

THOUGHTAUDIO



THE JUDGE'S HOUSE

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Produced by ThoughtAudio.com

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THE JUDGE'S HOUSE

When the time for his final college examination drew near, Harold Whitewater made up his mind to find an isolated place to study by himself. In thinking about the right place, he first thought of the seaside, but then realized that the attractions of the seaside would distract him from his studies. Then the other extreme of the rural countryside came to his mind next. But, as he reflected on this idea, he realized that he would dread total rural isolation. In the end, he resolved to find some unpretentious little town where there would be nothing to distract him and still just enough of civilization to not drive him stir crazy.

Next, he needed to decide which small town would be appropriate. His first thought was to ask some college friends for some ideas. Then he realized that if he took suggestions from his friends they would recommend places familiar to them and, more than likely, filled with familiar acquaintances or family members that he would end up having to entertain in some manner other. Whitewater needed absolute seclusion from his friends and friend's of friends, so he could completely concentrate on his studies.

He decided to search for a place by himself - without any help from anyone. In fact, he did not mention his plans to any of his friends, or tell them where he was going. For the remainder of his trip he would call himself Malcom Malcolmson to ensure remaining undisturbed or by any chance encounter by anyone who might recognize his famous name.

Once deciding on his name change, Malcolmson, as he is now called, felt the best way to find the ideal place was to have fate dictate the final destination. He decided to pack his bags with some clothes and his books, and catch the next train leaving the station without knowing where it was going.

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After traveling for three hours, the train stopped at a small town called Benchurch. As he looked out the window of the train, the town immediately stuck him as the optimal spot for his requirements. As he stepped off the train, he felt satisfied that he had obliterated his tracks so well from his friends that he was sure of having a peaceful and unobstructed time to concentrate on his studies.

As Malcolmson scanned the main street of Benchurch, he concluded the small town was perfect in every way. He decided the best thing to do was find an inn for the even, and then search for a house to rent the next day. He started down the main street of the town, and finally came upon the Good Traveler Inn. He peeked inside, and found that the inn mirrored the quaint, comfortable feeling of the small town. He rang the bell at the desk, and a nice, middle-aged woman came from a back room. Malcolmson asked for a quiet room, exchanged payment in cash for keys and went to his room to settle in for the night. As he opened the door to his room, he flung open the curtains, opened the window, and flung himself on the bed for a short nap.

Malcolmson woke up as the sun was beginning to set. He realized that he had not eaten all day, and decided to have dinner at a local pub. As he ordered his dinner, he asked the waiter where he could find a house to rent for a month or so. The waiter told Malcolmson that Benchurch was a market town, and every three weeks hosted excessive crowds.

But for the remainder of the twenty-one days, it was as like a deserted ghost town. When the market is not in town, there are many places available, but then all the rooms fills up and the town transforms into a roaring storm of excitement.

Malcolmson explained to the waiter that he needed a quiet place, undisturbed by the market's noise during his whole stay. The waiter thought for a moment, grew pale, and

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told Malcolmson that there was only one place he could think of that fit that description. It was called the Judge's House, but, he added, it comes with haunting price. Malcolmson dismissed the superstitious warning, and convinced the waiter that if he gave him the address to this ghostly house, his tip would reflect his appreciation. The waiter gave him the address, but refused Malcolmson's tip, as he nervously removed the empty plates from his table.

Early the next morning, Malcolmson began his search for the Judge's House. With address in hand, he would stop and ask the next person he saw directions to the Judge's House. As soon as he mentioned the name of the house, without exception, each person would raise their hand, point in a direction, bow their head to the ground and walk nervously away. It was if the mere mention of the house's name carried a strange and eerie curse.

Finally, as if by chance, Malcolmson found the Judge's House. On first glance, it satisfied his wildest ideas of what he was looking for in a study hide-away. It was an old, rambling, heavy-built house of the Jacobean style, with heavy gables and windows, unusually small, and set higher than was customary in such houses. It was surrounded with a massively built, high brick wall. In fact, on closer examination, it looked more like a fortified house than an ordinary dwelling.

But all these things pleased Malcolmson. "Here," he thought, "is the very spot I have been looking for. And, just as the waiter suggested, it is not occupied. I will find the rental agent, and move in as soon as possible.

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Malcolmson easily located the rental agent, Mr. Carnford, a local lawyer. He was a genial old gentleman, and frankly confessed his delight at anyone being willing to live in the house.

"To tell you the truth," said he, "I am only too happy, on behalf of the owners, to let anyone have the house, rent free, for a term of years, if for no other reason than to have the local people get use to the fact that it is inhabited. It has been empty so long that some kind of absurd prejudice has grown up around it. The best way to change this perception is to have someone occupy it – especially if," he added with a sly glance at Malcolmson, "he were a fine gentleman and scholar like yourself."

Malcolmson politely refused any thought of renting it for a long time, knowing that in a month he would be back at school. But, to ensure that his immediate need to find a place was satisfied, he paid in cash for three months' rent in advance. The agent handed happily him the keys, saying, "The house is yours." No more was spoken about the strangeness surrounding the house.

