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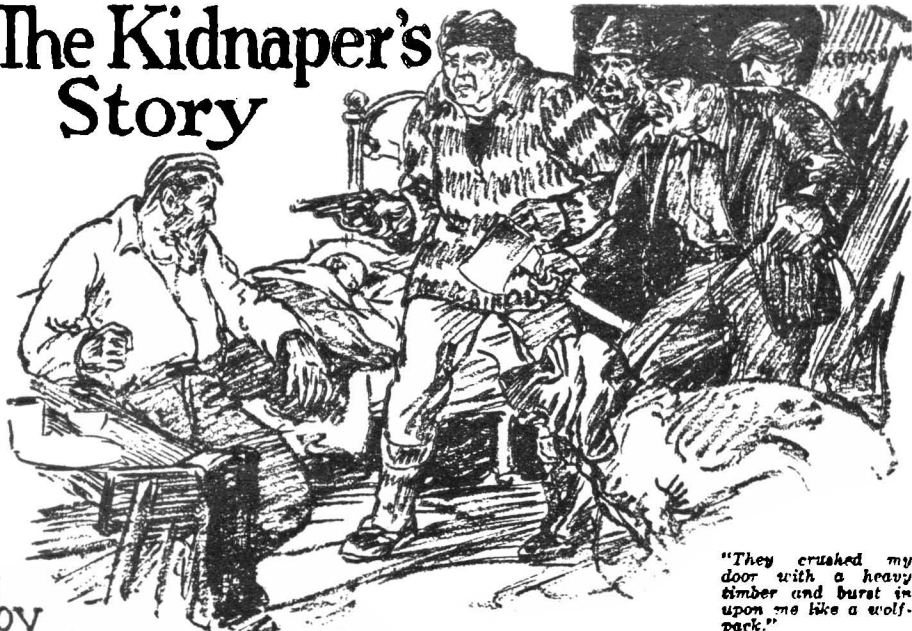
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**WEIRD TALES**

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# The Kidnaper's Story



"They crushed my door with a heavy timber and burst in upon me like a wolf-park."

by  
Walter G. Detrick

**T**HIS is the story of the once notorious man-wolf. He is a real personage, and he now lives among a colony of very illustrious folk—poets, doctors, artists, musicians and other notables; all, alas, like himself subjected to grievous restraint.

In my first encounter with him I was dusting the corridor that led to the den, when I noticed that his door was no longer shut. In fact it was opening, not as doors usually open, but was swinging inward on noiseless hinges with a movement as regular and as imperceptible as that of the hour hand on a clock.

I worked industriously, feigning unconcern, lest I frighten him back into his lair, for I had a great desire to see this most noted guest of the nation's most exclusive madhouse.

In a little while a bearded face set with unnaturally bright eyes appeared in the doorway; and after a long survey which included me and all my surroundings down to the last

speck on the walls, the wolf slunk out to meet me.

There was little of the wolf about him at this time. In truth he had the fawning, cringing manner of a setter that has been cruelly beaten. He had once been of more than average stature, but now he was pathetically bowed and shrunken as if all virtue had gone out of him.

In common with most of those who had read of his sensational escapades I believed he was here in order to escape the stern punishment of the law, and I was expecting to see something new in human depravity. What I did see, however, was the exact opposite, and my prejudices and fixed notions were so firmly rooted that I could scarcely believe that this cowering, stricken thing was the once fearsome wolf.

There was nothing gross or sensual about this man whose name had lately been a hissing and a byword for a nation; instead the seamed and lined

features wore a look of immortal pain, and in his deep-set eyes there was a look of fear—an intense torturing fear.

“Are you the new attendant?” he asked with the deprecatory air of one who seeks a great favor.

“I am, sir. What can I do for you?” I replied, seeking to put the man at ease.

“My name is J——,” he said, glancing about with his hunted, furtive look. “As soon as I heard your step in the hall I knew that you were a stranger. Now, you won’t disturb me? You won’t come near my door, will you?”

I tried to reassure him, but fear had bitten too deeply for mere words to be of avail. He kept repeating:

“Now if you were just to tap on my door I should be unable to sleep at all. Oh, what shall I do?”

Asking the same questions over and over, he clung to me until his gripping hands tore my clothing. My promises only served to increase his excitement, and in the end I was compelled to resort to harsh measures to rid myself of him.

