard that she and Lord Lathkill were both living in seclusion, with his mother, at the place in Derbyshire.

When circumstances brought me to England, I debated within myself, whether I should write or not to Carlotta. At last I sent a note to the London address.

I had a reply from the country: "So glad

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you are within reach again ! When will you come and see us ? ”

I was not very keen on going to Riddings. After all, it was Lord Lathkill's place, and Lady Lathkill, his mother, was old and of the old school. And I always something of a sansculotte, who will only be king when breeches are off.

“ Come to town,” I wrote, “ and let us have lunch together.”

She came. She looked older, and pain had drawn horizontal lines across her face.

“ You're not a bit different,” she said to me.

“ And you're only a little bit,” I said.

“ Am I ! ” she replied, in a deadened, melancholic voice. “ Perhaps ! I suppose while we live we've got to live. What do you think ? ”

“ Yes, I think it. To be the living dead, that's awful.”

“ Quite ! ” she said, with terrible finality.

“ How is Lord Lathkill ? ” I asked.

“ Oh,” she said. “ It's finished him, as far as living is concerned. But he's very willing for *me* to live.”

“ And you, are you willing ? ” I said.

She looked up into my eyes, strangely.

“ I'm not sure,” she said. “ I need help. What do you think about it ? ”

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"Oh God, live if you can!"

"Even take help?" she said, with her strange involved simplicity.

"Ah, certainly!"

"Would you recommend it?"

"Why, yes! You are a young thing——" I began.

"Won't you come down to Riddings?" she said quickly.

"And Lord Lathkill—and his mother?" I asked.

"They want you."

"Do you want me to come?"

"I want you to, yes! Will you?"

"Why, yes, if you want me."

"When, then?"

"When you wish."

"Do you mean it?"

"Why, of course."

"You're not afraid of the Lathkill ill-luck?"

"I!" I exclaimed in amazement; such amazement, that she gave her schoolgirl snort of laughter.

"Very well, then," she said. "Monday? Does that suit you?"

We made arrangements, and I saw her off at the station.

I knew Riddings, Lord Lathkill's place, from the outside. It was an old Derbyshire stone

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house, at the end of the village of Middleton : a house with three sharp gables, set back not very far from the high road, but with a gloomy moor for a park behind.

Monday was a dark day over the Derbyshire hills. The green hills were dark, dark green, the stone fences seemed almost black. Even the little railway-station, deep in the green, cleft hollow, was of stone, and dark and cold, and seemed in the underworld.

Lord Lathkill was at the station. He was wearing spectacles, and his brown eyes stared strangely. His black hair fell lank over his forehead.

"I'm so awfully glad you've come," he said. "It is cheering Carlotta up immensely."

Me, as a man myself, he hardly seemed to notice. I was something which had arrived, and was expected. Otherwise he had an odd, unnatural briskness of manner.

"I hope I shan't disturb your mother, Lady Lathkill," I said as he tucked me up in the car.

"On the contrary," he sang, in his slow voice, "she is looking forward to your coming as much as we both are. Oh, no, don't look on Mother as too old-fashioned, she's not so at all. She's tremendously up-to-date in art and literature and that kind of thing. She has her leaning towards

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the uncanny—spiritualism, and that kind of thing—nowadays, but Carlotta and I think that if it gives her an interest, all well and good.”

He tucked me up most carefully in the rugs, and the servant put a footwarmer at my feet.

“Derbyshire, you know, is a cold county,” continued Lord Lathkill, “especially among the hills.”

“It’s a very dark county,” I said.

“Yes, I suppose it is, to one coming from the tropics. We, of course, don’t notice it; we rather like it.”

He seemed curiously smaller, shrunken, and his rather long cheeks were sallow. His manner, however, was much more cheerful, almost communicative. But he talked, as it were, to the faceless air, not really to me. I wasn’t really there at all. He was talking to himself. And when once he looked at me, his brown eyes had a hollow look, like gaps with nothing in them except a haggard, hollow fear. He was gazing through the windows of nothingness, to see if I were really there.

It was dark when we got to Riddings. The house had no door in the front, and only two windows upstairs were lit. It did not seem very hospitable. We entered at the side, and a very silent manservant took my things.

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We went upstairs in silence, in the dead-seeming house. Carlotta had heard us, and was at the top of the stairs. She was already dressed; her long white arms were bare; she had something glittering on a dull green dress.

"I was so afraid you wouldn't come," she said, in a dulled voice, as she gave me her hand. She seemed as if she would begin to cry. But of course she wouldn't. The corridor, dark-panelled and with blue carpet on the floor, receded dimly, with a certain dreary gloom. A servant was diminishing in the distance, with my bags, silently. There was a curious, unpleasant sense of the fixity of the materials of the house, the obscene triumph of dead Matter. Yet the place was warm, central-heated.

Carlotta pulled herself together, and said, dulled :

"Would you care to speak to my mother-in-law before you go to your room? She would like it."

We entered a small drawing-room, abruptly. I saw the water-colours on the walls and a white-haired lady in black bending round to look at the door as she rose, cautiously.

"This is Mr. Morier, Mother-in-law," said Carlotta, in her dull, rather quick way, "on his way to his room."

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The dowager Lady Lathkill came a few steps forward, leaning from heavy hips, and gave me her hand. Her crest of hair was snow white, and she had curious blue eyes, fixed, with a tiny dot of a pupil, peering from her pink, soft-skinned face of an old and well-preserved woman. She wore a lace fichu. The upper part of her body was moderately slim, leaning forward slightly from her heavy black-silk hips.

She murmured something to me, staring at me fixedly for a long time, but as a bird does, with shrewd, cold, far-distant sight. As a hawk, perhaps, looks shrewdly far down, in his search. Then, muttering, she presented to me the other two people in the room: a tall, short-faced, swarthy young woman with the hint of a black moustache; and a plump man in a dinner-jacket, rather bald and ruddy, with a little grey moustache, but yellow under the eyes. He was Colonel Hale.

They all seemed awkward, as if I had interrupted them at a séance. I didn't know what to say: they were utter strangers to me.

"Better come and choose your room, then," said Carlotta, and I bowed dumbly, following her out of the room. The old Lady Lathkill still stood planted on her heavy hips, looking half round after us with her ferret's blue eyes. She had hardly any eyebrows, but they were arched

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high up on her pink, soft forehead, under the crest of icily white hair. She had never emerged for a second from the remote place where she unyieldingly kept herself.

Carlotta, Lord Lathkill and I tramped in silence down the corridor and round a bend. We could none of us get a word out. As he suddenly, rather violently flung open a door at the end of the wing, he said, turning round to me with a resentful, hangdog air :

“ We did you the honour of offering you our ghost room. It doesn’t look much, but it’s our equivalent for a royal apartment.”

It was a good-sized room with faded, red-painted panelling showing remains of gilt, and the usual big, old mahogany furniture, and a big pinky-faded carpet with big, whitish, faded roses. A bright fire was burning in the stone fireplace.

“ Why ? ” said I, looking at the stretches of the faded, once handsome carpet.

“ Why what ? ” said Lord Lathkill. “ Why did we offer you this room ? ”

“ Yes ! No ! Why is it your equivalent for a royal apartment ? ”

“ Oh, because our ghost is as rare as sovereignty in her visits, and twice as welcome. Her gifts are infinitely more worth having.”

“ What sort of gifts ? ”

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"The family fortune. She invariably restores the family fortune. That's why we put you here, to tempt her."

"What temptation should *I* be?—especially to restoring your family fortunes. I didn't think they needed it, anyhow."

