



Library podcast

Thrilling Tales, A Storytime for Grownups presents: "The Quest" by Saki and "The Interruption" by W.W. Jacobs

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[00:00:35] Welcome to Thrilling Tales The Seattle Public Libraries Storytime for Grownups. This program happens on the first and third Monday of every month right here in the auditorium. And my name is David. I'm a librarian with the Reader Services Department up on the third floor. So glad you could make it here today. We have two stories today. And I didn't really plan this, but it's sort of a Downton Abbey kind of story day because they're both take place in British manor houses. The first is quite a short story, followed by our main story for the day. And the first is by a writer named H.H. Monro. Although he was better known to his readers by his pen name, Saki. And the title of this story is "The Quest".

[00:01:20] An unwanted piece hung over the Villa Elsinore, broken, however, at frequent intervals by clamorous lamentations, suggestive of bewildered bereavement. The Moby's had lost their infant child, hence the piece which its absence entailed. They were looking for it in wild, undisciplined fashion, giving tongue the whole time, which accounted for the outcry which swept through the house and garden whenever they returned to try the home coverts. A new. Clovis, who was temporarily and unwillingly a paying guest at the villa, had been dozing in a hammock at the far end of the garden when Mrs Mumby had broken the news to him. We've lost the baby, she screamed. Do you mean that it's dead or stampeded or that you stick to the cards and lost it that way? Asked Clovis lazily. He was toddling about quite happily on the lawns, had Mrs. MOLOMBY tearfully and Arnold had just come in and was asking him what sort of sorts he would like with the asparagus. I hope, he said. Hollandaise, interrupted Clovis, with a show of quickened interest, because if there's anything I hate, and all of a sudden I missed the baby! Continued Miss Mumby in a shriller tone. We've hunted high and low in house and garden and outside the gates, and he's nowhere to be seen.

[00:02:48] Is he anywhere to be heard? Asked Clovis. If not, he must be at least two miles away. But where and and how? Asked the distracted mother. Perhaps an eagle or a wild beast has carried him off, suggested Clovis, aren't eagles and wild beasts in Surrey, said Miss Mumby, but a note of horror

had crept into her voice. They escape now and then from travelling shows. Sometimes I think they let them loose for the sake of the advertisement. I think what a sensational headline it would make in the local papers. Infant son of a prominent family devoured by a spotted hyena. But we should have found its remains. Sobbed Mrs. Mumby. If the hyena was rarely hungry, and not merely toying with his food, it wouldn't be much in the way of remains. Mrs. Momi turned away hastily to seek comfort and counsel in some other direction with the selfish absorption of young motherhood. She entirely disregarded Clovis as obvious anxiety about the asparagus sauce before she had gone a yard. However, the click of the side gate caused her to pull up sharp. Miss Gill, pet of the villa, pet her. Hoffe had come over to hear details of the bereavement. Clovis was already rather bored with the story, but Mrs. Mumby was equipped with that merciful faculty, which finds as much joy in the ninetieth time of telling as the first. Arnold had just come in and he was complaining of rheumatism. There are so many things to complain of in this household that it would never have occurred to me to complain of rheumatism, murmured Clovis. He was complaining of rheumatism. Continued Mrs. Momi, trying to throw a chilling inflection into a voice that was already doing a good deal of sobbing and talking at high pressure as well. She was again interrupted. There is no such thing as rheumatism, said Miss Gill pet.

[00:04:44] She said it with a conscious air of defiance that a waiter adopts in announcing that the cheapest price claret on the wine list is no more. She did not proceed, however, to offer an alternative of some more expensive malady, but denied the existence of them all. Mrs Moby's temper began to shine out through her grief. I suppose you'd say next that baby hasn't really disappeared. He has disappeared, conceded Miss Gill. Pet. But only because you have insufficient faith to find him. It's only lack of faith on your part that prevents him from being restored to you safe and well.

