

# Weird Tales



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Cover by Margaret Brundage

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HENRY AVELINE PERKINS, Associate Editor.



"In the darkness two semi-shapes glided swiftly by, like puffs of smoke from the house."

# The Half-Haunted

By GANS T. FIELD

*Would YOU laugh if something followed you all around your home—  
something cold and sneaky, that wasn't even there  
when you turned your head?*

I went into a house, and it wasn't a house.  
—A. A. MILNE.

**F**OR six months Judge Pursivant had intended to visit that old dwelling with the strange history, but Judge

Pursivant often has trouble finding time to do what he most wants. The fall passed, the winter came. He spent Christmas, not very joyfully, helping the widow of a friend repossess some property at Salem. New Year's Eve found him at Harrison-

ville, where de Grandin and Towbridge wanted his word on translating certain old Dutch documents better left untranslated. Heading west and south toward his home, he passed Scott's Meadows. And, though it was nearly dark and snowy, he could not resist the opportunity to visit Criley's Mill then and there.

A druggist on the little main street gave him directions. The judge drove up a steep ill-paved road, then between hills crowned with naked trees. Eventually he came to an old quarry road and followed it to here, across a rapid brown brook, a creaky bridge led to the place.

By the last rays of the sun, he decided he had either come the wrong way or come too late.

He had heard of a tall, gaunt building, the ruins of a mill house—a place two hundred years old, that looked two thousand. This was almost the opposite—quite new, of brown shingles, low and rambling, with a screened porch and wide windows. The place should have been cheerful, but it was not.

Pursuivant drove across, got out and knocked at the door. Snow began to shimmer down. Lights went on in the front room, and a man opened the door. He was small and slim, with a gray forelock and a lined, shrewd face, reminiscent of the late Will Rogers. He wore a smoking jacket and slippers.

"Yes?" he half challenged.

"Excuse me," replied Pursuivant, hunching his massive shoulders, "but is this Criley's Mill? The haunted house?"

"Haunted?" echoed the man on the threshold. "Why, I—I don't know."

There seemed to be only one thing to say. Pursuivant shook snowflakes from his tawny mustache and said it: "I'm sorry to have troubled you. I seem to have made a mistake."

At once the other changed his manner. "Oh, no, sir. No mistake. This *was* the

place. You see, I built where Criley's Mill was—just finished and moved in on Thanksgiving—look here, won't you come in? I'm sorry if I was abrupt. Just nerves. I didn't know who might be coming to my door—so far away from everything—"

His gaunt little hand caught at Pursuivant's big one. "Come in, sir. Or—wait. It's putting on to snow. I've got a double garage around back. Want to slide your car in with mine? Then we'll have a drink. Maybe a bite to eat."

He wanted Pursuivant to stay. The judge gazed at him with big blue eyes, deceptively innocent. Then he nodded and said, "Thanks. I'll be very glad to stay."

**A**FTER stowing the car, he returned through the snow. The little man still waited at the door to usher him in. "What did you say your name was?"

The judge had not said, but he replied, "Pursuivant. Judge Keith Pursuivant. I'm interested in haunted houses."

"And I'm Alvin Scrope—country editor, retired, bachelor." They were in the front room now, a room designed to answer a man's prayer for comfort. It had cushioned furniture, thick rugs, bright pictures, plenty of light, a shelf of books. But, as outside, the cheer was somehow lacking. "You'll have to pardon me," said Alvin Scrope. "My house boy left here New Year's eve, and I'm running the place alone for a day or so."

From a side table he lifted a bottle of scotch and a syphon. Mixing two highballs, he gave one to Pursuivant. "Snow's coming down harder. You'd better plan to stay the night."

Pursuivant laid aside overcoat and black hat. "You are very kind," he said, wondering why he had been half-rebuffed at first, then almost wheedled into entering. Alvin Scrope dabbed at his forelock.

"Yes, sir," he said, trying to sound

hearty, "I built this right where the old mill stood. How d'you like it?"