This scene was re-enacted time after time during the months that I was in charge of the “menagerie”, as his apartments were called. In time I grew to know him better, perhaps, than anyone else ever did, and what follows is his own story of the sensational kidnaping case in which he figured. Owing to his mental agitation his writings were at times jumbled and incoherent. I have had to make some changes and alterations, but for the most part this is his story just as it came to me.

Mad he undoubtedly was, and is; but I hope that the reading of this, his own version of his tragic and unhappy career, may cause at least a few to remember the exhortation of the great apostle which ends with the words: “And the greatest of these is charity.”

### A MADMAN'S MANUSCRIPT.

I DRINK the dregs and lees of life—gall and wormwood fill me to my fingertips. Good God! when I think of what I am and of what I should have been I could beat the hard walls and rave and scream. “Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find,” are the words of the Book. I sought seclusion, rest and peace of mind. I found confusion, kicks, blows, false accusations and a prison cell. I must be calm, however, and not let the gall and bitterness creep into my writing.

Today not more than a score of people know of my existence, or care, but a few years ago lurid tales of my misdoings were crowding kings and councilors off the front pages of the press and my name was known from ocean to ocean. I, who had always been kindly and well-disposed toward all living creatures, suddenly found myself pictured as a being too cruel and too depraved to claim kinship with the human species. If I am remembered at all it will be as a grisly monster with a thirst for human blood. I have neither hope nor desire to redeem myself in the opinion of a world of which I have ceased to be a part, but I am writing this sketch of my life in the hope of speeding a few dragging hours.

I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth. In other words my parents had wealth and a leading station in life. Secure against want, I might have lived a life of idle pleasure-seeking, but I strove mightily to add to the talents given to me.

I have been a student since early childhood and there are but few of the arts in which I have not dabbled, but my love for music amounted to a passion. My ambition was to become a great composer. Years of patient toil, however, brought me only indifferent success. Dreams of harmonies filled my soul, creative vapors surged through my brain, but when I tried

to put them into tangible form they became as sounding brass or as tinkling cymbals.

My parents died when I was still a boy, and to my shame be it said that I scarcely noticed their passing. I buried myself in myself and followed the will-o'-the-wisp with more zeal than before. Unremitting devotion to a single object turned my instincts from their normal course, and my fellow creatures began to jar unbearably on me. Most people are unhappy when alone, but another human being under the same roof with me drove my thoughts into confusion and rendered me acutely miserable. This is the reason that at the age of twenty-nine I was living the life of a recluse.

In northwestern Pennsylvania a pretty little river flows for a hundred miles or more through an unbroken wilderness. Inch by inch the busy stream has cut a gorge hundreds of feet deep through the rock of the Appalachian Plateau. On each hand the sides of this gorge slope sharply upward for three or four miles and then merge into the flat tableland above. No railroad has ever been built along the river's winding course. The blue haze that shrouds its hills in fair weather is undefiled by coal smoke. A generation ago the lumbermen denuded this region of its magnificent timber, but it is now covered with a young forest and is almost as wild and untrodden as in the days of the red Indian. Pretty hamlets sit on the edge of the defile, but far below, the river still flows free and untrammelled through a ribbon of green.

It was in this solitude that I chose to live. I found a log cabin built by some dead and forgotten pioneer. It stood on a shelf or bench of flat land about twenty feet above the river's brink. Above it a spring gushed forth in a cold, crystal-clear stream; below it the river played clarion over

its rocky bed. All things considered, it was an ideal spot. The cabin was in a sad state of disrepair and the creeping wilderness had claimed the few acres of cleared land that had once surrounded it, but these things worried me not at all. I purchased the place, and by spending money freely I soon had a very creditable habitation indeed.

I will pass lightly over the details of my housekeeping because I have a different sort of tale to tell. I hired people to come from the nearest village and perform the menial work about the place, but I insisted that all such work should be finished in the daytime. It was suggested that I have a telephone installed, but I would as soon have slept with a ticking infernal machine by my side. The only living creature that I kept near me was a horse on which I was accustomed to take long rides. The forest, however, teemed with wild things who were never intrusive, and I soon began to take a keen interest in the lives of these lesser people.

