



Library podcast

Thrilling Tales, A Storytime for Grownups presents: “Uncle Abraham’s Romance” and “In the Dark” by E. Nesbit

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[00:00:44] Good afternoon, everybody, welcome to Thrilling Tales. It's great to see you here today. My name is David. I'm a librarian. I work upstairs in the Reader Services Department on the third floor. So do come and see us some time. Thrilling tales happens on the first and third Monday of most every month. Today, we are featuring an author named Edith Nesbit or as she sometimes published E. Nesbit. Did anybody here as a child read the Railway Children? Well, it's a wonderful children's book. It's also great for adults. And it's what she's most known for was her books of children's stories. But she also wrote some things for adults, some very spooky things. And that's what we're going to have here today, as we often do. I will start with a very short story just for an appetizer and for late comers. And then we will get to the main event.

[00:01:39] So our first story is a love story, and it's called Uncle Abraham's Romance by Edith Nesbit. No, my dear, my uncle Abraham answered me. No, nothing romantic ever happened to me unless.

[00:02:01] But no. That wasn't romantic either. I was.

[00:02:07] To me, being 18, romance was the world. My uncle Abraham was old and lame. I followed the gaze of his faded eyes and my own rested on a miniature that hung at his elbow chair's right hand, a portrait of a woman whose loveliness, even the miniature painter's art, had been powerless to disguise a woman with large eyes that shone, and a face of that alluring oval. Which one hardly sees nowadays? I rose to look at it. I had looked at it a hundred times, often enough in my baby days I had asked, Who is that uncle? And always the answer was the same. A lady who died long ago. My dear. As I looked again at the picture, I asked, was she like this? Who your your romance, Uncle Abraham looked hard at me. Yes. He said at last. Yes. Very, very. Like I sat down on the floor by him to tell me about her. There's nothing to tell, he said. I think it was fancy mostly, and folly. But it's the realest thing in my life, my dear. A long pause, I kept silent. You should always give people time, especially

old people. I remember, he said in the dreamy tone, always promising so well to the ear that loves a story. I remember when I was a young man. I was very lonely indeed. I never had a sweetheart. I was always lame, my dear, from quite a boy, and the girls used to laugh at me. Silence again. Presently he went on. And so I got into the way of mooning off by myself in lonely places, and one of my favorite walks was up through our churchyard, which was set on a hill in the middle of the marsh country. I liked that because I never met anyone there.

[00:04:20] It's all over. Years ago, when I was a silly lad, but I couldn't bear of a summer evening to hear a rustle and a whisper from the other side of the hedge. Or maybe a kiss as I went by. Well, I used to go and sit all by myself in the churchyard, which was always sweet with the time and quite light on account of it being so high.

[00:04:43] Long after the marshes were dark, I used to watch the bats flitting about in the red light and wonder why God didn't make everyone's legs straight and strong and wicked follies like that. But by the time the light was gone, I had always worked it off, so to speak, and could go home quietly and say my prayers without bitterness.

[00:05:08] Well, one hot night in August, when I had watched the sunset fade and the crescent moon grow golden. I was just stepping over the low stone wall of the churchyard when I heard a rustle behind me. I turned around expecting it to be a rabbit or a bird.

[00:05:26] It was a woman. He looked at the portrait. So did high. Yes. He said that was her very face. I was a bit scared and said something. I don't know what. She laughed and said, Did I think she was a ghost? And I answered back and I stayed talking to her over the churchyard wall. Two, of course, died quite dark, and the glow worms were out in the wet grass all along the way home. Next night I saw her again and the next and the next. Always at twilight time. And if I past any lovers leaning on the styles in the marshes, it has nothing to me now. Again, my uncle paused. It was very long ago, he said shyly, and I'm an old man, but I know what youth means and happiness.