He went back to the Good Traveler's Inn and rang the bell. The kind lady he saw the night before appeared from the back room. He introduced himself, and she in turn introduced herself. Her name was Mrs. Whitham, the manager of the Inn. An investment group owned the Inn. She managed the Inn's operations and in turn received a small salary and a room located in the rear of the reception desk.

Malcolmson asked what the Inn could provide for his stay at the Judge's House. As soon as she heard where he was staying, she threw up her hands in amazement.

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"Not in the Judge's House!" she said, and grew pale as she spoke. "With all the places we have for temporary boarders in this town, why did you choose the one house that carries the curse of the devil?"

He explained his situation, how the college examines he was studying for where the most important in his college career with the results determining his future opportunities in his field. He needed to concentrate on his studies like never before and could not be disturbed by the market's noisy crowds expected in a few weeks.

Mrs. Whitham replied, "Well, I understand your future is at stake, and it does get crowded on Main Street. Still, caressing the devil's shadow for the sake of quiet doesn't make sense either."

Malcolmson was not a superstitious man and brushed off her talk as fabled myths that abundantly grow up in small towns such as these. As an educated man of mathematics and science, he knew better than to fall victim to these lower class fairy tales.

Mrs. Whitman sensed his disbelief and wanting to convince Malcolmson of her credibility continued by explaining, "You know the Judge was a man who hated everyone that came into contact with him, except his own aristocratic kind. He hated anything new, he hated those outside of his class, he hated anything with a thought of its own, and he mostly hated the young with their bright ideas. The rich men of the day kept him in power to guarantee their own right."

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The judge ensured no one would pass through his gate without a severe severance to his ideals, and he was backed by his mob. His mob became quiet when he was present, and always made obnoxious noises when he was out of their site.

They were a good team, allying with the devil to ensure their rule. On his deathbed, the judge claimed he would never leave his home or relinquish his power to those whom he hated. And this is the legend that lasts until this day.”

Malcolmson listened intently but with an aloof, almost condescending air. He felt that being from such a prestigious college provided him a special understanding that people living in remote and detached places such as Benchurch could not comprehend. These are simple people and honor superstitious legends as an antidote to isolation. Exaggerated events become legends and myths to entertain the common mind, to keep them motivated to continue their mundane lives. Malcolmson felt above the rumors of devils and ghosts. He was a modern man, a man of science, mathematics and literacy. In fact, his presence in Benchurch could help elevate the thinking of the townspeople - if he felt the urge.

Malcolmson responded to Mrs. Whitham, "But, my dear Mrs. Witham, you should not be so concerned about me! A man who is studying for the Mathematical Tripos, the final honors examination at the university in mathematics, has too much to think about to be disturbed by any of talk about a Judge's promise to induce supernatural evil after his own death. Death is a finite matter, and, as far as science is concerned ends there. No man, however powerful in life, can conserve his being, walk the earth, much less create a menace in an old house.

The nature of my work is too exact and prosaic to allow any order of my mind to be distracted by superstitious mysteries of any kind.

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Harmonical Progression, Permutations and Combinations, and Elliptic Functions are sufficient mysteries for me!"

Mrs. Witham nodded in resignation. She was impressed with Malcolmson, even though she still held firmly inside her soul that the legend of the Judge's house held more sway than he would give it. Nevertheless, she agreed to help him get settled in the house, find him a housekeeper, and provide food for his stay. They agreed upon the sum and Malcolmson began to prepare for his stay at the Judge's House.

As he packed his bags and books, the bellman of the Inn gathered them in front and hailed a carriage. Meanwhile Mrs. Whitham called for the kitchen to prepare food and called for maids to prepare a bed for shipment to the Judge's house. No matter how she felt about the house, a bright young gentleman should have hot meals and should not be sleeping in a bed over a hundred years old. When the carriage arrived, both Malcolmson and Mrs. Whitham got in.

"Why, you don't have to come with me, Mrs. Whitham. I can manage with the housekeeper you provided. I will pay you the same, of course, unless your curiosity has gotten the best of you and you would like to lay eyes on the place yourself."

"Well, Mr. Malcolmson, I pride myself on my service, and merely want to ensure that everything is in place for your stay. Although, I must admit, that by viewing the Judge's House, I can provide future guests with the value of first hand accounts of the devil's exploits. I assure you Mr. Malcolmson; it is only because I want to ensure value to my customers that I come with you."

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As the carriage arrived at the old house, everyone looked erratically in each other's eyes, moving in staccato movements toward the house. As they entered the front door, the lack of any demonic intervention seemed anti-climatic. It appeared to be just a dusty old home, in need of attention, and come cleaning. The tension of the group lessened. The food was properly placed, Malcolmson selected the great dining room as his main living quarters, and the bed set down in the corner of the room.

The doorbell rang, and Mrs. Dempster, the cleaning lady recommended by Mrs. Whitham arrived. Mrs. Dempster did not show the slightest bit of fear of the old house, arriving only a month before from London. The death of her husband, and the loss of her son from the fever, caused her to move to Benchurch to forget the pain of her loss. She introduced herself, and quietly began to clean the room.