I came to my cabin in March and for a time I found the new life very satisfying. I had my books and my piano for company, and when these palled there was the forest, which has always something new to offer him who has eyes that see.

Here, I thought, I have at last found rest, freedom from intrusion and an opportunity to work; here I will find the quiet that my soul craves. Destiny, however, is often at variance with the little plans of men, and while I was indulging in my dream of ease the gods of chance were preparing a rude awakening for me.

I THINK I had been living in my new home for about six weeks when there occurred the first of a series of events which were to lead to my undoing. For some time I had been unable to sleep well, and although I could find no tangible evi-

dence of the presence of an intruder I had an uneasy feeling that someone was prowling about my premises. Unable to concentrate on my work, I decided to go for a long ride in the woods. The month was May and the young forest was a delightful place.

About five miles from my cabin was a steep cone-shaped hill of jagged rock. In summer it was carefully avoided by the straggling berry-pickers and others who at times came to this part of the forest. This was because it was the home of numbers of the dreaded diamond rattlesnakes. On warm days, their scaly lengths outstretched on the gray rocks, they would bask in the sunshine; and woe to the luckless foot that disturbed their repose! Man has no more horrific foe than the great crotalus.

By some strange freak I have inherited none of the common ancestral dread of serpents. These evil things with cold unearthly eyes sent no shivers of fear coursing down my spine, and I in turn could come very near them without causing that whirl of rattles which according to an Indian proverb is more eloquent than a medicine man. Such an affinity between a member of the human family and the primal enemy, while rare, is not unknown, and I gave it but little thought; but in the end it was destined to have a prominent part in the misfortune that was to befall me.

On the morning of my eventful ride I followed a bridle path which led very close to this mount of evil renown; and then dismounting and tying my horse in an open space I began to clamber over the dangerous rocks, feeling my way with a long staff. I could not think of any spy having the temerity to follow me into this venom-guarded wilderness, but as I walked slowly up the steep path the sensation of being dogged by something malign and elusive grew stronger than ever. In a short time I heard a real trampling and a shuf-

fling, and putting aside a screen of bushes I beheld a strange sight.

A stockily built young fellow was standing on a flat rock some distance below me. I could not get a good view of his face, but I noticed that he tallied closely with me in height as well as in other physical characteristics. He was so engrossed in some occupation that he had not noticed me, and it was some time before I comprehended what he was doing. Then I saw that he was tormenting a huge rattler with a long rod, cleverly avoiding the reptile's vicious lunges. Round and round like a treader in the arena moved the man, the huge serpent thrashing after him. When he paused, the snake would coil, sound his rattles and then strike at the rod in blind rage.

When he had at last tormented his snakeship into such a frenzy that he would no longer try to come to close quarters, but remained in a springy hissing coil, striking aimlessly at whatever was thrown in front of him, the man drew from his pocket a ball made from some tuberous root through which he had thrust long thorns. He fastened this to the end of the rod and held it temptingly before the enraged serpent, who struck at it viciously and then began to show signs of great discomfort. The thorny pellet had become wedged between his flexible jaws and the end of that snake would not be a pleasant one.

Of all created things a snake is about the last to arouse normal human sympathy, but the man had gone about the cruel performance in a cold-blooded manner that repelled me; and I was thus all the more unprepared for the revelation that was to follow.

The snake gave a mighty wriggle and flopped off the rock, the thorns still worrying its jaws, and just then the stranger turned and beheld me standing above him. For the first time I was able to get a good view

of his face, and the sight caused me considerable chagrin.

I have a fairly good acquaintance with myself through observing my face in the glass when shaving and at other times, and here confronting me was my double. A close observer might have noted that his eyes were closer together and that the whole physiognomy was fiercer, but to the casual eye we were as alike as the proverbial two peas. I saw nothing flattering in the fantastic mirror into which I gazed. The stranger regarded me with a cold, unblinking stare in which there was something of the malignity of the snake; and as I looked into that countenance so like, and yet, I trust, so unlike my own, I knew that between us there could be neither quarter nor compromise.

During the whole encounter not a word had been spoken, and I do not know how long we might have stood dumbly staring at each other had not the tableau been broken in an unexpected manner. Close by his feet scurried a frightened rabbit. With a cat-quick pounce he caught the fragile little animal, and turning so that he again faced me he proceeded to rend it with his teeth after the manner of a bloodthirsty wild beast.