[00:06:27] Though I was always lame and the girls used to laugh at me. I don't know how long it went on. You don't measure time in dreams, but at last your grandfather said, I looked as if I had one foot in the grave and he would be sending me to stay with our kin in bath and take the waters. I had to go. I could not tell my father why I would rather die than go. What was her name, uncle? I asked. She never would tell me her name. Then why should she? I had names enough in my heart to call her by marriage. Chadwell, my dear. Even then, I knew marriage was not for me. I met her. Night after night. Always in our churchyard where you trees were the old crooked gravestones so thick in the grass that was there. We always met and always parted. The last time was the night before I went away. She was very sad and dearer than life itself. And she said, if you come back before the new moon, I shall meet you here just as usual. But if the new moon shines on this grave and you are not here, you will never see me again any more.

[00:07:47] She laid her hand on the tomb against which we had been leaning. It was an old like and whether worn stone and its inscription was just Suzanna Kingsnorth died 1723.

[00:08:01] I shall be here, I said. I mean it. She said very seriously and slowly. It is no fancy. You will be here when the new moon shines. I promised. And after a while we parted. I had been with my kinsfolk in Bath for nearly a month. I was to go home on the next day when turning over a case in the parlour. I came upon that miniature. I could not speak for a minute at last, I said, with dry tongue and heart beating to the tune of heaven and hell. Who is this? That said, my aunt, though, she was betrothed to one of our family years ago, but she died before the wedding. They say she was a bit of a witch. A handsome one, wasn't she? I looked again at the face, the lips, the eyes of my dear, lovely love, whom I was to meet tomorrow night when the new moon shone on that tomb in our churchyard. Did you say she was dead? I asked. I hardly knew my own voice. Years and years ago, her name's on the back and the date. I took the portrait out of its case to remember just the color of its faded red velvet bed and red on the back. Susanna Kingsnorth died 1723. That was in eighteen twenty three. My uncle stopped short. What happened? I asked breathlessly. I believe I had a fit. My uncle answered slowly, at any rate. I was very ill. And you missed the new moon on the grave. I missed the new moon on the grave. And you never saw her again? I never saw her again. But, uncle, do you really believe men can the dead?

[00:10:02] Well, she did you.

[00:10:07] My uncle took his pipe and filled it. It's a long time ago, he said, and many, many years old man's tales, my dear old man's tales. Don't you take any notice of them? He lighted the pipe and puffed silently a moment or two before he said. But I know what you mean. And love and happiness. No, I was always lame and the girls used to laugh at me. The end.

[00:10:46] All right, our main story today is also by Edith Nesbit, who when she wrote Scary Stories, this is from a collection called Grim Tales.

[00:10:54] She just went by E. Nesbit and this one is called In the Dark. It may have been a form of madness.

[00:11:05] Or it may be that he really was what is called haunted. Or it may, though. I don't pretend to understand how have been the development through intense suffering of a sixth sense in a very nervous and highly strung nature. Something certainly led him where they were, and to him they were all one.

[00:11:29] He told me the first part of the story and the last part I saw with my own eyes.

[00:11:36] Holding and I were friends even in our school days. What first brought us together was our common hatred of visger, who came from our part of the country. His people knew our people at home, and so he was put on to us when they came. He was the most intolerable person, boy and man that I have ever known.

[00:11:58] He would not tell a lie. And that was all right. But he didn't stop at that. If he were asked whether any other chap had done anything, been out of bounds or up to any sort of a lark, he would always say, I don't know, sir, but I believe so.

[00:12:17] He never did. No, we we took care of that. But what he believed was always right. I remember Haldane twisting his arm to say how he knew about that cherry tree business. And he only said, I don't know. I just feel sure.

[00:12:32] And I was right. You see? What can you do with a boy like that? We grew up to be men. At least. And I did. visger grew up to be a prig.

[00:12:45] He was a vegetarian and a teetotaller and an all wooler and Christian scientists and all the things that prigs are. But he wasn't a common prig. He knew all sorts of things that he oughtn't to have known that he couldn't have known in any ordinary decent way.

