



P E N G U I N



C L A S S I C S

SHIRLEY JACKSON

*The Sundial*

Foreword by VICTOR LAVALLE



## THE SUNDIAL

SHIRLEY JACKSON was born in San Francisco in 1916. She first received wide critical acclaim for her short story "The Lottery," which was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1948. Her novels—which include *The Sundial*, *The Bird's Nest*, *Hangsaman*, *The Road Through the Wall*, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, and *The Haunting of Hill House*—are characterized by her use of realistic settings for tales that often involve elements of horror and the occult. *Raising Demons* and *Life Among the Savages* are her two works of nonfiction. She died in 1965.

VICTOR LAVALLE is the author of the short story collection *Slapboxing with Jesus*; three novels, *The Ecstatic*, *Big Machine*, and *The Devil in Silver*; and an e-book-only novella, *Lucretia and the Kroons*. He has been the recipient of numerous awards, including a Whiting Writers' Award, a United States Artists Ford Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, a PEN/Open Book Award, an American Book Award, and the key to Southeast Queens. He teaches at Columbia University.

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For Bernice Baumgarten

## Foreword

In 2007 my girlfriend and I went to see the latest Coen brothers' film, *No Country for Old Men*, at a movie theater near Union Square in New York. The place was jammed, but we got decent seats. We'd been dating for a year by that time. Emily and I knew each other pretty well, but it had still been only a year, and it occurred to me, and I'm sure to her, that you could spend that long dating someone and still not know her, understand her, on some essential level. You're enjoying your days together but also waiting for that moment when you see a flash of the soul, the person's true essence, so you can decide if this relationship is truly serious. I wasn't thinking about this stuff consciously as the lights dimmed and the movie started, but it was there in the atmosphere of our relationship. Time to get serious or get gone. Then the predawn imagery of Texas—rough, lovely open country—appeared on the screen. Tommy Lee Jones spoke in a voice-over as the images played on. ("I was sheriff of this county when I was twenty-five years old.") The audience, Emily and I included, grew quiet.

Toward the end of this astounding film Tommy Lee Jones, who has been playing a weary old lawman, sits at the kitchen table of his home with his wife. By this point *No Country for Old Men* has morphed from a riveting crime drama into a parable about death, the one inescapable fate. Death in one form or another finds whomever it pleases in the film, and it will not be reasoned with, escaped, or outgunned. By the time Tommy Lee Jones sits in that kitchen his weariness seems well earned. His character has hoped that his earnestness, his competence, his goodness will spare him the destiny that has come for so many others. He tells his wife about two dreams he's had the night before. The second one is both chilling and resigned. The lawman finally grasps that the end will come for him, as it did for his father, as it does for every woman and man.

While Tommy Lee Jones was reciting these dreams, I found my eyes drawn away from the screen for a moment. Something was moving through the theater. I looked to my left, and there I saw a boy, probably nine or ten years old. He looked tall, but that was just because he was very thin. He had the reddish brown skin and large eyes of an Ethiopian, that striking beauty that can seem almost otherworldly in certain contexts. Certain contexts like right then in that dark theater.

The boy walked up the aisle, scanning the room. His head swiveled left and right. His large, bright eyes seemed to pan across every face in the theater. All the while Tommy Lee Jones's voice thundered on about his spectral dreams.

Emily, to my right, must have noticed my distraction. She inched forward in her chair. She was looking at this boy now too. Her instinct was to help him. She guessed, as I did, that he must've been looking for his seat in the dark, scanning for the empty chair where he'd probably just been sitting with his parents. But what parents would

bring their nine- or ten-year-old boy to a Coen brothers' movie? Especially this one. The boy's age made him seem as out of place as his appearance made him seem from another world. I looked up at the screen and Tommy Lee Jones had finished his speech and now he sighed and his eyes looked wet with the sudden *knowing* of what his second dream meant. At that moment Emily raised her left hand to wave to the boy, the one scanning all our faces with those impossibly bright eyes. But I grabbed her hand and pushed it back down onto the handrest.

"Don't call to him," I whispered. I knew she couldn't understand, and yet I said it.

Emily looked at me in the dark. Our faces were only slightly visible in the light cast by the movie screen. She narrowed her eyes.

"Because he's death?" she said.

It's the moment I knew Emily would be my wife.

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So why did I just tell you that anecdote?

I'm trying to relate what it felt like the first time I read Shirley Jackson's fiction. What it feels like each time I've read her work since. I didn't grow up in a small New England town like the one in *The Sundial*. I was raised in an apartment building in Queens, not in a sprawling, slightly sinister mansion like the one where the Halloran family resides. And the LaValles sure didn't have some storied patriarch whose name we uttered like a prayer, as the Hallorans so often do in this book. And yet when I open *The Sundial*, I feel the same sense of kinship, of recognition as I did in that movie theater when my soon-to-be wife seemed to read my mind.

