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Darkness Torn Apart

By WILLIS JACOBS

NO SOUND. Something, he did not know what, awakened him. Silence in the early morning.

A vague uneasiness filled him. His mouth was dry, his hands sticky. Perhaps someone was in the house. He listened intently, stilling his breath so as not to awaken Martha in her bed near by.

His unrest grew. All was not well. Something was near. His palms were damp, his brow wet with inchoate emotion. His eyes ached. And he heard vague murmurings.

Above, on the wall as he stared, the lines on the paper moved, rearranged, marshalled themselves into a semblance. His tired mind struggled with the problem. What was that semblance. Suddenly he knew, and as he saw he uttered a cry.

He put his hand to his mouth weakly. Martha lay immobile. Her lips, which were always open all day, were open now, but soundless. Her gums were chalky. Strange, he thought, she sleeps with her eyes open, blank. He had never noticed that before. And her face was stained. He almost laughed nervously as he visioned her expression when she would look into the glass and see her soiled face. And the way she always fought with him when he was dirty!

Queer, though, how she lay there, eyes vacuous.

Then he knew, and his nerves burst. He laughed, he roared, he fell from his bed laughing.

He gasped for breath, aching eyes watering. Should he not—he paused, forgetting his thought in his wonder and delight. Should he not—this was it—call the police, or somebody. What was done when one woke to find his wife's skull beaten in?

But was she dead? Maybe she was shamming. That would be like Martha, arousing hopes in him only to laugh

38] *The* NEW MEXICO QUARTERLY

at him. How did it go: To dash the cup from his lips. A good phrase.

He moved over to the bed and gazed down at her. She was dead all right. And it was blood all right. Her head crushed in. A good blow, a neat job, just as he would have done it, he told himself, if he had had nerve enough.

Whoever did it must have used a club or something, like that golf-stick of his Martha had thrown away yesterday. Why did she do that? She knew he liked the stick. He hadn't shown his anger—she always laughed at him when he was angry; he hadn't shown how much he hated her for doing things like that. Why did she always cross him so?

Yes, he must call the police. He walked slowly to the phone. The police: all over the house. Why should they come and track over the floors. And he'd get the blame from Martha for all the dirt. He always got the blame. Sometimes it shook him so . . . He was tired yet, in the early morning, and had forgotten for a moment.

He called up.

He was sitting down, thinking, thinking about many things, when the knock came.

He opened the door. "Who is it?" he asked.

"Police," said a tall man. "Police. Death, you said . . . murder . . ."

He remembered. "Yes," he said. "Yes. Upstairs; my wife, Martha, my wife, you know. Martha, my wife, Martha."

The policeman was looking at him strangely, his eyes all over him, his damp hands, his hot head. People all looked so strangely at him.

"Yes, Martha," he said eagerly. "Upstairs." They went up. The policeman spoke to a man who came to stand near by.

He looked wearily out of the open window, tired. His brow was warm, his thoughts tremulous. Tired.

A hand jostled him. It was the tall man. "I've asked you twice," he said sharply. "Did you touch her?"

"What?" he asked. The policeman's words were dim. He felt light, free enough to spring up softly, to fly, even like those busy birds out there.

The policeman spoke again slowly. "Did you touch her since you found her dead?"

"No," he said.

"Are you sure?"

He turned from the window. Why not fly to the sun?

"Did you say something?"

"Are you sure," the policeman said patiently, "that you never touched her?"

"Sure," she said. After reaching the sun he would turn to Paris. To Rangóon then, to Bokkara. Romantic names!

Somebody spoke into his ear. "I asked," the policeman said, "if you have any idea what weapon killed her. A club, it seems. Do you know?"

He thought deeply. Maybe he could see Rome and Lima and Cairo, too. He felt someone touch his arm.

"Do you know what weapon around here might have killed her?"

"Why yes, yes," he said. "Maybe they used my golf club. I found it last week on the road. Martha threw it out yesterday. But I went and got it when she wasn't looking and put it back into the closet there."

The policeman whispered something to the man near, who moved closer. The policeman opened the closet door.

"I put it on the top shelf," he said kindly. The policeman reached up.

How cool for his head it would be, what ease gliding through the air, floating there like the birds. And how cool, how cool.

The policeman grasped his arm. In his hand he held the club. There was blood and more on it.

"... Your hands," the policeman said.

"What?"

"Look at your hands."

They were splotted red.

40] *T h e* N E W M E X I C O Q U A R T E R L Y

"Looks like blood," he laughed.

"It is," the policeman said.

He would not stay in the air all the time. It would be wearisome. Like now. Wearisome, a toothful word. His head was weary. It was hot. What was the tall man saying?

"Therefore, I arrest you: murder . . . wife; fingerprints . . . club. Don't know if . . . in your sleep: case for psychiatrists . . ."

The policeman turned to the man nearby and spoke, shaking his head. To fly all one has to do is leap: spread arms and be blown lightly to the sky. Like those busy little birds. Cool! No more pain, no more trouble with Martha when she woke, no more murmurs in the head; and far away from those lines on the ceiling above his bed, the blood-red Hangman's Noose.

Yes, he would visit the sun first. Then Paris, Rangoon, Bokkara.

He clambered on the sill.

Whispers

By EUGENIA POPE POOL

If I could read the whispers
Of this wind, that blows
So softly on my face,
Then I should know the thought
Of all the worlds
That circle through
Unmeasured space.