

THE STONE TAPE

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OUTSIDE TASKERLANDS HOUSE — DAY

A SMALL CAR, an Austin 1300, is being carefully driven down the last of along drive and into the forecourt of the house.

There is much evidence of the massive rebuilding this ugly late-Victorian structure has undergone. There are contractors' huts on the lawn, and a large caravan. There are piles of material — sand and reinforcing metal and heavy pipes. Some scaffolding clings to the centre parts of the building.

The car pulls in behind large motor vans.

There are two vans, both emblazoned with the name "Ryan Electric Products". One has unloaded, the other is just finishing. Men are shifting bulky apparatus onto trolleys and moving it inside the house.

The car driver is JILL GREELEY, aged about 30. There is a very feminine, strong directness about her, so that what she is seems far more important than what she does. What she does is computer programming.

She surveys the house, oppressed by the sight of it. Her eyes go along the whole ugly length. One end of it looks still untreated, smothered in ivy.

She is so absorbed that she hardly notices that the vans are moving.

She looks round. One of them is backing straight towards her, huge and blind. She blips her horn but it still comes on. She glances to the side and sees the other van backing towards her from that direction. She has moved in too close; neither of the unseen drivers has noticed her.

She frantically starts her engine.

Then, as if something happens to her vision — the two objects are suddenly no longer motor vans but two huge, defocused shapes like standing stones in motion, slowly blundering and blending, looming over her. And their engine rumble descends to something deeper, an irregular grunting. Somehow obscene ...

Then it passes.

Jill finds herself sitting motionless, her car on the point of being crushed. She frantically throws her gears into reverse and slams her foot down.

The Austin shoots wildly backwards out of danger, swaying and skidding in the loose gravel. She glances in the rear mirror — - and sees a mass of builders' equipment; piles of pipes and scaffolding! She tugs at the wheel, hits the brakes. The car skids straight on in a spray of gravel.

Jill screams.

The Austin scrapes past a pile of reinforcing metal with an ugly grinding — - and thuds into a huge pile of sand. Jill is flung back in her seat. The engine stalls.

For a moment she hardly realises what has happened. She leans forward, head into hands. She shudders.

Fifty yards away the caravan door opens and ROY COLLINSON looks out. He is a grey-haired man of 45 or so, his face tight and strained.

Evidently he heard the scream. But he sees only the two vans slowly turning into the drive.

In the Austin, almost lost to sight behind the builders' equipment, Jill is still huddled over the wheel, giving herself time to recover. She numbly watches the vans go ... then a yellow fastback swinging in past them.

The fastback pulls up in the forecourt and Collinson turns to greet the new arrival: PETER BROCK, aged 35, Director of Research for Ryan Electrics. He is a man with a lot of drive, his temperament all upswing and downbeat. At the moment, he is on a big upswing, arriving to take over his new establishment.

BROCK: Hello, Colly.

COLLINSON: Peter.

BROCK: The big day.

COLLINSON: Don't expect too much. It's all a mess. If only we'd had another month — -

BROCK: Not a chance. (They survey the house in silence) It looks good. I mean, it looks as terrible as ever but — -stronger.

COLLINSON (with feeling): Why didn't they tear it down!

BROCK: Colly — -

COLLINSON: It would have been better. They had to rip the floors out and the roof and even the window frames — -there was nothing worth keeping. Just an ugly shell!

BROCK: Colly, he found it.

COLLINSON: Even so.

BROCK: Himself.

COLLINSON: I can understand about the park there — - at least it's big — - but this!

BROCK: He liked the style of it.

COLLINSON: My God.

BROCK: One look, that's all he needed, and his mind was made up. He said it spoke to him. Spoke to him, so it did. (This last comes in the mock brogue which is staff code for utterances of the firm's chairman) I know what it said. "Mr Ryan, for pity's sake don't knock me down!".

COLLINSON: He — - he could have built it new! For half the cost!

The stridency in his voice worries Brock.

BROCK: How long have you been down here?

COLLINSON: Three or four months.

BROCK: Got somebody stashed away in the caravan?

COLLINSON: Eh?

BROCK: Why not?

COLLINSON: Hardly. I quite like it. It's quite — - snug.

Horns blare in cheerful chorus. Three more cars are approaching down the drive.

BROCK: Here they come.

COLLINSON: Eddie Holmes was a great help. He's got most of your gear in position. I'm glad you could spare him.

BROCK: Good man, Eddie.

A battered estate car pulls in, with the other two close behind. Hands wave from windows. Then they are scrambling out. Most of Brock's staff are under 30, stamped in general with a kind of alert ingenuousness. EDDIE HOLMES, at 40, is the oldest, a dull-faced clever man. HARGRAVES and MAUDSLEY, both 25, one serious and introverted, the other afflicted with an adolescent sense of humour on top of basic cunning. CLIFF DOW is 30, a slow perfectionist.

There are three or four others, less noticeable characters. All of them are in high spirits. There has clearly been a lot of laughter on the way.

EDDIE: Aye, aye, Peter! Setting a good example.

MAUDSLEY: The conscientious boss is always the first in!

He leads the hammed-up dirty laugh.

BROCK: See what I've got — - a bunch of kids.

VOICES: Where is he! Mascot! Mascot! Mascot!

The rear of the estate car is flung up. An extraordinary figure bounces out. Its head is covered by a rubber Martian mask with bug eyes and sprouting wires. Its body is padded and covered with the green undulating rubber foam that is used under carpets, belted into place. On its chest hangs a control panel with flashing indicator lamps and a loud beeping noise. A sash marked "Ryan Electric Products" — - a relic of some trade exhibition — - is tied round its middle.

BROCK: Stew! is that Stewart?

EDDIE: Who else?

The figure bows as the cheering research staff close in. They sweep it off its feet and swing it aloft. They run with it beeping and flashing, in a wide circle.

In the Austin, Jill sits watching. Her nerves are steady. She smiles slightly, moves to get out.

The Martian figure yells as he is swept towards the house and nearly crashes into the door lintel. They tip him back and run him under it.

INSIDE THE ENTRANCE HALL

The figure is borne triumphantly in and set down with a bump. Then they demolish him. He yelps as the Martian mask is ripped off to reveal the thin face of STEWART JESSOP, 22, computer operator.

STEW: Help! Take me to your leader! I come in peace!

HARGRAVES: You're coming in pieces, mate!

They yell like wild animals. The control panel is battered into silence, the sash sent flying. Hands rip at the cords and rubber foam. They fight for possession of the padding.

An elaborately uniformed "Sergeant" appears from the reception desk, worried about exercising authority. Brock waves him back.

BROCK: They've got to do it. Like dogs peeing on something.

COLLINSON: Like what — - !

As Jill comes in, Stew is flung almost at her feet with the worrying pack on top of him, whooping and yelling.

JILL (in genuine, momentary horror): What are you doing to him!

MAUDSLEY: We're sacrificing a Martian!

BROCK: All right, break it up. That's enough. That'll do! (He reaches Jill, puts his arm round her) Just a bit of clowning.

MAUDSLEY: Innocent clowning, sir.

BROCK: Innocent? You lot?

EDDIE: You missed the fun, Jill.

DOW: You're late.

MAUDSLEY: Bride's privilege.

Brock gives him a hard look.

HARGRAVES: We've sacrificed a Martian!

Stew sits up, grinning and sweating. He wipes his face.

Brock draws Jill aside.

BROCK (quietly): You're shaking.

JILL (as quietly): I was — - nearly in an accident.

BROCK: How? Where?

JILL: Outside here. I had a sort of — - momentary — - I don't know — -

BROCK (his face hardening): Blackout's the usual word.

JILL: It wasn't that.

BROCK (sighing): You should have been with me. I should have been driving you. I'm sorry, I couldn't make last night.

JILL: Peter, please.

BROCK: So you'll get accident-prone.

JILL: Nothing happened.

She turns, aware that the others are watching them now.

The house is as oppressive inside as out. Changes have only worsened it. The great curving staircase now embraces a lift shaft. Air-conditioning ducts run everywhere and spare sections of ducting lie stacked about the place. There are coils of cable and other debris. wires dangle unconnected from the walls. A low-level reception desk shelters the sergeant.

BROCK: Welcome to Taskerlands. It doesn't look much now but wait till it's finished — - then you'll get the full horror.

COLLINSON: Don't put them off.

BROCK: Everybody know Roy Collinson, house master and bunny mother?

COLLINSON: Hold on.

BROCK: Any problems about the move — - getting digs in the area, housing wives and harems — - see Colly.

EDDIE: Why is it called that?

COLLINSON: Taskerlands?

EDDIE: Yes, what's it mean?

DOW: Work!

COLLINSON: It was built by a man called Tasker and these were his lands. He made a fortune out of iron railings.

HARGRAVES: It's not — - ancient?

COLLINSON: Sorry to disappoint. It was built about 1880. Mostly owned by the one family. Requisitioned during World War Two — - the American forces had it. Derelict ever since.

Some laughter.

BROCK: Right. Let's butter their paws. Come on — - (Leading the way briskly) Lift, soon to operate, I hope. My office is up there.

EDDIE: Very palatial.

BROCK: Of course, or why be boss? Reception desk, with Sergeant Patterson. Sergeant, get to know these faces.

SERGEANT (nodding and grinning): I know some already, sir.

BROCK: From here on, we're secret. So no chums in, no parties in the canteen — - which by the way is through there and extremely decent.

COLLINSON: And working.

BROCK: Loos that way, also working. And now — -

He opens the lab door and leads the way in.

THE LABORATORY

The laboratory is large and well equipped. It is filled with benches and steel shelves holding all kinds of equipment. Crates still unpacked stand round the walls.

There are a couple of TV cameras on roller tripods, large monitors, oscillographs, thermographs, a spectrum analyser.

Separated off from the rest by a glazed partition is the computer section. This is the territory of Jill and Stew. There is the usual teleprinter for data communications—a plotter of automatic graphs ... a high-speed line printer. But only a couple of the conventional tape storage units with their heavy tape spools visible through windows.

BROCK: This is Lab One. Soon there'll be two others like it to spread into. And if that's not enough there are five hundred acres outside to sit and think in.

MAUDSLEY: Who else is coming here?

BROCK: Nobody. Just us.

HARGRAVES: But it's enormous.

BROCK: We'll get bigger. I'll expand the team with people I choose. Handpicked. The best. Same as you're the best.

STEW: Flattery, Pete..

MAUDSLEY: Gets him a lot of places.

DOW: Yeah.

HARGRAVES: This lot.

MAUDSLEY: Fantastic.

DOW: Too good to be true.

HARGRAVES: After North Acton, eh!

STEW: What about the other crowd? The washing machine?

DOW: Here?

BROCK: Forget it.

DOW: That bunch in here?

BROCK: No! Can't you get it through your heads — - you're special! Incredible as it may seem, you are! I'll spell it out. This — place — is — ours. It — is — all — for — us. Because — we — are — on — the Big One! (He surveys their faces) D'you want a pep talk? D'you really want that?

DOW: About the Japs?

STEW: He's a bit simple. Brilliant but simple.

BROCK: Cliff — it is always about the Japs. In ten years they are going to have us all by whatever part of our anatomy they pick. There will be no electronics industry anywhere in the world but theirs. Unless —

EDDIE: I think we've a good chance.

BROCK: We've got only a single chance. We've got to play a card so high they can't top it.

STEW (mock-Japanese): Aah, so!

BROCK: A completely new recording medium.

STEW: Already have in honourable pocket.

EDDIE: Shut up, Stew.

STEW (seriously): What about tape, though?

EDDIE: Tape's finished.

STEW: They can still improve —

EDDIE: Its day is done.

BROCK: Stew. (He has a spool in his hand) Magnetic tape is compact, responsive, all the sales chat-up says. (He pulls some loose and crushes it in his fingers) Also delicate and prone to lose its memory.

MAUDSLEY: Like Cliff here.

BROCK: As you rightly say. (He tosses the spool down) It's time, gentlemen, for a breakthrough. Just record me, say, the whole of Wagner's Ring cycle inside a pin head — with instant playback, of course —

MAUDSLEY: Gimme till lunchtime.

BROCK: — and you can name your royalties.

EDDIE (hungrily): It is royalties, then?

BROCK: Forget about bonuses, you'll be right in there. I've got his word on it.

