

I submit for your consideration, the following manuscript which was mailed to this office some weeks ago. It is presented with neither evidence nor judgment as to its validity. This determination is for the reader to make.

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1

This occurred many years ago. My brother Saul and I had taken a fancy to the old, tenantless Slaughter House. Since we were boys the yellow-edged pronouncement —FOR SALE— had hung lopsided in the grimy front window. We had vowed with boyish ambition that, when we were old enough, the sign must come down.

When we had attained our manhood, this aspiration somehow remained. We had a taste for the Victorian, Saul and I. His painting was akin to that roseate and buxom transcription of nature so endeared by the nineteenth-century artists. And my writing, though far from satisfactory realization, bore the definite stamp of prolixity, was marked by that meticulous sweep of ornate phrase which the modernists decry as dullness and artifice.

Thus, for the headquarters of our artistic labors, what better retreat than the Slaughter House, that structure which matched in cornice and frieze our intimate partialities? None, we decided, and acted readily on that decision.

The yearly endowment arranged by our deceased parents, albeit meager, we knew to suffice, since the house was in gross need of repair and, moreover, without electricity.

There was also, if hardly credited by us, a rumor of ghosts. Neighborhood children quite excelled each other in relating the harrowing experiences they had undergone with various of the more eminent specters. We smiled at their clever fancies, never once losing the conviction that purchase of the house would be wholly practical and satisfactory.

The real estate office bumbled with financial delight the day we took off their hands what they had long considered a lost cause, having even gone so far as to remove the house from their listings. Convenient arrangements were readily fashioned and, in a matter of hours, we had moved all belongings from our uncommodious flat to our new, relatively large house.

Several days were then spent in the most necessary task of cleaning. This presented itself as far more difficult a project than first anticipated. Dust lay heavy throughout the halls and rooms. Our energetic dusting would send clouds of it billowing expansively, filling the air with powdery ghosts of dirt. We noted in respect to that observation that many a spectral vision might thus be made explicable if the proper time were utilized in experiment.

In addition to dust on all places of lodgment, there was thick grime on glass surfaces ranging from downstairs windows to silver-scratched mirrors in the upstairs bath. There were loose barristers to repair, door locks to recondition, yards of thick rugging out of whose mat to beat decades of dust, and a multitude of other chores large and small to be performed before the house could be deemed livable.

Yet, even with grime and age admitted, that we had come by an obvious bargain was beyond dispute. The house was completely furnished, moreover furnished in the delightful mode of the early 1900s. Saul and I were thoroughly enchanted. Dusted, aired, scrubbed from top to bottom, the house proved indeed a fascinating purchase. The dark luxurious drapes, the patterned rugs, the graceful furniture, the yellow-keyed spinet: everything was complete to the last detail, that detail being the portrait of a rather lovely young woman which hung above the living room mantel.

When first we came upon it, Saul and I stood speechless before its artistic quality. Saul then spoke of the painter's technique and finally, in rapt adulation, discussed with me the various possibilities as to the identity of the model.

It was our final conjecture that she was the daughter or wife of the former tenant, whoever he had been, beyond having the name of Slaughter.

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Several weeks passed by. Initial delight was slaked by full-time occupancy and intense creative effort.

We rose at nine, had our breakfast in the dining room, then proceeded to our work, I in my sleeping chamber, Saul in the solarium, which we had been able to improvise into a small studio. Each in our places, the morning passed quietly and effectively. We lunched at one, a small but nourishing meal and then resumed work for the afternoon.

We discontinued our labors about four to have tea and quiet conversation in our elegant front room. By this hour it was too late to go on with our work, since darkness would be commencing its surrounding pall on the city. We had chosen not to install electricity both for reasons of monetary prudence and the less sordid one of pure aesthetics.

We would not, for the world, have distorted the gentle charm of the house by the addition of blatant, sterile electric light. Indeed we preferred the flickering silence of candlelight in which to play our nightly game of chess. We needed no usurping of our silence by noxious radio bleatings, we ate our bakery bread unsinged and found our wine quite adequately cooled from the old icebox. Saul enjoyed the sense of living in the past and so did I. We asked no more.

But then began the little things, the intangible things, the things without reason.

Walking on the stairs, in the hallway, through the rooms, Saul or I, singly or together, would stop and receive the strangest impulse in our minds; of fleeting moment yet quite definite while existent.

It is difficult to express the feeling with adequate clarity. It was as if we heard something although there was no sound, as though we saw something when there was nothing before the eye. A sense of shifting presence, delicate and tenuous, hidden from all physical senses and yet, somehow, perceived.

There was no explaining it. In point of fact we never spoke of it together. It was too nebulous a feeling to discuss, incapable of being materialized into words. Restless though it made us, there was no mutual comparison of sensation nor could there be. Even the most abstract of thought formation could not approach what we were experiencing.

Sometimes I would come upon Saul casting a hurried glance over his shoulder, or surreptitiously reaching out to stroke empty air as though he expected his fingers to touch some invisible entity. Sometimes he would catch me doing the same. On occasion we would smile awkwardly, both of us appreciating the moment without words.

But our smiles soon faded. I almost think we were afraid to deride this unknown aegis for fear that it might prove itself actual. Not that my brother or I were superstitious in the least degree. The very fact that we purchased the house without paying the slightest feausance to the old wives' tales about its supposed anathema seems to belie the suggestion that we were, in any manner, inclined toward mystic apprehensions. Yet the house did seem, beyond question, to possess some strange potency.

Often, late at night, I would lie awake, knowing somehow that Saul was also awake in his room and that we both were listening and waiting, consciously certain about our expectation of some unknown arrival which was soon to be effected.

And effected it was.

It was perhaps a month and a half after we had moved into Slaughter House that the first hint was shown as to the house's occupants other than ourselves.

I was in the narrow kitchen cooking supper on the small gas stove. Saul was in the dining alcove arranging the table for supper. He had spread a white cloth over the dark, glossy mahogany and, on it, placed two plates with attendant silver. A candelabrum of six candles glowed in the center of the table casting shadows over the snowy cloth.

Saul was about to place the cups and saucers beside the plates as I turned back to the stove. I twisted the knob a trifle to lower the flame under the chops. Then, as I began to open the icebox to get the wine, I heard Saul gasp loudly and, something thumped on the dining-room rug. I whirled and hurried out of the kitchen as fast as I could.

One of the cups had fallen to the floor, its handle snapping off. I hurriedly picked it up, my eyes on Saul.

He was standing with his back to the living room archway, his right hand pressed to his cheek, a look of speechless shock contorting his handsome features.

"What is it?" I asked, placing the cup on the table.

He looked at me without answering and I noticed how his slender fingers trembled on his whitening cheek.

"Saul, what is it?"

"A hand," he said. "A hand. It touched my cheek."

I believe my mouth fell open in surprise. I had, deep within the inner passages of my mind, been expecting something like this to happen. So had Saul. Yet now that it had, a natural sense of oppressive impact was on both of our shoulders.

We stood there in silence. How can I express my feeling at that moment? It was as though something tangible, a tide of choking air, crept over us like some shapeless, lethargic serpent. I noticed how Saul's chest moved in convulsive leaps and depressions and my own mouth hung open as I gasped for breath.

