

The RED LAMP



By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

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One perceives, of course, that the Livingstones had been brought into the case. Dragged in, is the way Halliday puts it. But after the first conference between the doctor and himself they were in it, willy nilly.

"Who," Halliday asked Hayward, referring to his copy of my Uncle Horace's letter, "were likely to have access to Horace Porter at night?"

"No one, so far as I know. The Livingstones, possibly."

"Then the man who came in while he was writing this letter might have been Livingstone?"

"He was ill that night. I was with him."

"Then Livingstone's out," said Halliday, and turned in a new direction.

"Some theory, some wickedness, was put up to him. And it horrified and alarmed him. A man doesn't present such a theory without leading up to it. Let's try this: what subject was most interesting Horace Porter during the last years, or months, of his life?"

"Spiritism, I imagine. I know he was working on it."

"Alone? A man doesn't work that sort of thing alone, as a rule."

"I'll ask Mrs. Livingstone, if you like. She may know."

And ask the Livingstones he did, with the result that Halliday got his first real clew, and elaborated the darling theory which culminated in that fatal fall from the ladder, in the secret passage on the tragic night of the 10th of September. . . .

All this time, of course, it remained only a theory. Hayward scouted it at first, but came to it later on; the Livingstones offered a more difficult problem.

"They didn't want to be involved," Halliday says. "But after Edith's letter came I more or less had them. And of course after he'd tried to get into the house, and left the print of his hand on the window board, they had to come in. They'd denied any knowledge of the passage before that. But he knew it as well as I did, or better, and that there was a chance old Bethel knew it, too, and had used it."

This letter of Edith's, to which I

Play, Fool, Play!

She held the diamond between trembling fingers and stared at the man before her. What should she do? Should she cast it from her or—would it be better to reconsider? What would he say? What might he do? His eyes were staring into hers with stony intensity. The diamond seemed to burn her fingers. She felt weak and incompetent—incapable of decision. Bright spots danced before her eyes. She shuddered and drew a long breath. Yes! She must do it. There was no escape. Blindly she shut her eyes and tossed the diamond on the table in front of her. It was done! And then she heard her partner's deep sigh of relief as he gathered up the trick.—Colorado Dodo.

Laboring under the delusion that all his cattle had been poisoned, Otto Swink, a North Dakota farmer, killed himself.



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have already referred, runs as follows:

"Dear Madam: "I have read your article with great interest, and would like to suggest that a good medium might be very useful under the circumstances.

"You have one of the best in the country in your vicinity. She has retired, and is now living under another name somewhere in the vicinity of Oakville.

"When I knew her she was known as Eugenia Riggs, but this was her



"They'd Denied Any Knowledge of the Passage Before That."

maiden name, which she had retained. Her husband's name is Livingstone; I do not know his initials.

"She has abandoned the profession in which she made so great a success, but I understand is still keenly interested."

The letter is not signed. . . .

Halliday did not require that knowledge; he had suspected it before. But it gave him a lever. One attempt had already been made by Bethel to get back into the house. Time was getting short; before long we would have to go back to the city, and although he knew by that time who and what Bethel was, he could prove nothing. To go was to abandon the case.

He could not secure the arrest of a man because his lens prescription was the same as the murderer's. Or on the strength of an unsigned book manuscript left behind the wall of the den. He could not prove that Maggie Morrison had died in the process of the experiment; Gordon had puzzled over, because the mud on the truck wheels corresponded with the red iron-clay of the lane into the main house. He could not prove his own interpretation of the abbreviations S. and G. T. so liberally scattered through the diary. And he could not prove that it was Bethel who, looking for the broken lens in or near the culvert, had found my fountain pen there. A fact which Gordon had noted in the Journal as follows: "I have them now, sure. W. P. was here last night and left his fountain pen."

But he could, through the Livingstones, take a chance on proving all these things. And, against Livingstone's protests and fears, prove it he did. "As a matter of fact," he says, "they were in a bad position themselves, and they knew it. They had to come over again!"

Things were, indeed, rather parlous for the Livingstones. "As a matter of fact," Halliday says cheerfully, "I gave the police a very pretty case against them. It was all there, according to Greenough. Even to the hand-print!"