EDDIE: Himself?

BROCK: Yesterday. "Just put the boot into ould Nippon!" is how he delicately phrased it. So — if you want to be millionaires, it's a crash programme. Find the medium and everything else follows.

DOW: The hardware?

BROCK: We'd take the lot. Computers — TV — home recording — satellites — they all follow. Then Ryan Electrics becomes Ryan International becomes Ryan Interspatial. It is up to you.

EDDIE: I love this man's modesty.

BROCK: Thanks to Eddie you'll find all your junk in familiar order.

EDDIE: Disorder.

BROCK: Obviously. Sorry.

EDDIE: All that string.

BROCK: Now. Your pet projects will go on as before — Eddie's digital crystal and so on — but we're going to try something new. We'll correlate all results together.

MAUDSLEY: But Pete — if there's no connection —

BROCK: The computer might spot one. (Doubtful noises) Every clue counts.

EDDIE: It puts a lot on the computer.

All eyes go to Jill. She is standing by the computer, her

expression strange, as if she is still under the heavy apprehension that nearly made her crash the car.

BROCK: Jill's ready. She's going to try something very sophisticated. Projections — extrapolations — a sort of randomised mix with an accelerated uncertainty principle. How's that?

Jill seems to come to herself.

JILL: Something of the sort.

BROCK: You all right?

JILL: Yes, I — (As if to take attention away from herself, she turns to the twin tape storage units) What about data storage? Are those all we've got?

BROCK: Colly. Computer storage room. When do we get it?

COLLINSON: Oh yes. Well —

BROCK: What?

COLLINSON (embarrassed): There've been — problems.

BROCK (quietly): You were here to solve them. (Controlling his anger) How far have they got with it? Colly, how much have they done?

COLLINSON (bluntly): Nothing.

Brock stares at him in disbelief, then makes for the door.

BROCK: Let me see!

He stamps off down the passage. Collinson looks at Jill.

They both follow.

THE STORAGE ROOM

Brock throws open a massive door. There is still a notice screwed to it reading “U.S. ARMY. STORE ROOM”.

The room is immense. It could contain a small house. The walls go up 15 or 20 feet to meet the bare and rotting beams of the roof. The walls are covered with wooden panelling that now hangs away from them in sagging sheets.

There is a single window at one end, high up and half smothered by the ivy we saw outside.

Apart from a workmen’s trestle table, standing in the rubble, it is completely bare. A few square yards of the rotten panelling have been torn down and thrown on the floor. Then work seems to have been abandoned.

Brock stands in the middle of the room, unable to believe it.

BROCK: It — it simply isn’t — !Five months and not a single— ! Why didn’t you report it?

Collinson joins him. Jill stays in the doorway.

COLLINSON: I knew there were reasons they had to finish the priority jobs.

BROCK: Colly, this was priority!

COLLINSON: To be fair, it wasn’t in phase one.

BROCK: Refacing and air-conditioning and wiring — ! Did they just forget it?

COLLINSON: No.

BROCK: What then?

COLLINSON: Problems with the men. They claimed it was — I don’t know — a dirty job.

BROCK: There’s dry rot! Do they think it’s catching! Look at those panels — I could shift the lot in half an hour!

He grabs a swathe of distorted panelling and peels it back.

It splits, disclosing shroud-like hangings of fungus. Dust scatters. Brock sneezes.

He pulls savagely at another section and this too rips away. More fungus — and something else.

BROCK: Stairs.

Jill comes to look. The steps are little more than pegs the wall, scarcely a foot wide and very badly worn — hollowed, sloping and uneven.

COLLINSON: Yes, they saw those.

BROCK: The men?

He tugs at the next section of panelling. it is more resistant but it shows them enough.

JILL: They don't lead anywhere.

The steps run from ground level to about eight feet up and then stop.

BROCK: Surely that wasn't what — ? (Sourly, as he releases the panel) What else did they find? A skeleton?

COLLINSON: No-o.

BROCK: Anything?

COLLINSON: As a matter of fact, yes. About thirty tins of Spam.

BROCK: Spam!

COLLINSON: And a letter to Father Christmas.

He nods at the trestle table. With a comic groan Brock goes to look. There is a pile of rusty tins. He picks one up.

BROCK: U.S. Army issue.

COLLINSON: Doubt if it's fit now. They must have got forced in through the panelling. The Yanks used this for a store.

BROCK: Painted it khaki!

COLLINSON: Trying to quell the rot.

BROCK: Even then?

COLLINSON: It was empty before the war. When the rot gets really going like this they call it weeping. Weeping fungus.

Brock glares at the membranes of rot with personal enmity. There is a piece of paper on the table — a half disintegrated sheet that looks as if it was previously folded up in a tight wad. Jill picks it up and tries to make out the faded scrawl.

JILL: "Christmas Eve..."

COLLINSON: Oh yes, that's it.

JILL: "What ... I want for...Christmas ...

COLLINSON: A kid's writing.

His manner has changed — tight and nervous.

Brock suddenly attacks the wall, kicking out a great piece of panelling. Rot and dead wood and dust go flying. He kicks at it again, hacking more away with his foot.

BROCK: Even the stone's got it!

COLLINSON: It's just — very old.

BROCK: 1880?

COLLINSON: Ah, that's when they panelled it in. These walls are a lot older than the rest of the house. They've just been — built onto. In fact, they must have been knocked down and rebuilt and generally messed about a lot in the last thousand years. (Brock stares at him) Oh, yes. The foundations might be Saxon.

BROCK: Saxon!

COLLINSON: Just an amateur opinion.

BROCK: My God — !

COLLINSON: Informed amateur.

BROCK: If you're right, you see what it means? (in despair) They'll be in here — the environment boys, the conservationists — nailing their little notices on the door and writs and — they could stop everything! If they get on to it — (Thinking furiously) — what about the architect?

COLLINSON (with contempt): That architect!

BROCK: Didn't he spot it?

COLLINSON: Not till the day he quit.

BROCK (a tight smile): Right! If we go ahead fast — get everything concreted over and the machines in — while we can! Where are the men now?

COLLINSON: Working on the back.

BROCK: Come on! (In the doorway he turns a worry, love, you'll get your storage room!

They hurry off along the passage. Jill shivers. It is cold here, the chill suddenly striking. She follows.

As the men's footsteps fade they seem to echo inside the room. Curiously changed, though — this is a rapid pattering.

The effect is so startling that Jill spins round expecting to see another person. And finds nobody. She forces calm on herself and makes for the door. As she reaches it the sense of another presence behind her is overwhelming. She halts and steadies herself against the doorpost. Quite deliberately, she turns to look.

And sees a figure.

It is standing high up on the peg-like steps. The figure of a woman in black, its face hidden by arms raised in front of it. It looks as if it is on the point of falling. Still and rigid.

In the same moment that the vision lasts — and it is only a moment — there is a shrill rasp in the air. A human scream that has lost its humanity, denatured and dead.

Then silence. The steps empty.

Jill twists about and clings to the doorpost, beyond crying out. She claws her way into the passage. In the entrance hall she can see Brock and Collinson talking to one of the builders' men.

JILL (hoarsely): Peter

He turns. As he starts towards her she pitches forward...

BROCK'S SUITE — LIVING QUARTERS

Jill is huddled on a convertible bed. Her knees are drawn up beside her and her fists are bunched. She has come out of the first shock into a paroxysm of violent, confused sobbing.

Brock is trying to calm her.

BROCK: All right now, all right. Jill!

He pulls her crumpled face round. Her eyes open but it takes her a moment to focus on him. She looks like a child that can't explain what hurts. Then panic rises again.

JILL: I can't stay here, I've got to get away! Take me away! (wildly) Peter!

She sits up, tense and trembling, her fists held tight against her breasts and her body rigid. She is on the brink of hysteria.

He moves closer, stroking her, soothing her.

BROCK: Jill, Jill, Jill. Easy now. (He kisses her but she stays rigid in his arms) I'm sorry. I didn't listen to you before. Tell me about it.

JILL: What?

BROCK: The accident.

JILL: It isn't that.

BROCK: Tell me.

JILL: I — I hit a pile of sand, that's all. There were vans and — I couldn't have been watching. (Suddenly) I hate this place! I didn't want to come here!

BROCK: No. You didn't. (His face sets a little. Now he feels he knows where he is. They are on old ground. He sits back. Her fists are still pressed tight against her body like a barrier. He gently eases them down) Here. Dump the moist hankie.

JILL (opening her hand): Not — not a hankie.

Brock takes it.

BROCK: Oh. Father Christmas's letter.

She shakes her head.

BROCK (reading): "What I want ... for Christmas is ... please go away. Signed Martin Tasker". Well.

JILL (whispering): Not what you'd say.

BROCK: I don't know. One of my kids is like that, hates the idea of him coming down the chimney.

JILL: It wasn't to Father Christmas.

BROCK: Who, then?

JILL: I know. I think I know!

Again the rising note of hysteria. Brock hardens himself against it. He gets up.

The room is only half finished. it will be very luxurious indeed but at present is still a mess of hanging wires and unopened crates.

BROCK: How do you like it now? They've done a bit since we came down that time. All the shelving and — (He looks into the adjoining office, where a huge desk stands in a sea of unsecured carpet, and back to her) I quite liked it even without the shelving. Didn't you? (Her face is unresponsive) You know what all this is about. You're getting at me. (He waits for a protest but there isn't any) Mind you, I quite enjoyed your previous ploys. "How are Christine and the kids? How are Timothy's mumps? How's the dog's toothache?" Oh my Jilly. You're a very female one. (He sits on the bed) I need you. I know you weren't keen to transfer but I need you for your brain as well — if that doesn't sound crass but of course it does. If you're in doubt ask Eddie and the boys. (He strokes her forehead) What's in there is so rare and... valuable. (After a moment) Do it your own way. Commute home to old mummy or stay here. Stay? (She says nothing) Sometimes, anyway.

Jill looks him straight in the face. She is calmer, but only by her own effort.

JILL: I saw a ghost.

Just for a moment Brock's eyes soften — then the response dies and they are hard again. He gets up briskly.

BROCK: Let's get out of here for a while. Leave Colly to fight the labour relations.

He helps her up. when she is on her feet he kisses her.

JILL: Let's go ...

A LOCAL PUBLIC HOUSE

The brewers' gimmick when they face-lifted this roadside pub was 'motoring'. The beer handles are gaitered gear levers, and the whole bar looks like an accessory shop. Babycham bottles peep through spokes and steering wheels. Muffled muzak throbs.

Any jollity is dispelled by the BAR LADY, a genteel harridan, who forks out cold meats and pickles for Jill and Brock. Her helper, an ungainly little countrywoman, is allowed to work the beer engine.

HELPER (beaming): One Danish draught, one Super-Strong.

BROCK: One for yourself.

HELPER: Ta.

BAR LADY: No, thank you. Are they really making poison gas up there?

BROCK: No — we aren't.

BAR LADY: It's what I heard.

BROCK: Not a whiff.

BAR LADY (wearily): I mean germs. You know what I mean.

Feeling Jill's tension rise, he puts his hand over hers.

JILL: Do you know the place?

BAR LADY: I've only been here a month. That'll be — with the bread — one pound eighty pee. (As Brock pays) I mean, it won't do us any good. These days people don't like that sort of thing.

JILL: It's nothing bad!

BAR LADY (freezingly): We all know what secret means.

She moves away to attend more favoured customers. The helper grimaces and lifts her glass.

HELPER: Cheers. I believe it's been made very nice.

JILL: Do you know it?

HELPER: I used to. Well, sort of.

JILL: You went there?

HELPER: Not actually in. It was during the war when the Yanks was there. (She leans forward with a grotesque confidential giggle) I was a good-time girl!

BROCK: Hooray for you.

HELPER (pleased) : Yes, well — why not? They was nice boys. And the nylons!

JILL: Did they talk about the house?

HELPER: Ooh — it was all generals and people. Some headquarters Eisenhower was there once.

JILL: I mean — what was it like inside?

HELPER (puzzled): No. Very posh, I expect. There was one boy, though — (Fondness shows) — He was a caution. He said — now lemme think — oh dear, he had all these funny words, y'see, he was a coloured boy. I know — guppy. He said there was guppies in the store — that's where he worked —

BROCK: Guppies are fish. Tropical.

HELPER: Oh dear. Duppies?