*The Sundial* shares some of the characteristics of Shirley Jackson's most famous works of fiction. There's the enormous, imposing estate, as in *The Haunting of Hill House*; the once great but now diminished family, as in *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*; and even the doom-laden atmosphere of her classic short story "The Lottery." So what makes *The Sundial* stand out? Why is it worth reading? Because *The Sundial* is funny as hell.

This may surprise some readers. An eerie work of suspense by one of the great American masters of literary unease couldn't also make you laugh so loud you wake your sleeping wife, could it? If you accept the caveat that by *funny* I don't mean "light" or "silly" or "cheerful," then the answer is an easy yes. *The Sundial* is written with the kind of humor that would make a guillotine laugh.

The novel begins, after all, with the family returning from a funeral for Lionel Halloran, the heir to the Halloran estate and all its fortune. Lionel was pushed down the main stairs in the mansion and fell down dead. Who did the ghastly deed? His own mother. As the extended family returns home, here's the conversation between Lionel's widow and the couple's ten-year-old daughter, Fancy.

Young Mrs. Halloran, looking after her mother-in-law, said without hope, "Maybe she will drop dead on the doorstep. Fancy dear, would you like to see Granny drop dead on the doorstep?"

"Yes, mother." Fancy pulled at the long skirt of the black dress her grandmother had put on her.

I'm not spoiling anything by quoting this horrifically hilarious exchange because it occurs in the first two paragraphs of the book! In that moment I imagine Jackson

peering over those round-framed glasses in her famous author photograph, her eyes gleeful, because things are going to get so much worse.

The Hallorans, and their extended hangers-on, become a kind of cult when one of them, Aunt Fanny, receives prophetic messages from her long departed, much revered father. He has appeared to his only daughter to warn that the world is soon to end. All those in the Halloran home must prepare for the coming doom. Shut the doors and windows, close themselves off from the cursed world. Prepare to become the last of the human race. In quick time the family members are drawn into paranoia and conspiracy. They come to believe the prophecy. They have been chosen to inherit the earth. Jackson proceeds to illustrate, in rich detail, just how sad such a fate would be. The whole world ends, and *this* is all that's left? Jackson spares no one her precise, perceptive eye. Sadder still is how much I recognize myself, from my worst moments, in one character or another. What saves me from despair is Jackson's wit, her deadpan demolition of human foibles. For me, that kind of reading experience is essential, and when I discovered Shirley Jackson, it was as if she'd understood what I wanted, what I needed, and set it all down on the page long before I was even born. That recognition is profound, life changing, whether it comes in a darkened movie theater or between the covers of a novel.

Shirley Jackson enjoyed notoriety and commercial success within her lifetime, and yet it still hardly seems like enough for a writer so singular. When I meet readers and other writers of my generation, I find that mentioning her is like uttering a holy name. The grins we share. The blush of reverence. She doesn't appear to us in prophetic dreams but in her books.

VICTOR LAVALLE

After the funeral they came back to the house, now indisputably Mrs. Halloran's. They stood uneasily, without any certainty, in the large lovely entrance hall, and watched Mrs. Halloran go into the right wing of the house to let Mr. Halloran know that Lionel's last rites had gone off without melodrama. Young Mrs. Halloran, looking after her mother-in-law, said without hope, "Maybe she will drop dead on the doorstep. Fancy, dear, would you like to see Granny drop dead on the doorstep?"

"Yes, mother." Fancy pulled at the long skirt of the black dress her grandmother had put on her. Young Mrs. Halloran felt that black was not suitable for a ten-year-old girl, and that the dress was too long in any case, and certainly too plain and coarse for a family of the Halloran prestige; she had had an asthma attack on the very morning of the funeral to prove her point, but Fancy had been put into the black dress nevertheless. The long black skirt had entertained her during the funeral, and in the car, and if it had not been for her grandmother's presence she might very well have enjoyed the day absolutely.

"I am going to pray for it as long as I live," said young Mrs. Halloran, folding her hands together devoutly.

"Shall I push her?" Fancy asked. "Like she pushed my daddy?"

"Fancy!" said Miss Ogilvie.

"Let her say it if she wants," young Mrs. Halloran said. "I want her to remember it, anyway. Say it again, Fancy baby."

"Granny killed my daddy," said Fancy obediently. "She pushed him down the stairs and killed him. Granny did it. Didn't she?"

Miss Ogilvie raised her eyes to heaven, but lowered her voice in respect for the sad occasion of the day, "Maryjane," she said, "you are perverting that child's mind and very possibly ruining her chances of inheriting—"

"On this day," young Mrs. Halloran said, putting her mouse face into an expression of reproachful dignity, "I want it clearly understood by all of you, everyone here, and remembered always, *if you don't mind*. Fancy is a fatherless orphan today because that nasty old woman couldn't *stand* it if the house belonged to anyone else and I was still a wife, a beloved helpmeet." She breathed shallowly, and pressed her hands to her chest. "Pushed him down the stairs," she said sullenly.