But he held them off. He had done what he wanted, turned the police along a false trail and was free once more to travel along the true one. And in this he says, and I believe, that his purpose was not mercenary. "The situation was peculiar," he says. "The slightest slip, the faintest suspicion, and he was off."

And he goes back again to the subtlety and wariness of the criminal himself; so watchful, so wary, that throughout it had even been necessary to keep me in ignorance. "You had to carry on, Skipper," he says. "In a way, the whole thing hung on you. Even then, you nearly wrecked us once."

Which, he tells me the night of the second seance, when the criminal actually fell into the trap and entered the house. Livingstone was on guard upstairs that night, and everything would have ended then probably.

"But you spilled the beans!" he accuses me.

From the first the seances were devised for a purpose, and I gather that some of the phenomena were deliberately faked, in pursuit of that purpose. On the other hand, Mrs. Livingstone has always been firm in her statement that "things happened" which she cannot explain. The sounds in the library, the lights and the arrival of the book on the table are among them.

But trickery or genuine psychic manifestations, in the end they served their purpose. I called the third seance, and the mystery was solved.

It is not surprising that my memory of those last few moments is a clouded one; I was, of all those present except the police, the only one in complete ignorance of the meaning of what was going on about me. Edith knew, and was bravely taking her risk

with the others; even my dear Jane knew a little; no wonder she required her smelling salts.

Actually, out of the confusion, only two pictures remain in my mind:

One was of Greenough staring at Livingstone, and then jerking aside the curtains of the cabinet, where Halliday and Hayward had opened the panel and after turning on the red globe hanging there, were stooping over a body at the bottom of the ladder.

The other is of that figure at the foot of the stairs.

I know now that it could not have been there; that it was lying, dead of a broken neck, at the foot of the ladder. I have heard all the theories, but I cannot reconcile them with the fact. How could I have imagined it? I did not know then who was inside the wall.

I am not a spiritist, but once in every man's life comes to him the one experience which he can explain by no law of nature as he understands them. To every man his ghost, and to me, mine.

In the dimlight of the red lamp, dead though he was behind the panel, I will swear that I saw Cameron, alias Simon Bethel, standing at the foot of the stairs and looking up.

Chapter IV

Who are we to judge him? If a man sincerely believes that there is no death, the taking of life to prove it must seem a trivial thing.

He may feel, and from his book manuscript hastily hidden behind the wall of the den we gather he did feel, that the security of the individual counted as nothing against the proof of survival to the human race.

But that he was entirely sane, in those last months, none of us can believe. Cruelty is a symptom of the borderland between sanity and madness; so, too, is the weakening of what we call the Herd instinct. It is well known at the University that for the year previous to his death he had been distinctly anti-social.

Certainly, too, he fulfilled the axiom that insanity is the exaggeration of one particular mental activity. And that he combined this single exaggeration with a high grade of intelligence only proves the close relation between madness and genius; Kant, unable to work unless gazing at a ruined tower; Hawthorne, cutting up his bits of paper; Wagner's periodical violences.

The very audacity of his disguise, the consistency with which he lived the part he was playing, points to what I believe is called dissociation; toward the last there seems to have been a genuine duality of personality; during the day old Simon Bethel, dragging his helpless foot and without effort holding his withered hand to its spastic contraction; at night, the active Cameron, making his exits on his nocturnal adventures by the gun-room window; wandering afoot incredible distances; watching the door of Gordon's room and locking him in; learning from me of Halliday's interest in the case, and trying to burn him out; very early realizing the embarrassment of my own presence at the Lodge, and warning me away by that letter from Salem, Ohio.

It seems clear that he had not expected me at the Lodge; Larkin apparently told Gordon, but Gordon neglected to inform him. Just what he felt, what terror and anger, when I greeted him at the house on his arrival will never be known. I remember now how he watched me, peering up at me through his disguising spectacles, with the beef cube in his hand, and waiting. Waiting.

But the disguise held. My own very slight acquaintance with him, my near-sightedness, my total lack of suspicion, all were in his favor. And of the perfection of the disguise, it is enough to say that Gordon apparently never suspected it. He did suspect the paralysis.

"He moved his arm today," he wrote once, in the diary. "He knows I saw it, and he has watched me ever since."