[00:05:19] But if he's been eaten in the meantime by a hyena and partly digested, said Clovis, who clung affectionately to his wild beast theory, surely some ill effects would be noticeable. Miss Gill Pet was rather staggered by this complication of the question. I feel sure that the hyena has not eaten him, she said lamely. The hyena may be equally certain that it has. You see, it may have just as much faith as you have. And more special knowledge to the present whereabouts of baby. Mrs Momi was in tears again. If you have faith, she sobbed, struck by a happy inspiration. Once you find out little Eric for us, I'm sure that you have powers that are denied to us. Rosemary Gill Pet was thoroughly sincere in her adherence to Christian Science Principles, whether she understood or correctly expounded them, the learned in such matters may best decide in the present case. She was undoubtedly confronted with a great opportunity, and she strenuously summoned to her aid every scrap of faith that she possessed. She passed out into the bare and open high road, followed by Mrs Moby's warning It's no use going there. We've searched there a dozen times, but Rosemary's ears were already deaf to all things save self-congratulation for sitting in the middle of the highway, playing contentedly with the dust in some faded buttercups was a white pinafore baby with a mop of toe coloured hair tied over one temple with a pale blue ribbon taking first, the usual feminine precaution of looking to see that no motorcar was on the distant horizon.

[00:06:54] Rosemary dashed at the child and bore it despite its vigorous opposition in through the portals of Elsinore. The child's furious screams had already announced the fact of its discovery, and

the almost hysterical parents raced down the lawn to meet their restored offspring. The aesthetic value of the scene was marred in some degree by Rosemary's difficulty in holding the struggling infant, which was born wrong and foremost towards the agitated bosom of its family. Oh, little Eric has come back to us! Cried the moan, bees in unison, and the child had rammed its fists tightly into its eye sockets, and nothing could be seen of its face but a wildly gaping mouth. The recognition was, in itself, an act of faith. Easy. Glad to be back to Daddy and Mummy again, crooned Mrs Mumby. The preference, which the child was showing for its dust and buttercup distractions, was so marked that the question struck Clovis as being unnecessarily tactless.

[00:07:53] Give him a ride on the roly-poly, suggested the father brilliantly, as the Howells continued with no sign of early abatement. In a moment, the child had been placed astride the big garden roller, and a preliminary tug was given to set it in motion. From the hollow depths of the cylinder came an earsplitting roar, drowning even the vocal efforts of the squalling baby. And immediately afterwards there crept forth a white pinafores infant with a mop of toe colored hair tied over one temple with a pale blue ribbon. There was no mistaking either the features or the lung power of the new arrival. Our own little Eric screamed. Mrs. Mumby pouncing on him and nearly smothering him with kisses. Did you hide in the roly-poly to give us all a big fright?

[00:08:40] This was the obvious explanation of the child's sudden disappearance and equally abrupt discovery. There remained, however, the problem of the internal loping baby, which now sat whimpering on the lawn in a disfavor as chilling as its previous popularity had been unwelcome. The Moby's glared at it as though it had wormed its way into their shortlived affections by heartless and unworthy pretences. Miss Gill Pitt's face took on an ashen tinge as she stared helplessly at the bunched up figure that had been such a glad. Some sight to her eyes a few moments ago.

[00:09:14] When love is over and how little of love even the lover understands, quoted Clovis to himself, Rose Marie was the first to break the silence. If that is Eric, you have in your arms. Who is that?

[00:09:31] But that's I think it's for you to explain, said Mrs. MOLOMBY stiffly. Obviously, said Clovis. It's a duplicate, Eric. But your powers of faith called into being question is what are you going to do with him?

[00:09:46] The ashen pallor deepened in Rosemary's cheeks. Mrs. Mumby clutched the genuine Eric closer to her side, as though she feared that her uncanny neighbor might, out of sheer pique, turned him into a bowl of goldfish. I found him sitting in the middle of the road, said Rosemary weakly. You can't take him back and leave him there, said Clovis. The highway is meant for traffic not to be used as a lumber room for disused miracles. Rosemary wept. The proverb weep and you weep alone broke down as badly on application as most of its kind. Both babies were wailing lugubrious Lee and the parents. Moby's had scarcely recovered from their earlier lachrymose condition. Clovis alone maintained and unruffled. Cheerfulness must keep him always? Asked Rosemary dolefully. Not always, said Clovis consolingly, and go into the Navy when he's 13. Rosemary wept afresh. Course, added Clover's, there may be no end of bother about his birth certificate. You'll have to explain

matters to the Admiralty, and it dreadfully hidebound. It was rather a relief when a breathless nursemaid from the villa Charlottenburg over the way came running across the lawn to claim little Percy, who had slipped out the front gate and disappeared like a twinkling from the high road. And even then, Clovis found it necessary to go in person to the kitchen to make sure about the asparagus sauce beforehand, so that your appetizer, the main course is a story by W.W. Jacobs. Perhaps most famous for a story called "The Monkey's Paw", that this story is called "The Interruption".