[00:13:03] And it wasn't that he found things out. He just knew them. Once, when I was very unhappy, he came into my rooms. We were in our last year at Oxford and talked about things that I hardly knew myself. That was really why I went to India that winter. It was bad enough to be unhappy without having that beast know all about it.

[00:13:29] While I was away over a year and coming back, I thought a lot about how jolly it would be to see Old Holiday and again if I thought about visger at all. I wished he was dead, but I didn't think about it much. I did want to see whole day, and he was always such a jolly chap, gay and kindly and simple, honorable, upright and full of practical sympathies. I longed to see him, to see the smile and his jolly blue eyes looking out from the net of wrinkles that laughing had made round them. And here his jolly laugh, and feel a good grip of his big hand. I went straight from the docks to his chambers in Grays Inn, and I found him cold, pale and anemic, with dull eyes and a limp hand and pale lips that smiled without mirth and uttered a welcome without gladness.

[00:14:22] He was surrounded by a litter of disordered furniture and personal effects, half packed, some big boxes stood corded and there were cases of books filled and waiting for the enclosing boards to be nailed on. Yes, I'm moving, he said.

[00:14:37] I can't stand these rooms. Something strange about them. Something devilishly strange. I clear out tomorrow.

[00:14:46] The autumn dusk was filling the corners with shadows. Oh, you you got the furs, I said, just for something to say, for I saw the big case that held them lying, corded, among the others furs, he said. Oh, yes. Thanks awfully. Yes, I forgot about the furs. He laughed out of politeness, I suppose. There was no joke about the furs. They were many, and find the best I could get for the money. And I had seen them packed and sent off when my heart was very sore. He stood and looked at me and said nothing.

[00:15:24] Come out and have a bit of dinner, I said as cheerfully as I could to busy answered after the slightest possible pause and a glance round the room. Look here. I'm awfully glad to see you. If you just slip over an order in dinner, I go myself only. Well, you see how it is. I went and when I came back, he had cleared a space near the fire and moved his big gate table into it and we dined there by candlelight. I tried to be amusing. He, I'm sure, tried to be amused. We did not succeed either of us. And his haggard eyes watched me all the time, save in those fleeting moments, when, without his turning his head, he glanced back over his shoulder into the shadows that crowded round the little lighted place where we sat.

[00:16:13] When we had dined and the man had come in, taken away the dishes, I looked at Halden very steadily so that he stopped in a pointless anecdote and looked interrogation at me. Well, I said you're not listening. He said petulantly, What's the matter? Well, that's what you'd better tell me, I said. He was silent, gave one of those furtive glances at the shadows, and then stooped to stir the fire, too. I knew it. A blaze that must light every corner of the room. You're all to pieces, I said cheerfully. What have you been up to? Wine cards, speculation woman. Well, you know, if you won't tell me, you'll have to tell your doctor. Well, my dear chap, you're a wreck.

[00:16:58] You're a comfortable friend to have about the place, he said, and smiled a mechanical smile, not at all pleasant to see.

[00:17:06] I'm the friend you want, I think. Said I. Do you suppose I'm blind? Something has gone wrong and you've taken to something. Morphia, perhaps. And you've brooded over the thing till you've lost all sense of proportion. Now out with it, old chap. I bet you a dollar. It's not so bad as you think it.

[00:17:24] If I could tell you or tell anyone, he said slowly, it wouldn't be so bad as it is if I could tell anyone, I tell you. Even as it is, I've told you more than I've told anyone else. I could get nothing more out of him. But he pressed me to stay.

[00:17:43] Would have given me his bed and made himself a shake down, he said. But I had engaged a room at the Victoria, and I was expecting letters. So I left him quite late, and he stood on the stairs, holding a candle over the banisters to light me down.

[00:17:59] When I went back the next morning, he was gone.

[00:18:01] Men were moving his furniture into a big van with somebodies pen technique on painted on it and big letters. He had left no address with the porter and he had driven off in a handsome with two portmanteau or two Waterloo.