Mrs. Whitham scanned the room with a critical eye and finally muttered, "I will tell you this Mr. Malcolmson: There is something strange in the air of this room. It strikes me that the devil has found a home and waits for its unsuspecting prey. I know you think I am an old, countrywoman with no brains. But, I tell you, it doesn't take brains to see what I see. And what I see is not good, but evil. I hope your books will protect you, for surely I can't." With that sullen note, she left back to the Good Traveler's Inn.

Mrs. Dempster sniffed in a superior manner as the Mrs. Whitham disappeared, thinking Mrs. Whitham was merely being rude and unappreciative of Malcolmson's generosity.

"This is just a dusty and dirty place, that's all. If anyone would have their sense about them, they would have cleaned it long ago. I ain't scared of the bogies in this house."

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"I'll tell you what it is, sir," she said, "Bogies are all kinds and sorts of things -- except Bogies! Rats and mice, and beetles and creaky doors, and loose slates, and broken panes, and stiff drawer handles that stay out when you pull them and then fall down in the middle of the night. Look at the woodwork of the room! It is old -- hundreds of years old! Do you think there are no rats and beetles there? And do you imagine, sir, that you won't see any of them? Rats is bogies, I tell you, and bogies is rats, and don't think anything else. Given a good cleaning, most the bogies leave on their own, with a good soaking of soap and water."

"Mrs. Dempster," said Malcolmson gravely, making a polite bow, "you are as brave as an Arthurian Knight of the Round Table. No Bogie could stand in front of you and expect to live to tell about it. Your views on the supernatural are in concord with mine, although I have to admit from very different perspectives."

"Well sir, I've only been in town a short time, and my sadness brings an awareness of life, not death. I believe my son and husband have gone to the light of heaven. If I harbor the thoughts of darkness, then I would find despair my sparing partner. I prefer to clean a house and not die of sadness."

"Mrs. Dempster, I can't imagine anything but a clean floor and a straighten room to affect your sense of life," replied Malcolmson.

The old woman laughed heartily. "Ah, you young gentlemen from educated worlds," she said, "your wit bring a special charm to odd circumstances. I wonder how the world turns sometimes with such divergence in our ways." With that, she set to work cleaning the large room.

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Malcolmson decided to take a walk. He grabbed a book from the pile of packages left at the foot of the front door and began to settle himself into the objective of his trip – studying for his final examines. He wandered around for a few hours, enjoying the town he had chosen, his book beginning to cast its spell and draw him into the mental cognitions of learning. When he arrived back at the Judge's House, Mrs. Dempster had swept and tidied his room, started a fire burning the hearth, the lamps lit and the table spread with a delicious looking dinner. "This is indeed comfort," he said, and vigorously rubbed his hands in anticipation of his meal.

When he had finished his supper, and lifted the tray to the other end of the great oak dining-table, he got out his books again, put fresh wood on the fire, trimmed his lamp, and sat himself down to a stretch of hard work. He went on without a pause until about eleven o'clock, when he knocked off for a bit to fix his fire and lamp, and to make himself a cup of tea.

He had always been a tea-drinker, and during his college life many times he had stayed late at work drinking his tea. The rest was a great luxury to him, and he enjoyed it with a sense of delicious voluptuous ease. The renewed fire leaped and sparkled, and threw quaint shadows through the great old room.

And as he sipped his hot tea, he reveled in the sense of isolation from his usual surroundings and his college friends. It was then, that he began to notice, for the first time, how much noise the rats were making.

"Surely," he thought, "they could not have been making that noise the whole time I was studying. If they were, I would have noticed it."

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Suddenly, as the noise increased, he convinced himself that the noise had just started and wasn't there before. It was evident that at first the rats had been frightened at the presence of a stranger, and the light of the fire and lamp, but that as the time went on they had grown bolder and were now displaying themselves, as was their natural inclination.

The rats were very lively and made a cacophony of strange noises. Up and down the old woodwork, over the ceiling and under the floor they raced, gnawed and scratched! Malcolmson smiled to himself as he recalled the saying of Mrs. Dempster, "Bogies is rats and rats is bogies!"

Finally, as the tea began to have its effect of intellectual and nervous stimulus, he felt relief in tackling another spurt of work and in the sense of security that it gave him. But before he started he wanted to take one good look around the room, just to be sure. He grabbed his lamp and began shining it into sections of the room. As the light illuminated the room, he wondered why such a quaint and beautiful old house such as this, had been neglected for so long.

The carvings of the oak on the panels of the woodwork represented master craftsmanship. The work on the doors and windows was beautiful with a rare, meritorious quality. There were some old pictures on the walls.

However, their surface was coated with dust and dirt so thick, that he could not distinguish any detail in them, even though he held his lamp as high as he could over his head.

As he went around the room, he saw a hole at the base of the wall blocked for a moment by the face of a rat with its bright eyes glittering in the light. In an instant, the rat was gone, and a squeak and a scamper followed. The thing that struck him most, however,

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was the rope of the great alarm bell on the roof that hung down in a corner of the room on the right-hand side of the fireplace.