A man in his late twenties moves along behind the bar, aproned and carrying a crate of bottles.

MAN: He must have meant rats.

HELPER: You don't know, Alan.

ALAN: Taskerlands is full of rats. We used to play up there when I was a kid.

HELPER: Oh yes — you and that Jackie and —

She breaks off in some curious embarrassment. He gives her a hard look and goes on with emphasis, as if to prove he doesn't mind talking about it.

ALAN: Yes, old Jackie. We used to do dares.

JILL: The end room — you know it?

ALAN (after a moment): Yes. Stand there in the dark, after a bit you'd hear 'em all noising about and squealing.

JILL: Did you see them?

ALAN: What was there to see? If they was behind the woodwork?

He moves off with his crate. Brock glances at Jill. She is trembling.

JILL: Who else would know about it? About the house?

THE VICARAGE LIBRARY

The vicar is in his sixties. He is a scholar gone completely to seed. He has opened an old glass-fronted bookcase and is searching hopelessly through the mess inside. It is crammed to bursting with tattered journals and folders and exercise books. Bundles fall, scattering dust.

Brock and Jill are with him. All her tension has returned.

VICAR: You've seen the parish registers. Not many Taskers there ... among the births and marriages and... they were not ... statistically prominent. But apart from the registers I really don't know —

BROCK: We're wasting your time.

JILL: No, please —

VICAR: It's quite all right, if I can only —

JILL: I just thought there might be something more — personal. About the family and the house.

VICAR (opening an exercise book): Old sermons. Now who on earth would want to hear today about... about... ?

JILL: Did you know them? The Taskers?

VICAR: Eh? Oh ... they'd all gone before I came. Died out. That last one was a recluse, I believe. Now — there must be some odds and ends from my predecessor's time. I fancy — somewhere here — (He suddenly turns to them with eyes brightened by a vital recollection) You know? It came to me the other day — about pollution. It's the modern rediscovery of sin. The only form it can take in a materialistic world! (He is delighted with his notion) All the rubbish and mess — that's the new wickedness! And they can see it! The sudden conviction of — of — of non-returnable bottles! Eh?

BROCK (uncomfortably): Yes, Jill, I think —

VICAR: Then sackcloth and ashes. Plenty of ashes!

BROCK: I think we'd better get back.

VICAR: Oh dear.

BROCK: This — was just a thought.

VICAR (moving with them to the door): Yes, well I ... Come again and perhaps by then I —

BROCK: Thanks anyway.

VICAR: They must have been funny people. There was something about an exorcism once —

JILL: Exorcism!

VICAR (shaking his head): Now I can't approve of that. I know it's in the prayer-book, but — oh, dear, dear!

JILL: You do mean — laying a ghost? Her intensity catches at Brock.

VICAR: It was either there or ... now was it? Ah! (He seems to change his mind) I may be maligning them.

JILL: When was it?

VICAR: Oh — long, long ago. (Then he brightens out of his vagueness and happily remounts his hobby-horse. He beams) I feel I'm obsolete but not sinful — I cause so little pollution. Apart from tea-leaves — and my hens eat those up —

OUTSIDE TASKERLANDS HOUSE — DUSK

Jill's Austin pulls out of the corner behind the building materials, backfiring repeatedly. Brock holds up his hand to halt her and runs round behind the car to kick the sand out of her exhaust pipe. He waves her on. Engine running more smoothly, she turns away down the drive.

Brock watches her go. His face is serious. He has sent her off early. The other cars still stand parked. After a moment he starts towards the caravan. There is a light in its window.

INSIDE THE CARAVAN

Brock looks in and finds Collinson at work with two fingers on a portable typewriter by the light of an angle poise lamp.

BROCK: How did it go?

COLLINSON: Well — they've made a start, clearing the old panelling out. I'm just making a report. (As Brock glances back at the house) I'd leave them to it. They were decidedly tricky.

BROCK: Any reason given?

COLLINSON: No. They just don't like it. Come in — have a drink.

BROCK: Good idea.

Collinson clears a space for him. The whole caravan is tightly packed with files and office equipment as well as personal things, but method keeps everything in place. He produces whisky and glasses from a tiny cupboard, ice from an equally tiny fridge.

COLLINSON: How's Jill now?

BROCK: — I've sent her home.

COLLINSON: Just as well. A nasty shake-up.

BROCK: It wasn't just the car.

COLLINSON: Oh?

BROCK (after a moment): Bloody woman!

He sits frowning. Collinson watches him.

COLLINSON (carefully): I've only admired her from afar but... I'd say she's the type that ... hurts easily.

Brock seems not to hear him. So he goes on pouring out the drinks.

BROCK: Colly — were there any rats?

COLLINSON: Where?

BROCK: In the end room?

COLLINSON: No.

BROCK: No sign there'd been any?

COLLINSON: Rats wouldn't have left that Spam. They'd have chewed those tins open in no time.

BROCK: They could do that?

COLLINSON: The teeth of a hungry rat Here —

He passes Brock his glass.

BROCK: Cheers. (He glances at Collinson's report) I've got some work to finish too. I might stop over tonight.

COLLINSON: Break in the Director's suite a bit? (Brock nods absently. Collinson drinks and watches him, noticing his quietness) I was up in town last week. Dropped in on the legal department. One or two things I wanted to clear up about the house here — covenants and so on. They've got boxes and boxes of stuff — passed over by the trustees, I suppose. I brought one back. (Brock is still showing no attention. Collinson digs out an ancient document box and squeaks it open) One or two curiosities in it. How d'you like this? (He takes out a document) Application for the holding of a service of exorcism.

BROCK: What!

COLLINSON: August 1892.

BROCK: Let me see —

He grabs the document. Collinson follows it with a thin ledger.

COLLINSON: Full record of the alleged haunting. Evidence, I suppose.

BROCK: Louisa Hanks —

COLLINSON: That was her. There's even a report of her death.

He passes Brock a newspaper cutting.

BROCK: 1890 —

COLLINSON: Two years before.

BROCK: “Sad mishap at Taskerlands. Louisa Hanks, an under maid in the employ of Mr Horace Tasker, yesterday fell to her death from a flight of steps while engaged about her duties”. That’s all.

COLLINSON: Pretty good press for an under-maid in those days.

Brock stares at him.

BROCK: And they thought that she — ?

COLLINSON: More than thought. They kept a note of all the times and dates, went on doing it for ages afterwards. You see, the ghost-laying didn’t take.

Brock looks from the ledger to the document. to the cutting ... back to Collinson’s steady face.

BROCK: Have you seen it?

Collinson shakes his head.

COLLINSON: Only heard.

BROCK’S SUITE — OFFICE, NIGHT

Brock is walking uneasily about his office. Everything in him resists the idea. on the other hand —

He goes to the window and looks down into the dark forecourt. He can see the lighted windows of the caravan. more by way of fidgeting than from any urgent need to communicate, he picks up the phone and presses buttons.

BROCK: Christine ... look, honey, I’m still at this place, I won’t be home...Oh, the move, various buffooneries. It’s all right, I’ve eaten. All I should. How’s whatsisname, the horse ... Yes, Chuffy... it was that hoof? Aha... Oh, good. Love to the kids, then.

He puts the phone down. And sits frowning. And comes to a decision. He pulls his jacket on and hurries out.

ENTRANCE HALL AND PASSAGE

The stairway that descends beside the lift shaft is narrow, lit by temporary fixtures.

Brock comes down. At the foot of the stairs he stands by the deserted reception desk and listens. Not a sound.

He moves slowly along the dim passage, putting his feet down as quietly as he can without making a performance of it. The door of the storage room is shut. He stands by it and listens again.

For a few seconds there is no sound ... then the same rapid pattering Jill heard, that might come from the feet of a very small human or a very large rat.

He puts his hand to the doorknob. In the same instant there is a cry — again the same that Jill experienced, a hoarse rasp. It is almost as if he had caused it.

He instinctively takes his hand from the knob for a moment. Then he grips it firmly. . no sound ... and throws the door open. As he fumbles for the light switch there is a little rush of noises ... the pattering, the cry, very faint.

At the click of the switch it all ceases.

He looks round the storage room. He sees nothing move. A quantity of panelling has been ripped out by the workmen and left on the floor.

Then the sounds come again. The pattering — and, curiously close, the cry: A short, denatured screech, almost in his ear.

It comes again...and again.

Brock backs away.

THE LABORATORY — DAY

Coloured indicator lamps are flashing on a “breadboard” — a rough experimental lash-up of electronic components and printed circuits. Maudsley is making adjustments to the controls on a temporary panel, while Dow takes notes.

Eddie Holmes has one eye to an optical tube with many large-handled but delicate adjusters. It is supported in a frame that is gripped tight in a vice. A couple of feet in front of him, clamped to the same frame, is a kind of crystalline box, a thing of exquisite complexity.

Eddie is peering into the heart of the box.

EDDIE: Try going down two nanoseconds.

MAUDSLEY: Down two.

Eddie's other eye is open too but trained to ignore that it sees. It ignores the lab door opening and Brock coming in,

followed by Jill.

BROCK: I've got something to tell you all. (Eddie looks up with both eyes. He rubs them. Brock looks deliberately round the room, waiting for faces to lift from apparatus) We've got a ghost!

For a moment, nobody knows how to take the announcement. Whether he is expecting a laugh or not.

EDDIE: I'm glad to hear it, Peter.

MAUDSLEY: Every home should have one.

HARGRAVES: Every stately home.

EDDIE: Had me worried, the lack of class.

Collinson comes in. Brock turns to him.

COLLINSON: Not a chance.

BROCK: Talk to them yourself?

COLLINSON: I did. Push it any further and there'll be a general walk-out.

BROCK: That's it, then.

He turns to the others. They are even more puzzled.

EDDIE: What's this about, Peter?

STEW: Did you say ghost?

BROCK: Silly word, don't be put off. We could call it a phenomenon or something. Anyway it's real. It's got possession of the computer storage room and it's stopped all work there.

COLLINSON: The men won't go back.

STEW: They were going on about something in the canteen —

DOW: Yes. I thought it was the muck.

STEW: I wondered.

BROCK: Whatever it is in there I've heard it. Colly's heard it. And Jill's seen it.

EDDIE: Jill —

STEW: That what got you?

JILL: Yes.

STEW: What did you see?

JILL: A woman.

MAUDSLEY: Oh, come off it!

EDDIE: She isn't kidding.

BROCK: None of us are.

They don't know how to react. Maudsley gives a nervous giggle.

STEW: Let's go in there

HARGRAVES: Why not? I'm ready —

BROCK: All right. Thanks for the enthusiasm because I intend to use it.

STEW: Eh?

EDDIE: What d1you mean?

BROCK: They once had a go at it with bell, book and candle. Well — we're rather better equipped. (He lets this sink in) I'm going to chuck the lot at it.

EDDIE: Go after it with — electronics and — and —

BROCK: Find out exactly what makes it — well, it doesn't tick, it patters its feet and screeches. Everything we get Jill's going to program in the computer.

EDDIE: Analyse a spook?

BROCK: Say it's...a mass of data waiting for a correct interpretation. Nobody's ever managed it. I think we might.

Collinson glances at Jill's tight, strained face.

COLLINSON: Can you spare the time?

BROCK: No choice, Colly. It's got us stuck...

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM — DAY

Something is hurled through from the passage, to land twisting like a heavy snake on the floor. It is a heavy cable with a multi-outlet head.

MAUDSLEY: Ta.

He plugs in a large tape-recorder. Nearby, Dow is sorting out microphones, including a parabolic reflector.

DOW: Which mike, Pete?

BROCK: Stereo. (To Jill) Where did you see it?

JILL: Near the top of the steps.

The panelling has been stripped from the end wall, exposing the steps, and from about half the remainder of the room. It reveals a bare stone wall with a row of large joist holes about half-way up.

BROCK: Where she fell off.

JILL: There must have been an upper floor. Where those holes are. D'you think she was going up to it?

COLLINSON: No. This was a total ruin when Tasker bought. It's all in the deeds. He just roofed it and patched it and made it part of his house. A sort of folly.

JILL: Then — where was she going?

BROCK: Probably a big aspidistra at the top and she had to water it.

JILL: And died.

BROCK: Odd, that. You'd have thought she'd just break a leg or something. It's not high enough.