Then, in an added moment, the breathless vacuum was gone, the mindless dread dissolved. I managed to speak, trusting to break this awesome spell with words.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

His slender throat contracted. He forced a smile to his lips, a smile more frightened than pleasant.

“I hope not,” he replied.

He reinforced his smile with some effort.

“Can it really be?” he went on, his joviality failing noticeably.

“Can it really be that we’ve been duped into buying ourselves a haunted house?”

I maintained an effort to join in with his spirit of artificial gusto for the sake of our own minds. But it could not long last nor did I feel any abiding comfort in Saul’s feigned composure. We were both exceptionally hypersensitive, had been ever since our births, mine some twenty-seven years before, his twenty-five. We both felt this bodiless premonition deep in our senses.

We spoke no more of it, whether from distaste or foreboding I cannot say. Following our unenjoyable meal, we spent the remainder of the evening at pitifully conducted card games. I suggested, in one unguarded moment of fear, that it might be worth our consideration to have electrical outlets installed in the house.

Saul scoffed at my apparent submission and seemed a little more content to retain the relative dimness of candlelight than the occurrence before dinner would have seemed to make possible in him. Notwithstanding that, I made no issue of it.

We retired to our rooms quite early as we usually do. Before we separated, however, Saul said something quite odd to my way of thinking. He was standing at the head of the stairs looking down, I was about to open the door to my room.

“Doesn’t it all seem familiar?” he asked.

I turned to face him, hardly knowing what he was talking about.

“Familiar?” I asked of him.

“I mean,” he tried to clarify, “as though we’d been here before. No, more than just been here. Actually lived here.”

I looked at him with a disturbing sense of alarm gnawing at my mind. He lowered his eyes with a nervous smile as though he’d said something he was just realizing he should not have said. He stepped off quickly for his room, muttering a most uncordial good night to me.

I then retired to my own room, wondering about the unusual restlessness which had seemed to possess Saul throughout the evening manifesting itself not only in his words but in his impatient card play, his fidgety pose on the chair upon which

he sat, the agitated flexing of his fingers, the roving of his beautiful dark eyes about the living room. As though he were looking for something.

In my room, I disrobed, effected my toilet and was soon in bed. I had lain there about an hour when I felt the home shake momentarily and the air seemed abruptly permeated with a weird, discordant humming that made my brain throb.

I pressed my hands over my ears and then seemed to wake up, my ears still covered. The house was still. I was not at all sure that it had not been a dream. It might have been a heavy truck passing the house, thus setting the dream into motion in my upset mind. I had no way of being absolutely certain.

I sat up and listened. For long minutes I sat stock still on my bed and tried to hear if there were any sounds in the house. A burglar perhaps or Saul prowling about in quest of a midnight snack. But there was nothing. Once, while I glanced at the window, I thought I saw, out of the corner of my eye, a momentary glare of bluish light shining underneath my door. But, when I quickly turned my head, my eyes saw only the deepest of blackness and, at length, I sank back on my pillow and fell into a fitful sleep.

3

The next day was Sunday. Frequent wakings during the night and light, troubled sleep had exhausted me. I remained in bed until ten-thirty although it was my general habit to rise promptly at nine each day, a habit I had acquired when quite young.

I dressed hastily and walked across the hall, but Saul was already up. I felt a slight vexation that he did not come in to speak to me as he sometimes did nor even looked in to tell me it was past rising time.

I found him in the living room eating breakfast from a small table he had placed in front at the mantelpiece. He was sitting in a chair that faced the portrait.

His head moved around quickly at I came in. He appeared nervous to me.

"Good morning," he said.

"Why didn't you wake me up?" I said. "You know I never sleep this late."

"I thought you were tired," he said. "What difference does it make?"

I sat down across from him, feeling rather peevish as I took a warm biscuit from beneath the napkin and broke it open.

"Did you notice the house shaking last night?" I asked.

“No. Did it?”

I made no reply to the flippant air of his counter-question. I took a bite from my biscuit and put it down.

“Coffee?” he said. I nodded curtly and he poured me a cup, apparently oblivious to my pique.

I looked around the table.

“Where is the sugar?” I asked

“I never use it,” he answered. “You know that.”

“I use it,” I said.

“Well, you weren’t up, John,” he replied with an antiseptic smile.

I rose abruptly and went into the kitchen. I opened up one side of the cabinet and retrieved the sugar bowl with irritable fingers.

Then, as I passed it, about to leave the room, I tried to open the other side of the cabinet. It would not open. The door had been stuck quite fast since we moved in. Saul and I had decided in facetious keeping with neighborhood tradition that the cabinet contained shelf upon shelf of dehydrated ghosts.

At the moment, however, I was in little humor for droll fancies. I pulled at the door knob with rising anger. That I should suddenly insist on that moment to open the cabinet only reflected the ill-temper Saul’s neglect could so easily create in me. I put down the sugar bowl and placed both hands on the knob.

“What on earth are you doing?” I heard Saul ask from the front room.

I made no answer to his question but pulled harder on the cabinet knob. But it was as if the door were imbedded solidly into the frame and I could not loosen it the least fraction of an inch.

“What were you doing?” Saul asked as I sat down.

“Nothing,” I said and the matter ended. I sat eating with little if any appetite. I do not know whether I felt more anger than hurt. Perhaps it was more a sense of injury since Saul is usually keenly sensitive to my responses, but that day he seemed not the slightest particle receptive. And it was that blasé dispassion in him, so different to his usual disposition, that had so thoroughly upset me.

Once, during the meal, I glanced up at him to discover that his eyes were directed over my shoulder, focusing on something behind me. It caused a distinct chill to excite itself across my back.

“What are you looking at?” I asked of him.

His eyes refocused themselves on me and the slight smile he held was erased from his lips.

“Nothing,” he replied.

Nonetheless I twisted about in my chair to look. But there was only the portrait over the mantel and nothing more.

“The portrait?” I asked.

He made no answer but stirred his coffee with deceptive composure.

I said “Saul, I’m talking to you.”

His dark eyes on me were mockingly cold. As though they meant to say: Well, so you are but that is hardly a concern of mine, is it?

When he would not speak I chose to attempt an alleviation of this inexplicable tension which had risen between us. I put down my cup.

“Did you sleep well?” I asked.

His gaze moved up to me quickly, almost, I could not avoid the realization, almost suspiciously.

“Why do you ask?” he spoke distrustingly.

“Is it such an odd question?”

Again he made no reply. Instead he patted his thin lips with his napkin and pushed back his chair as though to leave.

“Excuse me,” he muttered, more from habit than politeness, I sensed.

“Why are you being so mysterious?” I asked with genuine concern.

He was on his feet, ready to move away, his face virtually blank.

“I’m not,” he said. “You’re imagining things.”

I simply could not understand this sudden alteration in him nor relate it to my equivalent cause. I stared incredulously at him as he turned away and began walking toward the hallway with short, impatient steps.

He turned left to pass through the archway and I heard his quick feet jumping up the carpeted steps. I sat there unable to move, looking at the spot from which he had just disappeared.