The judge fitted his big body into an armchair, and sipped. "I don't quite know yet. I've only come. How do you like it yourself, Mr. Scrope?"

Another dab at the forelock. "To tell the truth, I don't know either." He, too, drank before continuing. "Maybe because I've never had a place of my own before. And I've been used to working, always on the go with my paper—now I'm a little lost with all the slack time on my hands. You know how that is. But when I first saw the spot, with the ruined mill and all, stuck away here, I thought it was as nice a building site as I'd ever heard of."

"I've been told a little about the mill and its legend," ventured Pursuivant, rummaging a pocket for his pipe. At once his host began the tale, as Pursuivant had hoped:

"The place, I understand, was built before the War of Independence. It was owned and run by a man named Criley. He had a wife, a son and a daughter."

"Mind if I take notes?" asked Pursuivant, producing notebook and pen. "Go on, Mr. Scrope."

"Well, the war came. The miller and his son joined Washington's army. The British took New York, and there was a long, hard scrap to see whether they'd stop there or take the rest of the country, too."

PURSUIVANT nodded. He knew that dark, desperate phase of his nation's history. After the first disaster to American arms, the fighting had taken on the somber complexion of raids, ambushes, betrayals. Considerable savagery on both sides. Nathan Hale and John Andre—two fine gentlemen—hanged like felons. Thousands of other tragedies. All the New York area—including this part of New Jersey—stuck full of grim deeds, giving rise to creepy tales.

Scrope went on:

"New York had quite a few Hessian soldiers stationed around—hired to fight the Americans, you know."

Again Pursuivant nodded. His Virginia ancestor had followed Washington in the battle of Trenton. "The Hessians weren't very fierce fighters," he commented.

"There was an exception to that rule," Scrope declared pithily. "Still taking notes, Judge?—I can't tell you this particular Hessian's name, but it comes down in the story how he looked. Big as you, I figure. Burly. He was a famous hunter back home in Germany. Maybe a criminal, joining the army to escape— Anyway, he could beat the Americans at their own game of hunt and shoot."

"That's hard to believe," rejoined Pursuivant. "Some of Washington's men were hard-set old Indian fighters."

"This Hessian outdid the Indians. He'd strip naked—even in winter—and paint himself like a Mohawk and sally out to kill. He was a dead shot, and a devil with sword or hatchet or knife." Scrope paused to bite the end off a cigar. "He could track or stalk anything, and he'd fight two soldiers at a time. Sometimes more. He raided farms and murdered civilians, even women and children. Quite a score he ran up."

Scribbling in his book, the judge could see in his mind one of those fancy-portsraits so often vivid—a naked colossus, streaked with red and black, a heavy-boned face, thick, palé brows over slitted eyes. A belt stuck full of weapons. Had the Hessian looked like that? Pursuivant filled his pipe and thrust it under his mustache. "Go on," he prompted.

"The two women left here at the mill hated and feared that Hessian. They plotted against him. Pretended to be British sympathizers, and scraped an acquaintance."

"That was nervy of them," commented the judge. His mind's eye showed him new

pictures. Probably the daughter made the overture—buxom, rosy-checked on a chill afternoon, she managed to encounter the man of blood on a country lane. The Hessian would be a heavy-handed gallant. His broad, tough face grinned admiringly. The rural beauty, trying not to tremble, would venture a return smile, a curtsey.

"They invited him to dinner," Scrope continued. "He put on his best uniform—"

Strange that Hessian butcher would look in full dress—white small-clothes and gaiters modelling his brawny legs, the red coat with white facings and shiny buttons cramping his barrel torso. How out of place the powdered hair, the tall grenadier cap! But Scrope was getting on to the climax:

"When he sat down at the table, one of the women—mother or daughter, the stories disagree—stuck a serving knife into his back. They got rid of the body somehow—walled it up or buried it in the cellar. But the spirit returned."

"How many saw it?" demanded Pursuivant.