JILL: High enough for poor Louisa. And then... they panelled the place over. To hide it all.

They are all watching her. Rational by temperament and training, they are nevertheless uneasy in this place. There is something about its atmosphere that disturbs.

EDDIE: There's a big echo in here. We ought to measure it. Something to make a loud noise with? (At the table) What's all this?

JILL: Spam.

EDDIE: Eh? Somebody feeding the ghost?

He grins at her but the idea isn't funny. It hits her. Items click together in her mind.

JILL (almost a whisper): Perhaps they were.

Eddie thumps a rusty tin on the table but rejects the idea.

He goes on testing possible objects while Dow listens through his headphones. HARGRAVES points the parabolic reflector hopefully at the steps and locks it off.

HARGRAVES: Now we wait. Think I'll get my coat.

MAUDSLEY: Get mine, will you?

STEW (giving them a sour look): Oh spare us.

HARGRAVES: What? STEW: This act, the ghostly shivers.

HARGRAVES: No act.

MAUDSLEY: It's just — chilly. Don't you feel it?

STEW: Do you mind!

Then he notices Jill. She is trembling, tightening her arms round herself.

Eddie has improvised a clapper board out of two pieces of batten from a packing case. He smacks them sharply together. The percussion echoes through the room.

EDDIE: How's that?

DOW: Okay, I'll take it. (He switches the recorder on and speaks into the microphone) Testing room wavelength. Take one.

Eddie produces another clash of metal ... it echoes noticeably ... then, after a few seconds, another percussion.

JILL: Stop it. Oh stop it — !

BROCK: That's enough, Eddie.

Through their very voices comes the harsh rasping screech. It repeats several times in rapid succession.

There is wild excitement. The sound seems to break out in half a dozen places. They twist and turn to locate it. Then it is gone — in a single rapid patter of footsteps.

They are left staring at each other.

HARGRAVES: That was it! That was it!

BROCK: It was by the steps.

HARGRAVES (pointing down the room): No, over that way.

EDDIE: It was by the door.

MAUDSLEY: No, it wasn't.

EDDIE: Distinctly.

They are all arguing and pointing; almost a nervous reaction.

STEW: What did you hear?

EDDIE: It was over there! I'm not crazy!

MAUDSLEY: You could hardly hear it.

EDDIE: It was deafening!

BROCK: It wasn't loud.

EDDIE: Not loud? I heard it!

BROCK: Just close.

HARGRAVES: Hi, that's right.

BROCK: No perspective on it.

STEW (to Maudsley): What did you hear?

MAUDSLEY (shrugging): Not much.

STEW: I didn't hear anything.

JILL: I saw her. Again.

This stops the argument.

BROCK: Same place?

JILL: No, there. (She points to the middle of the room. Instinctively they turn to look at the spot)
Black clothes.

EDDIE: Solid?

JILL: Yes, quite solid.

BROCK: Was she moving?

JILL: I think so. There was something the matter. The way she moved —

BROCK: How?

JILL: Sort of — twisting.

Brock looks at the others. Nobody has anything to add.

BROCK: Let's hear it again. Cliff —

Dow turns the recorder spools back and switches on.

DOW'S VOICE (recorded): Testing room wavelength. Take one.

They hear the test sounds Eddie made and the two other voices cutting in.

JILL'S VOICE: Stop it. Oh stop it —

BROCK'S VOICE: That's enough, Eddie.

Then — silence, apart from small human exclamations.

EDDIE: She's not there. She didn't record.

DOW: I heard her in my headphones. I don't get this.

EDDIE: Let me check that thing.

He crouches by the recorder. Uneasy glances are exchanged.

HARGRAVES: She got away...

THE LABORATORY — DAY

More apparatus is being wheeled out of the laboratory towards the storage room: A TV monitor, TV cameras, thermographs. Jill slumps into her chair at the programming desk. Collinson is with her.

JILL: It's the screaming.

COLLINSON: Yes.

JILL: Could you hear it from the caravan?

COLLINSON: No, only if I went to the room. But I — well, I just can't take a woman's screams.

JILL: Soft-hearted.

COLLINSON: I was with my wife in a car crash.

JILL: Killed?

COLLINSON: No. We divorced. Might have had something to do with it. This is even worse in a way.

JILL: Worse?

COLLINSON: A living person in that pain, you can try to help them. Here — you can't. (Jill covers her face) , — I'm going to be very old and stuffy and say drop the whole thing.

JILL: No.

COLLINSON: If you really see something it must mean — extra sensitivity.

JILL: I'm a medium?

COLLINSON: That makes it sound —

JILL: Knocks on the table, one for yes, two for no.

COLLINSON: I'm serious.

She sees the concern in his face. Then Brock arrives with Stew.

BROCK (to Stew): Get all Colly's data on file. And stand by to take real time from next door.

STEW (switching on his teleprinter): Okay.

BROCK: Jill, can you start blocking something out? Heuristic stuff, really wild? (He glances at the tape storage units) Those won't touch it. Book time on the central computer. If you need it, go through to Chicago. All in code, Colly, it stays our little secret.

COLLINSON: Who pays?

BROCK: Himself. Sure held love it if he knew! (Collinson passes Stew the old ledger and a plastic folder of neatly typed notes) Full record of the first five years from 1890. Also the past six months.

STEW: What about the bit in between? The odd eighty years?

BROCK: We've got a witness ...

HALF AN HOUR LATER IN THE STORAGE ROOM

Alan is standing in the doorway of the storage room. He looks thoroughly bewildered. The room seems to be full of apparatus. Blank monitor screens flicker. Eddie and the others are tending and adjusting and improvising.

ALAN: Cameras? What's all this stuff? What's it for?

BROCK: I told you — ignore it.

ALAN: I didn't want to come.

BROCK: A few simple questions. That won't take long. (Alan doesn't move from the doorway) Remember this room?

ALAN: I was just a kid.

BROCK: YOU did come in here?

ALAN: I suppose so.

BROCK: You're not sure?

ALAN: Well, I did, then

As if to prove it, he comes forward now.

BROCK: How often?

ALAN (evasively): We — we knew we weren't rightly meant —

BROCK: How many times?

ALAN: I dunno.

BROCK: In a year, say?

ALAN: Ten times. A dozen.

BROCK: You said between 1952 and 1955.

ALAN: Yes.

BROCK: Maybe a total of thirty visits? (Alan nods. Brock turns to the nearest microphone) Get that, Stew?

INSIDE THE LABORATORY

Stew and Jill are working at the computer. Stew leans across the teleprinter desk to a microphone.

STEW: I got it.

BROCK'S VOICE (through speaker): Fills in the model a bit.

The teleprinter keys rattle beneath Stew's fingers.

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM

Brock turns back to Alan.

BROCK: And you heard — rats?

ALAN: Sometimes.

BROCK: Only sometimes?

ALAN: Nearly every time, if we waited.

INSIDE THE LABORATORY

BROCK'S VOICE (through speaker): Nearly every time.

Jill looks at Stew. He nods and keeps on typing it in.

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM

ALAN: We made these dares out of it, see? Old rats are dirty customers. They'll go for you. We used to fool about all over this house. Smash it up a bit you know.

BROCK: You're a country lad. You know the sound rats make.

ALAN (ignoring this): I reckon we must have bust all the windows. Real bad, we were. Used to see who could find a pane of glass still whole and — smash' Cost you a lot to put tem back, did it? (He is talking faster, suddenly urgent) I better go now. There'll be trouble if I don't get back. That old cow down there, she — (He breaks off, listening. The others notice something too. Maudsley shivers. Dow tenses and makes a dive for the parabolic reflector. All of them sense the chill: Brock ... Eddie...Alan) I reckon I'll just get along.

But he has hardly turned to go when there is a rapid pattering ... a single rasping cry.

INSIDE THE LABORATORY

No sound comes through the speaker but Jill reacts.

JILL (turning to Stew): It's there! Can't you hear it?

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM

The screech comes again and again.

Alan stands paralysed as Eddie and the others try to bring their apparatus to bear. Cameras are swung on their tripods. microphones scan the room.

Alan stands staring at Brock. Suddenly he cracks. With a strangled exclamation he turns and bolts. He collides with Maudsley. He pushes Dow out of his way, trips over a cable and falls against a thermograph tripod. He goes down with it. Then he is crawling towards the doorway, frantic with terror.

THE ENTRANCE HALL

Alan drags himself along the passage, trying to regain his feet But blood is spilling from a cut above one eye and he look. half stunned —only driven on by animal fear.

As he sways against the wall Jill throws the lab door open. He jerks away from the sudden movement. He stumbles past the reception desk and the pop-eyed sergeant — and drops to his knees, trying to wipe the blood out of his eyes. As Jill catches him up he peers round to see who or what it is.

ALAN: Don't want to be — like Jackie —

Brock appears in the passage, to find Jill crouching by Alan and the sergeant running to help.

BROCK: All right. It's over.

SERGEANT: What happened, sir?

BROCK: Get some water — whisky — anything — (As the sergeant hurries off, he makes for Alan) You never went into that room. Did you?

ALAN: I did.

BROCK: You're lying.

JILL: Peter —

BROCK: You stayed at the door and listened. You knew what it was.

JILL: Leave him alone!

BROCK: You were afraid of it.

JILL: Why not? Why shouldn't he be? It's a normal human reaction. He's the sane one! We're the freaks!

Brock turns quickly down the passage.

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM

Dow is playing a tape recording back and getting only a confusion of bumps and scuffles and shouts. He looks up as Brock returns, and shakes his head.

Eddie is watching a wildly swinging playback image on a monitor screen.

EDDIE (turning to Brock): Nothing.

Alan's panic has brought something to the surface in them all. He has acted out the secret fear they suppress, and it needs more effort to keep a rational view of this unrecordable thing.

THE ENTRANCE HALL

The sergeant had brought water in a jug, and a glass. Alan has drunk some. Jill is washing the cut on his face.

JILL: What happened to Jackie?

ALAN: Eh?

JILL: You said just now —

ALAN: We never done nothing to him. It was the door got stuck. That door.

JILL: He was inside the room?

ALAN (nodding): We never meant — we couldn't help it, could we? (His face is suddenly suffused with guilt) He's all right, old Jackie.

JILL: Did he ... see it?

ALAN (after a moment): He made out it spoke to him. And then ... the others come.

JILL (chilled): Others?

ALAN: Just his talk, see.

JILL: What happened to him?

ALAN: He's all right. Got this job, hasn't he?

JILL: Can I meet him?

ALAN: What for? He don't remember. (She stares at him) They took him up the County.

JILL: Where?

ALAN: The County. You know. They put him right. They can do that. He don't care a button, he just laughs. All the time. He's all right.

She can say nothing. Seeing Brock returning, Alan moves off abruptly and heads for the outer door.

BROCK (calling): Wait a minute — I'll get a car to take you —

JILL (fiercely): Let him go!

Then Alan has gone. They look at each other. Brock is showing the same strain as the rest of his team.

The phone rings on the reception desk, grating raw nerves.

SERGEANT (answering it): Reception ... Yes, he is. (To Brock) Mr Ryan's office.

It is like a cold douche. Brock takes the phone.

BROCK: Brock ... Oh ... Helen, my love, how are you?...Yes, we're settling in nicely... (Alarmed) McAlister? But —that's all been settled, there's no question of — there's no room for him here!...(Alarm subsiding) Talk to him? Well ... I just don't want to see the man, I'm in the middle of an experiment. Look, is he there? (He manages a grisly jocular) Himself, th'ould grey widow maker? ... I see, when's he back?...All right, then, under duress. Tomorrow. 'Bye. (He puts the phone down) Hell!

JILL: Experiment...

THE LABORATORY — DAY

A display screen flickers. Tiny flicks of blue light jump up and hold, building into an irregular graph-like pattern.

JILL: I don't know what you'd call that. The time since she died.

BROCK: Quasi-life.

JILL: All right, her quasi-life. During it she must have made eight thousand appearances, minimum.

BROCK: Sound only?

JILL: Yes. In vision, about a tenth as many.

Eddie and the others are gathering round to watch. There is a curious tension growing in them, a sense of the rational put under severe strain.

EDDIE: Sounds a hell of a lot.

JILL: Spread over all those years, it isn't. And there's a cyclic factor. Bursts of activity.

She indicates the peaks of the display.

BROCK: 1905 looks a good year. All round there.