[00:11:34] The last of the funeral guests had gone, and Spencer Goddard in decent black sat alone in his small, well furnished study. There was a queer sense of freedom in the house since the coffin had lifted the coffin, which was now hidden in its solitary grave beneath the yellow earth. The air, which for the last three days had seemed stale and contaminated, now smells fresh and clean. He went to the open window and looking into the fading light of the autumn day, took a deep breath. He closed the window and stooping down, put a match to the fire and dropping into his easy chair, sat listening to the cheery crackle of the wood at the age of 38. He had turned over a fresh page. Life free and unencumbered, was before him. His dead wife's money was at last. He is to spend as he pleased, instead of being doled out in reluctant giblets. He turned to the step of the door, and his face assumed the appearance of gravity and sadness that it had worn for the last four days. The cook, with the same air of decorous grief, entered the room quietly, and crossing to the mantelpiece placed upon it.

[00:12:50] Photograph. I thought you'd like to have it, sir. She said in a low voice to remind you. Gotthard thanked her and Rising took it in his hand and stood regarding it. He noticed with satisfaction that his hand was absolutely steady. It is a very good likeness till she was taken ill. Continued the woman. I never saw anybody change so sudden. The nature of her disease. Hannah said her master. The woman nodded and dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief, stood regarding him. Is there anything you want? He inquired after a time she shook her head. I can't believe she's gone. She said in a low voice. Every now and then I have a queer feeling that she's still here. It's your nurse, said her master sharply, and wanting to tell me something.

[00:13:49] By a great effort, Gotthard refrain from looking at her nerves. He said again, perhaps you ought to have a little holiday. It's been a great strain upon you. You too, sir, said the woman, respectfully waiting on her hand and foot, as you have done. I can't think how you stood it. If you'd only had a nurse, I preferred to do it myself, Hannant, said her master. If I had had a nurse, it would have alarmed her. The woman assented, and they are always peeking and prying into what doesn't concern them, she added. Always think they know more than the doctors do.

[00:14:26] Goddard turned a slow look upon her. The tall, angular figure was standing in an attitude of respectful attention. The cold slate, brown eyes were cast down, the sullen face expressionless.

[00:14:40] She couldn't have had a better doctor, he said, looking at the fire again. No man could have done more for her and nobody could have done more for than you did, sir. Was the reply. There's few husbands that would have done what you did. Gotthard stiffened in his chair. That will do, Hanah, he said curtly. Or done it so well.

[00:15:04] Said the woman with measured slowness with a strange sinking sensation, her master paused to regain his control. And then he turned and eyed her steadily. Thank you! He said slowly. You mean well? But at present I cannot discuss it for some time. After the door had closed behind her, he sat in deep thought the feeling of well-being of a few minutes before had vanished, leaving in its place an apprehension which he refused to consider, but which would not be allayed, he thought, over his actions of the last few weeks carefully, and could remember no flaw. His wife's illness, the doctor's diagnosis, his own solicitous care were all in keeping with the ordinary. He tried to remember the woman's exact words, her manner. Something had shown him fear. But he could have laughed at his fears the next morning the dining room was full of sunshine and the fragrance of coffee and bacon was in the air. But there's still a worried and commonplace Hannah worried over two eggs with false birth certificates over the vendor, of which she became almost lyrical. The bacon is excellent, said her smiling master. So was the coffee. But your coffee always is. Hannah smiled in return, and taking fresh eggs from a rosy cheeked maid put them before him. A pipe, followed by a brisk walk cheered him still further. He came home, glowing with exercise, and again possessed with that sense of freedom and freshness. He went into the garden, now his own and planned alterations.

[00:16:47] After lunch, he went over the house. The windows of his wife's bedroom were open and the room neat and airy. His glance wandered from the made up bed to the brightly polished furniture.

[00:16:58] Then he went to the dressing table and opened the drawers, searching each in turn, with the exception of a few odds and ends. They were empty. He went out into the landing and called for Hannah. Do you know whether your mistress locked up any of her things? He inquired. What things? Said the woman. Well, her jewelry, mostly. Oh! Hannah smiled. She gave it all to me, she said quietly. Gotthard checked an exclamation. His heart was beating nervously, but he spoke sternly. When? Just before she died of gastro enteritis, said the woman, there was a long silence.