"Many. The mother died of fright, and the daughter of jumping from an attic window, before the year was out. The son committed suicide before he'd been long back from the war—nobody says anything about the father, I guess he was killed in some battle. Well, that disposed of the family. The mill went out of use. There's lots of newer yarns. A girl from Scott's Meadows yonder stayed one night ten years ago, on a dare. Next morning she was roaming around, too crazy to talk."

"And you bought the place?"

"Yes. Tore down the old mill house, and rebuilt on its foundations. Shouldn't that lay any ghosts, Judge Pursuivant?"

"Most rebuilders prefer to burn the haunted place entirely," said the judge. "However, that depends on how much they believe in ghosts. I take it that you don't laugh at these stories."

Scrope almost bit his cigar in two. "Would you laugh," he asked, "if two houseboys quit on you inside of six weeks? If something followed you all around your cellar, something cold and sneaky, that wasn't ever there when you turned around? If you fidgeted all the time, like at a play by Ibsen or a story by Poe? It's no laughing matter, Judge."

Pursuivant leaned forward. "You imagine disturbing sights and sounds?"

"Right. Never quite see or hear them—just a whisper, a shadow in dim places, when I'm all alone here. I wish," and Scrope grew somber, "that I belonged to some classical old church. A priest, with bell, book and candle, would be mighty comforting."

"Just so," agreed Pursuivant. "It so happens that I know an old formula of exorcism. I'm not a clergyman, but I offer it for what it's worth, as charm or psychological clearance."

Scrope frowned, then smiled. The subject was new to him. Pursuivant made haste to be logical: "I'm not trying to make an occult convert out of you, Mr. Scrope. But it seems that a symbol or ceremony might serve as rationalization—a psychological peg to hang your worries on and forget them entirely—"

"Right as a rabbit!" cried Scrope, almost explosively. "Go ahead, Judge. Do it."

Pursuivant set down glass and pipe, and stood up. Scrope also rose from his chair. In so doing he moved backward and stood almost by the darkened door that led to the rear of the house. Pursuivant began solemnly:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch; I forbid you, in heaven's name, his house and home; I forbid you, in the name of God, his blood and flesh, his body and soul. Let all evil return from him and his, unto you and yours, in the name of the Trinity."

He finished, and Scrope's face showed a sudden thankful relief—which went out like a light. Scrope's thin body suddenly grated, reeled. His mouth opened, shouting:

"Let go! Let go!"

HE staggered backward to the door, turned halfway and braced himself against the jamb. He seemed to struggle with something beyond. Pursuivant sprang toward him, and at that instant Scrope was walking shakily back toward the center of the room. His eyes were glassy, his lips slack, his face pale.

"Thought it had me," he panted.

"What?" demanded Pursuivant, quickly pouring whiskey.

"Didn't you see? That big thing with a naked arm—and no eyes—"

"Drink this. I saw nothing."

Scrope drank obediently. Color returned a little. He spoke rapidly, as one who convinces himself of a hopeful fact: "My imagination ran away with me, didn't it?"

"Did it?"

Pursuivant filled Scrope's glass again. Plainly Scrope was trying to save his nerves by chatter. "Oh, it's quite clear, Judge. I've keyed up my imagination to what seems like reality. I was sure some sort of boogey—but if you didn't see it—"

"If I didn't see it," Pursuivant took up Scrope's words, "there is still no proof that it doesn't exist."

Scrope looked blank, and Pursuivant continued, "I take nothing for granted. This looks like the beginning of one of my adventures."

"But look here!" Scrope suddenly went a little wild in his speech. "You were forcing a spell against just that sort of thing. Why should—it—dare to tackle—"

"Desperation. To stave off defeat. Wait here."

He went to the inner door and peered. There was a dim hallway to a kitchen, an

open doorway for a bathroom at the left, and two closed doors to the right. He asked about them.

"Bedrooms," replied Scrope, steadying his voice. "Want a light?"

"No, thanks." Pursuivant entered the hall.