JILL: The time of the letter.

BROCK: Yes ... it could have been.

STEW: What letter?

BROCK: One to Father Christmas except that it wasn't.

JILL: From Martin Tasker aged 8. Later to die a recluse.

Brock moves aside for the others to inspect the display.

BROCK: See them? Patches of concentrated haunting.

EDDIE: Let's scrap that word.

BROCK: Haunt?

EDDIE: Yes.

MAUDSLEY: It blows Eddie's mind.

EDDIE: It gets in the way. Like the jokey talk.

MAUDSLEY: Saw a ghost eating toast Halfway up a lamp post!

EDDIE (rounding on him): Shut up!

The tension has thickened.

BROCK: Eddie's right. Let's cut out all the loaded words. Ghost ... spook ... apparition ... phantom.

EDDIE: Supernatural.

BROCK: Yes, that's a beauty. Spectre...wraith ... spirit.

HARGRAVES: Like a rollcall

BROCK: This isn't a little shade that couldn't get into heaven because the pearly gates were shut. It's something else, something interesting.

A tiny silence.

JILL: You don't want her to be alive.

EDDIE: Do you think it is?

JILL: No.

EDDIE: Well, then —

JILL: I might be wrong.

BROCK: Is anybody religious?

JILL: I don't mean that. Just — respect. For her, I suppose.

MAUDSLEY: Old Louisa?

JILL: She wasn't old, she was nineteen.

Brock gives her a long hard look.

BROCK: You've demolished her! I know you, love, I know how your mind works. You're on the track of something that serves her up as a very dry dish indeed — and you feel funny about it. Come on. Give!

JILL (hesitantly): It's just the first rough model. (She flips a switch. A wide coil of paper chatters and spills from the line printer) I took the sudden coldness as basic. A temperature drop of at least three degrees or we wouldn't notice it.

EDDIE: Fair enough.

JILL: Taking the volume of air in that room — and varying times from ten to ninety seconds — what we get is a power flow between 20 and 200 kilowatts a minute.

EDDIE: A heat pump.

STEW: A furnace in reverse!

Brock studies the print-out.

JILL: Peter you see what's coming out there? Heat drawn rapidly from the surroundings and concentrated.

EDDIE: Ionisation?

BROCK: Hot spots forming in the air.

EDDIE: Like — fireballs.

BROCK: Converting into other forms of energy — sound waves — light ... (doubtfully) It'd be quite a process. Crude energy forming itself into regular, recognisable patterns. I don't know.. .

EDDIE: Let's make a practical start. Search for these — hot spots, see if they exist.

STEW (amused): Hot spots.

MAUDSLEY: Ay, ay, Eddie.

DOW: Dirty old man.

EDDIE (eagerly): We've got heat sensors — we can do it. Two stages — a wide scan, then home in. It's the crossover stage — we can improvise there — (Already on the move, he turns impatiently) Come on, then!

DOW (as he follows): Hot spots.

MAUDSLEY: Carry me to the Kasbah.

Jill watches them go,

JILL: Well, Eddie buys it ...

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM — DAY

A thermograph detector is being slowly panned on a tripod by Maudsley. Eddie and the others are setting up black boxes improvised out of used canteen containers, with trailing wire and small lamps sprouting. Eddie places one on the top step.

EDDIE: Early warning. Any quick temperature change — this lamp comes on. Half a dozen altogether, that should cover the —

Turning to point the others out to Brock, standing below, he nearly slips off the worn steps.

BROCK: Watch it!

EDDIE (steadying himself): Following in Louisa's footsteps!

BROCK: One's enough...

INSIDE THE LABORATORY

Stew and Jill are working slowly through a data routine.

STEW: I don't buy it either. I've never felt cold in there.

Jill breaks off and swivels to face him.

JILL: Never once?

STEW: Not a goose-pimple.

JILL: But — you're skinny. You're a natural shiverer.

STEW: Yeah. Wrap up warm, Stew, me mum always says. (He frowns at his work) Struck another bug.

JILL: Okay. Re-run.

Stew presses keys. The teleprinter starts typing out its data so far. Brock comes in.

BROCK: How's it going? Trying more variables?

JILL: There are some we missed.

BROCK: Such as?

JILL: The strength of people's reactions.

BROCK: To it?

JILL: Everybody's is different. One hears hardly at all. Why?

BROCK: It's what you'd expect. Strength of eyesight or hearing.

JILL: What about Stew?

STEW: I still don't get a thing.

BROCK: Okay, you're ghostproof. Like colourblind.

JILL: Good. I'm running a fresh program. I'm going to put him in it.

BROCK: What?

JILL: I'm running Stew in it as a parameter.

STEW: Fame at last.

BROCK: What's the idea?

JILL: He's significant.

BROCK: How?

STEW: Don't mind me.

But Jill's intensity grips Brock.

JILL: Suppose ... Stew was your only witness. In that case, would she ... walk? D'you see what I mean? Would — she — walk — for — him?

Brock begins to get it ...

INSIDE THE STORAGE ROOM

Rapid footsteps patter in the storage room. This time they seem to run the whole length of it.

Maudsley swings a thermograph scanner wildly, trying to follow the sound. Eddie scrambles to help him.

Dow is aiming the parabolic microphone in another direction.

Brock and HARGRAVES are busy with more thermographs. But all the monitor screens fed by these machines remain blank.

Jill comes into the doorway with Stew.

A harsh rasping squeal. The footsteps break into half a dozen crossing patterns

Suddenly Jill sees it: A black figure at the foot of the steps, clawing its way up as if in slow motion, somehow almost paralysed.

JILL: Look! HARGRAVES sees it too.

HARGRAVES (pointing): There it is! (Brock abandons his thermograph. He sees nothing. The steps are empty) It was there! Right there! Sort of creeping! You must have seen her!

He runs to the spot as if he expects to find some trace and turns to them, baffled.

BROCK: Just you and Jill.

EDDIE (bitterly): No warning! (He snatches up one of his black boxes and breathes noisily, angrily, on the element. It instantly lights up) Oh, it works now!

He shakes the thing until the contents rattle.

Brock looks round. Stew is still standing in the doorway. Meeting Brock's eyes, he shakes his head. Brock turns to Jill. She is standing stiffly, controlling herself with an effort.

JILL: I saw her face this time. She's frightened...!

BROCK'S SUITE — LIVING QUARTERS, NIGHT

Jill sits hunched over a drink. Brock is getting one for himself.

JILL: She's running from something.

BROCK: The footsteps.

JILL: Always running.

BROCK: Probably old Tasker coming to pinch her bum. Three times round the table and the girl is mine, ha, ha.

JILL (emotionally): She died!

BROCK: It's really getting to you. (That does it. She rubs and dabs at her face as tears start streaming)...Jill.

JILL: Oh, Peter — to be afraid like that!

He sits and pulls her to him. She is shaking.

BROCK: Are you afraid? Of all this?

JILL: No. I don't think so —

BROCK: What, then?

JILL (with difficulty): It's — the thought of it. Of there being nothing left of you but — just enough to repeat the worst moment of your life over and over again!

BROCK: That doesn't happen.

JILL: But if it did — if she knew —

BROCK: Look, love, we talked about it. We all agreed —

JILL: Could there be anything there that knows?

BROCK: Not in my book.

JILL: Just — a dead mechanism?

BROCK: That's all that's left.

JILL: It's horrible. But it's better than knowing. I couldn't bear it if she knew!

He strokes her, gentling her.

BROCK: All right, love.

He kisses her but she is still tense and obsessed.

JILL: To be so alone —

She looks at him with horror behind her eyes.

BROCK (firmly): All right, that's it. You've said it and got it over. Your moment of superstition.

JILL: It wasn't.

She is calmer now. For a moment or two longer he keeps his arms round her. The tension is lessening, but slowly.

BROCK: What you need is another drink. (He picks up her empty glass. As he goes to fill it the phone rings) Oh, hell! (He tries to ignore it but it goes on ringing. He answers it) Hello? Christine, darling, I meant to ring before but you know – problems. Well, something slightly interesting for once. I'll tell you all about it when I ... Probably tomorrow . (Jill is on her feet. He flaps a detaining hand at her) Kids in bed are they? ... Is she? Give her my biggest kiss ... A what? A drawing? I can't wait. (Jill makes for the door. His back is turned and he doesn't notice) Listen, about Chuffy...was it inside the hoof? ... What did the vet say... ?

Jill slips out.

THE STORAGE ROOM — NIGHT

Jill slowly opens the door of the storage room. A face turns to her. It is Stew, sitting there alone by the dim flicker of blank monitor screens. Keeping a self-imposed watch.

He shrugs.

JILL (after a moment): She's about. I can tell...

BROCK'S SUITE — OFFICE, NEXT DAY

The Sergeant opens the door.

SERGEANT: Mr McAlister, sir.

McAlister comes in — a tall, talentless mechanic of relentlessly honest demeanour.

McALISTER: Hello, Brock. (The hand he extends is, disturbingly, bright scarlet. So is his other one) Excuse the red hands, I've been doing dye tests, in very inadequate conditions. (They shake, very briefly) You've never been to my place at Slough. Hardly more than a shed.

Brock indicates a chair. McAlister sits — sinking down and down almost to floor level.

McALISTER (cannily): The interview chair.

BROCK: Do the tests yourself?

McALISTER: All of them.

BROCK: Is that so?

McALISTER (proudly): I make it a rule.

BROCK: Never delegate?

McALISTER: Responsibility? Never.

BROCK: No.

McALISTER: I'm a plain nuts-and-bolts man.

BROCK: A what?

McALISTER: My own hands.

BROCK (thoughtfully): Held like that.

McALISTER: Who?

BROCK: Old Patrick. He was a...nuts-and-bolts man himself once. Started with electric irons.

McALISTER: I know.

BROCK: Of course you do. A good ploy.

McALISTER: I don't like that word.

BROCK: Gambit, then.

McALISTER (guardedly): He said we should have a talk.

BROCK: We're having it.

McALISTER: Meaningful.

BROCK: No.

McALISTER: Eh?

BROCK: Not meaningful. Since we're being fussy about words, that's not one he uses.

A tiny unstated bluff is being called. It has to do with who knows Ryan better. It is resolved by McAlister suddenly

looking humbler.

McALISTER: Brock — I need more working space. This place is enormous. Now if I could just look round it —

BROCK (stiffening): I'm sorry.

McALISTER: Some rooms you're not using —

BROCK: Not a chance.

McALISTER: Look — let me tell you about my project, then you'll see —

BROCK: I know. The world's machine.

McALISTER: Domestic —

BROCK: Domestic. The first to sort its own wash and program itself. The first to sniff out items with nonfast dye and reject 'em. Etcetera, etcetera.

McALISTER (red hands raised): It'll do all that!

BROCK: When it works.

McALISTER: It will!

BROCK: When it does ... that triumph of over-sophistication will cost nine hundred nicker per machine! Just to make!

McALISTER: That's a lie!

BROCK: I've seen the costings.

McALISTER: Where? Who showed them to you?

BROCK: Guess. (Brogue) Ah, we'll not beat ould Nippon with the like of this, at all, at all!

McALISTER (choking): He wouldn't say that.

BROCK: He did. He saw the point. This place is for fundamental research, not for patching duds.

McALISTER: He — he wouldn't have sent me down here —

BROCK: For me to tell you. Yes, he would. He's got a kind heart. I haven't. Right — chat over.

He goes to the door.

McALISTER: No, listen to me —

BROCK: No more time.

McALISTER: Please —

He follows Brock out.

THE ENTRANCE HALL

McAlister follows Brock down the stairs.

McALISTER: You can't possibly use all this —

BROCK: I can. I need every inch.

McALISTER: It's like Buckingham Palace —

BROCK: For a top-class research team. You see, I'll delegate everything to them. They'll carry out all tests. That's the right way. (He glances down the passage. The door of the storage room is shut and Eddie is on guard outside it, ostensibly unpacking something) Now, you'll excuse me if I don't show you to your car. Sergeant, will you please —

As if under escort, the glowering McAlister makes for the front door with the sergeant. Brock turns to the lab. Eddie joins him.

THE LABORATORY

An expectant group is already gathered round the computer, where Jill is completing her first model of the new program.

JILL: The nature of observed reality. That's what this program takes in.