"The king, thy murdered father's ghost," Essex said to Fancy. He yawned, and moved on the velvet bench, and stretched. "Where are the funeral baked meats? The old woman can't be planning to starve us, now she's got it all?"

"This is unspeakable," said young Mrs. Halloran, "to think of food, with Lionel barely cold. Fancy," and she held out her hand. Fancy moved unwillingly, her long black skirt swinging, and young Mrs. Halloran turned to the great stairway. "My place

now is with my fatherless orphaned child," she said over her shoulder. "They must send my dinner up with Fancy's. Anyway I believe I am going to have more asthma."

*WHEN SHALL WE LIVE IF NOT NOW?* was painted in black gothic letters touched with gold over the arched window at the landing on the great stairway; young Mrs. Halloran paused before the window and turned, Fancy toiling upward still, entangled in her skirt. "My grief," young Mrs. Halloran said, one hand on her breast and the other barely touching the wide polished handrail, "my lasting grief. Hurry *up*, Fancy." Together, young Mrs. Halloran leaning lightly upon the shoulder of her daughter, they moved out of sight down the hall, into the vastness of the upper left wing which, until so recently, they had shared with Lionel.

Essex looked after them with distaste. "I should think Lionel would have welcomed the thought of dying," he said.

"Don't be vulgar," said Miss Ogilvie. "Even with me, please remember that we are employees, not members of the family."

"I am here, however, if you please," Aunt Fanny said suddenly from the darkest corner of the hall. "You will of course have overlooked the fact that Aunt Fanny is here, but I beg of you, do not inhibit your conversation on *my* account. I am a member of the family, surely, but that need not—"

Essex yawned again. "I'm hungry," he said.

"I wonder if it will be a proper dinner? This is the first funeral since I've been here," Miss Ogilvie said, "and I'm not sure how she manages. I suppose we'll sit down, though."

"No one will waste a minute's thought if Aunt Fanny stays safely in her room," Aunt Fanny said. "Tell my brother's wife," she said to Essex, "that I will join her in grief after dinner."

"My first funeral, too," Essex said. Lazily, he stood up and stretched again. "Makes you sleepy. You think the old lady's locked up the gin in honor of the day?"

"They'll have plenty in the kitchen," Miss Ogilvie said. "But just a teensy one for me, thanks."

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"It's over," Mrs. Halloran said. She stood behind her husband's wheel chair, looking down onto the back of his head with no need, now, to control her boredom. Before Mr. Halloran had become permanently established in his wheel chair Mrs. Halloran had frequently found it difficult to restrain her face, or the small withdrawing gestures of her hands, but now that Mr. Halloran was in the wheel chair, and could not turn quickly, Mrs. Halloran was always graceful with him, standing protectively behind him and keeping her voice gentle.

"He's gone, Richard," she said. "Everything went off beautifully."

Mr. Halloran had been crying, but this was not unusual; since he had been made to realize that he would not, now, be vouchsafed a second run at youth he cried easily and often. "My only son," Mr. Halloran said, whispering.

"Yes." Mrs. Halloran forbade her fingers to drum restlessly upon the back of the wheel chair; one should not fidget in the presence of an invalid; in the presence of an old man imprisoned in a wheel chair one ought not to be impatient. Mrs. Halloran

sighed, soundlessly. "Try to be brave," she said.

"Do you remember," Mr. Halloran asked, quavering, "when he was born, we rang the bells over the carriage house?"

"Indeed we did," Mrs. Halloran said heartily. "I can have the bells rung again, if you like."

"I think not," Mr. Halloran said. "I think not. They might not understand, down in the village, and we must not indulge our own sentimental memories at the expense of public opinion. I think not. In any case," he added, "the bells are not loud enough to reach Lionel now."

"Now that Lionel is gone," Mrs. Halloran said, "I am going to have to get someone to manage the estate."

"Lionel did it very poorly. At one time the rose garden was perfectly visible from my terrace, and now I can only see hedges. I want the hedges all cut down. At once."

"You are not to excite yourself, Richard. You were always a good father, and I will have the hedges trimmed."

Mr. Halloran stirred, and his eyes filled again with tears. "Do you remember," he said, "I wanted to keep his curls?"

Mrs. Halloran put a little wistful smile on her face and came around the wheel chair to look at her husband. "Dear Richard," she said. "This is not healthy for you. I know that Lionel loved you better than anyone in the world."

"That's not proper," Mr. Halloran said. "Lionel has a wife and child, now, and his father must no longer come first. Orianna, you must speak to Lionel. Tell him that I will not have it. His first, his only duty is to the good woman he married, and his sweet child. Tell Lionel . . ." He stopped uncertainly. "Is it Lionel who died?" he asked after a minute.