It was only after a long while that I turned once more to examine the portrait more carefully.

There seemed nothing unusual about it. My eyes moved over the well-formed shoulders to the slender, white throat, the chin, the cupid-bowed red lip, the delicately upturned nose, the frank green eyes. I had to shake my head. It was only the portrait of a woman and no more. How could this affect any man of sense? How could it affect Saul?

I could not finish my coffee but let it stand cold on the table. I rose, pushed back my chair and started upstairs. I went directly to my brother's room and turned the knob to enter, then felt a stiffening in my body as I realized he had locked himself in. I turned away from his door, tight-lipped and thoroughly annoyed, disturbed beyond control.

As I sat in my room most of the day, sporadically reading, I listened for his footsteps in the hall. I tried to reason out the situation in my mind, to resolve this alien transformation in his attitude towards me.

But there seemed no resolution save that of assuming headache, imperfect sleep or other equally dissatisfying explanations. They served not at all to decipher his uneasiness, the foreign way in which his eye regarded me, his marked disinclination to speak civilly.

It was then, against my will I must state clearly, that I began to suspect other than ordinary causes and to yield a momentary credence to local accounts of the house in which we lived. We had not spoken of that hand he had felt, but was it because we believed it was imagination or because we knew it wasn't?

Once during the afternoon, I stood in the hallway with closed eyes, listening intently as though I meant to capture some particular sound and ferret it out. In the deep quiet I stood wavering back and forth on the floor, the very stillness ringing in my ears.

I heard nothing. And the day passed with slow, lonely hours. Saul and I had a morose supper together during which he rejected all extended conversation and multiple offers of card games and chess during the later evening.

After he had finished his meal, he returned immediately to his room and I, after washing the dishes, returned to mine and soon retired.

The dream returned again, yet not in certainty a dream, I thought lying there in the early morning. And had it not been a dream only a hundred trucks could have made such a vibration as that which shook the house in my fancy. And the light which shone beneath the door was too bright for candlelight, a glaring blue lucency of illumination. And the footsteps I heard were very audible. Were they only in my dream however? I could not be sure.

4

It was nearly nine-thirty before I rose and dressed, strongly irritated that my work schedule was being thus altered by concern. I completed my toilet quickly and went out into the hall, anxious to lose myself in occupation.

Then, as I looked automatically toward Saul's room, I noticed that the door was slightly ajar. I immediately assumed he was already up and at work above in the solarium, so I did not stop to see. Instead, I hurried downstairs to make myself a hasty breakfast, noticing as I entered the kitchen that the room was just as I had left it the night before.

After a moderate breakfast I went upstairs again and entered Saul's room.

It was with some consternation that I found him still on his bed. I say "on" rather than "in" since the blankets and sheets had been, and violently so, it appeared, thrown aside and were hanging down in twisted swirls upon the wooden floor.

Saul lay on the bottom sheet, clad only in a pajama trousers, his chest, shoulders and face dewed with tiny drops of perspiration.

I bent over and shook him once, but he only mumbled in sleep-ridden lethargy. I shook him again with hardened fingers and he rolled over angrily.

"Leave me alone," he spoke in thickened irritability. "You know I've been..."

He stopped, as though, once more, he was about to speak of something he should not.

"You've been what?" I inquired, feeling a rising heat of aggravation in my system.

He said nothing but lay there on his stomach, his face buried in the white pillow. I reached down and shook him again by the shoulder, this time more violently. At this he pushed up abruptly and almost screamed at me.

"Get out of here!"

“Are you going to paint?” I asked shaking nervously.

He rolled on his side and squirmed a little, preparatory to sleeping again. I turned away with a harsh breath of anger.

“You make your own breakfast,” I said, feeling yet more fury at the senseless import of my words. As I pulled shut the door in leaving I thought I heard Saul laughing.

I went back to my room and started to work on my play though hardly with success. My brain could not grasp concentration. All I could think of was the uncommon way in which my pleasant life had been usurped.

Saul and I had always been exceptionally close to one another. Our lives had always been inseparable, our plans were always mutual plans, our affections invariably directed primarily upon each other. This had been so since our boyhood when in grade school other children laughingly called us The Twins in contraction of our fuller title — The Siamese Twins. And, even though I had been two years ahead of Saul in school we were always together, choosing our friends with a regard to each other’s tastes and distastes, living, in short, with and for each other.

Now this; this enraging schism in our relationship. This harsh severance of comradely association, this abrupt, painful transmutation from intimacy to callous inattention.

The change was of such a gravity to me that almost immediately I began to look for the most grave of causes. And, although the implied solution seemed at the very least tenuous, I could not help but entertain it willingly. And, once more entertained, I could not remove myself from the notion.

In the quiet of my room, I pondered of ghosts.

Was it then possible that the house was haunted? Hastily I mulled over the various implications, the various intimations that the theory was verifiable.

Excluding the possibility that they were dream content, there were the heaving vibrations and the weird, high-pitched humming which had assailed my brain. There was the eerie blue light I had dreamed or actually seen beneath my door. And, finally, the most daunting of evidence, there was Saul’s statement that he had felt a hand on his cheek. A cold, damp hand!

Yet, despite all, it is a difficult thing to admit the existence of ghosts in a coldly factual world. One’s very instincts rebel at the admission of such maddening possibility. For, once the initial step is made into the supernatural, there is no

turning back, no knowing where the strange road leads except that it is quite unknown and quite terrible.

So actual were the premonitions I began to feel that I put aside my unused writing tablet and pen and rushed into the hall and to Saul's room as though something were awry there.

The ludicrous, unexpected sound of his snoring set me momentarily at ease. But my smile was short-lived, vanishing instantly when I saw the half-empty liquor bottle on his bedside table.

The shock of it made my flesh grow cold. And the thought came — he is corrupted, although I had no knowledge of its source.

As I stood there above his spread-eagled form, he groaned once and turned on his back. He had dressed, but his slept-in attire was now dishevelled and crumpled. His face, I noted, was unshaven and extremely haggard and the bloodshot gaze he directed at me was that of one stranger to another.

“What do you want?” he asked in hoarse, unnatural tones.

“Are you out of your mind?” I said. “What in God's name...?”

“Get out of here,” he said again to me, his brother.

I stared at his face and, although I knew it could be only the result of drink distorting his unshaven features, I could not dispel the apprehension that he was, somehow, coarse, and a shudder of strange revulsion ran through me.

I was about to take the bottle away from him when he swung at me, a wildly inaccurate flinging of the arm, his sense of direction blunted by a drink-thickened brain.

“I said, get out of here!” he shouted in a fury, streaks of mottled red leaping into his cheeks.

I backed away, almost in fright, then turned on my heel and hurried into the hall, trembling with the shock of my brother's unnatural behavior. I stood outside his door for a long time, listening to him toss restlessly on his bed, groaning. And I felt close to tears.

Then, without thought, I descended the darkening stairway, moved across the living room and dining alcove and entered the small kitchen. There, in the black silence, I held aloft a spluttering match and then lit the heavy candle I retrieved from the stove.

My footsteps, as I moved about the kitchen, seemed oddly muffled, as though I were hearing them through thick, cotton padding in my ears. And I began to get the most incongruous sensation that the very silence was drumming roughly in my ears.