IT WAS like stepping into a fog—into the vapor, for instance, of many damp, filthy coats in a sealed closet. Pursuivant snorted, and walked quickly through to the kitchen, turning on a light. Breathing was comfortable there. The sweat dried on his brow and his tawny mustache.

"All clear?" Scrope was asking.

"So far." The judge gazed around the clean white kitchen, with automatic refrigerator and electric range. It was the most reassuring room so far. He walked back into the hall, then into the rear bedroom.

"That's my room," Scrope informed him, from the parlor door.

Pursuivant waited only a moment in the chamber, which filled the rear quarter opposite the kitchen. Then into the hall yet again, to glance into the bathroom. It was a fight to throw off the smothering spiritual weight hanging in the dim atmosphere. Finally to the closed door of the front bedroom. "Who sleeps here?" he asked, hand on knob.

"You will, if you stay tonight," Scrope replied, and the judge entered.

In the first instant he thought he had been struck—his knees wavered, his brain swam and darkened. The walls—weren't they ruinous, flaking away?—whirled around him in the gloom. But he kept his feet and his head, groped for the light switch, turned it.

He had been wrong. The room was quite modern, cream-papered, and should be bright; but the light was as murky as though it shone through smoke. A neat single bed, a bureau, an armchair—how

could that arrangement cause such a deep shadow in the far corner? Or was it a shadow?

The weight he had felt in the hall was doubled here, crushing him as a diver is crushed by sea-bottom pressures. The switch clicked, though Pursuivant had not touched it. The light went out abruptly.

Something pawed at him through the darkness. A hand—he saw it dimly, but not its arm. Was there an arm? Pursuivant jerked away, but refused to retreat. Now a face hung in the thick dusk—a head, anyway, for he made out the contour only, not the features. But it must have a mouth. For he felt a fanning of tepid breath, heard a mumble that became a word of sorts:

"Raus. . ."

German. *Get out!*

Pursuivant stared at the hanging oval, trying to find eyes to fix with his own. Now another touch, at his shoulder. Light this time. Fluffy. Another voice, so soft as to be felt rather than heard:

"No . . . stay . . . you came to save. . ."

The featureless head became more solid, and a suggestion of body was visible beneath—thick, as big as Pursuivant's own body. Wide-planted columns that might be mist-moulded legs. Again: "*Raus!*"

Pursuivant backed from the room, leaving the door open. He was in the parlor again, wiping his face. He felt better.

Scrope, mixing more drinks, looked at him questioningly. "You felt it too, huh?"

"I felt something. For a moment I saw." The judge paused to marshal his findings. "Who has ever slept in that front bedroom?"

"Nobody. The house-boy—before he left—had a lean-to off the kitchen. You're inaugurating my guest room tonight, judge. Here, have a drink."

They touched glasses and drank. Then they crossed the heavy-aired hall to the kitchen. Scrope quickly cooked a meal,

simple but hearty—ham, eggs, home-fried potatoes, strong coffee. They ate at a white-topped table. Pursuivant acted as though fear had not come to him that night.

"I suggested that the Hessians weren't good fighters," he observed, holding out his cup, "but they were Germanic—and Germany has been the home of witches and devils. Read *Faust*, read *Phantasmagoria*, read the Brothers Grimm. And in a file of *Old New York*—out of print now—I found a story of how two Hessian soldiers bewitched a Manhattan farmer."

"True story?"

"It's in the reminiscences of George Rapaelje. That's a respected name in old New York history. Rapaelje claims to have seen it happen. Yes, and other Hessians—settling in Pennsylvania and New Jersey—worked magic."

"Of course. Look at that Headless Horseman yarn of Irving's," contributed Scrope. "Judge, you've got something. If that spell you recited—I wish you hadn't, for it didn't work."

Pursuivant looked earnestly at Scrope. "I didn't finish. It must be said three times, an hour apart." He drew out a thick gold watch. "And an hour has passed, or nearly."