Although he was fascinated with the room, he realized he had to get back to his studies. He pulled a great high-backed carved oak chair close to the hearth and sat down to his last cup of tea. He stoked the fire, and nestled back into his work. For a short time, the continual scampering of the rats disturbed him, but then the noise buried itself into the background. He became so immersed in his work that everything in the world, except the problem that he was trying to solve, passed away from him.

He suddenly looked up, the problem he was working on still unsolved, and sensed that it was the hour before the dawn, a time of dread to doubtful life. The noise of the rats had ceased when he realized that the lack of the rat's noise disturbed him. The fire had fallen low, but still it threw out a deep red glow. As he looked around pensively, he resumed his studies, in spite of the room's cool indifference. He looked up for a moment in thought, when his eyes drifted to the great high-backed carved oak chair. There sitting on the chair was an enormous rat, glaring at him with ominous eyes. He made a motion to it to chase it away, but the rat did not stir. Then he made the motion of throwing something.

Still it did not stir, instead showing its grating white teeth angrily. Its cruel eyes shone in the lamplight with an added vindictiveness, as if it meant to harm rather than protect.

Malcolmson drew back intuitively, and instinctively seized the poker from the hearth and lunged toward the rat in an attempt to kill it. Before, however, he could strike the rat, with a squeak that sounded like the concentration of hate, the rat jumped upon the floor, and, running up the rope of the alarm bell, disappeared in the darkness beyond the range

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of the green-shaded lamp. Instantly, as the giant rat disappeared, the noisy scampering of the rats in the walls began again.

By now, Malcolmson couldn't keep his mind on the problem he was trying to solve and as a shrill cockcrow outside beaconing the approach of morning, his mind became numb and he draped himself into his bed and went to sleep.

He slept so sound that even when Mrs. Dempster came into his room he did not wake up. She tidied up the place, prepared his breakfast ready, and then tapped on his shoulder. He opened his eyes, dazed, but glad to see the sunshine. He was still a little tired after his hard night's work, but a strong cup of tea soon freshened him up. He ate his breakfast, and asked Mrs. Dempster to fix him some sandwiches for his daily walk. He wanted to spend the entire day outside studying for his examine and did not plan to come home at dinnertime. He spent the day strolling in the beautiful countryside, stopping occasional to study his books and make notes. He spent the greater part of the day studying his Astrological Physics.

On his way back to the Judge's house, he stopped at the Good Traveler's Inn to see Mrs. Whitham and thank her for her excellent service and support. When she saw him coming through the bay window she came out to meet him and asked him in. She was excited to see him, although when she looked at him closely she couldn't help but say, "You look a little pale this morning Malcolmson. You must not overdo it, even if you are here for the purpose of re-learning your entire curriculum."

They both laughed. She continued, "If you work your brain to the breaking point, there will b no need for your final exam."

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"Well, I have to tell you, it's not the ghost of the Judge that's going to drive me insane, but the noise of the rats that haunt the place," chided Malcolmson. "There was one wicked-looking-old-devil that sat up on my own chair by the fire, and wouldn't go until I took the poker to him, and then he ran up the rope of the alarm bell and hid somewhere up in the wall or in the ceiling -- I couldn't see where, it was so dark."

"It seems even the rats are enchanted by the demon that lives in the house," said Mrs. Whitham, "That rat may be the devil himself, coming to the aid of the Judge. Just take care, Malcolmson."

Malcolmson began to laugh. Her sincere assessment of his situation seemed to put everything in a humorous perspective. "Oh, forgive me," said Malcolmson after a short time. "Don't think I trying to be rude, but the idea was too much for me -- that the old devil himself was on the chair last night!" And at the thought he laughed again. He looked at his watch and realized he was running late for dinner. He said goodbye to Mrs. Whitham and scurried back the old house.

This evening the scampering of the rats began earlier, and had actually been going on before his arrival. It seemed to cease only because his sudden presence disturbed them. He felt the noise was becoming a nuisance, but needed to shrug it off because of his need to study for his examines. He was hungry and was anxious to eat dinner. After dinner, he sat by the fire for a while and had a smoke, and then, having cleared his table, began to work as he did before. Tonight the rats disturbed him more than they had done on the previous night.

How they scampered up and down and under and over! How they squeaked and scratched and gnawed! How they, getting bolder by degrees, came to the mouths of their holes and

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to the chinks and cracks and crannies in the walls until their eyes shone like tiny lamps as the firelight rose and fell. But to him, now that he had become accustomed to them, their eyes were not wicked, only their playfulness touched him. Sometimes the boldest of them made came out on the floor or along the moldings of the woodwork.

When their noise became too annoying, Malcolmson would make a sound to frighten them, hitting the table with his hand and giving a fierce "Hsh, hsh," so that they fled straight to their holes.

This was how the early part of the night wore on. And despite the noise Malcolmson got more and more immersed in his work. All at once he stopped, as on the previous night, overcome by a sudden silence. There was not the faintest sound of gnaw, or scratch, or squeak. The silence was like the sound of a grave.