As I passed the left hand side of the cabinet I found myself swaying heavily as though the dead, motionless air had suddenly become mobile and were buffeting me about. The silence was a roaring now and, suddenly, I clutched out for support and my twitching fingers knocked a dish onto the tile floor.

A positive shudder ran through me then because the sound of the breaking dish had been hollow and unreal, the sound of something greatly distant. If I had not seen the porcelain fragments lying on the dark tile I might have sworn the dish had not shattered at all.

With a sense of mounting restlessness I pushed my index fingers into my ears and twisted them around as if to ease what seemed an obstruction. Then I clenched my fist and struck the fastened cabinet door, almost desperate for the comfort of logical sound. But no matter how strong my blows, the sound came to my ears no louder than that of someone far away knocking at some door.

I turned hastily to the small icebox, very anxious now to make my sandwiches and coffee and be out of there, up in my room once more.

I put the bread on a tray, poured a cupful of the steaming black coffee, and put the coffee pot down on its burner again. Then, with distinct trepidation, I bent over and blew out the candle.

The dining alcove and living room were oppressively dark now. My heart began to thud heavily as I moved across the rug, my footsteps muffled as I walked. I held the tray in stiff, unfeeling fingers, my gaze directed straight ahead. As I moved, my breath grew more harsh, bursting from my nostrils as I held my lips pressed tightly together lest they begin shaking with fright.

The blackness and the dead, utter silence seemed to crush in on me like solid walls. I held my throat stiff, my every muscle suspended by will for fear that relaxation would cause me to shake without control.

Halfway to the hall I heard it.

A soft, bubbling laughter which seemed to permeate the room like a cloud of sound.

A swamping wave of coldness covered my body and my footsteps halted abruptly as my legs and body stiffened.

The laughter did not cease. It continued, moving about me as if someone — or some thing — circled me on soundless tread, its eyes always on me. I began to tremble and, in the stillness, I could hear the rattling of the cup on my tray.

Then, suddenly, a damp, cold hand pressed against my cheek!

With a terrified howl of fear, I dropped the tray and ran wildly into the hall and up the stairs, my weakening legs propelling me forward in the blackness. As I ran there was another gush of liquid laughter behind me, like a thin trail of icy air in the stillness.

I locked the door to my room and hurled myself on the bed, pulling the bedspread over myself with shaking fingers. My eyes tightly shut, I lay there with heart pounding against the mattress. And, in my mind, the hideous cognition that all my fears were justified was a knife stabbing at delicate tissues.

It was all true.

As actually as if a living human hand had touched me, I had felt that cold and soggy hand on my cheek. But what living person was down there in the darkness?

For a short time I belied to tell myself it had been Saul executing a cruel and vicious joke. But I knew it had not been, for I would have heard his footsteps and I had heard none, either before or now.

The clock was chiming ten when I was at last able to summon the courage to throw off the spread, scrabble for the box of matches on my bedside table and light the candle.

At first the guttering light assuaged fear slightly. But then I saw how little it illuminated the silent darkness and I avoided, with a shudder, the sight of huge and shapeless walls. I cursed the old house for its lack of electricity. Fear might be eased in blazing lamplight. As it was, the imperfect flickering of that tiny flame did nothing to allay my fears.

I wanted to go across the hall and see if Saul were all right. But I was afraid to open my door, imagining hideous apparitions lurking there in the blackness, hearing once more in my mind the ugly, viscid laughter. I hoped that Saul was so hopelessly under alcoholic influence that nothing short of an earthquake could awaken him.

And, though I yearned to be near him even if he were treating me faithlessly, I felt no courage whatsoever. And, quickly undressing, I hastened to my bed and hurled my head beneath the blanket again.

I woke suddenly, shivering and afraid. The bedclothes were gone from my body, the black silence as awful as it had been earlier in the night.

I reached for the blankets anxiously, my fingers groping for them. They had fallen from the edge of the bed. I rolled on my side hurriedly and reached down, my fingers recoiling as they came in contact with the icy floorboards.

Then, as I reached for the blankets, I saw the light beneath the door.

It remained in sight only the fragment of a second but I knew I had seen it. And, as it passed abruptly from my eyes, the throbbing began. My room seemed filled with the humming pulsations. I could feel the bed shaking beneath me and my skin growing taut and frigid; my teeth chattering together.

Then the light appeared again and I heard the sound of bare feet and knew it was Saul walking in the night.

Driven more by fear for his safety than by courage, I threw my legs over the side of the bed and padded to the door, shuddering at the iciness of the flooring beneath my soles.

Slowly I opened the door, my body held tight in anticipation of what I might see.

But the hall was pitch black and I walked out and over to the door of Saul's room, listening to see if I could hear the sound of his breathing. But before I could judge anything, the hall below me suddenly illuminated with that unearthly blue glow and I turned and rushed, again instinctively, to the head of the stairs and stood there clutching the old banister, staring down.

Below, an aura of intense brilliant blue light was passing through the hall moving in the direction of the living room.

My heart leaped! Saul was following it, arms ahead of him in the familiar pose of the somnambulist, his eyes staring ahead and glittering in the shapeless blue effulgence.

I tried to call his name but found that my voice could make no utterance. I tried to move for the stairs to wrest my Saul away from this terror. But a wall, invisible in the blackness, held me back. It grew close and airless. I struggled violently but it was to no avail. My muscles were strengthless against the horrible, impossible power that clutched me.

Then, suddenly, my nostrils and brain were assaulted by a pungent, sickly odor that made my senses reel. My throat and stomach burned with almost tangible fire. The darkness grew more intense. It seemed to cling to me like hot, black mud, constricting my chest so that I could hardly breathe. It was like being buried

alive in a black oven, my body bound and rebound with heavy grave wrappings. I trembled, sobbing and ineffectual.

Then, abruptly, it all passed and I stood there in the cold hallway soaked with perspiration, weak from my frantic efforts. I tried to move but could not, tried to remember Saul, but was incapable of preventing the thought of him from slipping from my numbed brain. I shivered and turned to go back to my room but, at the first step, my legs buckled and I pitched forward heavily on the floor. The icy surface of it pressed against my flesh and, my body wracked by shivering, I lost consciousness.

When my eyes opened again I still lay crumpled on the cold floor.

I rose to a sitting position, the hall before my eyes wavering in alternate tides of light and darkness. My chest felt tight and a remorseless chill gripped my body. I pulled myself up to a bent-over stance and staggered to Saul's room, a cough burning in my throat as I stumbled across the floor and against his bed.

He was there and looked emaciated. He was unshaved and the dark wiry beard on his skin seemed like some repugnant growth. His mouth was open and emitting sounds of exhausted slumber and his smooth, white chest rose and fell with shallow movements.

He made no motion as I tugged weakly at his shoulder. I spoke his name and was shocked at the hoarse, grating sound of my own voice. I spoke it again, and he stirred with a grumble and opened one eye to look at me.

"I'm sick," I muttered. "Saul, I'm sick."

He rolled on one side, turning on his back to me. A sob of anguish tore at my throat.

"Saul!"