The utter fiendishness of this last act of cruelty broke the spell that had held me motionless, and I sprang toward him, but with a mocking laugh he ran away from me and disappeared mysteriously among the thick brush. Search as I might I could not find him, and at length, weary and puzzled, I sought my horse and rode slowly home. I gave a sigh of relief when I saw the friendly walls of my cabin looming up ahead of me; but it was within those walls that I was to receive another of those beastly surprizes of which the day had already been so well filled, for as I proceeded to make my evening toilet I found that my face and hands were smeared with blood!

There is much in life that it were wise to accept as being so without asking why, whence or wherefore. A little later events were to teach me much concerning the fallibility of human reason; but now I set about devising a rational explanation for my red hands. In my plunge through the underbrush I had received a few slight scratches, but it was passing strange that these should have bled so profusely.

It was with a sadly troubled mind that I at length sought my couch, and from this time my contentment was gone. During the day I thought of my impish double almost constantly; dreams of him filled my nights with terror. These dreams were usually vague things in which the identity of the stranger became mixed with that of the evil one himself, but there was one dream that was startlingly vivid.

I was a soldier in some medieval battle. I stood in a ragged line of infantry and watched the Saracen foe advance to the attack. In the forefront of their ranks rode my double, brandishing a whiplike rapier. Wickedly happy, he was humming an air which I tried in vain to recall when awake, but the words were something like this:

In sorrow depart,  
Weep till thou art blind,  
For the love of my heart  
Is not love of human kind.

With a jaunty air he approached me, still humming his song. I snapped my clumsy firelock at him, but the weapon failed to explode, and the next instant his keen blade pierced my breast.

With only slight variations this dream recurred again and again. I always awoke from it weak and trembling and bathed in perspiration. So powerfully did it impress me that I began to entertain the fancy that I and this infernal copy of myself had contended time after time in past ex-

istences and that our paths were soon to cross anew.

I DO NOT know into what byways of thought I might have wandered had I been left to brood and speculate in this fashion, but the march of events soon carried the affair into the world of reality. About a fortnight after my first encounter in the forest I awoke from a troubled sleep, oppressed by a sense of impending evil. Outside, a full moon was flooding the world with yellow light. By its aid I could clearly distinguish objects in the room and even see a little distance through the window.

I could hear my heart answering the familiar tick-tock of the clock with a loud lup-tup, and the cold sweat of fear was creeping out of my pores, but for a time I could find no reason for my terror. Watching the window closely, I at length perceived my own face pressed close against the glass, regarding me with eyes that shone in the half light.

Some events burst upon us with such sudden and unexpected weight that for a time they deprive us of the power of movement. This was one of them.

I lay like one paralyzed, unable even to utter a useless cry. The me on the outside carefully raised the window and dropped some little four-footed creature into the room. This thing began a mad race about the floor, uttering shrill shrieks very like those of a child. At the first prolonged, piercing wail I sprang from my bed and through the open window almost in one leap.

Now began a weird chase, unlike anything I have ever heard of or imagined unless it be the fantastic adventures of Alice in Wonderland. Myself, lacking shoes and trousers, my night clothes flapping in the breeze, pursued a fully clothed edition of myself over the rough lawn.

Round and round we ran like a sportive puppy chasing its tail. From their perch in the pines the great owls hooted, and the yellow moon looked down at us with a grin. It was not until long afterward, however, that the ludicrous aspect of the affair occurred to me. At the time my sole thought was to come to hand-grips with my arch-enemy and eternally end our affair. The pursuit seemed endless, but the clothed edition of myself at last ran into a clump of thick undergrowth and once more hid from my sight and hearing, although I could still sense his hated presence.

Giving up the useless pursuit, I returned to my cabin and found no trace of my nocturnal visitors except the open window. For some unaccountable reason I soon fell asleep. On awaking in the morning I tried to convince myself that it was only another vivid dream, but the cuts and bruises on my feet were too real to be disposed of in that way.