"Well!" he hesitated. "Not exactly in money: we can manage modestly that way; but in everything else but money——"

There was a pause. I was thinking of Carlotta's "luck for two." Poor Carlotta! She looked worn now. Especially her chin looked worn, showing the edge of the jaw. She had sat herself down in a chair by the fire, and put her feet on the stone fender, and was leaning forward, screening her face with her hand, still careful of her complexion. I could see her broad, white shoulders, showing the shoulder-blades, as she leaned forward, beneath her dress. But it was as if some bitterness had soaked all the life out of her, and she was only weary, or inert, drained of her feelings. It grieved me, and the thought passed through my mind that a man should take her in his arms and cherish her body, and start her flame again. If she would let him, which was doubtful.

Her courage was fallen, in her body; only her spirit fought on. She would have to restore

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the body of her life, and only a living body could do it.

"What *about* your ghost?" I said to him.

"Is she really ghastly?"

"Not at all!" he said. "She's supposed to be lovely. But I have no experience, and I don't know anybody who has. We hoped you'd come, though, and tempt her. Mother had a message about you, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"Oh, yes! When you were still in Africa. The medium said: 'There is a man in Africa. I can only see M, a double M. He is thinking of your family. It would be good if he entered your family.' Mother was awfully puzzled, but Carlotta said 'Mark Morier' at once."

"That's not why I asked you down," said Carlotta quickly, looking round, shading her eyes with her hand as she looked at me.

I laughed, saying nothing.

"But, of course," continued Lord Lathkill, "you *needn't* have this room. We have another one ready as well. Would you like to see it?"

"How does your ghost manifest herself?" I said, parrying.

"Well, I hardly know. She seems to be a very grateful *presence*, and that's about all I do know. She was apparently quite *persona grata*

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to everyone she visited. *Gratissima*, apparently ! ”

“ *Benissimo !* ” said I.

A servant appeared in the doorway, murmuring something I could not hear. Everybody in the house, except Carlotta and Lord Lathkill, seemed to murmur under their breath.

“ What’s she say ? ” I asked.

“ If you will stay in this room ? I told her you might like a room on the front. And if you’ll take a bath ? ” said Carlotta.

“ Yes ! ” said I. And Carlotta repeated to the maid-servant.

“ And for heaven’s sake speak to me loudly,” said I to that elderly correct female in her starched collar, in the doorway.

“ Very good, sir ! ” she piped up. “ And shall I make the bath hot, or medium ? ”

“ Hot ! ” said I, like a cannon-shot.

“ Very good, sir ! ” she piped up again, and her elderly eyes twinkled as she turned and disappeared.

Carlotta laughed, and I sighed.

We were six at table. The pink Colonel with the yellow creases under his blue eyes sat opposite me, like an old boy with a liver. Next him sat Lady Lathkill, watching from her distance. Her pink, soft old face, naked-seeming, with its pin-

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point blue eyes, was a real modern witch-face.

Next me, on my left, was the dark young woman, whose slim, swarthy arms had an indiscernible down on them. She had a blackish neck, and her expressionless yellow-brown eyes said nothing, under level black brows. She was inaccessible. I made some remarks, without result. Then I said :

“ I didn’t hear your name when Lady Lathkill introduced me to you.”

Her yellow-brown eyes stared into mine for some moments before she said :

“ Mrs. Hale ! ” Then she glanced across the table. “ Colonel Hale is my husband.”

My face must have signalled my surprise. She stared into my eyes very curiously, with a significance I could not grasp, a long, hard stare. I looked at the bald, pink head of the Colonel bent over his soup, and I returned to my own soup.

“ Did you have a good time in London ? ” said Carlotta.

“ No,” said I. “ It was dismal.”

“ Not a good word to say for it ? ”

“ Not one.”

“ No nice people ? ”

“ Not my sort of nice.”

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“What’s your sort of nice?” she asked, with a little laugh.

The other people were stone. It was like talking into a chasm.

“Ah! If I knew myself, I’d look for them! But not sentimental, with a lot of soppy emotions on top, and nasty ones underneath.”

“Who are you thinking of?” Carlotta looked up at me as the man brought the fish. She had a crushed sort of roguishness. The other diners were images.

“I? Nobody. Just everybody. No, I think I was thinking of the Obelisk Memorial Service.”

“Did you go to it?”

“No, but I fell into it.”

“Wasn’t it moving?”

“Rhubarb, senna, that kind of moving!”

She gave a little laugh, looking up into my face, from the fish.

“What was wrong with it?”

I noticed that the Colonel and Lady Lathkill each had a little dish of rice, no fish, and that they were served second—oh, humility!—and that neither took the white wine. No, they had no wine-glasses. The remoteness gathered about them, like the snows on Everest. The dowager peered across at me occasionally, like a white ermine out of the snow, and she had that cold

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air about her, of being good, and containing a secret of goodness: remotely, ponderously, fixedly knowing better. And I, with my chatter, was one of those fabulous fleas that are said to hop upon glaciers.

"Wrong with it? *It* was wrong, all wrong. In the rain, a soppy crowd, with soppy bare heads, soppy emotions, soppy chrysanthemums and prickly laurestinus! A steam of wet mob-emotions! Ah, no, it shouldn't be allowed."

Carlotta's face had fallen. She again could feel death in her bowels, the kind of death the war signifies.

"Wouldn't you have us honour the dead?" came Lady Lathkill's secretive voice across at me, as if a white ermine had barked.

"Honour the dead!" My mind opened in amazement. "Do you think they'd be honoured?"

I put the question in all sincerity.

"They would understand the *intention* was to honour them," came her reply.

I felt astounded.

"If I were dead, would I be honoured if a great, steamy wet crowd came after me with soppy chrysanthemums and prickly laurestinus? Ugh! I'd run to the nethermost ends of Hades. Lord, how I'd run from them!"

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The manservant gave us roast mutton, and Lady Lathkill and the Colonel chestnuts in sauce. Then he poured the burgundy. It was good wine. The pseudo-conversation was interrupted.

Lady Lathkill ate in silence, like an ermine in the snow, feeding on his prey. Sometimes she looked round the table, her blue eyes peering fixedly, completely uncommunicative. She was very watchful to see that we were all properly attended to; "The currant jelly for Mr. Morier," she would murmur, as if it were her table. Lord Lathkill, next her, ate in complete absence. Sometimes she murmured to him, and he murmured back, but I never could hear what they said. The Colonel swallowed the chestnuts in dejection, as if all were weary duty to him now. I put it down to his liver.

It was an awful dinner-party. I never could hear a word anybody said, except Carlotta. They all let their words die in their throats, as if the larynx were the coffin of sound.

Carlotta tried to keep her end up, the cheerful hostess sort of thing. But Lady Lathkill somehow, in silence and apparent humility, had stolen the authority that goes with the hostess, and she hung on to it grimly, like a white ermine sucking a rabbit. Carlotta kept glancing miserably at

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me, to see what I thought. I didn't think anything. I just felt frozen within the tomb. And I drank the good, good warm burgundy.

"Mr. Morier's glass!" murmured Lady Lathkill, and her blue eyes with their black pin-points rested on mine a moment.

"Awfully nice to drink good burgundy!" said I pleasantly.

She bowed her head slightly, and murmured something inaudible.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Very glad you like it!" she repeated, with distaste at having to say it again, out loud.

"Yes, I do. It's good."

Mrs. Hale, who had sat tall and erect and alert, like a black she-fox, never making a sound, looked round at me to see what sort of specimen I was. She was just a bit intrigued.

"Yes, thanks," came a musical murmur from Lord Lathkill. "I think I *will* take some more."

The man, who had hesitated, filled his glass.

"I'm awfully sorry I can't drink wine," said Carlotta, absently. "It has the wrong effect on me."

"I should say it has the wrong effect on everybody," said the Colonel, with an uneasy attempt to be there. "But some people like the effect, and some don't."

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I looked at him in wonder. Why was he chipping in? He looked as if he'd liked the effect well enough, in his day.