Mrs. Halloran moved around to the back of the wheel chair and permitted herself to close her eyes tiredly. Lifting her hand with deliberation, she put it down softly onto her husband's shoulder, and said, "His funeral went off very well."

"Do you remember," the old man said, "we rang the bells over the carriage house when he was born?"

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Mrs. Halloran set her wine glass down very quietly, looked from Essex to Miss Ogilvie and said, "Aunt Fanny will be down for dessert?"

"Adding the final touch of jubilation to a day of perfect happiness," Essex said.

Mrs. Halloran looked at him for a minute. "At such a remark," she said finally, "Lionel would have found it necessary to remind you that you were not here to be ironic, but to paint murals in the breakfast room."

"Orianna dear," said Essex with a little false laugh, "I had not suspected you of fallibility; the one painting murals in the breakfast room was the *last* young man; I am the young man who is supposed to be cataloguing the library."

"Lionel wouldn't have known," Miss Ogilvie said, and turned pink.

"But he would have suspected," Mrs. Halloran said agreeably, and then, "Aunt Fanny is at the door; I hear her little cough. Essex, go and let her in, or she will never bring herself to turn the doorknob."

Essex opened the door with a flourish; "Good evening, Aunt Fanny," he said. "I hope this sad day has agreed with you?"

"No one needs to worry over me, thank you. Good evening, Orianna, Miss Ogilvie. Please don't bother, really; you know perfectly well Aunt Fanny is not one to worry over. Orianna, I shall be glad to stand."

"Essex," said Mrs. Halloran, "set a chair for Aunt Fanny."

"I'm sure the young man would rather not, Orianna. I am accustomed to taking care of myself, as *you* have surely discovered."

"A glass of wine for Aunt Fanny, Essex."

"I take wine only with my equals, Orianna. My brother Richard—"

"Is resting. He has had his dinner, Aunt Fanny, and his medicine, and I promise you that nothing will prevent your seeing him later in the evening. Aunt Fanny, sit down at once."

"I was not brought up to take orders, Orianna, but I suppose you are mistress here now."

"Indeed I am, Essex." Mrs. Halloran turned easily in her chair and leaned her head back comfortably. "I want to hear how you wasted your youth. Only the scandalous parts."

"The path gets straighter and narrower all the time," Essex said. "The years press in. The path becomes a knife edge and I creep along, holding on even to that, the years closing in on either side and overhead."

"That's not very scandalous," Mrs. Halloran said.

"I am afraid," Aunt Fanny said, "that this young man did not have what we used to call 'advantages'. Not everyone, Orianna, was fortunate enough to grow up in luxury and plenty. As of course *you* know perfectly well."

"The statistics scratch at your eyes," Essex said. "When I was twenty, and could not see time at all, the chances of my dying of heart disease were one in a hundred and twelve. When I was twenty-five and deluded for the first time by a misguided passion, the chances of my dying of cancer were one in seventy-eight. When I was thirty, and the days and hours began to close in, the chances of my dying in an accident were one in fifty-three. Now I am thirty-two years old, and the path getting narrower all the time, and the chances of my dying of anything at all are one in one."

"Very profound," said Mrs. Halloran, "but still not altogether scandalous."

"Miss Ogilvie," said Essex, "treasures in an ebony box stolen from the music room and hidden under the handkerchiefs in the top right hand drawer of her dresser the small notes Richard Halloran wrote her four years ago, before, although it is perhaps rude to mention it, he took to his wheel chair. He left one every evening for her, under the big blue cloisonné vase in the main hall."

"Good heavens," said Miss Ogilvie, pale. "*That* could not be what she means by scandal."

"Do not trouble yourself, Miss Ogilvie," Mrs. Halloran said, amused. "In his capacity as librarian Essex has become accustomed to spying on all of you. He brings me very entertaining stories, and his information is always accurate."

"A moment of truth," said Aunt Fanny tightly. "Coarse and vulgar I said *then*, and coarse and vulgar I say *now*."

"I would not have stayed on—" Miss Ogilvie began with difficulty.

"Of course you would have stayed on. Nothing could have dislodged you; your mistake," Mrs. Halloran said kindly, "was in supposing you could dislodge *me*. Aunt Fanny's mistake, in a word."

"This is needless and disgusting," Aunt Fanny said. "Orianna, if I might have your gracious permission to retire?"

"Stay and finish your wine, Aunt Fanny, and Essex will think of more scandalous stories for you."

"The path gets narrower all the time," Essex said, grinning. "Does Aunt Fanny remember the evening when she drank Lionel's birthday champagne and asked me—"

"I believe I am going to be ill," Aunt Fanny said.

"You have my gracious permission," Mrs. Halloran said. "Essex, I am not pleased. *You* must be above suspicion, even if Aunt Fanny is not. Fanny, if you *are* going to make some demonstration, please get it over with; I want to have my walk before we play backgammon, and my schedule has already been much disturbed today. Miss Ogilvie, have you finished your wine?"