Quite steadily, if not casually, he walked into the hall. Scrope came just behind. Again Pursuivant felt the baleful weight and closeness. Undaunted, he began to recite for the second time:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch; I forbid you, in heaven's name, his house and home; I forbid—"

It had come heavily, noiselessly, out of the front bedroom. A hunchbacked hulk of it, that straightened and showed itself as tall and powerful as Pursuivant.

The judge knew amazement, complete but rational. Even in the half-light, he made out only a silhouette, roughly human,

vague at the edges—clothed or naked, he could not say. As before, a faceless head lifted itself on broad shoulders. Only the fingers of the hand were distinct. They spread, advanced. Thus his eyes summed up, while he kept reciting the exorcism, down to its end:

"—all evil return from him and his unto you and yours, in the name of the Trinity."

It blundered forward, clutching.

The doorway was no place to fight in, not even if the foe were normal. Pursuivant retreated, quickly and lightly for all his bearlike weight. Behind him, Scrope had run whimpering to the back door, tried to tear it open without unlocking.

"Come on!" Scrope was crying. "We'll get out of here!"

"Wait!" called Pursuivant in reply. "Look!" And Scrope paused and turned back.

"The thing's gone," said Pursuivant. "It vanished before my eyes as I retreated."

He clasped his big hands behind his back, scowling. Something was wrong here; absolutely unconventional—for there is a certain unconventionality about demons and their ways.

How often did the old books say that the best way to quell a specter is to face it dauntlessly? Yet here was the exact reverse. The foe had faded only when he and Scrope fled. He glared at the empty hall, as though to read there an answer to the enigma.

But the hall was not empty. In it was another pale suggestion of shape, slender this time. And the softer voice he had sensed in the bedroom:

"Again—again—"

It, too, vanished.

Scrope drew alongside of Pursuivant, peering. "Judge, were you and I seeing things? Both of us?"

Pursuivant actually grinned, and shook

his tawny head. "No chance of that, Scrope. People who see things don't see the same things at the same time."

"Group-hypnotism," began Scrope, as though the word might be a comfort, but again Pursuivant gestured a demur.

"I believe in many strange things, Scrope, but not in that. Don't go back into the hall. Sit here, in the kitchen. I begin to understand—to guess, at least."

They sought their chairs. Pursuivant faced the door.

"The old, familiar situation, worn threadbare by writers of fantasy," he pronounced. "The murdered one haunts the place of his destruction." He stared hard into the hallway, wondering if he had really seen a stir of movement there. "Anyway, it's here—spiteful and harmful, able to attack—"

"That's right," nodded Scrope, sighing. "He appeared to me, then you, then to both of us."

"Which brings us to point number two. The spell is going to work."

Scrope glanced up in almost prayerful eagerness. "You're sure?"

"Not quite sure of anything in life or death, but this thing's desperate. It's trying to fight us. I gather, from what you tell me, that it never manifested itself so strongly before—"

Scrope was nodding eagerly. "Sure. It's been around here, a sort of edgy atmosphere that drove my house-boys away—but nothing like this. As you say, it's playing the game for keeps now."

"It's in danger," replied Pursuivant, his blue eyes remaining fixed on the hallway. "So are we. But it's alone in its fight, and we have friends."

"Friends?" echoed Scrope.

"I saw another shape, or near-shape. Twice. It doesn't threaten. It pleads. It wants us to go ahead and win."

Scrope gazed at Pursuivant. "I think I saw it, too. But if it's a ghost—"



"Don't you realize that a ghost might want release? And others beside the Hessians found a tragic death here. Two women, didn't you say—I heard a voice ask for the final repetition of my spell. *Again*, it said."

"We-ell—" began Scrope uncertainly.

"The spirits of those two women are here, too," said Pursuivant confidently. "The evil of the place is too strong to let them escape, even though they're dead."

"Judge!" gasped Scrope, very pale. He swallowed twice, and continued:

"You realize something? If something happens to us—"

"Exactly," agreed Pursuivant, very steadily. "We'd be caught, too. For all eternity. I realize it perfectly. That is why we must push this thing through to the end—and win."