MAUDSLEY: Old philosophy stuff.

JILL: It might apply to her.

BROCK: How does that rhyme go ... ?

“There once was a man who said, God

Must think it exceedingly odd

That the sycamore tree

Continues to be

When there's no one about in the Quad.”

EDDIE: Does she walk when there's nobody there?

BROCK: That's it.

EDDIE: Makes a hell of a difference to the number of times. All those years when the house was empty.

Jill flips the switch of the line printer. It spills out its high-speed report.

STEW: Version with added Stewart.

Brock and Jill study it. Almost immediately something strikes him. He points it out to her, then relates it to a

second item.

JILL: Oh no. (Brock rips the roll off I to study it on his own) — I didn't spot that. I should have done. I just didn't spot the connection.

EDDIE: Let's have it.

BROCK (excitedly): If this means anything —

JILL: Let's start again.

BROCK: Why?

JILL: It's wrong.

BROCK: Why?

JILL: It must be.

BROCK: No. I like this. It's got the makings. It has. (To Jill) It's what you really wanted. You shaped it this way.

JILL: I didn't —

BROCK: You couldn't help it, love. The old intuition — right on the button.

EDDIE: For pity's sake —

BROCK: Beautifully simple.

JILL: I'll run it again.

EDDIE: Peter!

BROCK: It's the room.

EDDIE: What?

BROCK: Just the room itself, nothing else. Yes, this is better, it has to be right.

EDDIE: Peter, d'you mind telling —

BROCK: There is no ... ghost.

A small burst of surprise, even indignation.

THE OTHERS: But it's there! I heard it! I saw it! What's he mean?

BROCK: Try this for size. It holds an image — and when people go in there they pick it up. What you hear or what you see is inside your own brain!

EDDIE (frowning): Oh no —

BROCK: That'd be why the sounds don't echo and we can't locate them. That'd be why they don't record. No machine hears them.

DOW: I got them in my headphones.

BROCK: You got them in your head.

EDDIE: What about the hot spots?

BROCK: Forget them, Eddie.

EDDIE: I mean, the whole temperature thing —

BROCK: There isn't any.

EDDIE: Look, I know when I'm cold —

BROCK: The body's reaction — like allergy, and just as quick. Your whole physiology's affected.

HARGRAVES: By what?

BROCK: By what's in there.

EDDIE: But I thought you said —

BROCK: Don't you get it yet? It must work like ... a recording. Fixed in the floor and the walls, right in the substance of them. A trace ... of what happened in there. And we pick it up. We act as detectors — decoders — amplifiers.

EDDIE: A recording.

BROCK: It'd have to be in the stone.

EDDIE: I wonder.

HARGRAVES: Some kind of natural process?

DOW: But freaky.

BROCK: Perhaps it only occurs under extreme conditions. Some kind of — extreme human output. Emotion. Terror. And that prints off.

MAUDSLEY: Like — the shadows of people from the big bomb blasts.

DOW: Yes.

EDDIE: And we're — sensitive to it.

STEW: What about me?

BROCK: You? You've got no playback, that's all. Some transistors missing. You're the exception to prove the rule, thank God. (His grin grows wider) I'm waiting for the new penny to drop. If I'm right — this could be it. The Big One!

JILL (quietly): A new recording medium.

BROCK: The boot in the guts for ould Nippon!

JILL: If it's true —

BROCK: If it's true, you found it!

He kisses her. It sets off something like a goal-scoring reaction. Cowboy yippees. Cheers. Suddenly everybody is trying to kiss Jill...

BROCK'S SUITE — OFFICE — DAY

Hospitality glasses are clashed in a toast. Hospitality drinks are being downed. A lot of noise.

Brock pushes a glass into the hands of the bemused Collinson, who has just joined them.

BROCK: Colly — we're wetting the head of an idea! It could be the Big One!

COLLINSON: My God!

Brock has had several drinks and they seem only to have increased his excitement. He grabs Jill.

BROCK: I'm certain of it, love! The more I kick it around! Direct injection into the human brain of both sound and vision — no intervening apparatus!

JILL: I read about some research —

BROCK: The Japs, of course. But blind end — they got nowhere! It's going to be ours! Television without the telly set! No box — not even a visor in front of your eyes —

HARGRAVES: Just a sort of clip —

BROCK: Costume jewellery — the 13-channel earring!

Stew and Maudsley loom in, gibbering Jap-English through protruding paper teeth.

STEW: Honourable Nippon have met great defeat!

MAUDSLEY: Go now to cut honourable belly!

STEW: Berry! (taking teeth out) He couldn't say belly — ~

DOW: But when it goes wrong the repairman'd have to operate on your head

BROCK: Don't mention that — not in the sales brochure! Keep it positive. (He has his arm round Jill. He taps, an imaginary control on her temple) Coronation Street! (tap) Double Your Money! (tap) Come Dancing! (tap) War and Peace~! (tap) Porn Channel One! (tap) Porn Channel Two'

JILL: I'm going mad

BROCK: That's all right — (tap) — Channel 10, Home Doctor! (tap) Political Laugh-In! (tap) The Hard-Core Show! (tap) Urban Guerilla's Do-It-Yourself —

HARGRAVES: Hi, listen —

BROCK: Come on, let's have it!

HARGRAVES: No, the phone — it's ringing —

It is, almost drowned by their noise. Brock makes his way to the desk and answers it.

BROCK: Hello? Who? Yes, Brock speaking!...Helen — just a second. (Pressing a hold button, he turns to the others) Shut up a bit.

He makes for the other room. They quieten. The door shuts.

He picks up the extension phone.

BROCK: Okay, put him on ... Hello, Patrick ... Fine, fine. I've been meaning to ring you. I told McAlister the facts of life this morning, as I gathered you wanted me to ... Oh, has he? . . . Give him time, it'll sink in. Yes. . . yes ... it's what you've always said, fundamental research or nothing. (A pause. He suddenly looks grey) But surely ... we settled all that. Patrick. . But look here — (He suddenly has no choice. He has to play the card) Patrick, the proof of it ... listen, though ... Please will you listen to me! I think we've got it! Well — the Big One! (Delighted exclamations at the other end. He grins, confidence coming back fast) Yes! Yes!

THE STORAGE ROOM — LATER THAT DAY

Brock and Collinson are peering at a patch of stonework in the lower part of the wall.

COLLINSON: It's called Kentish rag.

BROCK: Kentish what?

COLLINSON: Rag.

BROCK: Joke time's over.

COLLINSON: All right, ragstone. It's a kind of greensand.

He picks up a crowbar and starts prising at it. The other members of the team sit watching with a kind of greed. All awe of the place has gone.

BROCK: Is it rare?

COLLINSON: Good grief, no. It's been quarried since Roman times. Used all over the south of England. Most of medieval London was built of this stuff.

BROCK: Better and better!

COLLINSON: How?

BROCK: It might explain a lot of — ghost stories.

COLLINSON: See what you mean.

BROCK: Colly, it all keeps clicking together!

THE LABORATORY

Jill is checking back the program with furious concentration.

STEW: Found the snag yet?

JILL: No.

STEW: Think there is one?

JILL: It's beginning to look... as if he's right.

THE STORAGE ROOM

Collinson's crowbar dislodges a piece of stone. He shows it to Brock.

COLLINSON: Crumbly stuff. That's why they stopped using it in the end. This was well weathered.

BROCK: Penetrated.

COLLINSON: Deeply. Algae — moulds — bacterial action. They all come into it.

BROCK: The protein medium, Eddie?

EDDIE: Maybe.

BROCK: We chased that for a long time too.

He stiffens.

The others notice it too but this time they wait with a new kind of expectation. Quite calmly. Eddie takes his own pulse. Then — the rapid pattering. A rasping screech.

THE LABORATORY

There is no sound here but the soft clatter of Stew's teleprinter. But Jill breaks off, listening.

THE STORAGE ROOM

The sound dies away. They look at each other, detached observers.

HARGRAVES: I saw it again. A fraction of a second.

COLLINSON: I seemed to be getting words.

BROCK: Words —

HARGRAVES: Yes, I wondered too.

COLLINSON: Couldn't make them out.

Brock is strangely, quietly exhilarated. He picks up the crowbar and taps it thoughtfully against the wall.

BROCK: Vibration. (turning) Are you game to go on?

EDDIE: Now? Yes.

BROCK: As long as it takes. Jill? Stew? Shall we make a night of it?

STEW'S VOICE (through speaker): Okay, Pete.

JILL'S VOICE (through speaker): What do you want to do?

BROCK: Get control.

THE LABORATORY

JILL (shaken): Not yet — how could we possibly — ?

BROCK'S VOICE (through speaker): The essence of experiment, Jilly. Put it to the proof!

THE STORAGE ROOM — THAT NIGHT

in a patch of light, the crowbar creaks and grates as Brock levers a piece of stone out — just as Collinson did.

BROCK: Frequency?

EDDIE'S VOICE: Seven forty.

BROCK: Right, give me that. Ten secs.

A droning sound hits the ear at the same frequency as the scraping of the crowbar. The metal horn of a sound projector is pointed at the spot by Maudsley. Eddie crouches over the amplifier controls.

The sound cuts. They wait.

BROCK: ...And another ten.

Again the drone. Jill and Stew are watching from the computer desk which has been set up nearby the doorway. The noise cuts. Another wait. Brock comes hurrying across.

BROCK: Well?

JILL: We haven't enough data.

BROCK: We're getting data all the time, and building. Stew —

Stew taps keys. The teleprinter re-runs. Brock studies its print, turns quickly to a display monitor nearby. This shows a three-dimensional drawing of the room itself. Brock makes an adjustment and the lines jump. . and jump again ... displaying a different perspective each time. Another adjustment — and a spray of radiating lines is superimposed to denote the current target area.

BROCK: Back to the steps. Laser plus sound

The thin cherry-red beam of a laser flicks back and forth across the steps, scanning them. Simultaneously there is a strident intermittent buzz.

BROCK: Cut them.

The sound stops. White light floods the steps. They wait. Brock has a stopwatch in his hand. Nothing happens.

BROCK: Right. Run number 17. Laser plus five second bursts.

EDDIE: Peter, what's the use?

BROCK: We're on the right track, just keep going.

EDDIE: You've had a — a response!

BROCK: No.

EDDIE: We've heard it twice tonight.

BROCK: Not because of anything we did. It didn't relate. It's got to relate, Eddie. (He looks round the wearying faces) Okay, break for ten minutes. We'll get more coffee up. Just another hour, if we don't get anything by then — Bear with me?

HARGRAVES (glumly): You're the captain.

Brock walks out into the passage. Eddie glares after him

As Jill comes up he nods after Brock — is there anything she can do, She goes doubtfully to see.

Ten minutes later the team are downing coffee and microwaved snacks. They are too tired to talk.

Eddie glowers down the passage.

THE ENTRANCE HALL — NIGHT

Brock is standing on the stairs, leaning against the wall. Adrenalin and alcohol have left an odd, inspirational effect. Jill is fighting her own weariness, trying to sound persuasive.

JILL: I think you're right. It's a vibration thing.

BROCK: I know it is.

JILL: But — Peter, it'll take huge programs to analyse it.

BROCK: Of course.

JILL: I'd like to develop them.

BROCK: Fine.

JILL: Then why this — tonight?

BROCK: I want to pull the trigger, just once. Or what the hell are we into — a tape that only plays back when it feels like it?

The sheer irrationality of it shocks her.

JILL: You just can't say that —

BROCK: I've got to know!

JILL: Peter, I don't think any of us is quite — we I've all been under strain — these days here — the more rational we've tried to be, the worse —

BROCK: What are you driving at?

JILL: We're all past it.

BROCK: Not me, love.

JILL: Yes, you.

BROCK: Don't say that. Don't do it. I've got a feeling about this. You get this exact grip on a thing this clarity — only once ever —

She is staring at him.

JILL: What have you — promised Ryan?

THE STORAGE ROOM — NIGHT

An appalling screech bursts from the horn of the sound projector, pounding at the walls as it is swung round. The sound wobbles, changing frequency with the stridency of an air raid siren, but much faster. Then it cuts.

Brock turns to the others.

BROCK: Nobody?

EDDIE: What's the use?

BROCK: Nerves jangled?

EDDIE: What do you think?

BROCK: That may be good.