"You are going to play backgammon?" demanded Aunt Fanny, distracted. "Tonight?"

"It is *my* house now, Aunt Fanny, as you have reminded me. I see no reason why I should not play backgammon in it."

"Coarse is coarse," Aunt Fanny said. "This is a house of mourning."

"I am sure that Lionel would have foregone dying, Aunt Fanny, if he thought his funeral would interfere with my backgammon. Miss Ogilvie, *have* you finished your wine now?" Mrs. Halloran rose. "Essex?" she said.

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The character of the house is perhaps of interest. It stood upon a small rise in ground, and all the land it surveyed belonged to the Halloran family. The Halloran land was distinguished from the rest of the world by a stone wall, which went completely around the estate, so that all inside the wall was Halloran, all outside was not. The first Mr. Halloran, father to Richard and Aunt Fanny—Frances Halloran she was then—was a man who, in the astonishment of finding himself suddenly extremely wealthy, could think of nothing better to do with his money than set up his own world. His belief about the house, only very dimly conveyed to the architect, the decorators, the carpenters and landscapers and masons and hodcarriers who put it together, was that it should contain everything. The other world, the one the Hallorans were leaving behind, was to be plundered ruthlessly for objects of beauty to go in and around Mr. Halloran's house; infinite were the delights to be prepared for its inhabitants. The house must be endlessly decorated and adorned, the grounds constructed and tended with exquisite care. There were to be swans on the ornamental lake before the house, and a pagoda somewhere, and a maze and a rose garden. The walls of the house were to be painted in soft colors with scenes of nymphs and satyrs sporting among flowers and trees. There was to be a great deal of silver, a great deal of gold, much in the way of enamel and mother-of-pearl. Mr. Halloran did not care much for pictures, but conceded a certain few to the decorator; he did, however, insist upon one picture of himself—he was a practical and a vain man—to be hung over the mantel of the room

the architect, inventing madly, was calling “your drawing room.” Mr. Halloran did not care for books, but he bowed to the incredulous smiles of the architect and decorator, and included a library, which was properly stocked with marble busts and ten thousand volumes, all leather-bound, which arrived by railroad and were carried carton by carton into the library and unpacked with care and set in order on the shelves by people hired to do the work. Mr. Halloran set his heart upon a sundial, and it was ordered from a particular firm in Philadelphia which was very good for that kind of thing, and Mr. Halloran himself selected the spot where it would go. He had half hoped that the inscription on the sundial—left to the discretion of the people in Philadelphia who knew so much about that kind of thing—would be “It is later than you think,” or perhaps even “The moving finger writes, and having writ,” but through the fancy of someone in Philadelphia—and no one ever knew who—the sundial arrived inscribed WHAT IS THIS WORLD? After a while Mr. Halloran quite fancied it, having persuaded himself that it was a remark about time.

The sundial was set into place with as much care as the books had been put into the library, and properly engineered and timed, and anyone who cared to ignore the little jade clock in the drawing room or the grandfather clock in the library or the marble clock in the dining room could go out onto the lawn and see the time by the sun. From any of the windows on that side of the house, which was the garden front looking out over the ornamental lake, the people in the house could see the sundial in the middle distance, set to one side of the long sweep of the lawn. Mr. Halloran had been a methodical man. There were twenty windows to the left wing of the house, and twenty windows to the right; because the great door in the center was double, on the second floor there were forty-two windows across and forty-two on the third floor, lodged directly under the elaborate carvings on the roof edge; Mr. Halloran had directed that the carvings on the roof be flowers and horns of plenty, and there is no doubt that they were done as he said.

On either side of the door the terrace went to the right for eighty-six black tiles and eighty-six white tiles, and equally to the left. There were a hundred and six thin pillars holding up the marble balustrade on the left, and a hundred and six on the right; on the left eight wide shallow marble steps led down to the lawn, and eight on the right. The lawn swept precisely around the blue pool—which was square—and up in a vastly long lovely movement to a summer house built like a temple to some minor mathematical god; the temple was open, with six slim pillars on either side. Although no attempt had actually been made to match leaf for leaf and branch for branch the tended trees which bordered the lawn on either side, there were four poplars, neatly spaced, around the summer house; inside, the summer house was painted in green and gold, and vines had been trained over its roof and along the pillars supporting it.

Intruding purposefully upon the entire scene, an inevitable focus, was the sundial, set badly off center and reading WHAT IS THIS WORLD?