He seemed to snap his body around insanely then, his hands clenched into bony, white fists at his sides.

"Get out of here!" he screamed. "Leave me alone or I'll kill you!"

The body-shaking impact of his words drove me back from the bed to where I stood dumbly staring at him, breath stabbing at my throat. I saw him toss his body back over as if he wanted to break it. And I heard him mutter to himself miserably, "Why does the day have to last so long?"

A spasm of coughing struck me then and, my chest aching with fiery pains, I struggled back to my own room and got into bed with the movements of an old

man. I fell back on the pillow and pulled up the blankets; then lay there shivering and helpless.

There I slept all day in spasmodic periods offset by waking moments of extreme pain. I was unable to rise to get myself food or water. All I could do was lie there, shaking and weeping. I felt beaten as much by Saul's cruelty to me as by the physical suffering. And the pain in my body was extremely severe. So much so that during one seizure of coughing it was so awful I began to cry like a child, hitting the mattress with weak, ineffective fists and kicking my legs deliriously.

Yet, even then, I think I wept for more than the pain. I wept for my only brother who loved me not.

It seemed that night came more swiftly than I had ever seen it come before. I lay alone in the darkness praying through mute lips that no harm should come to him.

I slept a while and then, abruptly, I was awake, staring at the light beneath the door, hearing the high-pitched humming in my ears. And I realized in that moment that Saul still loved me but that the house had corrupted his love.

And from this knowledge came resolution, from despair I gained amazing heart. I struggled to my feet and swayed there dizzily until the streaks before my eyes dispersed. Then I put on my robe and slippers, went to the door and threw it open.

What made things happen as they did I cannot say. Perhaps it was my feeling of courage that caused the black obstruction in the hall to melt before me. The house was trembling with the vibrations and the humming. Yet they seemed to lessen as I moved down the stairway and, all of a sudden, the blue light vanished from the living room and I heard loud and furious rumblings there.

When I entered, the room was in its usual order. A candle was burning on the mantel. But my eyes were riveted to the center of the floor.

Saul stood there, half naked and motionless, his body poised as though he were dancing, his eyes fastened to the portrait.

I spoke his name sharply. His eyes blinked and, slowly, his head turned to me. He didn't seem to comprehend my presence there for, suddenly, his glance flew about the room and he cried out in despairing tones:

"Come back! Come back!"

I called his name again and he stopped looking around but directed his gaze at me. His face was gaunt and cruelly lined in the flickering candlelight. It was the face of a lunatic. He gnashed his teeth together and started to move toward me.

"I'll kill you," he muttered in liquid tones. "I'll kill you"

I backed away.

"Saul, you're out of your mind. You don't..."

I could say no more for he rushed at me, his hands extended as if he would clutch at my throat. I tried to step aside but he grabbed hold of my robe and pulled me against him.

We began to struggle, I begging him to throw off this terrible spell he was under, he panting and gnashing his teeth. My head was being shaken from side to side and I saw our monstrous shadows heaving on the walls.

Saul's grip was not his own. I have always been stronger than he but, at that moment, his hands seemed like cold iron. I began to choke and his face blurred before my eyes. I lost balance and we both fell heavily to the floor. I felt the prickly rug against my cheek, his cold hands tightening on my throat.

Then my hand came in contact with something cold and hard. It was the tray I had dropped the night before, I realized. I gripped it and, realizing that he was out of his mind and meant to kill me, I picked it up and drove it across his head with all the power I had remaining.

It was a heavy metal tray and Saul sank to the door as if struck dead, his hands slipping from my bruised throat. I struggled up, gasping for breath, and looked at him.

Blood was running from a deep gash in his forehead where the edge of the tray had struck.

"Saul!" I screamed, horrified at what I'd done.

Frantically I leaped up and rushed to the front door. As I flung it open I saw a man walking by in the street. I ran to the porch railing and called to him.

"Help!" I cried. "Call an ambulance!"

The man lurched and looked over at me with startled fright.

"For God's sake!" I beseeched him. "My brother has struck his head! Please call an ambulance!"

For a long moment he stared at me, open-mouthed, then broke into a nervous flight up the street. I called after him but he would not stop to listen. I was certain he would not do as I'd asked.

As I turned back, I saw my bloodless face in the hall mirror and realized with a start that I must have frightened the wits out of the man. I felt weak and afraid again, the momentary strength sapped from me. My throat was dry and raw, my stomach on edge. I was barely able to walk back to the living room on trembling stalks of legs.

I tried to lift Saul to a couch but dead weight was too much for me and I sank to my knees beside him. My body slumped forward and, half crouched, half lay by the side of my brother. The harsh sound of my breathing was the only sound I could hear. My left hand stroked Saul's hair absently and quiet tears flowed from my eyes.

I cannot say how long I had been there when the throbbing began again; as if to show me that it hadn't really gone away.

I still crouched there like a dead thing, my brain almost in coma. I could feel my heart beating like some old clock in my chest, the dull-edged and muffled pendulum hitting against my ribs with a lifeless rhythm. All sound registered with similar force, the clock on the mantel, my heart and the endless throbbing; all blending into one horrible beat that became a part of me, that became me. I could sense myself sinking deeper and deeper as a drowning man slips helplessly beneath the silent waters.

Then I thought I heard a tapping of feet through the room, the rustling of skirts and, far off, a hollow laughter of women.

I raised my head abruptly, my skin tight and cold.

A figure in white stood in the doorway.

It began to move toward me and I rose with a strangled cry on my lips only to collapse into darkness.

6

What I had seen had been not a ghost but an intern from the hospital. The man I had called in the street had, apparently, done what I'd asked. It will give some indication of the state I was in when I reveal that I heard neither the ringing of the front doorbell nor the pounding of the intern's fist on the half-open door. Indeed, had the door not been open, I am certain that I would be dead now.

They took Saul to the hospital to have his head cared for. There being nothing wrong with me but nervous exhaustion, I remained in the house. I had wanted to go with Saul, but was told that the hospital was overcrowded and I would do more good by staying home in bed.

I slept late the next morning, rising about eleven. I went downstairs and had a substantial breakfast, then returned to my room and slept a few hours more. About two, I had some lunch. I planned to leave the house well before darkness to make sure nothing further happened to me. I could find a room in a hotel. It was clear that we would have to desert the place regardless of whether we sold it or not. I anticipated some trouble with Saul on that point but made up my mind to stand firm on my decision.

About five o'clock I dressed and left my room, carrying a small bag for the night. The day was almost gone and I hurried down the stairs, not wishing to remain in the house any longer. At the bottom of the staircase I stepped across the entry hall and closed my hand over the doorknob.

The door would not open.

At first I would not allow myself to believe this. I stood there tugging, trying to combat the cold numbness that was spreading itself over my body. Then I dropped my bag and pulled at the knob with both hands but to no avail. It was as securely fastened as the cabinet door in the kitchen.

Suddenly, I turned from the door and ran into the living room but all the windows were jammed fast into their frames. I looked around the room, whimpering like a child, feeling unspoken hate for myself for letting myself be trapped again. I cursed loudly and, as I did, a cold wind lifted the hat from my head and hurled it across the floor.