Next — a beam of bluish light swings rapidly across the area of the steps. Synchronised with it come sharp, separate blasts of sound — with something of the effect of a dentist's drill.

Brock watches. Like the others, he now wears protective goggles.

BROCK: Hold the U.V. on the steps!

At the teleprinter, Stew has suddenly had all he can take. He covers his ears. Jill moves to take over ...

Now it is flashing light, as rapid as a stroboscope, with sound to match.

Brock signals. The sound cuts. The light is sane again. Eddie stares dazedly about. HARGRAVES has quietly started to cry.

But Brock ignores them as he turns again to the computer.

It chatters out its report.

BROCK: Right. On the next run we'll try

EDDIE: Stop it! You don't know what you're doing any more

BROCK: Following a logical line.

EDDIE: It's insane!

BROCK: Quit, then.

EDDIE: What?

BROCK: Get off the project.

EDDIE: Peter

BROCK: Get off the entire project! You can!

EDDIE (choking) : Don't talk to me like, that, Peter, not to me

The teleprinter chatters again, a line of delayed print-out.

Brock turns to read it.

BROCK: What the hell — ?

JILL (peering): That's not — computer language.

BROCK: It's your code number. You fed it in.

JILL: No —

BROCK: You must have done.

JILL: There are words. They might be words. See — "pray".

STEW: "Soul". That's "soul" there.

JILL: "Pray." "Prayer".

A deathly hush. Then a terrified wail from the demoralised HARGRAVES.

HARGRAVES: It's in the computer!

For a moment the thought has them all in its grip. They are past objective thinking, utterly exhausted.

Brock is the first to recover.

BROCK: No —

HARGRAVES: It is! It is! It's in there!

Brock grabs him and shakes him like a rat.

BROCK: You bloody fool! Jill picked up the words! You got words yourself — that's how it works! I told you.

There is a familiar pattering. This time it is fearful to them.

EDDIE (whispering): There it is —

BROCK (after a moment, insanely): Come when I tell you!

He lunges towards the sound projector and switches it on. At full volume he swings the horn, blasting every part of the room.

Jill claps her hands to her ears.

People stumble towards the doorway to escape it. The sound goes on and on — and seems to change, erupting into a vast grunting that makes the whole place shudder. For a moment it seems completely out of control. Brock is shaken like a man on a pneumatic drill.

Then — silence. He stands panting, hardly knowing what he has done or why.

The others drift back.

JILL: It's different.

BROCK (numbed): Eh?

JILL: She's gone.

BROCK: What do you mean?

JILL: Completely. I can tell.

Eddie totters forward in a kind of grotesque triumph.

EDDIE: I'll tell you what he's done! D'you know what he's done? He's wiped the tape!

Brock stares blankly at them.

Maudsley gives a sick snigger. otherwise nobody is laughing. They are incapable of it.

BROCK (mumbling): Thanks ... we'll leave it at that. Might try ...another run tomorrow.

JILL: Run what? She's gone!

She has a horror of him, as if she has just watched him commit a murder. Eddie takes her by the arm.

Brock crouches on the floor. Listening and waiting...

Hours later Brock is still there, watching by the flicker of the blank monitor screens. More and more anxiously ...

Dawn, and Brock is still there. Still alone. He has dropped asleep, leaning awkwardly against a monitor. His head droops a little more sideways — and wakes him. He pulls himself back to consciousness, wondering what woke him. Expectant again.

But there is nothing...

THE ENTRANCE HALL — DAY

Coming in next day, Jill finds the Sergeant looking his usual self, at least.

SERGEANT: Morning, Miss Greeley — or should I say good afternoon?

JILL: It's up to you. (Monitors are being wheeled along the passage from the storage room. Collinson is in charge. Jill's look is a question. He shakes his head) ... He really did it.

COLLINSON: I kept away.

JILL: Where is he?

Collinson indicates the floor above...

INSIDE BROCK'S SUITE — OFFICE

Brock is huddled in his chair, looking too small for it. He is still wrapped in a dressing-gown and looks grey and dishevelled.

BROCK (into phone, wretchedly): Look, Patrick. I'm sorry if I gave the impression that we...Perhaps I shouldn't have, then ... No, not backing down at all, I just don't want you to waste your time coming here and. . .Oh, I have! every confidence! I know we're on the track of it, we've only got to get the bugs out of it...as always ... What?...Of course you've got a right to. It's a ... mineral ... medium... Don't pin me down, I can't be more specific at this moment of time ... Patrick, please! (desperately) It — it's a variant on Eddie Holmes's digital crystal — in fact that may turn out to be it after all. I just can't give a technical explanation right now... Of course I will, Patrick. Of course. Good bye.

He puts the phone down in a sweat — and sees Jill watching, him from the doorway. For a moment or two neither speaks.

BROCK: Don't say — anything! It's over, it's finished! If I can just walk away from this one — ! (worriedly) He Is a funny man, you never quite know ... you can't tell from his voice. Just so long as this doesn't — doesn't ... He's devious of course but what the hell. I've seen him be treacherous but not to anybody that — anybody that...No. No. He wouldn't...

THE ENTRANCE HALL

Men from a Ryan Electrics van which has drawn up outside trolley a large, square, canvas-covered object in across the hall towards the reception desk.

THE LABORATORY

All the apparatus is back in place. Brock, looking more or less himself again, is restoring confidence to his team.

BROCK: Whatever the ... effect was, it is obviously gone for good.

EDDIE: Obliterated.

BROCK: Yes. (He looks at Jill but she says nothing) Now we've had time to take it in — I'm glad. It's what I wanted to do in the first place.

EDDIE: Oh, Peter — !

BROCK: Now, be fair — I did. So let's regard it as a bit of a nonsense, part of the house-warming. It got out of hand. I plead guilty. But now — the room is clear, we can set it up for computer storage, get on! I've been working out new schedules —

The sergeant looks in.

SERGEANT: Beg pardon, Sir —

BROCK: What is it?

THE ENTRANCE HALL

Brock comes from the lab with the others following curiously. The sergeant points to the canvas-covered object. It looms there like a squat monolith.

SERGEANT: Where's it to go, sir?

With rising apprehension Brock lifts a corner of the canvas cover. Then he throws it off. The thing revealed is white and shining, with the unmistakable single eye of a washing machine. Its top is monstrously swollen to accommodate a mass of special controls.

BROCK: McAlister! (His stricken eyes meet Jill's) The old bastard did it! He did do it!

THE LABORATORY — DAYS LATER

Eddie is peering through his optical tube. His spare eye goes to Stew as he passes laden with used rolls of computer paper.

EDDIE: Ready for my data?

STEW: Just clearing the decks.

EDDIE: From the other night?

STEW: Yeah.

EDDIE: Get rid of it. As things now are, get rid of it fast.

Stew moves on — to where Jill stands poring over more paper print-out.

JILL: Stew. If she simply fell —

STEW: What have you got there?

JILL: The words that came through. Why these words? “Pray”. . . “soul”...”pray” again ... “prayer” ... “save”. They’re nothing to do with falling off steps.

STEW: Jill, forget it.

JILL: “Save” ... from what?

STEW: Forget it.

JILL (remembering): The others...! (She frowns, thinking back to what Alan said. Then she rips off the print-out) I’m going to show him this.

STEW: Not Peter.

JILL: Of course.

STEW: No, love — not today.

JILL: What?

STEW: The big invasion. McAlister.

She hesitates. Then she goes quickly out.

THE STORAGE ROOM — DAY

Brock is clutching a large plan as he glowers round the storage room.

BROCK: At least he's not getting this.

COLLINSON: He'll be fine in the other wing.

BROCK (with satisfaction): It's filthy damp.

Work on the room is proceeding at last. Workmen are erecting scaffolding along the side wall, which has been stripped, like all of them, of remaining panelling. The place has a bare, industrial look.

Brock turns to Jill as she comes in.

BROCK: Jill, look at this. Location of the store-core units —

JILL: I want to show you something. From the other night —

BROCK (warding off the print-out): Oh no. No!

JILL: The words —

BROCK: I don't want to see. I don't want to know!

He moves off quickly to confer with the workmen. Collinson gives her a warning gesture and joins him.

Then it happens.

Jill finds herself shaken by a spasm of trembling — far more violent than any before. As if the strength is being whipped out of her body. She grabs at a ladder to steady herself.

Brock and Collinson are engaged in some joke with the workmen, all of them laughing.

Then — silence. The men are still laughing and talking but without sound.

Instead, an instant later, an obscene grunting roar.

It is overpowering. Through the continuing horror of it Jill can see the men talking and working on, evidently oblivious of it. It simply does not reach them.

It ends suddenly too. Brock's laugh is heard again, and the small sounds of the scaffolding work.

Collinson happens to turn.

COLLINSON: Jill!

Brock turns too and sees the state she is in. Collinson is the first to reach her.

BROCK: Get her out of this —

JILL: You didn't hear it! (Collinson almost carries her out into the passage) It was different — this was different! It's not her — it's something else! Peter — !

BROCK (firmly): You'll have to keep out of this room. It's the associations.

JILL: It isn't

BROCK: Stay out of it.

JILL: Let me tell you

BROCK: Things went too far. My fault, I know it was.

JILL: If you'll only —

BROCK: Now you've got to rest. Unwind. Go home and take it easy. We can't have you cracking up.

JILL: Peter —

BROCK: Will you do that for me? (He glances at his watch) Time!

He hurries towards the entrance hall.

COLLINSON (quietly): He's right, Jill.

OUTSIDE TASKERLANDS HOUSE — DAY

Two strange cars pull in outside the front entrance. An old Rover and a viva.

From the first McAlister gets out. He looks twice as tall, swollen with triumph. One of his team is with him, three others get out of the Viva — all of them grey, bullied men.

As they turn in a body to make their entrance, a lightweight motorbike sputters across the gravel. Its rider kicks the stand down, beams at them and trots into the house ahead of them.

It is the vicar.

INSIDE THE ENTRANCE HALL

As the vicar enters he spots Brock standing by the reception desk with the air of a general forced to ignominious parley.

VICAR: Mr Brock! There you are! (Brock stares at him blankly) I've tracked down that exorcism!

BROCK: What?

VICAR: I went to the museum!

BROCK (in horror): Not now —

VICAR: And there it was!

BROCK (desperately): Colly — cope, will you — cope, please!

Collinson hurries forward.

VICAR: It wasn't easy to discover —

BROCK: Very kind of you, very helpful, but — just at the moment I've got business!

He turns to face the invaders. McAlister leads them with eyes gleaming and a thin smile.

McALISTER: Well, Brock?

BROCK: This way.

He leads them off towards the spare wing.

VICAR (hurt): That really was a little short —

COLLINSON: You said — an exorcism?

VICAR: Yes.

COLLINSON: He knows about it.

VICAR: Oh.

COLLINSON: We had the documents. 1892.

VICAR: When? Oh, no.

COLLINSON: It was.

VICAR: 1760.

Jill comes forward. The vicar recognises her, nods and beams.

JILL: 1760? The house wasn't built then.

VICAR: Indeed not. There was just — some sort of ruin here. Nevertheless there'd been — complaints, so — a service was performed. Quite useless, apparently — that's if you accept there had been anything there in the first place ...

THE LABORATORY — DAY

Jill is working at the teleprinter with feverish concentration when Eddie comes up.

EDDIE: Jill, what about tackling mine?

JILL: Give me a chance.

EDDIE: What is this? (He looks over her shoulder) For God's sake! Don't let Peter see that. We've got work to do. JILL (promising): Soon, Eddie.

Eddie goes sourly off. Stew moves in.

STEW: Well?

JILL: It's the concept of a tape that's wrong. It's more like a great depth — a core —

STEW: The stone.

JILL: He erased her. But she was only in the surface layer, the most recent.

STEW: 1890 recent!

JILL: There'd be much older impressions underneath. Much deeper.

STEW: How far are you trying to go back?

JILL: A long way...

THE ENTRANCE HALL — DAY

Brock and McAlister are coming down the stairs together as Jill appears from the lab.

McALISTER: I must have an office.

BROCK (unhelpfully): Do what I can —

McALISTER: I have a great deal of paper work.

BROCK (meanly): Costing?

McAlister glares at him. Jill takes advantage of the pause.

JILL: Peter — have you got a moment?

BROCK (quickly): This is Jill Greeley, who programs our computer. Robert McAlister.