After the first Mr. Halloran had his house, painted and paneled and brocaded and jeweled and carpeted, with sheets of silk on the beds and water colored blue in the pool, he brought his wife, the first Mrs. Halloran, and his two small children to live there. Mrs. Halloran died there within three months, without ever having seen more of the sundial than the view from her bedroom window; she did not go to the center of the maze nor visit the secret garden, she never walked into the orchard to pick herself

an apricot, although fresh fruit was brought her every morning in a translucent blue bowl; roses were brought her from the rose garden and orchids and gardenias from the hothouses, and in the evenings she was carried downstairs to sit in a chair before the great fire in what Mr. Halloran was by now frankly calling the drawing room. Mrs. Halloran had been born in a two-family house on the outskirts of a far-off city where most of the year seemed wintry, and she felt that she had never been warm in her life until she sat before the great fire in her drawing room. She could not bring herself to believe that in this house she would never see winter again, and even the eternal summer in her room, of roses and gardenias and apricots, did not reassure her; she died believing that snow was falling outside the window.

The second Mrs. Halloran was Orianna, Richard's wife, who had made a particular point of behaving with appreciation and docility while her father-in-law was alive. "I believe," she told Richard once, after they had returned from their honeymoon in the Orient and settled down in the big house, "I believe that it is our duty to make your father's last years happy ones. After all, he is your one living relative."

"He is not at all my one living relative," Richard pointed out, puzzled. "There is my sister Frances, and my Uncle Harvey and his wife in New York and their children. And I am sure I have other second and third cousins."

"But none of them has any control over your father's money."

"Did you marry me for my father's money?"

"Well, that, and the house."

---

"Tell me again," Mrs. Halloran said, looking down at the sundial in the warm evening darkness.

"What is this world?" Essex said quietly, "'What asketh man to have? Now with his love, now in his colde grave, Allone, with-outen any companye.'"

"I dislike it." Standing in silence, Mrs. Halloran reached out and touched a finger to the sundial; there were faint noises of leaves stirring and a movement in the water of the pool. In the darkness the house seemed very far away, its lights small, and Mrs. Halloran, touching the sundial, moved her finger along a W, and thought: without it the lawn would be empty. It is a point of human wickedness; it is a statement that the human eye is unable to look unblinded upon mathematical perfection. I am earthly, Mrs. Halloran reminded herself conscientiously, I must look at the sundial like anyone else. I am not inhuman; if the sundial were taken away I, too, would have to avert my eyes until I saw imperfection, a substitute sundial—perhaps a star.

"Are you warm enough?" Essex asked. "You shivered."

"No," said Mrs. Halloran. "I think it has turned quite chilly. We had better go back to the house."

Walking, Mrs. Halloran caressed with her soft steps the fine unyielding property she walked upon; she was not unable to perceive the similar firmness of Essex' arm under his sleeve, and she felt the very small tensing of his muscles as equally a response to her perfection and a little gesture of protection; this is all mine, she thought, savoring the sweet quiet stone and earth and leaf and blade of her holding. She remembered then that she had decided to send Essex away and thought, smiling a little, poor Essex,

unable to comprehend that the essence of the good courtier must be insecurity. Now I own the house, she thought, and could not speak, for love of it.

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In the big drawing room Richard Halloran sat by the fire in his wheel chair, and Miss Ogilvie sat, pointedly remote, at a table far away with Aunt Fanny. Miss Ogilvie was holding a book and Aunt Fanny was playing solitaire; she had clearly not felt herself entitled to turn on an adequate light, and both she and Miss Ogilvie bent, squinting.

"Orianna," said her husband, when Mrs. Halloran and Essex came in through the tall doors from the terrace, "I was thinking about Lionel."

"Of course you were, Richard." Mrs. Halloran gave her scarf to Essex, and went to stand behind her husband's wheel chair. "Try not to think about it," she said. "You'll have trouble sleeping."

"He was my son," Richard Halloran said, patiently explaining.

Mrs. Halloran leaned forward. "Shall I move you away from the fire, Richard? Are you too warm?"

"Don't badger him," Aunt Fanny said. She lifted a card to hold it pointedly toward the light and look at it. "Richard was always perfectly capable of making his own decisions, Orianna, even about his own comfort."

"Mr. Halloran has always been such a forceful man," Miss Ogilvie added fondly.

"We rang the bells over the carriage house for his first birthday," Mr. Halloran explained across the room to Aunt Fanny and Miss Ogilvie. "My wife thought we might ring the bells again today—as a sort of farewell, you know—but I thought not. What do you think, Fanny?"

"By no means," Aunt Fanny said firmly. "In deplorable taste. Naturally." She looked at Mrs. Halloran, and said "Naturally," again.

"Essex," said Mrs. Halloran, not moving. "I wonder if we should have them ring the bells, after all." Essex, crossing the room with the soundless step of a cat, stood beside her attentively, and Mr. Halloran nodded and said, "Thoughtful. He would have liked it. We rang the bells over the carriage house," he told Miss Ogilvie, "for his first birthday, and then every birthday after that, until he asked us not to do it any more."

"I am afraid, however, that it is too late to ring the bells tonight," Mrs. Halloran told her husband gravely.