Abruptly, I placed my shaking hands over my eyes and stood there trembling violently, afraid of what might happen any second, my heart hammering against my chest. The room seemed to chill markedly and I heard that grotesque humming noise again that came as if from another world. It sounded like laughter to me, laughter that mocked me for my poor, feeble efforts to escape.

Then, with equal suddenness, I remembered Saul again, remembered that he needed me and I pulled away my hands from my eyes and screamed aloud:

"Nothing in this house can harm me!"

Sudden cessation of the sound gave me added courage. If my will could successfully defy the ungodly power of the place, then perhaps it could also destroy them. If went upstairs, if I slept in Saul's bed, then I too would know what he had experienced and thus be enabled to help him.

I felt no lack of confidence in my will to resist, never once stopping to think that my ideas might not be my own.

Quickly, two steps at a time, I rushed up the stairs and into my brother's room. There I quickly removed my hat, overcoat and suitcoat, loosened my tie and collar and sat down on the bed. Then, after a moment, I lay down and looked up at the darkening ceiling. I tried to keep my eyes open but, still fatigued, I soon fell asleep.

It seemed only a moment before I was fully awake, my body tingling with sensations of not unpleasant character. I could not understand the strangeness of it. The darkness seemed alive. It shimmered under my gaze as I lay there, warm with a heat that betokened sensualism although there was hardly any apparent cause for such a feeling.

I whispered Saul's name without thinking. Then the thought of him was taken from my brain as if invisible fingers had plucked it away.

I remember rolling over and laughing to myself, behavior most extraordinary if not unseemly for a person of my steady inclinations. The pillow felt like silk against my face and my senses began to fade. The darkness crept over me like warm syrup, soothing my body and mind. I muttered senselessly to myself, feeling as if my muscles were sucked dry of all energy, heavy as rock and lethargic with a delicious exhaustion.

Then, when I had almost slipped away, I felt another presence in the room. To my incredulous realization, it was not only familiar to me but I had absolutely no fear of it. Only an inexplicable sense of langorous expectation.

Then she came to me, the girl in the portrait.

I stared at the blue haze about her for only a moment for this quickly faded and, in my arms was a vibrantly warm body. I remember no one feature of her behavior for everything was lost in overall sensation, a sensation mixed of excitement and revulsion, a sense of hideous yet overpowering rapacity. I hung suspended in a cloud of ambivalence, my soul and body corroded with unnatural desire. And in my mind and echoing on my tongue I spoke a name over and over again.

The name Clarissa.

How can I judge the number of sick, erotic moments I spent there with her? Sense of time completely vanished from the scheme of things. A thick giddiness enveloped me. I tried to fight it but it was no use. I was consumed as my brother Saul had been consumed by this foul presence from the grave of night.

Then, in some inconceivable fashion, we were no longer on the bed but downstairs, whirling about in the living room dancing wildly and closely. There was no music, only that incessant, beating rhythm I had heard those nights before. Yet now it seemed like music to me as I spun about the floor holding in my arms

the ghost of a dead woman, entranced by her stunning beauty yet, at the same time, repelled by my uncontrollable hunger for her.

Once I closed my eyes for a second and felt a terrible coldness crawling in my stomach. But when I opened them it was gone and I was happy once more. Happy? It seems hardly the word now. Say rather hypnotized, torpid, my brain a numbed vessel of flesh unable to remove me one iota from this clutching spell.

Dancing went on and on. The floor was filled with couples. I am sure of that and yet I recall no aspect of their dress or form. All I remember is their faces, white and glistening, their eyes dull and lifeless, their mouths hanging open like dark, bloodless wounds.

Around and around and then a man with a large tray standing in the hallway arch and sudden immersion in the dark; empty and still.

7

I awoke with a sense of complete exhaustion.

I was soaked with perspiration, dressed only in my bottom undergarment. My clothes lay scattered across the floor, apparently thrown about in a frenzy. The bedclothes also lay in disordered heaps on the floor. From all appearances, I had gone insane the night before.

The light from the window annoyed me for some reason and, quickly, I shut my eyes, reluctant to believe it was morning again. I turned over onto my stomach and put my head beneath the pillow. I could still remember the enticing odor of her hair. The memory of it made my body shudder with odious craving.

Then a warmth began to cover my back and I raised myself up with a muttering frown. The sunlight was streaming through the windows onto my back. With a restless movement I pushed myself up, threw my legs over the side of the bed and got up to draw the shades.

It was a little better without the glare. I threw myself on the bed again, closed my eyes tightly and crowded the pillow over my head. I felt the light.

It sounds incredible, I know, but I felt it as surely as do certain creeper plants that climb towards the light without ever seeing it. And, in feeling light, I yearned all the more for darkness. I felt like some nocturnal creature somehow forced into brightness, repelled and pained by it.

I sat on the bed and looked around, a sound of unrelenting complaint in my throat. I bit my lips, clenched and unclenched my hands, wanting to strike out violently at something, at anything. I found myself standing over an unlit candle,

blowing sharply on it. I knew, even then, the senselessness of the act and yet I did it nevertheless, trying, in vain, to make an invisible flame go out so that night could return through its dark roads. Bringing back Clarissa.

Clarissa.

A clicking sound filled my throat and my body positively writhed. Not in pain or pleasure but in a combination of the two. I put my brother's robe over my body and wandered out into the silent hallway. There were no physical wants, no hunger, thirst, or other needs. I was a detached body, a comatose slave to the tyranny which had shackled me and now refused to let me go.

I stood at the head of the stairway, listening intently, trying to imagine her gliding up to meet me, warm and vibrant in her mist of blue. Clarissa. I closed my eyes quickly, my teeth grated together and, for a split second, I felt my body stiffen with fright. For a moment I was returned to myself.

But then, in another breath, I was enslaved again. I stood there, feeling myself a part of the house, as much a portion of it as the beams or the windows. I breathed its breath, felt its soundless heartbeat in my own. I became at one with an inanimate body, knowing its past life, sensing the dead hands that had curled their fingers on the arms of the chairs, on banisters, on doorknobs, hearing the labored tread of invisible footsteps moving through the house, the laughter of long consumed humor.

If, in those moments, I lost my soul, it became a part of the emptiness and stillness that surrounded me, an emptiness I could not sense nor a stillness feel for being drugged. Drugged with the formless presence of the past. I was no longer a living person. I was dead in all but those bodily functions which kept me from complete satisfaction.

Quietly, and without passion, the thought of killing myself drifted through my mind. It was gone in a moment but its passage had stirred no more in me than apathetic recognition. My thoughts were on the life beyond life. And present existence was no more than a minor obstruction which I could tumble with the slightest touch of razored steel, the minutest drop of poison. I had become the master of life for I could view its destruction with the most complete apathy.

Night. Night! When would it come? I heard my voice, thin and hoarse, crying out in the silence.

"Why does the day have to last so long!"

The words shocked me back again, for Saul had spoken them. I blinked, looked around me as if just realizing where I was. What was this terrible power over me? I tried to break its hold but, in the very effort, slipped back again.