He remembered the odd occurrence of the previous night, and instinctively he looked at the chair standing close by the fireside. And then a very chilling sensation ran through his body. There, on the great-old-high-backed-carved-oak-chair, beside the fireplace, sat the same enormous rat, steadily glaring at him with sinister eyes.

Instinctively he took the nearest thing to his hand, a book of logarithms, and flung it at the ominous rat. The badly aimed book missed its mark. The rat did not stir. So again, Malcolmson chased after the rat with a poker. The rat fled up the rope of the alarm bell, not so much in fear but more as an wraithlike enticement. Strangely, the departure of the giant rat was instantly followed by the renewal of the noise made by the general rat community. On this occasion, as on the previous one, Malcolmson could not see at what part of the room the rat disappeared, since the green shade of his lamp left the upper part of the room in darkness and the fire had burned low.

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He looked at his watch and found it was close to midnight. He stoked the fire and made himself his nightly pot of tea. He had gotten through a fair amount of work, and decided he was entitled to a cigarette. So he sat on the great-carved – oak-chair before the fire and enjoyed it.

While he was smoking, he began to wonder where the big rat disappeared to and decided that the first thing tomorrow he would get a rattrap. Accordingly, he lit another lamp and placed it so that it would shine into the right-hand corner of the wall by the fireplace. Then he got all the books he had with him, and placed them close to him ready to throw at the vermin if he appeared again.

Finally, he lifted the rope of the alarm bell and placed the end of it on the table, fixing the extreme end under the lamp. As he handled it he could not help noticing how pliable it was, especially for such a strong rope and one that had not be in use for such a long time. "You could hang a man with this rope," he thought to himself. When he finished prepping the corner, he looked around, and said confidently, "There now, my friend, I think this time we will learn something about you!"

He then began his work again, and though, as before, somewhat disturbed at first by the noise of the rats, soon lost himself in his proposition and problems.

Again, his attention suddenly turned his attention to his immediate surroundings. This time, it was not only the sudden silence that got his attention, there was also a slight movement of the rope, and the lamp moved. Without stirring, he looked to see if his pile of books was within range, and then cast his eye along the rope. As he looked, he saw the great rat drop from the rope onto the oak armchair and sat there glaring at him.

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He raised a book in his right hand, and taking careful aim, flung it at the rat. The rat, with a quick movement, sprang aside and dodged the missile. Then he took another book, and a third, and flung them one after the other at the rat, but each time unsuccessfully. At last, as he stood with a book poised in his hand to throw, the rat squeaked and seemed afraid. This made Malcolmson more eager than ever to strike the rat, and the book flew and struck its mark with a resounding blow.

The gave a terrified squeak, and after first giving his pursuer a terrible, malevolent look, ran up the chair-back and made a great jump to the rope of the alarm bell and ran up it like lightning.

The lamp rocked under the sudden strain, but it was heavy and did not topple over. Malcolmson kept his eyes on the rat, and saw it by the light of the second lamp leap to a molding on the wall and disappear through a hole in one of the great pictures which hung on the wall, obscured and invisible through its coating of dirt and dust.

"I shall look up my friend's habitation in the morning," said the student, as he went over to collect his books. "The third picture from the fireplace! ... I will not forget it." He picked up the books one by one, commenting on them as he lifted them. *Conic Sections* he does not mind, nor *Cycloid Oscillations*, nor the *Principia*, nor *Quaternions*, nor *Thermodynamics*. Now he glanced at the book that hit the rat!" Malcolmson picked it up and looked at it. As he did so a sudden pallor overspread his face. He looked around uneasily and shivered slightly, as he murmured to himself: "The Bible my mother gave me! What an odd coincidence."

He sat down to work again, and the rats in the walls renewed their noise. They did not disturb him, however. Somehow, their presence gave him a sense of companionship. But,

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for some reason, he could not focus on his work. After a number of hours of trying to master the subject matter in front of him, he gave up in despair and decided to go to bed, as the first streak of dawn stole in through the eastern window.

He slept heavily but uneasily, and dreamed a lot. When Mrs. Dempster woke him late in the morning he seemed ill at ease, and for a few minutes did not seem to realize exactly where he was. His first request rather surprised the servant.

"Mrs. Dempster, when I am out today I would like you to get a ladder and dust those pictures -- especially that one ... the third from the fireplace -- I want to see what they are."

Late in the afternoon Malcolmson studied his books in the shaded walk, and the cheerfulness of the previous day came back to him as the day wore on. He found that his studies were progressing well. He had satisfactorily worked out conclusions to all the problems that had been baffling him, and he was in a state of jubilation when he paid a visit to Mrs. Witham at "The Good Traveler Inn." He found a stranger in the cozy sitting room with the landlady, who was introduced to him as Dr. Thornhill. She was not quite at ease, and this, combined with the doctor's plunging at once into a series of questions, made Malcolmson conclude that his presence was not an accident so without introduction he said, "Dr. Thornhill, I shall with pleasure answer you any question you may choose to ask me if you will answer me one question first."

The doctor seemed surprised, but he smiled and answered at once, "Done! What is it?"

"Did Mrs. Witham ask you to come here and see me and advise me?"