McAlister thrusts out a bright blue hand.

McALISTER: I'll have need of you, lassie, and your wee machine. (He turns his back on her and the pair of them move off rapidly towards the other wing) I got that crack about costing. Let me tell you my machine is viable and I'm going to prove it...

Jill is left standing ...

OUTSIDE TASKERLANDS HOUSE — DAY

Eddie and some of the others are taking a break near the front entrance, idly watching McAlister and a couple of his team unloading things from the van — wash drums, cables, etc. The last man struggles under a burden of dazzlingly dyed sheets — orange, turquoise and cerise.

EDDIE: What do they think they're doing! Colours like that! My wife's old machine'd just spit them out naturally!

STEW: Those blokes are curious.

EDDIE: You're telling me!

STEW: No, I mean — one of them said what was this about a ghost.

EDDIE: Oh, be careful —

STEW: Don't worry, I was.

Jill comes from the house, walking fast. Her face is set and desperate.

EDDIE: Jill —

He calls after her but she goes straight on towards the caravan.

INSIDE THE CARAVAN

Collinson is working on some papers when Jill throws the caravan door open.

JILL: Colly — they're still working on that room!

COLLINSON: I'm glad to say.

JILL: Nobody thinks there's anything wrong?

COLLINSON: Not ... now. (He gets up, disturbed by her expression) Jill —

For whole seconds she stares in front of her as if she is struggling to focus on something deep in her mind.

JILL: There must be a... decay.

COLLINSON: Of what? Jill, what decay?

JILL: Whatever's ... stored in the stone. The recording. Otherwise ... it'd be like perpetual motion, an impossibility. It would have to ... corrode and lose definition-over long enough time it would have to. But then if you boosted it —(shrilly) Colly, I think that's what he's done!

COLLINSON: Boosted?

JILL: Some deep-level record, much older. So old and...shapeless ...

COLLINSON: Jill, there's nothing.

JILL: I know there is.

Collinson shakes his head. Then:

COLLINSON: Remember I'm on your side.

JILL: You're not any longer!

COLLINSON: Sit down and let's talk —

JILL: Am I the only one? Am I?

COLLINSON: Jill —

She backs away from the concern in his eyes. She throws the door open...

INSIDE THE LABORATORY — DAY

Jill is working feverishly at the computer. one by one the others stop the work they are doing, till they are all watching her ...

BROCK'S SUITE — OFFICE, DAY

Folder in hand, Jill looks into Brock's encounters an angry argument.

Brock is sitting hot-eyed at his desk. McAlister is shaking a bright green fist in his face.

McALISTER: — Full facilities! I'll accept nothing less! And you can just stuff that up your — up your — er — and —and — and —

He shoots a doubtful “presence-of-ladies” look at the newly imported girl secretary who sits nearby with a shorthand pad on her knee. Then he blunders out past Jill with a snarl of apology to her.

Jill shuts the door. Brock's eyes are fixed on her.

BROCK (to the secretary): Get out. Make some coffee.

The girl measures Jill with a look and goes into the living quarters.

JILL: I've got to talk to you.

BROCK: If it's what I think —

JILL: Even if it is.

Brock is out of his chair in a moment. He Comes close, keeping his voice down to a furious whisper.

BROCK: You won't give up, will you! You started this whole thing and you keep it going! You're determined to! You're getting to enjoy it!

JILL: Enjoy — !

BROCK: Oh, not healthy yum-yum enjoy. Some people like to destroy people, Jilly, and you're turning into one. If you can't take me from my family, it's got to be destruction!

JILL: It's not true!

BROCK: That creature that just went out of here — that baboon with the dyed hands — he's got his foot on my neck! Through you!

JILL (desperately) : Peter — you were right about the recording. (For a split second he seems to be listening to her) There are more things on it.

BROCK: Oh no.

JILL: I can prove it.

BROCK: Sweetie, you're into fantasies.

JILL: You've got to listen!

BROCK: Unless we're careful you could get very sick. You're going on leave. For a month — no, make it two months, starting now.

JILL: I can't —

BROCK: Stew can take over, he knows the computer. And he's — levelheaded. He's up to it.

JILL: Peter —

She sees his eyes and gives up. His mind is sealed against anything she can say.

She turns — and sees the secretary watching through a crack in the doorway.

BROCK: Home and rest now...

THE LABORATORY — NIGHT

The lab is dark, apart from the area of the computer where Jill is working alone. All round her are discarded rolls of print-out paper.

Collinson looks in, an old mac pulled round him, wet with rain.

COLLINSON: Jill! I saw the light. What are you doing?

She looks at him as if she hardly recognises him — then goes on tapping at the teleprinter keys. He comes to her side and peers at what she is doing — but he can make nothing of it.

JILL: I think someone else did know about this.

COLLINSON: Who?

JILL: Louisa.

He watches her face as she works feverishly on. In a moment she has forgotten he is there.

He turns and goes quickly out.

The slight sound of the door shutting seems to break her absorption. She sits back in her chair, covers her face. when she looks again at the paper roll in the machine, the same result is still there ...

THE ENTRANCE HALL — NIGHT

Jill comes out of the lab . She glances up the stairs — there are lights somewhere above — then turns along the passage towards the storage room.

A temporary notice has been stuck on the door, crudely lettered: “Keep Out, Building Work in Progress”. She opens the door. She switches the light on.

THE STORAGE ROOM

The storage room is empty, lit by a couple of bare bulbs. Builders’ equipment lies everywhere and more scaffolding has been erected.

Jill looks about, tense. But everything is aggressively ordinary.

She crosses to the stone steps and considers them. Ordinary, too, in the hard light. A workman has left a battered bucket on one of the lower ones and she dislodges it — just to break the silence. It clatters and rolls away...

BROCK’S SUITE — OFFICE, NIGHT

Collinson is facing a dishevelled Brock, who has just pulled a dressing-gown over his nakedness.

BROCK (incredulously): At this hour?

COLLINSON (quietly): I think she’s having a breakdown.

BROCK: Yes. (The tousled, undressed secretary peers out of the darkened living quarters. He waves her back) I sent her on leave.

COLLINSON: When?

BROCK: Today. I told her to go.

COLLINSON (amazed): Just like that? Just — go.

BROCK: What else? If you feel strongly about it — go with her! In fact I think you should, you’ve been under a bit of strain here, all this extra work, you’re due for a —

COLLINSON: Take Jill?

BROCK: A spot of leave’s what you both need, so why not, the pair of you? Get it all out of your system—

THE STORAGE ROOM

Jill is starting back towards the passage when she feels the premonitory chill. But she keeps a grip on herself and keeps moving.

The passage is dark, as if the light in the entrance hall has gone out.

Oddly enough, there are two tiny spots of red light — low down and flashing alternately like indicator lamps. Then both glow evenly — and come rushing forward at incredible speed, swelling in an instant into two eyes, yet not eyes like those of any living creature, for they keep twisting and moving on separate courses.

She stumbles back and almost trips over a spade, sending it scraping across the concrete. It is the only sound.

The eyes have gone.

More movement. She turns — and sees shapes, or rather shapeless things moving towards her across the open floor with the same incredible speed.

JILL (screams): Peter!

As if this served to set it off, the grunting begins — the same huge, unearthly noise she heard here earlier.

She starts across the floor — in the only direction she can, towards the steps.

They are hunting her. Huge forms, terrifying in their very lack of definition, with here and there eye-like dots of red light. They move across the ground with that dreadful speed, quartering it like hounds. There is a brute male violence about every movement, a lust to bring down and tear —

Then she is on the steps, pressing herself against the wall.

JILL: Help me! Help — !

She glances up.

The steps lead to an upper floor, with light pouring down from the opening.

She claws her way up to reach it.

The steps beneath her feet are unworn and strong.

Frantic, she reaches the top of them.

And there is nothing. No upper floor, not even a roof above her — only the night sky.

The whole room has vanished.

Instead of the walls there are standing stones round a moonlit space. And there the shapeless things are circling, closing in —

Then she falls.

It is a long way down ...

THE ENTRANCE HALL

Normal silence — then Brock and Collinson come running down the stairs. They look into the lab, then make for the storage room.

THE STORAGE ROOM

Jill is lying on the concrete at the foot of the steps. Brock and Collinson run to her.

Her eyes are open. She is dead...

THE ENTRANCE HALL — A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER

Brock, Collinson, Eddie and Stew come slowly in through the front door. Maudsley and HARGRAVES trail after them. All are soberly dressed.

The sergeant is missing from his place at the desk.

McAlister and one of his team come down the stairs. McAlister already looks more like a senior executive than a mechanic, and has acquired a plain-looking secretary who follows them holding some thick folders.

McALISTER: What was it?

COLLINSON: Accidental death. McAlister gives a sour sniff.

McALISTER: By the by, Brock — those environment boys were back, looking for you.

BROCK (dully): Oh.

McALISTER: Clapping a preservation order on that room, are they?

He goes on with his followers towards his own wing.

EDDIE: Pleased with the verdict?

Brock says nothing.

EDDIE: Why did you have to say all that? About her?

BROCK: Her mental state. They had to know.

EDDIE: Did they?

BROCK: Look, it wasn't just the fall that did it, they knew that.

STEW: They said shock.

BROCK: Complete vagal inhibition. That's when your whole system packs up. She brought it on herself.

Eddie gives him a look of disgust and turns away to the lab.

EDDIE: I'll just get my coat, Stew.

STEW: Okay.

COLLINSON (quietly to Brock): You were lucky.

Eddie reappears indignantly in the lab doorway.

EDDIE: What's he doing in there!

THE LABORATORY

The sergeant is standing beside the computer, busy with a paper-shredding machine. He has turned most of the used print out rolls into a huge mound of shreds. He is feeding in the last of them.

SERGEANT: Just what I was told, sir. Ask Mr Brock.

BROCK (entering with the others): We had to get rid of it.

STEW: That's — what she'd just been working on —

BROCK: It had to go. Look, I'm not suppressing anything — not evidence — it's all computer language —

STEW: All her work.

COLLINSON (calmly as ever): Leave it to me.

He motions Stew and Eddie out and closes the door. The last of the paper is buzzed into shreds.

BROCK: Mad stuff, Colly.

COLLINSON: It's gone now.

BROCK: You saw it? Well, you wouldn't understand it. Seven thousand years, it said! I mean — insane stuff!

Collinson hits him as hard as he can. It is an imperfectly aimed blow. It gets Brock in the throat, sending him sprawling in the shredded paper.

He lies there, choking and gasping while Collinson walks out. The sergeant is at a loss.

SERGEANT (to Collinson): Look here, sir! (He turns to help Brock) You all right, sir? Are you? What on earth did he — ? Shocking behaviour, shocking! Mr Collinson, too! (He gets Brock to his feet and brushes the clinging shreds off him) Er ... want I should do anything about him, sir?

Brock shakes his head. He rubs his bruised throat, breathing hoarsely. He makes for the door.

THE ENTRANCE HALL

The entrance hall is deserted.

SERGEANT (relieved) : Made off, has he, sir? Disgraceful. Sure you're all right, sir? (Brock nods) Oh, before I forget, them conservation inspectors was here again.

BROCK: Yes.

SERGEANT: In there along time, sir. They said there would be a summons. When they went one of 'em said did you know about the room.

BROCK: Eh?

SERGEANT: Just that, sir.

BROCK: What did he mean?

SERGEANT: That's all, sir, just did you know about the room. (Brock looks along the passage) Feel okay now, sir?

BROCK: Yes. Thanks. You can go.

SERGEANT: Thank you, sir. Good night, sir.

Brock takes out his keys.

Reaching the door, from which the builders' sign has been removed and a small official-looking notice substituted, he puts a key into the newly fixed lock.

THE STORAGE ROOM

The room looks much the same. Builders' equipment is still scattered about.

Brock shivers slightly.

As a rational man rejecting any alternative explanation, he buttons his jacket.

He walks across the floor —

There is a sudden scream in the air, close by. A woman's voice, sharp and clear.

VOICE: Help me — ! (He glances round but sees nothing) Peter! (He is stung by the unmistakable sound of his name) Help me — Peter — !

BROCK (whispers): Jill.

Then it screams again, and again, and again. And there is nothing he can do.

Except stand there stunned by the knowledge ... that there is a new voice on the stone tape ...