To find myself once more in that strange coma which suspends the mortally ill in that slender portion of existence between life and death. I was hanging on a thread over the pit of everything that was hidden to me before. Now I could see and hear and the power to cut the thread was in my hands. I could let myself hang until the strands parted one by one and lowered me slowly down. Or I could wait until driven beyond endurance, then end it suddenly, cut myself loose and plunge down into the darkness; that signal darkness where she and hers remained always. Then I would have her maddening warmth. Maybe it was her coldness. Her comfort then. I could pass eternal moments with her and laugh at the robot world.

I wondered if it would help to get dead drunk and lose all consciousness till night.

I descended the stairs on unfeeling legs and sat for a long time before the mantel looking up at her. I had no idea what time it was nor did I care. Time was relative, even forgotten. I neither knew of it nor cared about it. Had she smiled at me then? Yes, her eyes glowed, how they glowed in the dimness. That smell again. Not pleasant yet something excitingly musky and pungent about it.

What was Saul to me? The idea filled my mind. He was no relation of mine. He was a stranger from another society, another flesh, another life. I felt complete dispassion towards him. You hate him, said the voice in my mind.

That was when it all collapsed like a flimsy house of cards.

For those words caused such a rebellion in my innermost mind that, suddenly, my eyes were cleared as though scales had fallen from them. I looked about, my head snapping crazily. What in God's name was I doing, still here in the house?

With a shiver of angry fear I jumped to my feet and ran upstairs to dress. As I passed the hall clock I saw with a start that it was past three in the afternoon.

As I dressed, normal sensations returned one by one. I felt the cold floor beneath my bare feet, became aware of hunger and thirst, heard the deep silence of the house.

Everything flooded over me. I knew why Saul had wanted to die, why he loathed the day and waited for the night with such angry impatience. I could explain it to him now and he would understand because I had been through it myself.

And, as I ran down the stairs, I thought about the dead of Slaughter House, so outraged at their own inexplicable curse that they tried to drag the living down into their endless hell.

Over, over! — exulted my mind as I locked the front door behind me and started through the misty rain to the hospital.

I did not see the shadow behind me, crouching on the porch.

8

When the woman at the hospital desk told me that Saul had been discharged two hours before my arrival, I was too stunned to speak. I clutched at the counter, staring at her, hearing myself tell her that she must be mistaken. My voice was hoarse, unnatural. The woman shook her head.

I sagged against the counter then, all the drive gone out of me. I felt very tired and afraid. A sob broke in my throat as I turned away and I saw people staring at me while I moved across the tile floor with unsteady motions. Everything seemed to swirl about me. I staggered, almost fell. Someone clutched my arm and asked me if I were all right. I muttered something in reply and pulled away from the person without even noting if it were a man or a woman.

I pushed out through the door and into the gray light. It was raining harder and I pulled up my coat collar. Where was he? The question burned in my mind and the answer to it came quickly, too quickly. Saul was back in the house. I felt sure of it.

The idea made me start running up the dark street toward the trolley-car tracks. I ran for endless blocks. All I remember is the rain driving against my face and the gray buildings floating by. There were no people in the streets and all the taxicabs were full. It was getting darker and darker.

My legs almost buckled and I was thrown against a lamppost and clung to it, afraid of falling into the streaming gutter.

An ugly clanging filled my ears. I looked up, then chased after the trolley car and caught it at the next block. I handed the conductor a dollar and had to be called back for my change. I stood hanging from a black strap, swaying back and forth with the motion of the car, my mind tormented by thoughts of Saul alone in that house of horror.

The warm, stale air of the car began to make me sick to the stomach. I could smell the raincoats and the wet clothes of the people caught in the rain as well as the smell of dripping umbrellas and packages soaked. I closed my eyes and stood there, teeth clenched, praying that I would get home before it was too late.

I got off the car at last and ran up the block as fast as I could. The rain sprayed over my face and ran into my eyes, almost blinding me. I slipped and went sprawling on the sidewalk, skinning my hands and knees. I pushed up with a whine, feeling the clothes soaked against me. I kept running wildly, only sensing the direction by instinct until I stopped and saw through the thick veil of rain, the house in front of me, high and dark.

It seemed to crawl over the ground toward me and clutch me to itself for I found myself standing and shivering on the wooden porch. I coughed and felt the chill through my flesh.

I tried the door. At first I could not believe it. It was still locked and Saul had no key! I almost cried in gratitude. I ran down from the porch. Where was he then? I had to find him. I started down the path.

Then, as surely as if I had been tapped on the shoulder I whirled about and stared up at the porch. A flash of lightning illuminated the darkness and I saw the broken, jagged-edged window. My breath caught and I stared at it, my heart pounding like a heavy piston in my chest.

He was in there. Had she come already? Was he lying upstairs in bed smiling to himself in the blackness, waiting for her luminous self to come and envelop him?

I had to save him. Without hesitation I ran up on the porch and unlocked the door, leaving it wide open so that we could escape.

I moved across the rug and onto the steps. The house was quiet. Even the storm seemed apart from it. The rushing sound of the rain seemed to grow less and less distinct. Then I turned with a gasp as the front door slammed shut behind me.

I was trapped. The thought drove barbs of fear into me and I almost ran down to try and escape. But I remembered Saul and fought to quicken resolution. I had conquered the house once and I could do it again. I had to. For him.

I started up the stairs again. Outside the flashes of lightning were like false neon trying to invade the austerity of the house. I held onto the banister tightly, muttering beneath my breath to keep attention from degrading into fright, afraid to let the spell of the house beset me again.

I reached the door to my brother's room. There I stopped and leaned against the wall, eyes closed. What if I found him dead? I knew the sight would unnerve me. The house might defeat me then, taking me in that moment of utter despair and twisting my soul from my grip.

I would not let myself conceive of it. I would not allow myself the realization that without Saul life was empty, a meaningless travesty. He was alive.

Nervously, my hands numbed with fright, I pushed open the door. The room was a stygian cave. My throat contracted and I took a deep breath. I clenched tight fists at my sides.

"Saul?" I called his name softly.

The thunder roared and my voice disappeared beneath the swell. A flash of lightning brought a split second of daylight into the room and I looked around quickly, hoping to see him. Then it was dark again and silent except for the endless rain falling on the windows and roof. I took another step across the rug, cautiously, my ears tense, trying to hear. Every sound made me start. I twitched and shuffled across the floor. Was he here? But he must be. If he were here in the house, this was the room he would be in.

“Saul?” I called, louder. “Saul, answer me.”

I began to walk toward the bed.

Then the door slammed behind me and there was a rushing sound behind me in the darkness. I whirled to meet it. I felt his hand clamp on my arm.

“Saul!” I cried.

Lightning filled the room with hideous light and I saw his twisted white face, the candlestick held in his right hand.

Then he struck me a violent blow on the forehead, driving a wedge of agonizing pain into my brain. I felt his hand release me as I slumped to my knees and my face brushed against his bare leg as I fell forward. The last sound I heard before my mind fell into the darkness was laughing and laughing and laughing.

9

I opened my eyes. I was still lying on the rug. Outside it was raining even harder. The sound of it was like the crashing of a waterfall. Thunder still rolled in the sky and flashes of lightning made the night brilliant.