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For a moment, Dr. Thornhill was taken back, and Mrs. Witham got fiery red and turned away. But the doctor was a frank and quick man, and he answered at once and openly:

"She did, but she didn't intend you to know it. I suppose it was my clumsy haste that made you suspect. She told me that she did not like the idea of your being in that house all by yourself, and that she thought you drank too much strong tea. In fact, she wants me to advise you, if possible, to give up the tea and the very late hours.

I was a keen student in my time, so I suppose I may take the liberty of a college man, and without offence, advise you not quite as a stranger." Malcolmson with a bright smile held out his hand. "Shake — as they say in America," he said. "I must thank you for your kindness, and Mrs. Witham too, and your kindness deserves a mutual return on my part. I promise to take no more strong tea -- no tea at all until you let me -- and I shall go to bed tonight at one o'clock at the latest. Will that do?"

"Excellent," said the doctor. "Now tell us all that you noticed in the old house." So Malcolmson immediately started to tell them, in minute detail all that had happened over the last two nights. He was interrupted every now and then by some exclamation from Mrs. Witham, until finally when he told of the episode of the Bible the landlady's pent-up emotions found vent in a shriek, and it was not until a stiff glass of brandy and water had been administered that she regained composure. Dr. Thornhill listened with a face of growing gravity, and when the narrative was complete and Mrs. Witham had been restored he asked, "The rat always went up the rope of the alarm bell?"

"Always."

"I suppose you know," said the Doctor after a pause, "what that rope is?"

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"No?"

"It is," said the Doctor slowly, "the very rope which the hangman used for all the victims of the Judge's judicial malice!"

Here he was interrupted by another scream from Mrs. Witham, and, again, steps had to be taken to revive her. Malcolmson looked at his watch, and found that it was close to his dinner-hour, and left for home before her complete recovery.

When Mrs. Witham was herself again she almost assailed the Doctor with angry questions as to what he meant by putting such horrible ideas into the poor young man's mind. "He has quite enough there already to upset him," she added.

Dr. Thornhill replied, "My dear madam, I had a distinct purpose for doing it! I wanted to draw his attention to the bell-rope, and to fasten it there. It may be that he is in a highly over-wrought state, and has been studying too much, although I am bound to say that he seems as sound and healthy a young man, mentally and bodily, as ever I saw -- but then the rats -- and that suggestion of the devil." The doctor shook his head and went on.

"I would have offered to go and stay the first night with him but that I felt sure he would have been offended by my offer. If in the night he gets frightened or start to hallucinate, I want him to pull that rope. Because he is all alone the bell will give us warning so that we can reach him in time. I will stay up late tonight and keep my ears open. Do not be alarmed if Benchurch gets a surprise before morning."

"Oh, Doctor, what do you mean? What do you mean?"

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"I mean this, that possibly -- no, more probably -- we will hear the great alarm-bell from the Judge's House tonight."

When Malcolmson arrived home, he realized he arrived later than usual, and Mrs. Dempster had already left. He was glad to see that the place was bright and tidy with a cheerful fire and a well-trimmed lamp.

The evening was colder than might have been expected in April, and a heavy wind was blowing with such rapidly increasing strength that there was every promise of a storm during the night. For a few minutes after his entrance, the noise of the rats ceased, but as soon as they became accustomed to his presence, they began again.

He was glad to hear them, for he once more felt the feeling of companionship in their noise, and his mind ran back to the strange fact that they only ceased to manifest themselves when the other -- the great rat with the sinister eyes -- came upon the scene. Only the reading lamp was lit and its green shade kept the ceiling and the upper part of the room in darkness so that the cheerful light from the hearth spreading over the floor and shining on the white cloth laid over the end of the table was warm and cheery. Malcolmson sat down to his dinner with a good appetite and a buoyant spirit. After his dinner and a cigarette, he steadfastly sat down to work, determined not to let anything disturb him. He remembered his promise to the doctor, and made up his mind to make the best of the time at his disposal.

For an hour or so, he productively worked at his studies ... and then his thoughts began to wander from his books. The gloomy and noisy circumstances around him, and the fact that they physically distracted him, not to mention his nervous susceptibility were not to be denied. By this time, the wind had become a gale, and the gale a storm.

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The old house, solid though it was, seemed to shake to its foundation, and the storm roared and raged through its many chimneys and its queer old gables, producing strange, unearthly sounds in the empty rooms and corridors. Even the great alarm-bell on the roof must have felt the force of the wind, because the rope rose and fell slightly, as though the bell moved from time to time, and then the limber rope fell on the oak floor with a hard and hollow sound.

As Malcolmson listened to it, he remembered the doctor's words, "It is the rope which the hangman used for the victims of the Judge's judicial malice."

He went over to the corner of the fireplace and took it in his hand to look at it, and took an immediate and intense interest in it. As he stood there he lost himself for a moment in speculation as to who these victims were, and the grim wish of the Judge to have such a ghastly relic always hanging under his eyes. As he stood there the swaying of the bell on the roof lifted the rope now and again, but then there came a new sensation -- a sort of tremor in the rope, as though something was moving along it. Looking up instinctively, Malcolmson saw the great rat coming slowly down towards him, glaring at him steadily. He dropped the rope and started backward with a muttered curse, and the rat turning ran up the slope again and disappeared. At the same instant Malcolmson became conscious that the noise of the other rats, which had ceased for a while, began again.