"It takes very little to change an appearance beyond casual recognition," Halliday tells me. "The idea is to take a few important points and substitute their opposites. Take a man with partial paralysis; one side of his face drops, you see. Well, he can't imitate that, but he can put a fig in the other cheek and raise it. Put hair on a bald-headed man, and watch the change. And there are other things; eyebrows now—"

Only once did I come anywhere near the truth, and then it slipped past me, and I did not catch it. That was on the night he sent for me, after he had struck Gordon down. He was frightened that night, we know now. Gordon was suspicious; might even have gone to the police.

And that night he tested his disguise and me.

Much of the explanation of that tragic summer becomes mere surmise, naturally. There is no surmise, however, necessary as regards Cameron's coming to the third seance, at my invitation. So far as he knew, we still believed that Simon Bethel was dead. That our circle, so innocent in appearance, so naive, was a cleverly devised trap seems not to have occurred to him. My frankness, the product of my ignorance, would probably have reassured a man less driven by necessity than he was.

But even had he suspected something, I believe he would have come. His other attempts, to enter the house and secure the manuscript, had failed. And any day some bit of mischance, a mouse behind a panel, a casual repair, and this book of his, with its characteristic phrasing, its references

to his earlier works, would be in the hands of the police.

With what secret eagerness he accepted my invitation we can only guess. Halliday, carefully plotting, had already discounted his acceptance in advance.

"I knew he would come, of course," he says. "He wanted to get in. We offered him not only that, but darkness to cover any move he wanted to make. It had to work out."

And here he explains the necessity of having the criminal caught flagrante delicto. It had to be shown, he says, not only that Cameron had written the manuscript, but that it was he who had hidden it where it lay.

"The case against him stood or fell by that," he says. . . .

But aside from this, much of the explanation of that tragic summer becomes pure guesswork. We have, however, elaborated the following as fulfilling our requirements as to the situation:

We know for instance that on old Horace Porter's developing interest in spiritism, Mrs. Livingstone referred him to Cameron. But we do not know why that interest developed.

Is it too much, I wonder, to say that the house itself led him to it? In this I know I am on dangerous ground, and it becomes still more dangerous if one grants that Mrs. Livingstone's gift of a red lamp led him to experimenting with it.

We do know, however, that after he had had this lamp for three months or so, he got in touch with Cameron, and it seems probable that such experiments as were made there at night with this lamp roused Cameron to fever heat.

Mrs. Livingstone believes there was a pact between them, the usual one of the first to "pass over" to come back if possible. We do not know that, but it seems plausible. Neither Halliday nor I believe, however, as she does, that Cameron killed the older man, in a fit of rage over the rejection of his proposal to carry their investigations to the criminal point.

What seems more probable is that Cameron had very early recognized the advantages of the house for the psychic and scientific experiments he had in mind, and that he finally submitted the idea to old Horace. With what growing horror and indignation they were received we know from his letter.

They turned a possible ally into an angry and dangerous enemy; the rejection of the proposition, with the threat which accompanied it, left Cameron stripped before the world as an enemy to society. He went home and brooded over it.

"But he couldn't let it rest at that," Halliday says. "He went back. And the old man was at his desk. There was danger in Cameron that night, and the poor old chap was frightened. We'll say he crumpled his letter up in his hand, and Cameron didn't see it. Maybe there was an argument and Cameron knocked him down. But he got up again, and he managed to drop the letter into an open drawer; after that, his heart failed, and he fell for good."

We acquit him of that. Of the others—

We are, with regard to the underlying motive, the so-called experiments, again obliged to resort to surmise. We know, for instance, of Cameron's early experiments in weighing the body before and immediately after death. He has himself recorded them. But in the manuscript of his book he distinctly states his belief that the vital principle, whatever that may be, is weakened by long illness, and his belief that those who pass over suddenly out of full health, are more able to manifest themselves.

He quotes numerous instances of murdered men, whom tradition believes to have returned for motives of vengeance. But he himself believes that this ability to return is due to the strength of the unweakened vital principle. The whole spirit, he calls it. And although his manuscript in itself does not deal with any discoveries he may have made during the summer, there are accompanying it certain pages of figures which seem to prove that he made more than one experiment along those lines during his occupancy of the house.