"You are right, my dear, as always, Poor Lionel would not hear them, in any case. Perhaps tomorrow will not be too late."

"Lionel was a fine man," Miss Ogilvie said, drooping mournfully. "We will miss him."

"Yes, you must get someone to cut down the hedges," Mr. Halloran said to his wife.

"His father was always everything a boy could desire," said Aunt Fanny. "Richard, are you too warm by the fire? You always disliked being overheated. Although," she added, "the fire is not very high, apparently. At least, it gives almost no light."

"Essex," said Mrs. Halloran, "go and turn on the lamp for Aunt Fanny."

"Thank you, no," Aunt Fanny said. "It is never necessary to consult *my* comfort, Orianna. You are perfectly aware that I ask for nothing at your hands. Or," she added, glancing at Essex, who stood by her, "at the hands of a hired—"

"Young man to catalogue the library," Essex supplied.

"Mr. Halloran," Miss Ogilvie asked, "may I get you a shawl to throw over your shoulders? Perhaps your back is cold? I know one's back so often is, even when the fire is warming one's . . ." she hesitated, "extremities," she said.

"Do you mean feet, Miss Ogilvie?" Mrs. Halloran asked. "Because I assure you that Richard still has his, although they are not often visible. Miss Ogilvie is concerned about your feet," she said down to her husband.

"My feet?" He smiled. "Don't do much walking any more," he explained gallantly to Miss Ogilvie, who blushed.

"Aunt Fanny," Mrs. Halloran said, and they all turned to her, wondering at her voice, "I am happy to hear that you ask for nothing at my hands, because there is something I am going to tell all of you, and Aunt Fanny reassures me."

"I?" said Aunt Fanny, astonished.

"The essence of life," said Mrs. Halloran gently, "is change, you will all, being intelligent people, agree. Our one recent change—I refer, of course, to the departure of Lionel—"

"It was Lionel, then," Mr. Halloran said, nodding to himself before the fire.

"—has been both refreshing and agreeable. We could very well do without Lionel. I am now convinced that a thorough housecleaning is necessary. Richard will stay, of course." She put her hand on her husband's shoulder and he nodded again, gratified.

"Essex," said Mrs. Halloran. "I wonder if we have not detained you past your time?"

"The library—" said Essex, putting his fingers against his mouth and staring.

"I think I shall let the library go for a while," Mrs. Halloran said, "and get someone to paint murals in my dressing-room. You will, of course, receive a small settlement to start you on some small scholarly pursuit."

"The path," Essex said tightly, "gets narrower all the time."

"So wise of you," Mrs. Halloran said.

"I would have hoped—" Essex tried. "I would hope that after—"

"Essex, you are thirty-two years old. It is not too late for you to find a career in life. You might work with your hands. You may of course take a day or so to plan. Miss Ogilvie," and Miss Ogilvie put out her hand blindly and took hold of her chair arm. "I am pleased with you," Mrs. Halloran said. "This is not criticism, Miss Ogilvie. You are a gentlewoman, of a sort too rarely found in the world today; you have been sheltered—you came, I think, just shortly before Fancy was born?—you have been sheltered from the world all your life, and I would not thoughtlessly put you out to live exposed. I think we shall put you into a little boarding house, genteel, of course—you may be positive that it will be genteel, and altogether suitable for your condition of life and your breeding; some watering place? A spot by the sea? In the off season you will play cribbage with other ladies of similar station in life. Perhaps during some warm autumn month you will fall into the hands of an adventurer, carried away by the sound of the sea and the fading merriment on the pier; perhaps even Essex, in his trackless scholarly wanderings, will find you and take your money away from you. You would of course be perfectly safe in the hands of an ordinary adventurer, since the little nest egg I will give you will be absolutely out of your control; I feel that it is only wise."

"This is heartless." Miss Ogilvie sank back in her chair. "I have not deserved this."

"Perhaps not. But you must allow me my impulse of generosity. I insist upon the

nest egg.”

“And I? Am I to be turned out, too?”

“Dear Aunt Fanny, this is your home. Do you suppose me ungrateful enough to turn you away from the home of your childhood? You have lived here with your mother, with your father—a fine man; I remember your father.”

“My mother and father have nothing to do with *you*. My brother—”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Halloran. “You went to your first, and only, dance, in the ballroom here; Miss Halloran, you were then; we must not lose sight of Miss Halloran in Aunt Fanny. Equally, however, your brother and I are alone now; we have not been alone in this house since our marriage. There is room enough for you and me in the house, Fanny,” Mrs. Halloran said indulgently.

“I have never thought so,” Aunt Fanny said.

“Do you recall the tower, Fanny? Your father built it; it was to have been an observatory, was it not? I remember workmen there during my early days in the house. The tower could be made extremely comfortable. You may even take some of my furniture up there; I have no objection to your choosing anything in the house, except, of course, those objects of particular sentimental value; the blue cloisonné vase in the hall will go with Miss Ogilvie.”