[00:18:13] The porter thought, well, a man has a right to the monopoly of his own troubles if he chooses to have it. And I had troubles of my own that kept me busy. It was more than a year later that I saw a whole day and again I had got rooms in the Albany.

[00:18:35] By this time and he turned up there one morning very early indeed, before breakfast, in fact.

[00:18:42] And if he had looked ghastly before, he now looked almost ghostly.

[00:18:49] His face looked as though it had worn thin like an oyster shown, but has for years been cast up twice a day by the sea on a shore all pebbly. His hands were thin as a bird's claws, and they trembled like caught butterflies.

[00:19:05] I welcomed him with enthusiastic cordiality and pressed breakfast on him. And this time I decided I would ask no questions, for I saw that none were needed. He would tell me he intended to tell me. He'd come here to tell me and for nothing else. I lit the spirit lamp. I made coffee and small talk for him. And I ate and drank and waited for him to begin. And it was like this that he began. I am going.

[00:19:34] He said, to kill myself. Oh, don't be alarmed. I suppose I had said, or looked something. I shan't do it here or now. I shall do it when I have to. When I can't bear it any longer. And I want someone to know why. I don't want to feel that I'm the only living creature who does know. And I can trust you, can't I? I murmured something reassuring. I should like you.

[00:20:03] If you don't mind to give me your word that you won't tell a soul what I'm going to tell you.

[00:20:08] As long as I'm alive afterwards, you can tell whom you please. I gave him my word. He sat silent looking at the fire. Then he shrugged his shoulders. It's extraordinary how difficult it is to say it. He smiled. The fact is, you know that beast George visger. Yes, I said I hadn't seen him since I came back. Somebody told me he'd gone to some island or other to preach vegetarianism to the cannibals, and now he's out of the way. Bad luck to him. Yes, sir. Hold on. He's out of the way, but he's not preaching anything in point of fact. He's dead. Dead was all I could think of to say. Yes, said he. It's not generally known, but he is. What did he die of? I asked. Not that I cared. The bare fact was good enough for me. Well, you know what an interfering Champy always was? Always knew everything. Heart to heart talks have everything open and above board. Well, he interfered between me and someone else told her a pack of lies. Lies. Well, the things were true, but he made lives of them the way he told them. Well, you know, I did. I nodded. And she threw me over. And she died and we weren't even friends. And I couldn't see her before, I couldn't even. Oh, my God. But I went to the funeral. He was there. They'd asked him. And then I came back to my rooms and I was sitting there thinking. And he came up. He would do it's just what he would do. The beast. I hope you kicked him out. No, I didn't try. Listen to what he'd got to say. He came to say that no doubt it was all for the best. That he hadn't known the things that he told her. He'd only guessed he'd guessed right. What right had he to guess? Right.

[00:22:36] And he said it was all for the best, because besides that, there was madness in my family. He'd found that out, too.

[00:22:44] And he's there. If there is, I didn't know it. And that was why it was all for the best.

[00:22:52] So then I said there wasn't any madness in my family before, but there is now. And I got hold of his throat. I'm not sure whether I meant to kill him. I ought to have meant to kill him anyhow. I did kill him. What did you say?

[00:23:12] I had said nothing. It's not easy to think at once of the tactful and suitable thing to say when your oldest friend tells you that he is a murderer. When I could get my hands out of his throat, it was as difficult as his days to drop the handles of a galvanic battery. He fell in a lump on my hearthrug. And I saw what I'd done. How is it that murderers ever get found out? They're careless, I suppose. I found myself saying they lose their nerve. I didn't. He said I never was calmer. I sat down in the big chair and I looked at him and I thought it all out. He was just off to that island. I knew that he'd said goodbye to everyone. He told me that there was no blood to get rid of or only a touch at the corner of his slack mouth. He wasn't going to travel in his own name because of interviewers. Mr. Somebody. Some things luggage would be unclaimed and his cabin empty. No one would guess that Mr. Somebody something was Sir George visger f r s. It just was plain as plain. There was nothing to get rid of. But the man, no weapon, no blood. And I got rid of him. All right.