"Oh, no!" retorted Carlotta coldly. "The effect on different people is quite different."

She closed with finality, and a further frost fell on the table.

"Quite so," began the Colonel, trying, since he'd gone off the deep end, to keep afloat.

But Carlotta turned abruptly to me.

"Why is it, do you think, that the effect is so different on different people?"

"And on different occasions," said I, grinning through my burgundy. "Do you know what they say? They say that alcohol, if it has an effect on your psyche, takes you back to old states of consciousness, and old reactions. But some people it doesn't stimulate at all, there is only a nervous reaction of repulsion."

"There's certainly a nervous reaction of repulsion in me," said Carlotta.

"As there is in all higher natures," murmured Lady Lathkill.

"Dogs hate whisky," said I.

"That's quite right," said the Colonel. "Scared of it!"

"I've often thought," said I, "about those old states of consciousness. It's supposed to be

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an awful retrogression, reverting back to them. Myself, my desire to go onwards takes me back a little."

"Where to?" said Carlotta.

"Oh, I don't know! To where you feel a bit warm, and like smashing the glasses, don't you know?"

J'avons bien bu et nous boirons !
Cassons les verres nous les payerons !
Compagnons ! Voyez vous bien !
Voyez vous bien !
Voyez ! voyez ! voyez vous bien
Que les d'moiselles sont belles
Où nous allons ! "

I had the effrontery to sing this verse of an old soldiers' song while Lady Lathkill was finishing her celery and nut salad. I sang it quite nicely, in a natty, well-balanced little voice, smiling all over my face meanwhile. The servant, as he went round for Lady Lathkill's plate, furtively fetched a look at me. *Look!* thought I. *You chicken that's come untrussed!*

The partridges had gone, we had swallowed the *flan*, and were at dessert. They had accepted my song in complete silence. Even Carlotta! My *flan* had gone down in one gulp, like an oyster.

"You're quite right!" said Lord Lathkill, amid the squashing of walnuts. "I mean the

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state of mind of a Viking, shall we say, or of a Cataline conspirator, might be frightfully good for us, if we could re-capture it."

"A Viking!" said I, stupefied. And Carlotta gave a wild snirt of laughter.

"Why not a Viking?" he asked in all innocence.

"A Viking!" I repeated, and swallowed my port. Then I looked round at my black-browed neighbour.

"Why do you never say anything?" I asked.

"What should I say?" she replied, frightened at the thought.

I was finished. I gazed into my port as if expecting the ultimate revelation.

Lady Lathkill rustled her finger-tips in the finger-bowl, and laid down her napkin decisively. The Colonel, old buck, rose at once to draw back her chair. *Place aux hommes!* I bowed to my neighbour, Mrs. Hale, a most disconcerting bow, and she made a circuit to get by me.

"You won't be awfully long?" said Carlotta, looking at me with her slow, hazel-green eyes, between mischief and wistfulness and utter depression.

Lady Lathkill steered heavily past me as if I didn't exist, perching rather forward, with her crest of white hair, from her big hips. She

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seemed abstracted, concentrated on something, as she went.

I closed the door, and turned to the men.

“ Dans la première auberge
J’étais b’en bu ! ”

sang I in a little voice.

“ Quite right,” said Lord Lathkill. “ You’re quite right.”

And we sent the port round.

“ This house,” I said, “ needs a sort of Spring cleaning.”

“ You’re quite right,” said Lord Lathkill.

“ There’s a bit of a dead smell ! ” said I.
“ We need Bacchus, and Eros, to sweeten it up, to freshen it.”

“ You think Bacchus and Eros ? ” said Lord Lathkill, with complete seriousness ; as if one might have telephoned for them.

“ In the best sense,” said I. As if we were going to get them from Fortnum and Mason’s, at least.

“ What exactly is the best sense ? ” asked Lord Lathkill.

“ Ah ! The flame of life ! There’s a dead smell here.”

The Colonel fingered his glass with thick, inert fingers, uneasily.

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"Do you think so?" he said, looking up at me heavily.

"Don't you?"

He gazed at me with blank, glazed blue eyes, that had deathly yellow stains underneath. Something was wrong with him, some sort of breakdown. He should have been a fat, healthy, jolly old boy. Not very old either: probably not quite sixty. But with this collapse on him, he seemed, somehow, to smell.

"You know," he said, staring at me with a sort of gruesome challenge, then looking down at his wine, "there's more things than we're aware of, happening to us!" He looked up at me again, shutting his full lips under his little grey moustache, and gazing with a glazed defiance.

"Quite!" said I.

He continued to gaze at me with glazed, gruesome defiance.

"Ha!" He made a sudden movement, and seemed to break up, collapse and become brokenly natural. "There, you've said it. I married my wife when I was a kid of twenty."

"Mrs. Hale?" I exclaimed.

"Not this one"—he jerked his head towards the door—"my first wife." There was a pause; he looked at me with shamed eyes, then turned his wine-glass round and his head dropped.

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Staring at his twisting glass, he continued: "I married her when I was twenty, and she was twenty-eight. You might say, she married me. Well, there it was! We had three children—I've got three married daughters—and we got on all right. I suppose she mothered me, in a way. And I never thought a thing. I was content enough, wasn't tied to her apron strings, and she never asked questions. She was always fond of me, and I took it for granted. I took it for granted. Even when she died—I was away in Salonika—I took it for granted, if you understand me. It was part of the rest of things—war—life—death. I knew I should feel lonely when I got back. Well, then I got buried—shell dropped, and the dug-out caved in—and that queered me. They sent me home. And the minute I saw the Lizard light—it was evening when we got up out of the Bay—I realised that Lucy had been waiting for me. I could feel her there, at my side, more plainly than I feel you now. And do you know, at that moment I woke up to her, and she made an awful impression on me. She seemed, if you get me, tremendously powerful, important; everything else dwindled away. There was the Lizard light blinking a long way off, and that meant home. And all the rest was my wife, Lucy: as if her skirts filled all

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the darkness. In a way, I was frightened; but that was because I couldn't quite get myself into line. I felt: *Good God! I never knew her!* And she was this tremendous thing! I felt like a child, and as weak as a kitten. And, believe me or not, from that day to this she's never left me. I know quite well she can hear what I'm saying. But she'll let me tell you. I knew that at dinner-time."

"But what made you marry again?" I said.

"She made me!" He went a trifle yellow on his cheek-bones. "I could feel her telling me, '*Marry! Marry!*' Lady Lathkill had messages from her too; she was her great friend in life. I didn't think of marrying. But Lady Lathkill had the same message, that I must marry. Then a medium described the girl, in detail: my present wife. I knew her at once, friend of my daughters. After that the messages became more insistent, waking me three and four times in the night. Lady Lathkill urged me to propose, and I did it, and was accepted. My present wife was just twenty-eight, the age Lucy had been——"

"How long ago did you marry the present Mrs. Hale?"

"A little over a year ago. Well, I thought I

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had done what was required of me. But directly after the wedding, such a state of terror came over me—perfectly unreasonable—I became almost unconscious. My present wife asked me if I was ill, and I said I was. We got to Paris. I felt I was dying. But I said I was going out to see a doctor, and I found myself kneeling in a church. Then I found peace—and Lucy. She had her arms round me, and I was like a child at peace. I must have knelt there for a couple of hours, in Lucy's arms. I *never* felt like that when I was alive: why, I couldn't stand that sort of thing! It's all come on after—after—— And now, I daren't offend Lucy's spirit. If I do, I suffer tortures till I've made peace again, till she folds me in her arms. Then I can live. But she won't let me go near the present Mrs. Hale. I—I—I daren't go near her."

He looked up at me with fear, and shame, and shameful secrecy, and a sort of gloating showing in his unmanned blue eyes. He had been talking as if in his sleep.

"Why did your dead wife urge you to marry again?" I said.

