

Prologue: due to a certain neglect, Henry has passed away at the Argentine National Hospital. The coroner reported that he had eaten a surfeit of boiled chicken and boiled vegetable in the past twenty-four hours and had probably thereby gotten an overdose of water. This is not a legal cause of death in the United States, but it is in Argentina, where for some reason such cases are incredibly frequent.

1. Jean has gotten Henry's body back from Argentina by certified mail. Argentine mail is no more efficient than the Argentine hospital, so that when Henry arrives he is somewhat jellified and unpleasant, and a nauseous scent escapes his casket.

Never one to be daunted by such circumstances, Jean has laid Henry's body out for viewing. She's never liked Henry's relatives much anyway, and she feels she would not mind watching Henry's mother see Henry in his Current Condition.

Out of human decency, however, Jean orders flowers in the hope that their smell will mask other less savoury odors. She goes to the little florists' shop next door to André's pet shop and gets 150 bouquets of flowers, some of which are white and some of which are pale blue. Jean likes pale blue; it reminds her of waiting rooms. The pale blue bouquets cost her \$5 each, the white \$2. If she spent a total of \$360 on the flowers, how many bouquets of each color did she order?

2. After Henry's funeral and interment, Jean goes to his lawyer to enquire about finances. She finds that Henry left absolutely all he owned to her, and so she is now a very wealthy woman. As well as various other goods including jewels, property, antiques, and the Nay mansion, she has \$20,000 in stock in the companies Pearson Perfect Skin Care Products and Cormorant Chinese Silk Importers. She owns 2000 shares in Pearson and 1000 in Cormorant; the value of four shares of Pearson equals half the value of one share of Cormorant. What are the values of the shares?

3. Soon after the funeral, Jean gets a letter in the mail that signed only "Zeckrin." It offers her a part in a very lucrative sort of business if she will only bring in some papers of Henry's. Jean immediately goes and looks at the papers that Mr. Zeckrin apparently wants. She can't make much sense of them, as they seem to be plans of some sort. What she does figure out, however, is that they are plans for banks and other places that are supposed to be secure. She doesn't think that Mr. Zeckrin can be entirely honorable, so she writes a polite and dignified reply to tell him that Henry's papers apparently went with him to Argentina and were lost there, because she can't find them at all.

Then she gets another letter from Zeckrin. It says that he will pay for a ticket to Argentina and give her a "spending allowance,"¹ the total of which will be worth 10,000 smackeroos. All she has to do is look for the papers. Or, if she likes, she can buy her own ticket to Argentina and accept twice the amount of the projected spending allowance when she returns. If a ticket to Argentina costs $\frac{1}{4}$ as much as the spending allowance, what is each worth and how much would Jean profit (after the ticket) if she chose option 2?

¹ Known in less polite circles as a "bribe".

4. She decides to quit the house Henry built for her, because it holds too many poignant memories. As she walks from room to room, she can't help remembering... Henry building walls... Henry putting in the carpet... Henry standing over the piranha bowl with a handful of Joffcub... Henry strangling the cat and drowning the kittens...

Yes, when it comes down to it, in the latter days Henry was a bit ... touched. Jean admits this to herself freely. He would never have gone on that ill-fated trip to Antarctica via Argentina if he had not been a little mad. The coroner's report from Argentina makes slighting mention of a brain tumor, but clearly the Argentine doctor thought that could have had little or no effect on Henry. But perhaps ... ?

So she moves into Uncle Nay's house. It is huge and rambling, and she and Henry never had time to give it a thorough overhaul when it was so suddenly vacated. She clears out for herself a few rooms and makes a mental note to go through the other things later.

She sleeps the first night in a comfortable-seeming room, whose high gothic windows overlook Nay's vast gardens. She is somewhat daunted by the imposing bedposts, and as she crosses the threshold of the room an indescribable feeling of fear and sorrow take hold of her, and she shudders. This emotion is but the impression of a moment, and is as fleeting as it is deep.

During her sleep, however, she is disturbed by terrible dreams. She imagines that she sees ghosts of the dead: her father, drowned in the Abbot River when she was only twelve, shakes his mossy head like some god of an ancient stream, and points his finger at her mother with shaming hatred. His eyes blaze with a fiery fury, and his teeth gnash together. Then, too, Jean dreams Nay, murdered by a person unknown, and his face, arrogant but gentle, floats before her disturbed mind. She awakes, but her waking brings no relief, for she is seized by delirium and fever.

One third of her visions are of her mother and the rest are of her father. After each vision of her mother, Jean takes two aspirin; after each of her father, only one. If she consumed a total of 20 aspirin during her illness, how many visions did she have?

5. For days Jean's life hangs in the balance between life and death; when at last she begins to grow well again, the impressions she has received are indelibly imprinted on her mind, and she cannot help but wonder what tragedy marred her parents' lives, when she was too young even to perceive it.

Omens fall thick and fast thereafter, and seldom does Jean walk any hallway or enter any room, without seeing strange visions, or hearing a distant gurgling of water, or feeling that the paintings watch her and the mirrors mock her footsteps.

Terrified, lost, nearly destroyed in mind and body, emaciated by eternal fasting and moved to tears by the slightest whisper of wind, Jean goes to a psychologist. He asks her probing questions about her parents and her childhood; but all that he says to her creates only a feeling of dread, and gains her no release. She leaves the shrink and goes to a hypnotist, for her belief in supernatural and magnetic powers has already grown great under the influence of The House,

and she thinks that the same powers that cause her haunting may be the instrument of its removal.