After this my situation became worse. For a time I did not actually see my evil twin, but not a night passed that I did not become aware of his presence about my dwelling, and upon going to investigate I would hear his retreating footsteps; at other times I would be aroused by strange blood-curdling yells. I feared to appeal to anyone for aid because I could picture the unbelieving looks with which my tale would be received. At length I took to sleeping during the day and to prowling the forest at night. I thus escaped persecution, but I had an uneasy feeling that my tormentor was biding his time and preparing new surprises for me.

IN THE small hours of a Friday morning I was returning to my home after one of these nocturnal rambles. Dew dripped from the leafy branches above my head; little breaths of air fought and grappled



as they flowed over the fog-draped river. The moon had waned into the little crescent of the last quarter and there was something cheerless and evil about its light. My troubles half forgotten, I trudged along the woodland path in a sort of waking dream out of which I was startled by the now familiar screams of mortal anguish.

A stone's throw ahead of me was a familiar figure bearing some sort of burden. Brandishing my staff I ran after him, but my incautious foot caught in one of the snarelike roots which here and there rose from the path like crooked croquet arches, and I fell, striking my head a heavy blow.

When I had finished counting stars my enemy had vanished and I was holding in my arms the burden he had let fall. It was a yellow-haired child—a boy about one year old.

Utterly dumfounded by this new development, I writhed on the ground. Ignoring the pitiful wails which came from the little bundle by my side, I implored high heaven for light on the mystery in which I was entangled, but heaven was dumb. The river babbled inanely, the face in the little moon leered at me, and that was all.

At length a sort of ealmness succeeded my frenzy. I carried the child to my cabin and placed him on the bed; then barring the door and closing the heavy shutters I sat in the thick darkness, biting my nails and thinking—thinking.

As one whose life is finished may find his whole past parading before him in his last moment, so an endless troop of memory pictures crowded through my tired brain; and all the while the whimperings of the hapless infant smote on my ear drums. How was I to explain his presence here? How anything?—how—how—

But in the end it matters little whether we dumbly submit to fate, or whether we struggle and pray. In

some far-off corner of the universe sat the little gods who had staged this drama for their pastime, and they had decreed that it should move swiftly to its conclusion. The hundreds of birds that lived about my home were announcing the coming of dawn, when I noticed a new sound rising above their shrill chirping.

*Oung—oung*—it rang through the forest in tunable notes—not unlike the distant sound of a great bell. At first far and faint, it grew in volume until the forest rang with it, and then I knew what it was. It was the bay of a hunting hound. So crowded had the past hour been that I failed to grasp the significance of this new development until a pack of the great beasts were prowling about the cabin and leaping and snarling at the closed door. Even at this my numbed wits failed to grasp the fact that I was the quarry they were seeking. until close behind the dogs I heard the tramp of men's feet.

They paused not to parley, but crushed my door with a heavy timber, and burst in upon me like a wolf-pack. With faces drawn and white and with lips parted in a sort of animal snarl they invaded the little room. Some carried electric torches which they directed aimlessly about; others were brandishing firearms, and all were talking with the full vigor of lusty lungs. Meanwhile the dogs crowded in among the men and their deafening clamor was the final touch needed to transform my once quiet retreat into bedlam.

Possibly this confusion only lasted for a matter of seconds, but to my strained nerves it seemed to stretch over an interminable time before it was broken by an occurrence more bizarre and dramatic than any of the preceding ones had been. While the hubbub was at its height a stout fellow wearing the barred jacket and high boots of a lumberman discovered the blanket-wrapped bundle up-

on the bed and turned his flashlight full upon it.

"By the Great — —! look at this," he exclaimed, profaning the name of the Savior in a great oath; and so terrible was the emotion that shook the rough voice that the blasphemy sounded like a prayer. The human clamor stilled instantly and all crowded about the bed. Even the dogs with their keen senses became aware of the sudden tension and fell silent save for low whines.

Before us in the white glare of the torch lay the child—a likable little fellow with blue eyes. He bore evidence of the rough handling which he had received, but it was not this fact that caused the gasp of horror.

Upon one chubby shoulder was a wound, a slight thing in itself, but at its edges were the unmistakable marks of teeth—human teeth!