"I don't know," he replied. "I don't know. She was older than I was, and all the cleverness was on her side. She was a very clever woman, and I was never much in the intellectual line,

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myself. I just took it for granted she liked me. She never showed jealousy, but I think now, perhaps she was jealous all the time, and kept it under. I don't know. I think she never felt quite straight about having married me. It seems like that. As if she had something on her mind. Do you know, while she was alive, I never gave it a thought. And now I'm aware of nothing else but her. It's as if her spirit wanted to live in my body, or at any rate—I don't know——”

His blue eyes were glazed, almost fishy, with fear and gloating shame. He had a short nose, and full, self-indulgent lips, and a once-comely chin. Eternally a careless boy of thirteen. But now, care had got him in decay.

“And what does your present wife say?” I asked.

He poured himself some more wine.

“Why,” he replied, “except for her, I shouldn't mind so much. She says nothing. Lady Lathkill has explained everything to her, and she agrees that—that—a spirit from the other side is more important than mere pleasure—you know what I mean. Lady Lathkill says that this is a preparation for my next incarnation, when I am going to serve Woman, and help Her to take Her place.”

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He looked up again, trying to be proud in his shame.

"Well, what a damned curious story!" exclaimed Lord Lathkill. "Mother's idea for herself—she had it in a message too—is that she is coming on earth the next time to save the animals from the cruelty of man. That's why she hates meat at table, or anything that has to be killed."

"And does Lady Lathkill encourage you in this business with your dead wife?" said I.

"Yes. She helps me. When I get as you might say at cross purposes with Lucy—with Lucy's spirit, that is—Lady Lathkill helps to put it right between us. Then I'm all right, when I know I'm loved."

He looked at me stealthily, cunningly.

"Then you're all wrong," said I, "surely."

"And do you mean to say," put in Lord Lathkill, "that you don't live with the present Mrs. Hale at all? Do you mean to say you never *have* lived with her?"

"I've got a higher claim on me," said the unhappy Colonel.

"My God!" said Lord Lathkill.

I looked in amazement: the sort of chap who picks up a woman and has a good time with her for a week, then goes home as nice as pie, and now look at him! It was obvious that he had a

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terror of his black-browed new wife, as well as of Lucy's spirit. A devil and a deep sea with a vengeance !

"A damned curious story !" mused Lord Lathkill. "I'm not so sure I like it. Something's wrong somewhere. We shall have to go upstairs."

"Wrong !" said I. "Why, Colonel, don't you turn round and quarrel with the spirit of your first wife, fatally and finally, and get rid of her ?"

The Colonel looked at me, still diminished and afraid, but perking up a bit, as we rose from table.

"How would you go about it ?" he said.

"I'd just face her, wherever she seemed to be, and say : '*Lucy, go to Blazes !*'"

Lord Lathkill burst into a loud laugh, then was suddenly silent as the door noiselessly opened, and the dowager's white hair and pointed uncanny eyes peered in, then entered.

"I think I left my papers in here, Luke," she murmured.

"Yes, mother. There they are. We're just coming up."

"Take your time."

He held the door, and ducking forward, she went out again, clutching some papers. The Colonel had blenched yellow on his cheek-bones.

We went upstairs to the small drawing-room.

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“ You were a long time,” said Carlotta, looking in all our faces. “ Hope the coffee’s not cold. We’ll have fresh if it is.”

She poured out, and Mrs. Hale carried the cups. The dark young woman thrust out her straight, dusky arm, offering me sugar, and gazing at me with her unchanging, yellow-brown eyes. I looked back at her, and being clairvoyant in this house, was conscious of the curves of her erect body, the sparse black hairs there would be on her strong-skinned dusky thighs. She was a woman of thirty, and she had had a great dread, lest she should never marry. Now she was as if mesmerised.

“ What do you do usually in the evenings ? ” I said.

She turned to me as if startled, as she nearly always did when addressed.

“ We do nothing,” she replied. “ Talk ; and sometimes Lady Lathkill reads.”

“ What does she read ? ”

“ About spiritualism.”

“ Sounds pretty dull.”

She looked at me again, but she did not answer. It was difficult to get anything out of her. She put up no fight, only remained in the same swarthy, passive, negative resistance. For a moment I wondered that no men made love to

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her: it was obvious they didn't. But then, modern young men are accustomed to being attracted, flattered, impressed: they expect an effort to please. And Mrs. Hale made none: didn't know how. Which for me was her mystery. She was passive, static, locked up in a resistant passivity that had fire beneath it.

Lord Lathkill came and sat by us. The Colonel's confession had had an effect on him.

"I'm afraid," he said to Mrs. Hale, "you have a thin time here."

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, there is so little to amuse you. Do you like to dance?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, then," he said, "let us go downstairs and dance to the Victrola. There are four of us. You'll come, of course?" he said to me.

Then he turned to his mother.

"Mother, we shall go down to the morning-room and dance. Will you come too? Will you, Colonel?"

The dowager gazed at her son.

"I will come and look on," she said.

"And I will play the pianola, if you like," volunteered the Colonel.

We went down, and pushed aside the chintz chairs and the rugs. Lady Lathkill sat in a chair,

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the Colonel worked away at the pianola. I danced with Carlotta, Lord Lathkill with Mrs. Hale.

A quiet soothing came over me, dancing with Carlotta. She was very still and remote, and she hardly looked at me. Yet the touch of her was wonderful, like a flower that yields itself to the morning. Her warm, silken shoulder was soft and grateful under my hand, as if it knew me with that second knowledge which is part of one's childhood, and which so rarely blossoms again in manhood and womanhood. It was as if we had known each other perfectly, as children, and now, as man and woman, met in the full, further sympathy. Perhaps, in modern people, only after long suffering and defeat, can the naked intuition break free between woman and man.

She, I knew, let the strain and the tension of all her life depart from her then, leaving her nakedly still, within my arm. And I only wanted to be with her, to have her in my touch.

Yet after the second dance she looked at me, and suggested that she should dance with her husband. So I found myself with the strong, passive shoulder of Mrs. Hale under my hand, and her inert hand in mine, as I looked down at her dusky, dirty-looking neck—she wisely avoided powder. The duskiness of her mesmerised body

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made me see the faint dark sheen of her thighs, with intermittent black hairs. It was as if they shone through the silk of her mauve dress, like the limbs of a half-wild animal, that is locked up in its own helpless dumb winter, a prisoner.

She knew, with the heavy intuition of her sort, that I glimpsed her crude among the bushes, and felt her attraction. But she kept looking away over my shoulder, with her yellow eyes, towards Lord Lathkill.

Myself or him, it was a question of which got there first. But she preferred him. Only for some things she would rather it were me.

Luke had changed curiously. His body seemed to have come alive, in the dark cloth of his evening suit; his eyes had a devil-may-care light in them, his long cheeks a touch of scarlet, and his black hair felt loose over his forehead. He had again some of that Guardsman's sense of well-being and claim to the best in life, which I had noticed the first time I saw him. But now it was a little more florid, defiant, with a touch of madness.

He looked down at Carlotta with uncanny kindness and affection. Yet he was glad to hand her over to me. He, too, was afraid of her: as if with her his bad luck had worked. Whereas, in a throb of crude brutality, he felt it would not

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work with the dark young woman. So, he handed Carlotta over to me with relief, as if, with me, she would be safe from the doom of his bad luck. And he, with the other woman, would be safe from it too. For the other woman was outside the circle.

I was glad to have Carlotta again : to have that inexpressible delicate and complete quiet of the two of us, resting my heart in a balance now at last physical as well as spiritual. Till now, it had always been a fragmentary thing. Now, for this hour at least, it was whole, a soft, complete, physical flow, and a unison deeper even than childhood.

As she danced she shivered slightly, and I seemed to smell frost in the air. The Colonel, too, was not keeping the rhythm.