[00:17:44] He turned and with great care, mechanically closed the doors of the dressing table. The tilted glass showed him the pallor of his face and he spoke without turning round. That is all right, then, he said huskily. I only wanted to know what had become of it. I thought perhaps merely Hannah shook her head. Millie's all right, she said with a strange smile. She's as honest as we are. Is there anything more you want, sir? She closed the door behind her with the quietness of the well trained servant Gotthard, steadying himself with his hand on the rail of the bed, stood looking into the future.

[00:18:25] To the days past, monotonously as they passed with a man in prison. Gone was the sense of freedom and the idea of a wider life instead of a cell. A house with ten rooms. But Hannah. The jailer guarding each one, respectful and attentive. The model servant he saw in every word. A threat against his liberty. His life in the sullen face and cold eyes. He saw her knowledge of power in her solicitude for his comfort and approval. A sardonic jest. It was the master playing at being the servant. The years of unwilling servitude were over. But she felt her way carefully, with infinite zest in the game, warped and bitter, with the cleverness which had never before had scope. She had entered into her kingdom.

[00:19:16] She took it little by little, savoring every morsel. I hope I've done right, sir, she said one morning. I've given Millie notice. Gotthard looked up from his paper, isn't she satisfactory? He inquired. Not to my thinking, sir, said the woman. And she says she's coming to see you about it. I told her that would be no good. I better see her and hear what she has to say, said her master. Well, of course, if you wish to, said Hannah, only after giving a notice. If she doesn't go, I shall. I should be sorry to go. I've been very comfortable here, but it's either her or me. I should be sorry to lose you, said Gotthard in a hopeless voice. Thank you, sir, said Hannah. I'm sure I've tried to do my best. I've been with you for some time now, and I know all your little ways. I expect you understand. I understand you better than anybody else. Would I do all I can to make you comfortable? Very well. I will leave it to you, said Goddard, in a voice which strove to be brisk and commanding. You have my permission to dismiss or. There's another thing I wanted to see you about, said Hannah. My wages. I was gonna ask for a rise, saying that I'm really the housekeeper here now. Certainly, said her master, considering that only seems fair. Let me see what. What are you getting? Thirty six. Goddard reflected for a moment and then turned with a benevolent smile. Very well, he said cordially, I'll make it forty two. It's ten shillings a month more. I was thinking of 100, said Hannah dryly. The significance of the demand appalled him, rather a big jump, he said at last. I really don't know that I. It doesn't matter, said Hannah. I thought it was worth it to you, that's all. You know best. Some people might think I was worth two hundred. That's a bigger jump. But after all, a big jump is better than she broke off and tittered. Goddard eyed her, then a big drop.

[00:21:29] She concluded her masters face set. The lips almost disappeared, and something came into the pale eyes that was revolting. Still eyeing her, he rose and approached her. She stood her ground and meet him eye to eye.

[00:21:44] You are jocular. He said at last short life and a merry one. Said the woman. Mine or yours? Both, perhaps. Was the reply. If I give you a hundred, said Gotthard, moistening his lips, that ought to make your life merrier. At any rate, Hannah nodded. Mary and long, perhaps, she said slowly.

[00:22:10] I'm careful, you know. Very careful. I'm sure you, answered Goddard. His face relaxing. Careful what I eat and drink. Me? Said the woman, eyeing him steadily. That is why, as he said slowly, I am myself. That is why I am paying a good cook, a large salary.

[00:22:31] But don't overdo things, Hannah. Don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

[00:22:37] I'm not likely to do that, she said coldly. Live and let live. That is my motto. Some people have different ones, but I'm careful nobody won't catch me napping. I've left a letter with my sister in case.

[00:22:50] Gotthard turn slowly and in a casual fashion. Put the flowers straight in a bowl on the table and wandering to the window looked out. His face was white again and his hands trembled to be opened.

[00:23:02] After my death, continued Hannah. I don't believe in doctors. Not after what I've seen of them. I don't think I know enough. So if I die, I shall be examined.

[00:23:12] I've given good reasons. And suppose, said Goddard, coming from the window, suppose she is curious, and she opens it before you die.