All this got him thinking, and it occurred to him that he had not investigated the lair of the rat or looked at the pictures, as he had intended. He lit the other lamp without the shade, and, holding it up went and stood opposite the third picture where he had seen the rat disappear on the previous night.

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At the first glance, he jumped back so suddenly that he almost dropped the lamp, and a deadly pallor spread over his face. His knees shook, heavy drops of sweat came on his forehead, and he trembled like an aspen tree whose leaves flutter in the lightest wind. But he was young and plucky, and pulled himself together, and after the pause of a few seconds stepped forward again, raised the lamp, and examined the picture which had been dusted and washed, and now stood out clearly.

It was of a judge dressed in his robes of scarlet and the white fur of an ermine weasel. His face was strong and merciless, evil, crafty and vindictive, with a sensual mouth, hooked nose of reddish color, and shaped like the beak of a bird of prey. The rest of the face was of a cadaverous color. The eyes were of peculiar brilliance and with a terribly malignant expression. As he looked at them, Malcolmson grew cold, because he saw in the eyes of the judge the very counterpart of the eyes of the great rat. Then, the lamp almost fell from his hand.

Looking at the picture, he saw the rat with its ominous eyes peering out through the hole in the corner of the picture, and noted the sudden cessation of the noise of the other rats. However, he pulled himself together, and went on with his examination of the picture. The Judge was seated in a great high-backed carved oak chair, on the right-hand side of a great stone fireplace where, in the corner, a rope hung down from the ceiling, its end lying coiled on the floor.

With a feeling of horror, Malcolmson realized the scene of the room in the picture was exactly the same as the room in which he stood. He turned around suddenly and gazed around him in an awestruck manner as though he expected to find some strange presence behind him. Then he looked over to the corner of the fireplace -- and with a loud cry he let the lamp fall from his hand.

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There, in the judge's armchair, with the rope hanging behind, sat the rat with the Judge's ominous eyes, intensified with a fiendish leer. Except for the howling of the storm outside there was silence.

The noise of the fallen lamp brought Malcolmson back to reality. Fortunately, it was made of metal, and so the oil did not spill. Thankfully, the practical need of attending to it at once settled his nervous apprehensions. When he finished adjusting the lamp, he wiped his brow and thought for a moment.

"This will not do," he said to himself. "If I go on like this I will become a crazy fool. This must stop! I promised the doctor I would not drink tea. Thank heaven for that, he was right! My nerves would have gotten into a bizarre state. Funny I did not notice it. I never felt better in my life. However, it is all right now, and I will not be such a fool again." Then he mixed himself a good stiff glass of brandy and water and resolutely sat down to his work.

It was nearly an hour when he looked up from his book, disturbed by the sudden stillness. Outside, the wind howled and roared louder than ever, and the rain drove in sheets against the windows, beating like hail on the glass. Inside, however, there was no sound whatever except the echo of the wind as it roared in the great chimney, and now and then a hiss as a few raindrops found their way down the chimney in a lull of the storm. The fire had fallen low and had ceased to flame, though it threw out a red glow. Malcolmson listened attentively, and presently heard a thin, squeaking noise, very faint. It came from the corner of the room where the rope hung down, and he thought it was the creaking of the rope on the floor as the swaying of the bell raised and lowered it.

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Looking up, however, he saw in the dim light the great rat clinging to the rope and gnawing it. The rope was already nearly gnawed through — he could see the lighter color where the strands were laid bare. As soon as he looked up to the rope, the job was completed, and the severed end of the rope fell clattering on the oaken floor. For an instant, the great rat remained like a tassel at the end of the rope, which now began to sway back and forth.

Malcolmson felt for a moment another pang of terror as he realized that the possibility of calling the outer world to his assistance was cut off.

Then an intense anger took his horror's place, and seizing the book, he was reading he hurled it at the rat.

Even though the book was right on target the rat dropped off and struck the floor with a soft thud before the missile could reach him. Malcolmson instantly rushed over towards the great rat, but it darted away and disappeared in the darkness of the shadows of the room. Malcolmson felt that his work was over for the night, and determined, then and there, to vary the monotony of the proceedings by a hunt for the rat. He took off the green shade of the lamp to insure a wider spreading light. As he did so the gloom of the upper part of the room was relieved, and in the new flood of light, much greater compared with the previous darkness, the pictures on the wall stood out boldly.

From where he stood, Malcolmson saw right opposite him the third picture on the wall from the right of the fireplace. He rubbed his eyes in surprise, and then a great fear began to come upon him.

At the center of the picture, the judge had disappeared from the image, and only the white of the canvas remained. Malcolmson, his body dripping in a chill of horror, turned slowly around, began to shake and tremble, like a man in a palsy. He froze as he saw the Judge

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sitting on the carved oak chair, smiling with an insidious grin, and his eyes glistening a deep green hiss of evil. Malcolmson's strength left him as he stared at the Judge.