“ Has it turned colder ? ” I said.

“ I wonder ! ” she answered, looking up at me with a slow beseeching. Why, and for what was she beseeching me ? I pressed my hand a little closer, and her small breasts seemed to speak to me. The Colonel recovered the rhythm again.

But at the end of the dance she shivered again, and it seemed to me I too was chilled.

“ Has it suddenly turned colder ? ” I said, going to the radiator. It was quite hot.

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"It seems to me it has," said Lord Lathkill, in a queer voice.

The Colonel was sitting abjectly on the music stool, as if broken.

"Shall we have another? Shall we try a tango?" said Lord Lathkill. "As much of it as we can manage?"

"I—I——" the Colonel began, turning round on the seat, his face yellow. "I'm not sure——"

Carlotta shivered. The frost seemed to touch my vitals. Mrs. Hale stood stiff, like a pillar of brown rock-salt, staring at her husband.

"We had better leave off," murmured Lady Lathkill, rising.

Then she did an extraordinary thing. She lifted her face, staring to the other side, and said suddenly, in a clear, cruel sort of voice :

"Are you here, Lucy?"

She was speaking across to the spirits. Deep inside me leaped a jump of laughter. I wanted to howl with laughter. Then instantly, I went inert again. The chill gloom seemed to deepen suddenly in the room, everybody was overcome. On the piano-seat the Colonel sat yellow and huddled, with a terrible hang-dog look of guilt on his face. There was a silence, in which the cold seemed to creak. Then came again the peculiar bell-like ringing of Lady Lathkill's voice :

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"Are you here? What do you wish us to do?"

A dead and ghastly silence, in which we all remained transfixed. Then from somewhere came two slow thuds, and a sound of drapery moving. The Colonel, with mad fear in his eyes, looked round at the uncurtained windows, and crouched on his seat.

"We must leave this room," said Lady Lathkill.

"I'll tell you what, Mother," said Lord Lathkill curiously; "you and the Colonel go up, and we'll just turn on the Victrola."

That was almost uncanny of him. For myself, the cold effluence of these people had paralysed me. Now I began to rally. I felt that Lord Lathkill was sane, it was these other people who were mad.

Again from somewhere indefinite came two slow thuds.

"We must leave this room," repeated Lady Lathkill in monotony.

"All right, Mother. You go. I'll just turn on the Victrola."

And Lord Lathkill strode across the room. In another moment the monstrous barking howl of the opening of a jazz tune, an event far more extraordinary than thuds, poured from the unmoving bit of furniture called a Victrola.

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Lady Lathkill silently departed. The Colonel got to his feet.

"I wouldn't go if I were you, Colonel," said I. "Why not dance? I'll look on this time."

I felt as if I were resisting a rushing, cold dark current.

Lord Lathkill was already dancing with Mrs. Hale, skating delicately along, with a certain smile of obstinacy, secrecy, and excitement kindled on his face. Carlotta went up quietly to the Colonel, and put her hand on his broad shoulder. He let himself be moved into the dance, but he had no heart in it.

There came a heavy crash, out of the distance. The Colonel stopped as if shot: in another moment he would go down on his knees. And his face was terrible. It was obvious he really felt another presence, other than ours, blotting us out. The room seemed dree and cold. It was heavy work, bearing up.

The Colonel's lips were moving, but no sound came forth. Then, absolutely oblivious of us, he went out of the room.

The Victrola had run down. Lord Lathkill went to wind it up again, saying:

"I suppose mother knocked over a piece of furniture."

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But we were all of us depressed, in abject depression.

"Isn't it awful!" Carlotta said to me, looking up beseechingly.

"Abominable!" said I.

"What do you think there is in it?"

"God knows. The only thing is to stop it, as one does hysteria. It's on a par with hysteria."

"Quite," she said.

Lord Lathkill was dancing, and smiling very curiously down into his partner's face. The Victrola was at its loudest.

Carlotta and I looked at one another, with hardly the heart to start again. The house felt hollow and gruesome. One wanted to get out, to get away from the cold, uncanny blight which filled the air.

"Oh, I say, keep the ball rolling," called Lord Lathkill.

"Come," I said to Carlotta.

Even then she hung back a little. If she had not suffered, and lost so much, she would have gone upstairs at once to struggle in the silent wrestling of wills with her mother-in-law. Even now, *that* particular fight drew her, almost the strongest. But I took her hand.

"Come," I said. "Let us dance it down. We'll roll the ball the opposite way."

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She danced with me, but she was absent, unwilling. The empty gloom of the house, the sense of cold, and of deadening opposition, pressed us down. I was looking back over my life, and thinking how the cold weight of an unliving spirit was slowly crushing all warmth and vitality out of everything. Even Carlotta herself had gone numb again, cold and resistant even to me. The thing seemed to happen wholesale in her.

“One has to choose to live,” I said, dancing on.

But I was powerless. With a woman, when her spirit goes inert in opposition, a man can do nothing. I felt my life-flow sinking in my body.

“This house is awfully depressing,” I said to her, as we mechanically danced. “Why don’t you *do* something? Why don’t you get out of this tangle? Why don’t you break it?”

“How?” she said.

I looked down at her, wondering why she was suddenly hostile.

“You needn’t fight,” I said. “You needn’t fight it. Don’t get tangled up in it. Just side-step, on to another ground.”

She made a pause of impatience before she replied:

“I don’t see where I am to side-step to, precisely.”

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"You do," said I. "A little while ago, you were warm and unfolded and good. Now you are shut up and prickly, in the cold. You needn't be. Why not stay warm?"

"It's nothing I do," she said coldly.

"It is. Stay warm to me. I am here. Why clutch in a tug-of-war with Lady Lathkill?"

"Do I clutch in a tug-of-war with my mother-in-law?"

"You know you do."

She looked up at me, with a faint little shadow of guilt and beseeching, but with a *move* of cold obstinacy dominant.

"Let's have done," said I.

And in cold silence we sat side by side on the lounge.

The other two danced on. They at any rate were in unison. One could see from the swing of their limbs. Mrs. Hale's yellow-brown eyes looked at me every time she came round.

"Why does she look at me?" I said.

"I can't imagine," said Carlotta, with a cold grimace.

"I'd better go upstairs and see what's happening," she said, suddenly rising and disappearing in a breath.

Why should she go? Why should she rush off to the battle of wills with her mother-in-law?

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In such a battle, while one has any life to lose, one can only lose it. There is nothing positively to be done, but to withdraw out of the hateful tension.

The music ran down. Lord Lathkill stopped the Victrola.

"Carlotta gone?" he said.

"Apparently."

"Why didn't you stop her?"

"Wild horses wouldn't stop her."

He lifted his hand with a mocking gesture of helplessness.

"The lady loves her will," he said. "Would you like to dance?"

I looked at Mrs. Hale.

"No," I said. "I won't butt in. I'll play the pianola. The Victrola's a brute."

I hardly noticed the passage of time. Whether the others danced or not, I played, and was unconscious of almost everything. In the midst of one rattling piece, Lord Lathkill touched my arm.

"Listen to Carlotta. She says closing time," he said, in his old musical voice, but with the sardonic ring of war in it now.

Carlotta stood with her arms dangling, looking like a penitent schoolgirl.

"The Colonel has gone to bed. He hasn't

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been able to manage a reconciliation with Lucy," she said. "My mother-in-law thinks we ought to let him try to sleep."

Carlotta's slow eyes rested on mine, questioning, penitent—or so I imagined—and somewhat sphinx-like.

"Why, of course," said Lord Lathkill. "I wish him all the sleep in the world."

Mrs. Hale said never a word.

"Is Mother retiring too?" asked Luke.

"I think so."

"Ah! then supposing we go up and look at the supper-tray."