[00:23:20] Well, we must change that, said Hannah, shrugging her shoulders. But I don't think she will. I sealed it up with sealing wax with a mark on it. She might open it and say nothing about it.

[00:23:31] Persisted her master and unwholesome grin spread slowly over Hannah's features. I should know it soon enough, she declared boisterously. And so would other people. So there would be an upset. Cheatham would have something to talk about for once. We should be in the papers. Both of us.

[00:23:50] Godhood forced to smile.

[00:23:52] Dear me. He said gently, your pen seems to be a dangerous weapon. Hannah, but I hope that the need to open it will not happen for another 50 years. You look well and strong.

[00:24:04] The woman nodded. Well, don't take up my troubles before I come, she said, with a satisfied air. Well, there's no harm in trying to prevent them coming. Prevention is better than cure.

[00:24:15] Exactly, said her master. And by the way, there's no need for this little financial arrangement to be known by anybody else. I might become unpopular with my neighbors for setting a bad example. Course I am giving you this sum because I really think you are worth it. I'm sure you do, said Hannah. I'm not sure I'm worth more. This will do to go on with. I shall get a girl for less than we are paying Millie. And that be another little bit extra me.

[00:24:42] Certainly said got it and smiled again. Come to think of it, said Hannah, pausing at the door.

[00:24:47] Why, sure, I shall get anybody else. And then that'll be more than ever for me. If I due to work, I might as well save the money. Her master nodded and left to himself, sat down to think out a position which was as intolerable as it was dangerous at a great risk. He had escaped from the dominion of one woman, only to fall bound and helpless into the hands of another. However vague and unconvincing the suspicions of Hannah might be, they would be sufficient. Evidence could be on Earth. Cold with fear. One moment and hot with fury the next. He sought in vain for some avenue of escape. It was his brain against that of a cunning, illiterate fool. A fool whose malicious stupidity only added to his danger. And she drank. With largely increased wages, she would drink more. And his very life might depend upon a hiccup to boast. It was clear that she was enjoying her supremacy. Later on, her vanity would urge you to display it before others. He might have to obey the crack of her whip before witnesses, and that would cut off all possibility of escape.

[00:25:58] He sat with his head in his hands. There must be a way out and he must find it soon.

[00:26:05] He must find it before gossip began, before the changed position of master and servant lent color to her story. When that story became known, shaking with fury, he thought of her lean, ugly throat and the joy of choking her life out with his fingers.

[00:26:22] He started suddenly and took a quick breath. Now, not fingers. A rope.

[00:26:33] 3. Bright and cheerful outside. And with his friends in the house, he was quiet and submissive. Millie had gone. And if the service was poor and the rooms neglected, he gave no sign.

[00:26:45] If a bell remained unanswered, he made no complaint and two studied insulin's turn the other cheek of politeness. When at this tribute to her power, the woman smiled. He smiled in return, a smile which, for all its disarming softness, left her vaguely uneasy. I'm not afraid of you. She said once with a menacing air. I hope not. Said Goddard in a slightly surprised voice. Some people might be, but I'm not. She declared if anything happened to me, nothing could happen to such a careful woman as you are, he said, smiling again. You ought to live to 90 with luck. It was clear to him that the situation was getting on his nerves. Unremembered. But terrible dreams haunted his sleep. Dreams in which some great, inevitable disaster was always pressing against him. Although we could never discover what it was. Each morning he awoke on refreshed to face another day of torment.

[00:27:45] He could not meet the woman's eyes for fear of revealing the threat that was in his own. DeLay was dangerous and foolish. He had thought out every move in that contest of wits, which was to remove the shadow of the rope from his own neck and place it about that of the woman. There was a little risk, but the stake was a big one. He had but to set the ball rolling, and others would keep it on its course. It was time to act. He came in a little jaded from his afternoon walk and left his tea untouched. He ate the little dinner and sitting hunched up over the fire, told the woman that he had taken a slight chill. Her concern, he felt grimly, might have been greater if she had known the cause. He was no better the next day and after lunch called in to consult his doctor, he left with a clean bill of health except for a slight digestive derangement. The remedy for which he took away with him in a bottle for two days, he swallowed one tablespoon full three times a day and water without result. Then he took to his bed. A day or two in bed won't hurt you, said the doctor. Show me that tongue of yours again.