“I will take my mother’s jewelry.”

“I daresay that people in this house years from now will begin to talk of the haunted tower.” Mrs. Halloran laughed. “Well,” she said, “who is left now? It will be lonely here for Maryjane, I know; I am positive that she had a genuine feeling for Lionel, although I would not care to define it any further than that. I think I shall send Maryjane home again. Lionel found her in a public library in the city, so that is where she is going. She had a little apartment at the time, and I shall arrange for her to have her little apartment back again. She will not absolutely have to go back to work in the library, because of course I will be generous. She may even take up again with her old friends as though no time had passed; I am afraid, however, that she must not hope to find a second Lionel. One Lionel in a lifetime is, I believe, quite enough for anyone.”

“And Fancy?” said Miss Ogilvie, barely speaking. “I am her governess, I should—”

“Fancy is mine, too, now,” Mrs. Halloran said, smiling. “Some day everything I have will belong to Fancy, and I think to keep Fancy with me.”

“I think you’ve been joking with us,” Essex said, his voice flat, and without life. “It’s one of your jokes, Orianna. You want us all to be frightened, and beg, and then you will laugh and say you were joking—”

“Do you really think so, Essex? Then I will be interested to see how far my joke will go before you beg. Richard?” Mr. Halloran opened his eyes and smiled.

“Bedtime,” he said cheerfully. Mrs. Halloran turned the wheel chair. “Goodnight,” she said; “Goodnight,” Mr. Halloran said, and Mrs. Halloran had pushed the wheel chair almost to the door before Essex ran to open it for her.

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Miss Ogilvie was crying, not noisily, but obtrusively; she had cried slightly when Lionel died, but her tears then had been more formal, and she had kept her nose from turning red. Aunt Fanny sat in patient grimness, staring into the fire. Her hands were

folded in her lap; when her brother and sister-in-law left the room Aunt Fanny had said “Goodnight, Richard,” and had not spoken since. Essex walked, because when he was still he saw himself; “Cringing,” he said, “fetching and lying and spying and outraging, and turned away as I deserve. Aunt Fanny,” he said, “Miss Ogilvie—we are contemptible.”

“I always tried to do what was best,” Miss Ogilvie said miserably. “She had no right to speak to me so.”

“It was true,” Essex said. “I was shallowly protected; I thought I was clever and quick and invulnerable, and that is not a very good protection; I thought she was fond of me, and I made myself into a pet monkey.”

“She could have broken it more gently,” Miss Ogilvie said.

“An ape, a grotesque little monster.”

“Be quiet,” said Aunt Fanny, and they turned to her, surprised. She was looking toward the door; it opened, and Fancy slipped in.

“Fancy,” said Aunt Fanny, “your grandfather would not like you to be downstairs so late. Go at once to your room.”

Disregarding Aunt Fanny utterly, Fancy moved to the fireplace and sat crosslegged on the hearth rug. “I spend a lot of time in here,” she said. “When you’re all in bed, mostly.” She looked directly at Miss Ogilvie. “You snore,” she said.

Miss Ogilvie, goaded, almost snarled. “You ought to be spanked,” she said.

Fancy ran her hand richly along the soft hearth rug. “It’s going to belong to me when my grandmother dies,” she said. “When my grandmother dies, no one can stop the house and everything from being mine.”

“Your grandfather—” Aunt Fanny said. “My brother—”

“Well,” said Fancy, as one explaining to an unreasonable child, “of course I know that it really belongs to Grandfather. Because it belongs to the Hallorans. But it doesn’t really *seem* to, does it? Sometimes I wish my grandmother would die.”

“Little beast,” said Essex.

“This is not properly spoken, Fancy,” Miss Ogilvie said gravely. “It is very rude of you to think about your grandmother’s dying, when she has been so kind to you. And it is very rude to steal about the house at night spying on people and then making comments on—” She hesitated. “You ought to behave better,” she said.

“Furthermore,” said Aunt Fanny, “you had better not count your riches before you get them. You have plenty of toys.”

“I have my doll house,” Fancy said suddenly, looking for the first time squarely at Aunt Fanny. “I have my beautiful little doll house with real doorknobs and electric lights and the little stove that really works and the running water in the bathtubs.”

“You are a fortunate child,” Miss Ogilvie said.

“And all the little dolls. One of them,” Fancy giggled, “is lying in the little bathtub with the water really running. They’re little doll house dolls. They fit exactly into the chairs and the beds. They have little dishes. When I put them to bed they have to go to bed. When my grandmother dies all *this* is going to belong to me.”

“And where would we be then?” Essex asked softly. “Fancy?”

Fancy smiled at him. “When my grandmother dies,” she said, “I am going to smash my doll house. I won’t need it any more.”