In one flash I looked at the bed. The sight of the covers and sheets all thrown about insanely made me push up. Saul was downstairs with her!

I tried to get to my feet but the pain in my head drove me back to my knees. I shook my head feebly, running trembling hands over my cheeks, feeling the gouged wound in my forehead, the dried blood which had trickled down across one temple. I swayed back and forth on my knees, moaning. I seemed to be back in that void again, struggling to regain my hold on life. The power of the house surrounded me. The power which I knew was her power. A cruel and malignant vitality which tried to drink out the life force from me and draw me down into the pit.

Then, once more, I remembered Saul, my brother, and the remembrance brought me back the strength I needed.

“No!” I cried out as if the house had told me I was now its helpless captive. And I pushed to my feet, ignoring the dizziness, stumbling through a cloud of pain across the room, gasping for breath. The house was throbbing and humming, filled with that obnoxious smell.

I ran drunkenly for the door, found myself running into the bed. I drew back with almost a snarl at the numbing pain in my shins. I turned in the direction of the door and ran again. I did not even hold my arms ahead of me and had no chance to brace myself when I ran into the door dizzily.

The excruciating pain of my nose being near broken caused a howl of agony to pass my lips. Blood immediately began gushing down across my mouth and I had to keep wiping it away. I jerked open the door and ran into the hall, feeling myself on the border of insanity. The hot blood kept running down across my chin and I felt it dripping and soaking into my coat. My hat had fallen off but I still wore my raincoat over my suit.

I was too bereft of perception to notice that nothing held me back at the head of the stairs. I half ran, half slid down the stairs, guided on by that humming, formless laughter which was music and mockery. The pain in my head was terrible. Every downward step made it feel as if someone drove one more nail into my brain.

“Saul, Saul!” I cried out, running into the living room, gagging as I tried to call his name a third time.

The living room was dark, permeated with that sickly odor. It made my head reel but I kept moving. It seemed to thicken as I moved for the kitchen. I ran into the small room and leaned against the wall, almost unable to breathe, pinpoints of light spinning before my eyes.

Then, as lightning illuminated the room I saw the left cupboard door wide open and, inside, a large bowl filled with what looked like flour. As I stared at it, tears rolled down my cheeks and my tongue felt like dry cloth in my mouth.

I backed out of the kitchen choking for breath, feeling as if my strength were almost gone. I turned and ran into the living room, still looking for my brother.

Then, in another flash of lightning, I looked at her portrait. It was different and the difference froze me to the spot. Her face was no longer beautiful. Whether it was shadow that did it or actual change, her expression was one of vicious cruelty. The eyes glittered, there was an insane cast to her smile. Even her hands, once folded in repose, now seemed more like claws waiting to strike out and kill.

It was when I backed away from her that I stumbled and fell over the body of my brother.

I pushed up to my knees and stared down in the blackness. One flash of lightning after another showed me his white, dead face, the smile of hideous knowledge on his lips, the look of insane joy in his wide-open eyes. My mouth fell open and breath caught in me. It seemed as if my world was ending. I could not believe it was true. I clutched at my hair and whimpered, almost believing that in that moment, Mother would wake me from my nightmare and I would look across at Saul's bed, smile at his innocent sleep and lie down again secure with the memory of his dark hair on the white pillow.

But it did not end. The rain slapped frenziedly at the windows and thunder drove deafening fists against the earth.

I looked up at the portrait. I felt as dead as my brother. I did not hesitate. Calmly I stood and walked to the mantel. There were matches there. I picked up the box.

Instantly, she divined my thoughts for the box was torn from my fingers and hurled against the wall. I dove for it and was tripped by some invisible force. Those cold hands clutched at my throat. I felt no fright but tore them away with a snarl and dove for the matches again. Blood began running faster and I spat out some.

I picked up the box. It was torn away again, this time to burst and spray matches all over the rug. A great hum of anguish seemed to rock the house as I reached for a match. I was grabbed. I tore loose. I fell to my knees and slapped at the rug in the darkness as lightning eased. My arms were held tightly. Something cold and wet ran around in my stomach.

With maniacal fury I pressed my teeth against a match I saw in the lightning and bit at the head. There was no rewarding flare. The house was trembling violently now and I heard rustlings about me as if she had called them all to fight me, to save their cursed existence.

I bit at another match. A white face stared at me from the rug and I spit blood at it. It disappeared. I tore one arm loose and grabbed a match. I jerked myself to the mantel and dragged the match across the rough wood. A speck of flame flared up in my fingers and I was released.

The throbbing seemed more violent now. But I knew it was helpless against flame. I protected the flame with my hand though, lest that cold wind come again and try to blow it out. I held the match against a magazine that was lying on a chair and it flared up. I shook it and the pages puffed into flame. I threw it down on the rug.

I went around in that light striking one match after another, avoiding the sight of Saul lying there. She had destroyed him but now I would destroy her forever.

I ignited the curtains. I started the rug to smoldering. I set fire to the furniture. The house rocked and a whistling sigh rose and ebbed like the wind.

At last I stood erect in the flaming room, my eyes riveted on the portrait. I walked slowly toward it. She knew my intentions for the house rocked even harder and a shrieking began that seemed to come from the walls. And I knew then that the house was controlled by her and that her power was in that portrait.

I drew it down from the wall. It shook in my very hands as if it were alive. With a shudder of repugnance I threw it on the flames.

I almost fell while the floor shuddered almost as if an earthquake was striking the land. But then it stopped and the portrait was burning and the last effect of her was gone. I was alone in an old burning house.

I did not want anyone to know about my brother. I did not want anyone to see his face like that.

So I lifted him and put him on the couch. I do not understand to this day how I could lift him up when I felt so weak. It was a strength not my own.

I sat at his feet, stroking his hand until the flames grew too hot. Then I rose. I bent over him and kissed him on the lips for a last goodbye. And I walked from the house into the rain.

And I never came back. Because there was nothing to ever come back for.

* * * * *

This is the end of the manuscript. There seems no adequate evidence to ascribe the events recounted as true. But the following facts, taken from the city's police files, might prove of interest.

In 1901, the city was severely shocked by the most wholesale murder ever perpetrated in its history.

At the height of a party being held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Marlin Slaughter and their daughter Clarissa, an unknown person poisoned the punch by placing a very large amount of arsenic in it. Everyone died. The case was never solved although various theories were put forth as to its solution. One thesis had it that the murderer was one of those who died.

As to the identity of this murderer, supposition had it that it was not a murderer but a murderess. Although nothing definite exists to go by, there are several testimonies which refer to "that poor child Clarissa" and indicate that the young woman had been suffering for some years from a

severe mental aberration which her parents had tried to keep a secret from the neighbors and the authorities. The party in mention was supposed to have been planned to celebrate what her parents took for the recovery of her faculties.

As to the body of the young man later supposed to be in the wreckage, a thorough search has revealed nothing. It may be that the entire story is imagination, fabricated by the one brother in order to conceal the death of the other, said death probably being unnatural. Thus, the older brother knowing the story of the house tragedy may have used it for a fantastic evidence in his favor.

Whatever the truth, the older brother has never been heard of again either in this city or in any of the adjacent localities.

And that's the story. S.D.M.