He rose once again and went to the door. Foot on the sill, he leaned ever so narrowly in. Then he drew quickly back, like a spectator from the cage of an angry beast.

"Still here," he reported. "Ready for us. It, too, knows that the showdown's at hand."

Scrope studied the doorway, eyes and lips hard. "I've got a theory. It stays in that part of the house, the middle part. Might it live in the cellar?"

"Why?" asked Judge Pursuivant.

"Because the cellar—the old basement—lies only under the bathroom and the hall and that guestroom, with only a bit lapping under parts of the kitchen and—"

"By thunder, you have it!" interrupted Pursuivant excitedly.

While Scrope stared, the judge fished his pen from his vest pocket. He began to sketch, on the table-top.

"See here," he lectured as he drew. "Your house is sprawling—great big rooms, making a wide base, like this." He outlined a square. "And the cellar is rather centrally located, so." He marked

in a smaller rectangle, which took a middle slice of the square.

"Yes. That's about like it," nodded Scrope. "What are you getting at?"

"Don't you see, man?" cried Pursuivant, almost roughly. "That basement shows the limits of the old house—narrow and high, just as this new one is broad and low. The spirit haunted the old place. Your house takes in that original territory, and some new ground as well."

He threw down the pen.

"You're only half haunted, Scrope."

Understanding dawned into the little man's face. He sprang to his feet. He began a glad jabber:

"That changes everything. We're safe. If we don't go in there—"

"Oh, but we're going in there."

Scrope looked wide-eyed, scared. Pursuivant elaborated:

"The last recital of the spell will take place right in that thing's den—right on his own dunghill, so to speak. We'll destroy him forever, where he can't seek refuge from us."

**A**GAIN an hour was passed. The two rose from their chairs in the kitchen.

"It's time," said Scrope, looking at his wrist watch. "Judge, must I come in there with you?"

"You must," Pursuivant assured him. "Into that front bedroom. The creature must face his final exorcism."

He walked to the hall, and in. Scrope kept close behind, on feet that sounded amazingly heavy for so small a body. They stood together in the hall's dimness.

It was no longer the hall, new and narrow and fresh-painted in light color. It was a corner of something else.

Despite the gloom, Pursuivant could see plainly that the walls had somehow fallen away. He stood as in a wide and ruinous apartment, with shattered windows extending almost to the high ceiling. The half-

rotted floor boards were strewn with rubbish, like plaster fallen away from ancient laths. Wind—there was surely wind here, in the very center of Scrope's snug home. Yes, wind, blowing through the cracks in this big wrecked place to which they had somehow been wafted. . . .

"Judge," breathed Scrope, "I know. This is the old mill—it looked like this, before they tore it down—"

"Quiet," bade Pursuivant. He moved in the direction where he remembered the front bedroom's door to be. It was before him now—he felt its knob under his hand though he could not see it. Hinges creaked. They could walk farther into the room that had been part of the razed mill.

Again things were changed to their eyes.

A sort of blue-green light, such as filters down to the bottom of deep water, showed them spacious floor, high ceiling, great windows—but no more in ruins. The room was suddenly fresh, solidly built, a room for living. Painted plaster, broad white sills and jambs, some furry pelts spread like rugs—and furniture. Even in the weird soft glimmer, Pursuivant knew valuable antiques when he saw them. Yonder table was such—dark, stout, gleaming. The chairs, too. The table was spread with white linen, set with silver and china. And somebody—something—was seated there, as if to eat.

The Hessian—of course. Or what had been the Hessian.

It faced them across the table. Now Pursuivant knew where the watery glow came from.

That semi-shape exuded it, like touch-wood. He could dimly make out a clarification of outline and detail—a dress coat of ancient British style, powdered hair, elegance strangely out of place upon such a brute body. The most light came from around the head, which still did not have a face.

Pursuivant began to recite once more:

"All ye evil spirits, I forbid you this man's bed, his couch—"

The blue light dimmed. The shape rose and came toward them.