What waits and strays he picked up on those night journeys of his we do not know; poor wanderers, probably, with no place in the world from which they could be missed.

At the same time, Halliday feels that the experiments were not necessarily to be with life and death; he suggests that they were to lie, rather in deep narcosis, pushed to the danger point, and that it was under this narcosis that Maggie Morrison, for one, succumbed.

Among Cameron's papers, later on we found a curious document entitled "The Reality of the Soul. Through a Study of the Effects of Chloroform and Curari on the Animal Economy," with the note in Cameron's hand: "The soul and the body are separated by the agency of anesthesia. The soul is not a breath, but an entity."

Of the nature of the further tests made we have no idea. Halliday believes that, shown the space behind the wall by Horace Porter, he later utilized it to conceal such apparatus as he used in his experiments.

"It seemed to be full of stuff," he says, "the night I found it."

But later on, as the chase narrowed he got rid of it, bit by bit at night probably throwing it into the bay. This is borne out by the fact that, late that following autumn, going back to Twin Hollows, to look over the property with a real estate dealer, I found

washed up on the beach the battered fragments of a camera.

Only a portion of the lens remained in the frame, but this lens had been of quartz. As nearly as I can discover, the theory of quartz used in such a manner is to photograph the ultra-violet. In other words, I dare say, to make visible that strange world which may lie beyond the spectrum and our normal vision.

Did he obtain anything? We shall never know.

But sometimes I wonder. Suppose a man to have done what he had done to prove the immortality of the soul; to have taken lives and have risked his own, to give to the world the survival after death it so pathetically craves. And he fails; there is nothing. His own conviction has not weakened, but his proofs are not there.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, he himself breaks through the veil. With that idea dominant, he passes over to the other side, perhaps to the long sleep, perhaps not. But in that instant between waking and sleeping, to prove his point! To make good his contention; To justify his course! I wonder.

And I wonder, too, if at that moment of realization the supreme irony of the situation could have occurred to him? That the wounded hand, the one injury poor Gordon had managed to inflict on him, was the factor which had shot him, head foremost, into eternity? . . .

Was Cameron our sheep-killer? We believe so, with certain reservations. We know he was at Bass Cove, under an assumed name, at the time, probably looking over the ground.

At the same time, it seems unlikely that he killed the first lot of Nylle's sheep; that we believe was an act of revenge on the part of a man Nylle had recently discharged.

But that the idea seized on his imagination seems probable. He was planning that mad campaign of his, and it fell in well with what was to come. It prepared the neighborhood, in a sense, but it set them looking for a maniac with a religious mania. And it was an effective alibi for him, occurring before his arrival at the house.

Jane has always believed that he added the symbol in chalk deliberately to incriminate me. I do not. He added it, after Helena Lear had told him of it, as he added the stone altar, a madman's conception of a madman's act.

Carroway's murder was incidental to that preparation of his, but in view of all we know, we can reconstruct it fairly well.

Thus we have the boy, tiring of carrying his rifle, putting it away in the darkness and possibly dozing. We have the appearance of the killer, and Carroway unable to locate his rifle quickly, following him to the water-front and reaching to too late.

Underneath our float the killer should have found his knife, but as we know, Halliday had taken it away. They were two unarmed men, then, who met that night on the quiet surface of the bay. And one of them, although nobody knew it, was not sane.

Unarmed only in one sense, however.



Cameron Had an Oar and Used It

for Cameron had an oar. And used it. When it was over, he apparently rowed back quietly to the creek beyond Robinson's point, left his boat there, and walked to Bass Cove.

The proprietor of the small hotel there seems never to have known that he was out at night.

"He was a very quiet gentleman," he says, "and always went to bed early."

One thing which had puzzled us, in the Morrison case, was that the girl had stopped her truck, at a time when the nerves of the countryside were on edge. It seems probable, therefore, that on some nights, at least, it was not the square and muscular Cameron who went forth, but an old crippled man.

Shown to her by the lightning flashes that night, age and infirmity by the roadside and a storm going, what wonder that she stopped? The only marvel is that, this bait having proven successful, it does not appear to have been used again.

Much that impressed me strongly at the time has lost its impression now. It is a curious fact that a man may see a ghost—and many believe that they have done so—without any lasting belief in so-called survival after death. And so it is with me.