We found Lady Lathkill mixing herself some night-cap brew over a spirit-lamp: something milky and excessively harmless. She stood at the sideboard stirring her potations, and hardly noticed us. When she had finished she sat down with her steaming cup.

"Colonel Hale all right, Mother?" said Luke, looking across at her.

The dowager, under her uplift of white hair, stared back at her son. There was an eye-battle for some moments, during which he maintained his arch, debonair ease, just a bit crazy.

"No," said Lady Lathkill, "he is in great trouble."

"Ah!" replied her son. "Awful pity we

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can't do anything for him. But if flesh and blood can't help him, I'm afraid I'm a dud. Suppose he didn't mind our dancing? Frightfully good for *us*! We've been forgetting that we're flesh and blood, Mother."

He took another whisky and soda, and gave me one. And in a paralysing silence Lady Lathkill sipped her hot brew, Luke and I sipped our whiskies, the young woman ate a little sandwich. We all preserved an extraordinary aplomb, and an obstinate silence.

It was Lady Lathkill who broke it. She seemed to be sinking downwards, crouching into herself like a skulking animal.

"I suppose," she said, "we shall all go to bed?"

"You go, Mother. We'll come along in a moment."

She went, and for some time we four sat silent. The room seemed to become pleasanter, the air was more grateful.

"Look here," said Lord Lathkill at last. "What do you think of this ghost business?"

"I?" said I. "I don't like the atmosphere it produces. There may be ghosts, and spirits, and all that. The dead must be somewhere; there's no such place as nowhere. But they don't affect me particularly. Do they you?"

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"Well," he said, "no, not directly. Indirectly I suppose it does."

"I think it makes a horribly depressing atmosphere, spiritualism," said I. "I want to kick."

"Exactly! And ought one?" he asked in his terribly sane-seeming way.

This made me laugh. I knew what he was up to.

"I don't know what you mean by *ought*," said I. "If I really want to kick, if I know I can't stand a thing, I kick. Who's going to authorise me, if my own genuine feeling doesn't?"

"Quite," he said, staring at me like an owl, with a fixed, meditative stare.

"Do you know," he said, "I suddenly thought at dinner-time, what corpses we all were, sitting eating our dinners. I thought it when I saw you look at those little Jerusalem artichoke things in a white sauce. Suddenly it struck me, you were alive and twinkling, and we were all bodily dead. Bodily dead, if you understand. Quite alive in other directions, but bodily dead. And whether we ate vegetarian or meat made no difference. We were bodily dead."

"Ah, with a slap in the face," said I, "we come to life! You or I or anybody."

"I *do* understand poor Lucy," said Luke. "Don't you? She forgot to be flesh and blood

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while she was alive, and now she can't forgive herself, nor the Colonel. That must be pretty rough, you know, not to realise it till you're dead, and you haven't, so to speak, anything left to go on. I mean it's awfully important to be flesh and blood."

He looked so solemnly at us, we three broke simultaneously into an uneasy laugh.

"Oh, but I *do* mean it," he said. "I've only realised how very extraordinary it is to be a man of flesh and blood, alive. It seems so ordinary, in comparison, to be dead, and merely spirit. That seems so commonplace. But fancy having a living face, and arms, and thighs. Oh, my God, I'm glad I've realised in time!"

He caught Mrs. Hale's hand, and pressed her dusky arm against his body.

"Oh, but if one had died without realising it!" he cried. "Think how ghastly for Jesus, when he was risen and wasn't touchable! How very awful, to have to say *Noli me tangere!* Ah, touch me, touch me *alive!*"

He pressed Mrs. Hale's hand convulsively against his breast. The tears had already slowly gathered in Carlotta's eyes and were dropping on to her hands in her lap.

"Don't cry, Carlotta," he said. "Really, don't. We haven't killed one another. We're

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too decent, after all. We've almost become two spirits side by side. We've almost become two ghosts to one another, wrestling. Oh, but I want you to get back your body, even if I can't give it you. I want my flesh and blood, Carlotta, and I want you to have yours. We've suffered so much the other way. And the children, it is as well they are dead. They were born of our will and our disembodiment. Oh, I feel like the Bible. Clothe me with flesh again, and wrap my bones with sinew, and let the fountain of blood cover me. My spirit is like a naked nerve on the air."

Carlotta has ceased to weep. She sat with her head dropped, as if asleep. The rise and fall of her small, slack breasts was still heavy, but they were lifting on a heaving sea of rest. It was as if a slow, restful dawn were rising in her body, while she slept. So slack, so broken she sat, it occurred to me that in this crucifixion business the crucified does not put himself alone on the cross. The woman is nailed even more inexorably up, and crucified in the body even more cruelly.

It is a monstrous thought. But the deed is even more monstrous. Oh, Jesus, didn't you know that you couldn't be crucified alone!—that the two thieves crucified along with you were the two women, your wife and your mother! You

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called them two thieves. But what would they call you, who had their women's bodies on the cross? The abominable trinity on Calvary!

I felt an infinite tenderness for my dear Carlotta. She could not yet be touched. But my soul streamed to her like warm blood. So she sat slack and drooped, as if broken. But she was not broken. It was only the great release.

Luke sat with the hand of the dark young woman pressed against his breast. His face was warm and fresh, but he too breathed heavily, and stared unseeing. Mrs. Hale sat at his side erect and mute. But she loved him, with erect, black-faced, remote power.

"Morier!" said Luke to me. "If you can help Carlotta, you will, won't you? I can't do any more for her now. We are in mortal fear of each other."

"As much as she'll let me," said I, looking at her drooping figure, that was built on such a strong frame.

The fire rustled on the hearth as we sat in complete silence. How long it lasted I cannot say. Yet we were none of us startled when the door opened.

It was the Colonel, in a handsome brocade dressing-gown, looking worried.

Luke still held the dark young woman's hand

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clasped against his thigh. Mrs. Hale did not move.

"I thought you fellows might help me," said the Colonel, in a worried voice, as he closed the door.

"What is wrong, Colonel?" said Luke.

The Colonel looked at him, looked at the clasped hands of Luke and the dark young woman, looked at me, looked at Carlotta, without changing his expression of anxiety, fear, and misery. He didn't care about us.

"I can't sleep," he said. "It's gone wrong again. My head feels as if there was a cold vacuum in it, and my heart beats, and something screws up inside me. I know it's Lucy. She hates me again. I can't stand it."

He looked at us with eyes half glazed, obsessed. His face seemed as if the flesh were breaking under the skin, decomposing.

"Perhaps, poor thing," said Luke, whose madness seemed really sane this night, "perhaps you hate *her*."

Luke's strange concentration instantly made us feel a tension, as of hate, in the Colonel's body.

"I?" The Colonel looked up sharply, like a culprit. "I! I wouldn't say that, if I were you."

"Perhaps that's what's the matter," said Luke, with mad, beautiful calm. "Why can't you feel

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kindly towards her, poor thing ! She must have been done out of a lot while she lived."

It was as if he had one foot in life and one in death, and knew both sides. To us it was like madness.

"I—I !" stammered the Colonel ; and his face was a study. Expression after expression moved across it : of fear, repudiation, dismay, anger, repulsion, bewilderment, guilt. "I was good to her."

"Ah yes," said Luke. "Perhaps *you* were good to her. But was your body good to poor Lucy's body, poor dead thing !"

He seemed to be better acquainted with the ghost than with us.

The Colonel gazed blankly at Luke, and his eyes went up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down.

"My body !" he said blankly.

And he looked down amazedly at his little round stomach, under the silk gown, and his stout knee, in its blue-and-white pyjama.

"My body !" he repeated blankly.

"Yes," said Luke. "Don't you see, you may have been awfully good to her. But her poor woman's body, were you ever good to that ?"

"She had everything she wanted. She had three of my children," said the Colonel dazedly.