[00:24:31] How? He smiled cunningly. No, no. He's hit. That's where I draw the line.

[00:24:39] It's not that I doubt your word. But if you talked in your sleep or had a fever or anything. No, no. As long as you don't know where the body is. Don't you see? I'm all right.

[00:24:50] Even if you could prove that I've said all this, which you can't. It's only the wanderings of my poor, unhinged brain. You see. I saw and I was sorry for him. And I did not believe that he had killed visger. He was not the sort of man who kills people. So I said, yes, old chap, I see. Now look here. Let's go away together. You and I travel a bit and see the world and forget all about that beastly chap. His eyes light it up at that high. He said, you understand. You don't hate me and shrink from me. I wish I told you before. You know, when you came in, I was packing all my sticks spent. Well, it's too late now. Too late. I'm not a bit of it. I said, come. We'll pack our traps and be off tonight. Out into the unknown. Don't you know? Well, that's where I'm going, he said. You wait when you've heard what's been happening to me. You won't be so keen to go travelling about with me. Oh, but you told me what's been happening to you, I said. And the more I thought about what he had told me, the less I believed it. No, he said slowly. No, I've told you what happened to him. What's happened to me is quite different. Did I tell you what his last words were? Just when I was coming at him before I got his throat, you know, he said, look out. You'll never be able to get rid of the body. Besides, anger's sinful, you know that way. He had like a tractor on its hind legs. So afterwards I got thinking of that.

[00:26:31] But I didn't think of it for a year because I did get rid of the body. All right. And then I'm sitting in that comfortable chair and I thought, hello.

[00:26:41] It must be about a year now since that. And I pulled up my pocketbook and I went to the window to look at the little Alman act I carry about it. It was getting dusk. And sure enough, it was a

year to the day. And then I remembered what he'd said. And I said to myself, Well, I'm not much trouble getting rid of your body, your brute. And then I looked at the hearthrug and. Oh, he screamed suddenly and very loud.

[00:27:10] I can tell you, no, I can't.

[00:27:15] My man opened the door. He wore a smooth face over his wriggling curiosity. Did you call, sir? Yes, I lied. I want you to take a note to the bank and wait for an answer. And when he was got rid of holding and said, where was I? You were just telling me what happened after you looked at the almanac. What was it? Nothing much, he said, laughing softly Oh, nothing much, only that I glanced at the hearthrug and there he was, the man I'd killed a year before.

[00:27:53] Don't try to explain or I shall lose my temper. The door was shut. The windows were shut. He hadn't been there a minute before. And he was there then, that's all.

[00:28:06] Hallucination was one of the words I stumbled among. Exactly what I thought, he said triumphantly, but I touched it. It was quite real heavy, you know, and harder than life. People are somehow to the touch more like a stone thing covered with kid. The hands were in the arms, like a marble statue in a blue serge suit. Much I hate men who wear blue serge suits. There are hallucinations of touch, too. I found myself saying exactly what I thought, holding more triumphant than ever said, but there are limits, you know, limits. So then I thought someone had got him out that the real him and stuck him there to frighten me while my back was turned. And I went to the place where I'd hidden him. And he was there just as I'd left him only. Well, it was a year ago. There are two of him there now. My dear chap, I said this is simply comic. Yes, he said it is amusing.

[00:29:19] I find it so myself, especially in the night when I wake up and think of it. I hope I shan't die in the dark. Winston It's one of the reasons why I think I shall have to kill myself. I could be sure then of not dying in the dark.

[00:29:34] Is that all? I asked. Feeling sure that it must be?