The Judge curled his index finger into the air, pointing it directly at Malcolmson. The old man began to speak in a crusty, sullen voice. His grin was hatred and his words pure malevolence. "So, you want to play with death against the Judge, do you? You, who are so smart and intelligent and know everything there is to know because you go to the University. You come to my land, into my home, cast dispersions on me, attempt to kill me and think I will crawl meekly away. Then let me ask you one question: Where is your sword of death, your allies in darkness – or if you prefer – light? Who bestows your source of authority over my omnipotent authority?"

Malcolmson look spastically around the room, not knowing what he was looking for, but realizing that a weapon of any sort would help him escape. His thoughts were petrified, immovable and still in his otherwise brilliant mind.

The Judge began to talk again. "So, your all intelligent books do not jump up to aid, or do your calculations mystify me. Let me show you my sword of death's reprisal." At that moment, the Judge lifted his finger into the air and the most insidious beast rose to the ceiling of the room. It was dusty brown, with scales and forked tail. Its mouth growled with tiger like fangs.

The beast drooled as he moved his head back and forth. The room became instantly cold. The as suddenly as the beast appeared – it disappeared into a vacuous smoke of brown, dingy vapor.

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“I wrap myself in the darkness of the world. I smother my loins in trepidation and abhorrence. I bellow out judgments of condemnation to those like you, who believe in the redemption of men and the advancement of their kindred spirits. It is me and my brethren who walk the earth in search of souls such as yours. I walk in death, as you walk in light.”

Outside, the roar and howl of the storm grew louder. The great chimes in the marketplace struck twelve midnight.

The rats began to scamper into the room, creating a fiendish noise, screeching in anticipation. The Judge raised his finger, and everything became quiet and still. “It is time to pass judgment on this trespasser of ours, captured in the act of non-solicitous gratitude. His crime, my brethren, is the dishonor of our state, the arrogance of a modern man, the disbelief in our existence in live after death, and the impudence of intruding on our residence of dark worship. What do you say brothers; you have heard the crimes and have been witness to his acts. He has been captured and now stands before my court.”

The rats screeched and ranted. They bounded from one side of the room to the other, some biting Malcolmson others scampering over his face and body. He began to bleed from the numerous bites and began to feel his life force slipping from his. The Judge raised his finger and again the room went silent.

“The judgment is in,” affirmed the Judge. “You, of no worthy cause except to disrupt our hallowed place of destitution, wake us from our hellish sleep, portend to overtake us with your wisdom of calculation and books, you are hereby condemned to death by hanging.”

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At that, the rope rose up in mid air and formed itself into a hanging noose. For a moment, Malcolmson spotted the beast in the vapor tying the noose, but then it disappeared. The judge lifted his finger, and the rope was placed around Malcolmson's throat. He was lifted into the air it seemed invisibly, but he felt an enormous force holding onto his body. He was lifted to the oak chair and his feet placed on the set of it.

“You will come to know that I judge all new things with a strict rule, and that the keeper of death is my companion. It is he that holds you to your chair, and it is I who condemns you to die.” With that, the Judge lowered his finger and the chair invisibly fell away. Malcolmson dropped with a sudden force then stopped in mid-air by the rope. His feet dangled and his body shook. His face turned red, then purple, his eyes looking in disbelief of the moment.

A few moments later Malcolmson's body became limp. Suddenly, the bell on top of the Judge's house began to toll. Dr. Thornhill raised up in complete horror. “The time has come,” he said. And with that, began to wake up as many townspeople as he could to go to the Judge's House and assist Malcolmson.



A crowd soon assembled. Lights and torches of various kinds appeared, and soon a large body of townspeople had assembled outside the Judge's House. They knocked loudly at the door, but there was no reply. Then they burst in the door, and poured into the great dining room, the doctor at the head of the crowd.

There at the end of the rope of the great alarm-bell hung the body of the student, and on the face of the Judge in the picture was a malignant smile.

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The crowd gathered around the body. Mrs. Whitham held her hand to her mouth, slinking downward in shock.

Mrs. Dempster moved her way to the front of the crowd, looking around the room in disbelief.

Dr. Thornhill crouched down and placed two fingers on the dead man's throat.

"He's dead, we'll have to inform his next of kin," explained Dr. Thornhill as he looked straight ahead to the ground. "Mrs. Whitham, if you give me his previous residence, I will be sure to contact the authorities to begin the process."

"I do not have any information on the young gentleman Dr. Thornhill. He paid in cash and left no ledger of his permanent address. All I know is that his name is Malcolmson." Mrs. Whitham was stymied by the fact she had come to know Malcolmson without knowing anything about his past, where he was from, except that he was a student of a college about to take his exams."

Over the next few months, after repeated inquires to many universities and colleges, no match was found of the Benchurch guest. He was buried in the Benchurch graveyard near the Judge's House, beside many of the Judge's victims lay buried beside him.

And because of this story, and many others that were to come over the years, the people of Benchurch still proclaim that the Judge's pledge of maintaining his domain for eternity is aided with living underworld of darkness along with his evil clan.

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The bogie is a rat and the rat is a bogie.

THE END