On editing my Journal, however, I find myself confronting the same ques-

tions which confronted me during that terrible summer.

Have I a body, or is my body all there is of me? In other words, am I an intelligence served by certain physical organs? Or am I certain physical organs, actuated by an intelligence as temporary as they?

Frankly, I do not know.

But any careful analysis of the extra-normal phenomena of the summer seems to show, every so often, some other-world intelligence, struggling to get through to us. As though—

We have never had, as I have said, any explanation of the coming of the book during the second seance, nor of the sounds from the library. While much of the physical phenomena of the first two seances was deliberately engineered by Mrs. Livingstone, in pursuance of Halliday's plan to get Cameron into the house, these two things remain without explanation.

The same thing is true of my finding of the letter, of the lighthouse apparition, of the sitting at Evanston, and of Jane's clairvoyant visions. None of which, by the way, she has had since. And yet all of which had their part, large or small, in our solving and understanding of the crimes.

Peter Geiss, and the figure in the fore-rigging of the sloop, my own vision of Cameron at the foot of the stairs, when he lay dead behind the panel, what am I to say of these?

Am I to accept them as I do Jane's "vision without eyes" as no more extraordinary than the feats of somnambulists, who go through their curious nightly progress with closed eyelids? Am I to accept them, refute them, or evade them? . . .

There are, however, certain incidents which, puzzling as they were at the time, lend themselves to very simple explanation. Among these are the cough I heard more than once, and Hadly's story of the materialization in the Oakville cemetery.

Throughout Gordon's diary, here and there, were the letters S. and G. T. There was also, in one place, a sentence which translated, became "The G. P. stuff went great last night."

Halliday believes that Gordon was what we know as a medium, and that it was in that capacity primarily that Cameron took him to the country. The S. he therefore translates as "sitting," and the G. T. as "genuine trance." After the G. T. there almost invariably follows the rather pathetic entry: "Feel rotten today," or "all in."

Hadly's ghost, then, in all probability was the secretary, securing data for the "sittings" which he so carefully differentiates from the nights when he went into genuine trance. Being honest with himself, poor boy, and honest nowhere else. And the same was no doubt true as to the dry cough which he practiced on me, the night I was in the garage.

It was during those "sittings," too, almost certainly, that under pretended control from beyond he began to ferret out, with the cunning of his kind, the story underneath; to bring back Horace Porter, and watch the reaction; to mention the boat he had discovered, and see the man across from him, in the dim red light, twitch and tremble.

To play him, to fool him, and at the last to threaten and blackmail him. And, in the end, to die.

But there remain these things I cannot explain. One of the most curious is the herbal odor; that this was not a purely subjective impression is shown by the fact that both Hayward and Edith noticed it during the second seance. The scent of flowers is I believe, not unusual during certain psychic experiments; Warren speaks of the impression of tuberoses being waved before him to the dark by some ghostly hand.

Of this, as of the other inexplicable phenomena, I can only say that at the time I did not doubt them; living them again, as I prepare this manuscript, I accept them once more. But I do not explain them.

"You wish," said Cicero, "to have the explanation of these things? Very well. . . . I might tell you that the magnet is a body which attracts iron and attaches itself to it; but because I could not give you the explanation of it, would you deny it?"

In closing this record, I cannot do better than copy the following extract from my Journal, made the following June:

June 1, 1923. Our little Edith was married today. Heigh-ho. And again, heigh-ho.

How we begrudge the happiness of others when it is at our expense! How I hate Halliday when, once in the house, he put his arms around her and held her close. How I resented that calm air of possession with which he took his place in the line beside her and shook hands smilingly with the hysterical crowd that kissed and blessed them, on the way to the dining room and food.

And yet—how happy they are, and how safe she is.

"My wife," he said. "Forever and ever. Amen." Old glass and new glass; china, silver and linen; the Lears' candlesticks; every corner of the house filled with guests and gifts—and Jock. And for the two of them nothing and nobody; just a space filled with shadows which smiled and passed; themselves the only reality.

And perhaps they are. Love at least is real; the one reality perhaps. "Love thou art absolute; sole lord of life and death."

So they have gone, and tonight Jane and I are alone. Safe and quiet—and alone, alas.

Heigh-ho!

[THE END]