There followed a moment of stunned inaction. The color fading from their faces, the men stared and gaped as if unable to credit the monstrous thing. I could hear their breath drawing in with a peculiar sucking gasp. Slowly, as if on a pivot, all turned until they were facing me; then grim-faced and savage they attacked me with their bare hands. In a moment I was bleeding from a dozen wounds, and I would have died then and there had not one of their number who wore a uniform intervened and saved me for a worse fate.

In obedience to his sharp commands they left off beating me, but they snapped irons on my hands and feet and bound me with rope until I resembled a swathed mummy. As my captors worked I could hear them muttering threats about torturing and burning me, but the fates had spun a different web for my luckless self. Bound hand and foot, I was dragged to the road, thrown like a calf into a waiting truck and hauled to a huge stone jail; and not until

the prison doors had closed upon me did I receive a word as to the why and wherefore of this latest misfortune.

The child had been stolen from the home of a wealthy man who had his summer residence about ten miles from my abode. By means of a ladder the thief had boldly entered a second-story window and had stolen the youngster from his crib without awakening the nurse who slept in the same room. She discovered the crime soon afterward, and the posse were able to follow close on the heels of the miscreant, who everybody now believed was myself.

Circumstances were against me, but I merely stated that on the night of the crime I was walking at an unusual hour because I was restless and unable to sleep. In the course of my walk I had encountered a man walking furtively and carrying a screaming child. I had tripped while pursuing him and had fallen so hard that I was stunned. When I recovered I had picked up the child which the kidnaper had abandoned and was caring for it when the posse arrived.

This was as much of the truth as I could hope for anyone to believe, and it soon transpired that even this hope was vain. The fable of the man-wolf had been given to the public, and it was useless to try to convince them of its falsity. Foolish old Sixteenth Century legends by the score were made to apply to my case and were given to the public with a Walrus and Carpenter gravity. The bit of truth about my walks in the snake-infested hill was seized upon avidly, and thereby many a tale was hung. In addition to my lupine lust for blood they said that I had acquired some of the magic of the snakes with whom I played, and thus it was that I could lure my intended victims to their doom.

In spite of the universal contempt and horror with which I was regard-

ed, there was one magic wand of which they could not deprive me. Its name was money. At its touch the prison cell became comfortable; and an able lawyer was found who, after due investigation, assured me that the net of circumstances connecting me with the crime of kidnaping was too weak to hold me long.

I might have obtained my freedom on bail, but I found the locked and bolted prison very comfortable. I fancied that its heavy walls would exclude my strange tormentor, and that thought in itself was compensation for much of the evil that had befallen me. There were a few other prisoners in the jail, but they did not annoy me, and I found real comfort in the visits of my attorney.

**I** THINK that my respite lasted exactly one week, and then came the deluge.

I was sitting idly in my cell, indulging in my old pastime of day-dreaming, when from the corridor I heard a voice like my own, mouthing this doggerel verse:

Myself met myself on the Camperdown lane;  
 Myself from myself to untangle I tried,  
 But the tangle untangled retangled again  
 And myself with myself must forever  
 abide.

There before me in the corridor was my double. In his hands, and crying piteously, was a little four-footed animal with a face like a child's. His leering countenance pressed close against the bars, my arch-enemy mumbled over and over again the inane rime:

Myself met myself on the Camperdown lane.

This was more than flesh and blood could endure. In frantic attempts to reach my hated tormentor I tore at the hard iron bars with teeth and hands, and I screamed until the spiders crept out of their hiding places in the old walls to listen.

At length strong men came into my cell and bound me to my cot. They gave me some drug which caused me to fall into a deep sleep, and when I awoke my evil genius was gone; but I turned my face to the wall and pulled the blanket over my head.

When my attorney visited me again he was accompanied by a grave-looking old man who wore a neatly trimmed beard. This man talked to me for a long time and I told him everything. He did not interrupt with questions, but listened intently, nodding his head in understanding.

All that we said does not concern the present story. The result of our talk was that I left the prison and went to live with my new friend, who, as I was to learn later, is a doctor.

He has given me a splendid apartment with every convenience. It has thick stone walls, and the barred windows have shades which when drawn exclude every ray of light. I care for this apartment with my own hands. I have keys for the doors and I never open them to anyone except the doctor. My meals are brought to the door of my living room, but the attendant who brings them must depart before I go out for them.

Now and then I venture into the outdoors, but I soon hurry back. I have a great fear of meeting with myself again.