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“ Ah yes, that may easily be. But your body of a man, was it ever good to her body of a woman? That’s the point. If you understand the marriage service: with my body I thee worship. That’s the point. No getting away from it.”

The queerest of all accusing angels did Lord Lathkill make, as he sat there with the hand of the other man’s wife clasped against his thigh. His face was fresh and naïve, and the dark eyes were bright with a clairvoyant candour, that was like madness, and perhaps was supreme sanity.

The Colonel was thinking back, and over his face a slow understanding was coming.

“ It may be,” he said. “ It may be. Perhaps, that way, I despised her. It may be, it may be.”

“ I know,” said Luke. “ As if she weren’t worth noticing, what you did to her. Haven’t I done it myself? And don’t I know now, it’s a horrible thing to do, to oneself as much as to her? Her poor ghost, that ached, and never had a real body! It’s not so easy to worship with the body. Ah, if the Church taught us *that* sacrament: *with my body I thee worship!* that would easily make up for any honouring and obeying the woman might do. But that’s why she haunts you. You ignored and disliked her body,

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and she was only a living ghost. Now she wails in the afterworld, like a still-wincing nerve."

The Colonel hung his head, slowly pondering. Pondering with all his body. His young wife watched the sunken, bald head in a kind of stupor. His day seemed so far from her day. Carlotta had lifted her face; she was beautiful again, with the tender before-dawn freshness of a new understanding.

She was watching Luke, and it was obvious, he was another man to her. The man she knew, the Luke who was her husband, was gone, and this other strange, uncanny creature had taken his place. She was filled with wonder. Could one so change, as to become another creature entirely? Ah, if it were so! If she herself, as she knew herself, could cease to be! If that woman who was married to Luke, married to him in an intimacy of misfortune that was like a horror, could only cease to be, and let a new, delicately-wild Carlotta take her place!

"It may be," said the Colonel, lifting his head. "It may be." There seemed to come a relief over his soul, as he realised. "I didn't worship her with my body. I think maybe I worshipped other women that way; but maybe I never did. But I thought I was good to her. And I thought she didn't want it."

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"It's no good thinking. We all want it," asserted Luke. "And before we die, we know it. I say, before we die. It may be after. But everybody wants it, let them say and do what they will. Don't you agree, Morier?"

I was startled when he spoke to me. I had been thinking of Carlotta : how she was looking like a girl again, as she used to look at the Thwaite, when she painted cactuses-in-a-pot. Only now, a certain rigidity of the will had left her, so that she looked even younger than when I first knew her, having now a virginal, flower-like *stillness* which she had not had then. I had always believed that people could be born again : if they would only let themselves.

"I'm sure they do," I said to Luke.

But I was thinking, if people were born again, the old circumstances would not fit the new body.

"What about yourself, Luke?" said Carlotta abruptly.

"I!" he exclaimed, and the scarlet showed in his cheek. "I! I'm not fit to be spoken about. I've been moaning like the ghost of disembodiment myself, ever since I became a man."

The Colonel said never a word. He hardly listened. He was pondering, pondering. In his way, he too was a brave man.

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"I have an idea what you mean," he said. "There's no denying it, I didn't like her body. And now, I suppose, it's too late."

He looked up bleakly : in a way, willing to be condemned, since he knew vaguely that something was wrong. Anything better than the blind torture.

"Oh, I don't know," said Luke. "Why don't you, even now, love her a little with your real heart? Poor disembodied thing! Why don't you take her to your warm heart, even now, and comfort her inside there. Why don't you be kind to her poor ghost, bodily?"

The Colonel did not answer. He was gazing fixedly at Luke. Then he turned, and dropped his head, alone in a deep silence. Then, deliberately, but not lifting his head, he pulled open his dressing-gown at the breast, unbuttoned the top of his pyjama jacket, and sat perfectly still, his breast showing white and very pure, so much younger and purer than his averted face. He breathed with difficulty, his white breast rising irregularly. But in the deep isolation where he was, slowly a gentleness of compassion came over him, moulding his elderly features with strange freshness, and softening his blue eye with a look it had never had before. Something of the tremulous gentleness of a young bridegroom had come upon

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him, in spite of his baldness, his silvery little moustache, the weary marks of his face.

The passionate, compassionate soul stirred in him and was pure, his youth flowered over his face and eyes.

We sat very still, moved also in the spirit of compassion. There seemed a presence in the air, almost a smell of blossom, as if time had opened and gave off the perfume of spring. The Colonel gazed in silence into space, his smooth white chest, with the few dark hairs, open and rising and sinking with life.

Meanwhile his dark-faced young wife watched as if from afar. The youngness that was on him was not for her.

I knew that Lady Lathkill would come. I could feel her far off in her room, stirring and sending forth her rays. Swiftly I steeled myself to be in readiness. When the door opened, I rose and walked across the room.

She entered with characteristic noiselessness, peering in round the door, with her crest of white hair, before she ventured bodily in. The Colonel looked at her swiftly, and swiftly covered his breast, holding his hand at his bosom, clutching the silk of his robe.

"I was afraid," she murmured, "that Colonel Hale might be in trouble."

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"No," said I. "We are all sitting very peacefully. There is no trouble."

Lord Lathkill also rose.

"No trouble at all, I assure you, Mother!" he said.

Lady Lathkill glanced at us both, then turned heavily to the Colonel.

"She is unhappy to-night?" she asked.

The Colonel winced.

"No," he said hurriedly. "No, I don't think so." He looked up at her with shy, wincing eyes.

"Tell me what I can do," she said in a very low tone, bending towards him.

"Our ghost is walking to-night, Mother," said Lord Lathkill. "Haven't you felt the air of spring, and smelt the plum-blossom? Don't you feel us all young? Our ghost is walking, to bring Lucy home. The Colonel's breast is quite extraordinary, white as plum-blossom, Mother, younger-looking than mine, and he's already taken Lucy into his bosom, in his breast, where he breathes like the wind among trees. The Colonel's breast is white and extraordinarily beautiful, Mother, I don't wonder poor Lucy yearned for it, to go home into it at last. It's like going into an orchard of plum-blossom, for a ghost."

His mother looked round at him, then back at

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the Colonel, who was still clutching his hand over his chest, as if protecting something.

"You see, I didn't understand where I'd been wrong," he said, looking up at her imploringly. "I never realised that it was my body which had not been good to her."

Lady Lathkill curved sideways to watch him. But her power was gone. His face had come smooth with the tender glow of compassionate life, that flowers again. She could not get at him.

"It's no good, Mother. You know our ghost is walking. She's supposed to be absolutely like a crocus, if you know what I mean: harbinger of spring in the earth. So it says in my great-grandfather's diary: for she rises with silence like a crocus at the feet, and violets in the hollows of the heart come out. For she is of the feet and the hands, the thighs and breast, the face and the all-concealing belly, and her name is silent, but her odour is of spring, and her contact is the all-in-all." He was quoting from his great-grandfather's diary, which only the sons of the family read. And as he quoted he rose curiously on his toes, and spread his fingers, bringing his hands together till the finger-tips touched. His father had done that before him, when he was deeply moved.

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Lady Lathkill sat down heavily in the chair next the Colonel.

"How do you feel?" she asked him, in a secretive mutter.

He looked round at her, with the large blue eyes of candour.

"I never knew what was wrong," he said, a little nervously. "She only wanted to be looked after a bit, not to be a homeless, houseless ghost. It's all right! She's all right here." He pressed his clutched hand on his breast. "It's all right; it's all right. She'll be all right now."

He rose, a little fantastic in his brocade gown, but once more manly, candid and sober.

"With your permission," he said, "I will retire."—He made a little bow.—"I am glad you helped me. I didn't know—didn't know."

But the change in him, and his secret wondering were so strong on him, he went out of the room scarcely being aware of us.