In the end she is uncured; but she has spent a vast sum in the pursuit of solace, and fears she can afford no more without jeopardizing her own future, and making certain a life of poverty and starvation. Her mind is too broken for any work, her spirit too dumb for any undertaking.

If she spent 50 hours in therapy with the psychologist and 147 with the hypnotist, at a cost of \$34,400, and if the psychologist's fees are half those of the hypnotist, what did each charge per hour?

Epilogue: (Written in an elegant, lady-like hand, but growing progressively shakier:)

FEBRUARY 1: Today I saw my dear Father's face again, as on the first night of my stay in the House. He seemed more tamed in spirit, almost sorrowful, as though grieving for another. I wondered what disturbed him, when I saw that he held a child in his arms. The child's fair hair hung limply down, and his eyes were wide with an innocence that belongs mostly to angels. His features were not unfamiliar, but bore a marked resemblance to those of my late Beloved Mother.

My father held this child in his arms, and I saw that the boy was Dead. Oh, what horror then possessed my soul! For though dead, the boy raised his stiff arm, and pointed at a figure that lurked in the shadows. It was my mother; her arms were bare, and she wore a dress of black silk, which was very Unseemly. On one arm was the dread Murderer's Mark, the fleur-de-lis, and as my mother reached for the boy, my father tore it away from her. Oh, what can this portend, except that she was guilty of that heinous crime, the murder of a beautiful child, her own son! The boy then seemed to crumble, as though succumbing to years of Bodily Corruption, so that my father held a vile mass of worms and filth. Yet even then he clung to it, sobbing out protestations of Paternal Love...

FEBRUARY 3: Last night was the first time I have had an undisturbed rest since I came to this place; but when I woke, I was bizarrely seized by a spirit alien to me, and my hand was compelled to write, again and again, "What the woman has done, the man shall avenge." But this vengeance, what it should be or how carried out, or on whom, or by whom, all was unknown to me. I woke as from a trance, sobbing out my anguish.

FEBRUARY 9: All is clear to me now – all that has happened since I came to this accursed place, and all that happened in my childhood, when my eyes were too blind to see. My father and mother had a son. Without doubt it is true... I have seen the picture albums, hidden here in the attic, as they must have been when my mother came here on her Second and Most Vile marriage. He is a gentle soul; I can see in his eyes that he never meant harm to any soul. And yet my mother must have killed him. The shock is more than I can bear, but it must be true. The visions I have seen admit of no other interpretation. And indeed, throughout my youth I was conscious of a second presence, always hovering near me, sometimes protective and sometimes pettish and resentful, but always watching my actions with an emotion near jealousy. And in my mind, sometimes, on the awaking from a dream, I heard the whisper of a name, Frederick, that seemed

linked to my own but now without an owner. Could it be that my dead brother had no rest all the time I was young, but watched me and saved me from the fate that was his, and could have been mine?

Oh, mother, what insanity was yours! You must have killed Nay, too, though you were acquitted of the crime. You killed all you loved, even my father, who was as guileless as a dove until the day he saw his son laid stiff and lifeless at his feet. I feel all this to the core of my being, know it as though I had always known it, and yet it sinks my spirits to meditate on it. Yet I cannot avoid the thoughts. Certainly my mother was mad, and almost as certainly my own dear Henry hovered on the brink of an insanity as black and desperate as her own. What a black cloud hovers over my house!

FEBRUARY 20: There is a crawling and rustling sound in the walls. The house must be infested, everywhere I go I hear the sound of paper crunching. It must be insects.

FEBRUARY 29: I feel a fool, and so low that I can barely move my pen. I have traced the insects to their source: the noise is most loud in the basement. And down in the wine cellar it positively roars. What ill omen is this? But I have not the courage to go down and see what is down there.

MARCH 12: I have tried to avoid thinking, but it is not possible. The dreams surround me and crowd my every waking moment. I dare not go down to the wine cellar now, but I am sure, sure beyond doubt that Frederick, my own harmless brother Frederick, lies buried in the bottom of this house and is eaten by insects. And I wonder... why did mother bring him here? And where did she keep him all these years? There was no room in her apartment.

Can he always have been here?

Oh, insects. I dream of insects, millions and millions, with their horrible jaws, chewing away at the body of my brother.

I think now of walking into Nay's Lake, and swallowing all the water I can hold, and so to sink into a dark oblivion. I have been reading over Werther; how is it possible that he, who once moved me to tears of compassion and sincere sympathy, should now seem happy in a lot so much superior to my own?

It will not be understood, when my body is found in the water. Oh let this book be my Testament! I have none other in whom to confide.

MARCH 16: What a lightening of spirit. I am nearly free. The day is lovely, and the birds flit through the air, their graceful wings tracing out arcs of beauty. My soul seems to have refined itself into a pure, all-burning flame. I see nothing but the fairness of the earth; the House seems one vast cobweb that I shall soon shake off, like this mortal body itself; it has no power to fetter me. But the beauties of nature will always be mine; when I am laid in the earth I shall eternally commune with them; flowers of all colors will heap themselves over me, and the restless wind will blow forever clean across my heart. All the past, which is constructed in this evil house, is soon to be gone.

MARCH 17: It is today. Glorious as yesterday, indeed! Farewell, men; farewell vengeful insects. I will cremate you all, with my dead brother, as he deserves.

(Newspaper obituary): The late Mrs. Henry Henrik, née Jean Elise, widow, was found in a lake. An inquiry into the case ruled that the drowning was a suicide. Mrs. Henrik was cremated at the Ergleblatz mortuary and her ashes scattered in the vicinity of her former home in Pine Lake Hills. Her home had burnt to the ground on the day of the suicide; firemen say that this probably took place by her agency.