"Scrope," muttered Pursuivant, between phrases of his formula. "Lights—turn them on—"

He put himself where the approaching shape would find him. "I forbid you, in heaven's name—" he continued.

Strong hands seized him, hands as cold as marsh ice. He had a sense of filth and ferocity being hurled at him. He fought back.

**JUDGE KEITH PURSUIVANT** was big, strong and cunning, but here was his match. It worked those cold hands to his throat, striving to shut off his breath and the words he spoke. He heard it panting and snarling, like the unknown animals of which one dreams. His own fists struck for that featureless face, battering it backward upon its cloudy shoulders, but the thing wrestled closer and closer, trying to throttle him.

"The lights—won't work!" Scrope was screaming. He struck a match, set it to a scrap of paper he whisked out of his pocket. This little torch he held aloft.

The rosy light dominated the blue, and Scrope saw plainly the thing that Pursuivant grappled. He screamed louder, and dropped the blazing paper. It floated sideways, into some sort of a wall hanging. A stronger flame leaped up. Pursuivant caught the hard, chill wrists of his enemy and tore himself free.

"—unto you and yours, in the name of Trinity!" he finished.

Then he wheeled abruptly, seized and lifted Scrope, and hurried him away. They found themselves in the parlor, the room they had known before. Behind them flames gushed and roared, like a blast furnace.

Scrope, set on his feet again, seemed

ready to faint. Pursuivant shook sense and steadiness back into him.

"Come on," he ordered. "Keep moving. Outside. This place is burning like a wicker basket."

THEY reached the outside, and Pursuivant let Alvin Scrope lean against a tree for support. He himself hurried to the double garage. He started and brought out first one, then the other of the cars, parking them at a point safe from any flying sparks or embers.

He returned to his companion. The flames now burst from the open parlor windows, licking at the clapboards and shingles outside. Snow fell but scantily, barely enough to make a hissing in the heat.

Scrope shook himself, like a dog coming out of water. He was getting command over his fear-crumbling spirit.

"Hadn't we better get to a phone somewhere?" he suggested. "There's a volunteer fire department in town—"

"No," said Pursuivant. "No fire departments. Let that house burn to the ground."

"To the ground?" Scrope's face looked stronger in the red light. "Yes, of course. You're exactly right. No more ghosts after fire. I can build again."

"Build, and be at peace. Let it burn, I say. We'll drive the cars to Scott's Meadows, and stay at the little inn there. And tomorrow you can come and stay with me at my home until you catch hold of your affairs again."

"Thanks. I will."

They fell silent. In the darkness, no longer so chilly, came a rustle of passing. A semi-shape—two semi-shapes—glided swiftly by, like puffs of smoke from the house.

*Thank you*, Pursuivant felt gentle cries of joy, more in his heart than in his ears. *Thank you—*

They were gone.

Scrope, too, had been aware of that passing. "I guess," he ventured, "that the spirits of those poor women are set free."

From the heart of the red rage of flame that now possessed all the house came suddenly a sound—a shout, a roar, a scream—recognizable as human and masculine.

Scrope faltered and swore. "That—was the Hessian?"

"It is what was the Hessian," agreed Pursuivant, gazing at the fire.

Another peal of sound. Full of horror—full of agony.

"Why does he stay?" quavered Scrope. "Those others thanked us for setting them free—why does he hang on there until he's burned clear loose from—" He broke off. "I know," he said, gaining command of himself again.

Pursuivant turned toward him. "What, then?"

"The women were killers—yes. But they killed for a good purpose. They knew they'd find some kind of happiness now that they're not held here. But," and Scrope, too, faced the fire, "the other thing has nothing like that to expect. He hangs onto the burning den. Because, when he leaves, it'll be for—for—"

"Something much worse," finished Pursuivant for him.

Once again the suffering voice mounted up and shook the night. Then it died to a wail, a rattle, it died to nothing. It was silent.

The flames flapped like banners of victory. They seemed cleaner and more joyous.

Pursuivant and Scrope suddenly shook hands.