Lord Lathkill threw up his arms, and stretched, quivering.

"Oh, pardon, pardon," he said, seeming, as he stretched, quivering, to grow bigger and almost splendid, sending out rays of fire to the dark young woman. "Oh, Mother, thank you for my limbs, and my body! Oh, Mother, thank you for my knees and my shoulders at this

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moment ! Oh, Mother, thank you that my body is straight and alive ! Oh, Mother, torrents of spring, torrents of spring, whoever said that ? ”

“ Don’t you forget yourself, my boy ? ” said his mother.

“ Oh no, dear, no ! Oh, Mother dear, a man has to be in love in his thighs, the way you ride a horse. Why don’t we stay in love that way all our lives ? Why do we turn into corpses with consciousness ? Oh, Mother of my body, thank you for my body, you strange woman with white hair ! I don’t know much about you, but my body came from you, so thank you, my dear. I shall think of you to-night ! ”

“ Hadn’t we better go ? ” she said, beginning to tremble.

“ Why, yes,” he said, turning and looking strangely at the dark young woman. “ Yes, let us go ; let us go ! ”

Carlotta gazed at him, then, with strange, heavy, searching look, at me. I smiled to her, and she looked away. The dark young woman looked over her shoulder as she went out. Lady Lathkill hurried past her son, with head ducked. But still he laid his hand on her shoulder, and she stopped dead.

“ Good-night, Mother, Mother of my face and

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my thighs. Thank you for the night to come, dear, Mother of my body."

She glanced up at him rapidly, nervously, then hurried away. He stared after her, then switched off the light.

"Funny old Mother!" he said. "I never realised before that she was the mother of my shoulders and my hips, as well as my brain. Mother of my thighs!"

He switched off some of the lights as we went, accompanying me to my room.

"You know," he said, "I can understand that the Colonel is happy, now the forlorn ghost of Lucy is comforted in his heart. After all, he married her! And she must be content at last: he has a beautiful chest, don't you think? Together they will sleep well. And then he will begin to live the life of the living again. How friendly the house feels to-night! But, after all, it is my old home. And the smell of plum-blossom—don't you notice it? It is our ghost, in silence like a crocus. There, your fire has died down! But it's a nice room! I hope our ghost will come to you. I think she will. Don't speak to her. It makes her go away. She, too, is a ghost of silence. We talk far too much. But now I am going to be silent too, and a ghost of silence. Good-night!"

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He closed the door softly and was gone. And softly, in silence, I took off my things. I was thinking of Carlotta, and a little sadly, perhaps, because of the power of circumstance over us. This night I could have worshipped her with my body, and she, perhaps, was stripped in the body to be worshipped. But it was not for me, at this hour, to fight against circumstances.

I had fought too much, even against the most imposing circumstances, to use any more violence for love. Desire is a sacred thing, and should not be violated.

"Hush!" I said to myself. "I will sleep, and the ghost of my silence can go forth, in the subtle body of desire, to meet that which is coming to meet it. Let my ghost go forth, and let me not interfere. There are many intangible meetings, and unknown fulfilments of desire."

So I went softly to sleep, as I wished to, without interfering with the warm, crocus-like ghost of my body.

And I must have gone far, far down the intricate galleries of sleep, to the very heart of the world. For I know I passed on beyond the strata of images and words, beyond the iron veins of memory, and even the jewels of rest, to sink in the final dark like a fish, dumb, soundless, and imageless, yet alive and swimming.

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And at the very core of the deep night the ghost came to me, at the heart of the ocean of oblivion, which is also the heart of life. Beyond hearing, or even knowledge of contact, I met her and knew her. How I know it I don't know. Yet I know it with eyeless, wingless knowledge.

For man in the body is formed through countless ages, and at the centre is the speck, or spark, upon which all his formation has taken place. It is even not himself, deep beyond his many depths. Deep from him calls to deep. And according as deep answers deep, man glistens and surpasses himself.

Beyond all the pearly mufflings of consciousness, of age upon age of consciousness, deep calls yet to deep, and sometimes is answered. It is calling and answering, new-wakened God calling within the deep of a man, and new God calling answer from the other deep. And sometimes the other deep is a woman, as it was with me, when my ghost came.

Women were not unknown to me. But never before had woman come, in the depths of night, to answer my deep with her deep. As the ghost came, came as a ghost of silence, still in the depth of sleep.

I know she came. I know she came even as a woman, to my man. But the knowledge is

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darkly naked as the event. I only know, it was so. In the deep of sleep a call was called from the deeps of me, and answered in the deeps, by a woman among women. Breasts or thighs or face, I remember not a touch, no, nor a movement of my own. It is all complete in the profundity of darkness. Yet I know it was so.

I awoke towards dawn, from far, far away. I was vaguely conscious of drawing nearer and nearer, as the sun must have been drawing towards the horizon, from the complete beyond. Till at last the faint pallor of mental consciousness coloured my waking.

And then I was aware of a pervading scent, as of plum-blossom, and a sense of extraordinary silkiness—though where, and in what contact, I could not say. It was as the first blemish of dawn.

And even with so slight a conscious registering, *it* seemed to disappear. Like a whale that has sounded to the bottomless seas. That knowledge of *it*, which was the marriage of the ghost and me, disappeared from me, in its rich weight of certainty, as the scent of the plum-blossom moved down the lanes of my consciousness, and my limbs stirred in a silkiness for which I have no comparison.

As I became aware, I also became uncertain.

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I wanted to be certain of *it*, to have definite evidence. And as I sought for evidence, *it* disappeared, my perfect knowledge was gone. I no longer knew in full.

Now as the daylight slowly amassed, in the windows from which I had put back the shutters, I sought in myself for evidence, and in the room.

But I shall never know. I shall never know if it was a ghost, some sweet spirit from the innermost of the ever-deepening cosmos; or a woman, a very woman, as the silkiness of my limbs seems to attest; or a dream, a hallucination! I shall never know. Because I went away from Riddings in the morning, on account of the sudden illness of Lady Lathkill.

"You will come again," Luke said to me. "And in any case, you will never really go away from us."

"Good-bye," she said to me. "At last it was perfect!"

She seemed so beautiful, when I left her, as if it were the ghost again, and I was far down the deeps of consciousness.

The following autumn, when I was overseas once more, I had a letter from Lord Lathkill. He wrote very rarely.

"Carlotta has a son," he said, "and I an heir. He has yellow hair, like a little crocus, and one of

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the young plum-trees in the orchard has come out of all season into blossom. To me he is flesh and blood of our ghost itself. Even mother doesn't look over the wall, to the other side, any more. It's all this side for her now.

"So our family refuses to die out, by the grace of our ghost. We are calling him Gabriel.

"Dorothy Hale also is a mother, three days before Carlotta. She has a black lamb of a daughter, called Gabrielle. By the bleat of the little thing, I know its father. Our own is a blue-eyed one, with the dangerous repose of a pugilist. I have no fears of our family misfortune for him, ghost-begotten and ready-fisted.

"The Colonel is very well, quiet and self-possessed. He is farming in Wiltshire, raising pigs. It is a passion with him, the *crème de la crème* of swine. I admit, he has golden sows as elegant as a young Diane de Poitiers, and young hogs like Perseus in the first red-gold flush of youth. He looks me in the eye, and I look him back, and we understand. He is quiet, and proud now, and very hale and hearty, raising swine *ad maiorem gloriam Dei*. A good sport!

"I am in love with this house and its inmates, including the plum-blossom-scented one, she who visited you, in all the peace. I cannot understand why you wander in uneasy and distant parts of the

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earth. For me, when I am at home, I am there. I have peace upon my bones, and if the world is going to come to a violent and untimely end, as prophets aver, I feel the house of Lathkill will survive, built upon our ghost. So come back, and you'll find we shall not have gone away. . . .”