[00:29:39] No. Said Holding at once. That's not all. He's come back to me again. In a railway carriage it was. I'd been asleep, and when I woke up there, he was lying on the seat opposite me. Look just the same. I pitched him out onto the line at Red Hill Tunnel. And if I see him again, I'm going out myself. I can't stand it. It's too much. I'd sooner go whatever the next world's like. There aren't things in it like that. We leave them here in graves and boxes. You think I'm mad, but I'm not. You can't help me. No one can help me.

[00:30:15] He knew. You see, he said I shouldn't be able to get rid of the body, and I can't get rid of it. I can't. I can't. He knew he always did know things that he couldn't know.

[00:30:26] But how? Cut his game short. After all, I've got the ace of Trumps and I play it on his next trick. I give you my word of honor, Winston, that I am not mad. My dear old man, I said, I don't think

you're mad, but I do think your nerves are very much upset. Mine are a bit, too. Do you know why I went to India? It was because of you and her. I couldn't stay and see it, though I wished for your happiness and all that, you know, I did. Only when I came back, she'd. And you. Let's see it out together, I said you won't keep fancying things if you've got me to talk to. And I always said you weren't half bad old duffer. She liked you. He said, oh, yes. I said she liked me. And that was how we came to go abroad together. I was full of hope for him. He'd always been such a splendid chap, so sane and strong. I couldn't believe that he was gone mad. Gone forever, I mean, so that he'd never come right again.

[00:31:38] Perhaps my own trouble made it easy for me to see things not quite straight. Anyhow, I took him away to recover his mind's health, exactly as I should have taken him away to get strong after a fever, and the madness seemed to pass away in a month or two. We were perfectly jolly. And I thought I'd cured him. And I was very glad because of that old friendship of ours, and because she had loved him and liked me.

[00:32:05] And we never spoke of visger. I thought he'd forgotten all about him, I thought I understood how his mind, overstrained by sorrow and anger, had fixed on the man he hated and woven a nightmare, a web of horror around that detestable personality.

[00:32:23] And I had got the whip hand of my own trouble, and we were as jolly as sand boys together all those months. And we came to Brugge at last. In our travels, and Brugge was very full because of the exhibition. We could only get one room and one bed. So we tossed for the bed, and the one who lost the toss was to make the best of the night in an armchair and the bed clothes we were to share equitably. We spent the evening at the cafe Sean tall and finished at a beer hall, and it was late and sleepy when we got back to the ground. Viene.

[00:32:59] I took our key from its nail in the concierge's room, and we went up and we talked a while. I remember of the town in the belfry in the Venetian aspect of the canals by moonlight. And then Holden got into bed, and I made a chrysalis of myself in my share of the blankets, and fitted the tight roll into the armchair. I was not at all comfortable, but I was compensating Li tired, and I was nearly asleep when Holden roused me up to tell me about his will.

[00:33:28] I've left everything to you, old man. He said, I knew I can trust you to see to everything. Quite so, said I. And if you don't mind, we'll talk about it in the morning.

[00:33:38] He tried to go on about it, about what a friend I'd been and all that. But I shut him up and I told him to go to sleep. But no, he wasn't comfortable. He said he'd got a thirst like a lime kiln, and he noticed there was no water bottle in the room, and the water in the jugs like Pale Soupy said all all right. I said, light your candle and go and get some water. Then in heaven's name, let me go to sleep. But he should know you light it. I don't want to get out of bed in the dark. I might I might step on something, might night or walk into something that wasn't there when I got into bed. Right. I said walk into your grandmother, but I lit the candle all the same and he sat up in bed and he looked at me very pale with his hair, all tumbled from the pillow and his eyes blinking and shining.