[00:28:54] The doctor pondered, but what is the matter with me, Roberts inquired the patient out into trouble about nerves, a bit wrong digestion and a little bit impaired. You'll be all right in a day or two.

[00:29:07] Gotthard nodded. So far, so good. Roberts had not outlived its usefulness. He smiled grimly after the doctor had left at the surprise.

[00:29:17] He was preparing for him a little rough on Roberts and his professional reputation. Perhaps. But these things could not be avoided.

[00:29:26] He lay back and visualized the program a day or two longer, getting gradually worse, then a little sickness after that, a nervous, somewhat shamefaced patient hinting at things. His food had a queer taste. He felt worse after taking it. He knew it was ridiculous. Still, there was some of his beef tea that he'd put aside. Perhaps the doctor would like to examine it and the medicine secretions too. Perhaps he would like to see those propped on his elbow.

[00:29:57] He stared fixedly at the wall. There would be a trace, a faint trace of arsenic in the secretions. There would be more of a trace. In the other things, an attempt to poison him would be clearly indicated, and his wife's symptoms had resembled his own. Let Hannah get out of the web. He was spinning if she could.

[00:30:20] As for the letter she had threatened him with, let her produce it. It could only recoil upon herself. 50 letters could not save her from the doom that he was preparing for her. It was her life or his, and he would show no mercy for three days. He doctored himself with said jealous care, watching himself anxiously while his nerve was going, and he knew it before him. Was the strain of the discovery, the arrest, a trial, the gruesome business of his wife's death? A long business. He would wait no longer, and he would open the proceedings with dramatic suddenness. It was between nine and 10 o'clock at night when he rang his bell, and it was not until he had rung four times that he heard the heavy steps of Hannah mounting the stairs. What do you want? She demanded, standing in the doorway. I'm very ill, he said. Gasping. Run for the doctor, quick! The woman stared at him in genuine amazement.

[00:31:14] Well, at this time of night, she exclaimed. Not likely. I'm dying, said Goddard, in a broken voice. Not you! She said, roughly. You'll be better in the morning. I'm dying, he repeated.

[00:31:27] Go for the doctor. The woman hesitated. The rain beat in heavy squalls against the window, and the doctor's house was a mile distant on the lonely road. She glanced at the figure on the bed. I should catch my death cold, she grumbled. She stood sullenly regarding him. He certainly looked very ill and his death would by no means benefit her. She listened, scowling to the wind and the rain. All right. She said at last and went noisily from the room. His face set in a mirthless smile.

[00:32:03] He heard her bustling about below the front door, slammed violently, and he was alone. He waited for a few moments and then getting out of bed, put on his dressing gown and set about his preparations with a steady hand. He added a little white powder to the remains of his beef tea and to the contents of his bottle of medicine. He stood listening a moment at some faint sound from below. Having satisfied himself, lit a candle and made his way to Hannah's room for a space. He stood irresolute, looking about him. Then he opened one of the drawers, and placing the broken packet of powder under a pile of clothing at the back, made his way back to bed. He was disturbed to find that he was trembling with excitement and nervousness. He longed for tobacco, but that was impossible to reassure himself. He began to rehearse his conversation with the doctor and again he thought over every possible complication. The scene with the woman would be terrible. He would have to be too ill to take any part in it.

[00:33:03] The less he said, the better others would do. All that was necessary. He lay for a long time listening to the sound of the wind in the rain. Inside the house seemed unusually quiet and with an odd sensation, he suddenly realized that it was the first time that he had been alone in it since his wife's death. He remember that she would have to be disturbed. The thought was unwelcome. He did not want her to be disturbed. Let the dead sleep. He sat up in bed and drew his watch from beneath the pillow. Hannah ought to have been back before. In any case, she ought not to be long. Now, at any moment, he might hear her key in the lock. He lay down again and reminded himself that things were shaping well. He had shaped them, and some of the satisfaction of the artist was his. The silence was oppressive. The house seemed to be listening, waiting.

[00:34:03] He looked at his watch again and wondered with a curse what had happened to the woman. It was clear that the doctor must be out, but that was no reason for her delay. It was closed on midnight and the atmosphere of the house seemed in some strange fashion to be brooding and hostile.