[00:34:27] That's better, he said. Look here. Oh. Oh, yes, I see. It's all right. It's queer how they mark the sheets here. Blest if I didn't think it was blood. Just for a minute. The sheet was marked not at the corner, as sheets are marked at home, but right in the middle where it turns down with a big Red Cross stitching. Yes, I see. It's a queer place to market its queer letters to have on it, he said. GV Grong Devean, I said, what letters do you expect him to mark things with? Hurry up. You come to he said. I mean, yes, it does stand for John Dean, of course. I wish you'd come down to Winston. I'll go down, I said, and I turned with the candle in my head. He was out of bed and close to me in a flash. No, he said, I want to. I don't want to stay alone in the dark. And he said it just as a frightened child might have done. All right, then. Come along, I said. And we went. I tried to make some joke.

[00:35:23] I remember about the length of his hair and cut of his pajamas, but I was sick with disappointment.

[00:35:30] It was almost quite plain to me, even then, that all my time and trouble had been thrown away, and that he wasn't cured after all. We went down as quietly as we could, and we got a carafe of water from the long bare dining table at the Sala Marché. He got hold of my arm at first, and then he got the candle away from me, and he went very slowly, shading the light with his hand and looking very carefully all about as though we expected to see something that he wanted very desperately not to see.

[00:35:58] Of course I knew what that something was. It didn't like the way he was going on. I can't at all express how deeply I didn't like it. And he looked over his shoulder every now and then, just as he did that first evening after I came back from India. Well, the thing got on my nerves so that I could hardly find the way back to our room. And when we got there, I give you my word. I'm more than half expected to see what he had expected to see. That or something like that on the hearth rug. Of course, there was nothing. I blew out the light. My titan, my blankets round me. I'd been trailing them after me and our expedition. And I was settled in my chair when Haldane spoke. You've got over blankets, he said. Oh, I haven't said I only what I've always had. I can't find mine. Then he said and I could hear his teeth chattering and I'm cold.

[00:36:51] I'm here for cuts sake. Light the candle light. It lighted something horrible and I couldn't find the matches. Light a candle. Light the candle, he said, and his voice broke, as a boy's does sometimes in chapel. If you don't come to me. It's so easy to come at anyone in the dark. Winston lit a candle for the love of God. I can't die in the dark. I am lighting it, I said savagely, and I was feeling for the matches on the marble top chest of drawers on the mantelpiece, everywhere, but on the round center table where I put them. You're not going to die. Don't be a fool, I said. It's all right. Get a light in a second. He said, it's cold. It's cool, it's cold like that three times. And then he screamed aloud, like a woman, like a child, like like a hare when the dogs have got it.

[00:37:47] Had heard him scream like that once before.

[00:37:51] What is it? I cried, hardly less loud, for God's sake. Hold your noise. What is it?

[00:37:57] And there was an empty silence. And very slowly. It's physical, he said, and he spoke thickly as through some stifling veil nonsense where I asked when my hand closed on the matches as he spoke here.

[00:38:18] He screamed sharply, as though he had torn the veil away beside the bed.

[00:38:26] I got the candle light I got across to him. He was crushed in a heap at the edge of the bed. And stretched on the bed beyond him was a dead man, white and very cold. Holden had died in the dark. It was also simple. We had come to the wrong room. The man the room belonged to was there on the bed and engaged and paid for before he died of heart disease earlier in the day. A French Koomey voice you're representing soap and perfumery. His name? Felix LeBlanc. Later in England, I made cautious inquiries.

[00:39:21] The body of a man had been found in the Redhill tunnel, a haberdasher man named Simmons' who had drunk spirits of salts owing to the depression of the trade. The bottle was clutched in his dead hand. For reasons that I had, I took care to have a police inspector with me when I opened the boxes that came to me by Hall Danes will one of them was the big box metal lined in which I had sent him the skins from India for a wedding present. God help us all. It was closely soldered inside were the skins of beasts? No, the bodies of two men. One was identified after some trouble as that of a hawker of pins in city offices subject to Fitz.

[00:40:17] He had died in one, it seemed the other body was visitors right enough. Explain it as you like.

[00:40:28] I offered you, if you remember a choice of explanations before I began the story. I have not yet found the explanation that can satisfy me.

[00:40:47] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.