[00:34:20] In a lull in the wind, he thought he heard footsteps outside and his face cleared as he sat up listening for the sound of the key in the door below. Then another moment, the woman would be in the house and the fears engendered by a disordered fancy would have flown.

[00:34:35] But the sound of the steps had ceased. He could hear no sound of entrance. Until all hope had gone, he sat listening. He was certain he had heard footsteps. Who's.

[00:34:49] Trembling and haggard, he sat waiting, assailed by a crowd of murmuring fears. One whispered that he had failed and would have to pay the penalty of failing, that he had gambled with death and lost.

[00:35:01] By a strong effort, he fought down these fancies and closing his eyes, tried to compose himself to rest. It was evident now that the doctor was out and that Hannah was waiting to return with him in his car. It was frightening himself for nothing at any moment. He might hear the sound of their arrival.

[00:35:21] He heard something else and sitting up suddenly tried to think what it was and what had caused it. It was a very faint sound, stealthy. Holding his breath, he waited for it to be repeated. He heard it again. The mere ghost of a sound, a whisper of a sound. But significant as most whispers are.

[00:35:43] He wiped his brow with his sleeve and told himself firmly that it was nerves and nothing but nerves. But against his will, he still listened. He fancied now that the sound came from his wife's room, the other side of the landing. It increased in loudness and became more insistent. But with his eyes fixed on the door of his room, he still kept himself in hand and tried to listen instead to the wind and the rain. And for a time he heard nothing but that. Then there came a scraping, scurrying noise from his wife's room, and a sudden terrific crash with a loud scream. His nerve broke and springing

from bed. He sped downstairs and flinging open. The front door dashed into the night. The door caught by the wind slammed behind him.

[00:36:29] With his hand holding the garden gate open, ready for further flight, he stood sobbing for breath. His bare feet were bruised and the rain was very cold. But he took no heed.

[00:36:42] Then he ran a little way along the road and stood for some time hoping and listening. He came back slowly. The wind was bitter and he was soaked to the skin. The garden was black and forbidding and unspeakable horror might be lurking in the bushes.

[00:37:00] He went up the road again, trembling with cold. And then in desperation, he passed through the terrors of the garden to the house, only to find the door closed. The ports gave a little protection from the icy rain, but none from the wind and shaking in every limb. He leaned in abject misery against the door. He pulled himself together after a time and stumbled round to the back door, locked and all the lower windows were shuttered. He made his way back to the porch and crouching there in hopeless misery, waited for the woman to return.

[00:37:36] For. He had a dim memory when he awoke of somebody questioning him and then of being half pushed, half carried upstairs to bed. There was something wrong with his head and his chest, and he was trembling violently and very cold.

[00:37:54] Somebody was speaking. You must have taken leave of your senses, said the voice of Hannah. I thought you were dead. He forced his eyes to open. Doctor, he muttered. Doctor. Out on a bad case, said Hannah. I waited till I was tired of waiting. And then I came along. Good thing for you, I did. They'll be round first thing in the morning. You ought to be here by now.

[00:38:17] She bustled about tidying up the room, his leaden eyes following her as she collected the beef, tea and other things on a tray and carried them out.

[00:38:28] Nice thing I did yesterday, she remarked as she came back. Well, if the Mrs. Bedroom Window open when I open the door this morning, I found it beautiful. Chippendale glass Overzat blown off the table and smashed to pieces. Did you hear it?

[00:38:43] Gotthard made no reply in a confused fashion, he was trying to think, accident or not, the fall of the glass had served his purpose.

[00:38:54] Were there such things as accidents or was life a puzzle? A puzzle into which every piece was made to fit fear in the wind? No conscience. And the wind had saved the woman. He must get the powder back from her drawer before she discovered it and denounced him. The medicine he must remember not to take it. He was very ill, seriously ill. He must have taken a chill owing to that panic flight into the garden. Why didn't the doctor come? He had come at last. He was doing something to his chest. It was cold again. The doctor. It was something he wanted to tell him. Hannah and a powder. What was it?



[00:39:51] Later on, he remembered, together with other things that he had hoped to forget. He lay watching an endless procession of memories broken at times by a glance at the doctor, the nurse and Hannah, who were all standing near the bed regarding him. They had been there a long time and they were all very quiet.

[00:40:15] The last time he looked at Hannah was the first time for months that he had looked at her without loathing and hatred. And then he knew that he was dying.

[00:40:39] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

