

DR. MONTAGUE. (*Wearily.*) Certainly not, my dear. (*He glances at Luke.*) I concede. It's your game. (*He rises.*)

LUKE. (*Pleasantly.*) You're a worthy opponent, Doctor. Shall we have another go at it later?

DR. MONTAGUE. As you wish. (*Luke lines up the chessmen.*)

ARTHUR. They usually put them away with one candle and a crust of bread. Horrible thing to do, when you think about it.

DR. MONTAGUE. (*Crossing u.*) No nun was ever walled up alive. It's all legend. Imagination.

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Following him.*) All right, John. We won't quarrel over it. Just understand, however, that sometimes purely materialistic views give way before facts. Now it is a proven fact that among the visitations troubling this house are a nun and also . . . (*She pauses, waiting for someone to react.*)

LUKE. (*Quickly.*) What else was there? (*Mrs. Montague turns.*)

I am so interested in hearing what—ah—planchette had to say.

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Wagging a finger at Luke.*) Nothing about you, young man. (*Coily.*) Although one of the young ladies present may hear something of interest. (*Eleanor and Theodora glance at her. Mrs. Montague looks mysterious.*) Oh, yes—Helen wants us to search the cellar for an old well.

LUKE. You think Helen was buried alive?

MRS. MONTAGUE. I doubt it. More likely we'll find evidence of the missing nun.

DR. MONTAGUE. More likely we'll find eighty years of rubbish.

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Turning.*) John, I cannot understand this skepticism in you, of all people. After all you *did* come to this house to collect evidence of supernatural activity. But now, when I bring you a full account of the causes—and an indication of where to start looking—you are positively scornful.

DR. MONTAGUE. We have no authority to dig up the cellar.

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Hopefully.*) Arthur could—

DR. MONTAGUE. (*Breaking in, firmly.*) No. My lease specifically forbids any tampering. We are students—not vandals.

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Innocently.*) I should think you'd want to know the truth, John.

DR. MONTAGUE. (*Stepping away from her.*) There is nothing I should like to know more.

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Sighing.*) Dear me, how patient one must be sometimes. (*She shakes her head.*) But I do want to read you

the little passage we received toward the end. (*She crosses to Arthur.*) Arthur, do you have it? (*Arthur shuffles through his papers.*) It was just after the message about the flowers you are to send to your sick aunt. (*She beams at Eleanor and Theodora.*) Planchette has a control named Merrigot who's taken a genuine personal interest in Arthur. Brings him word from distant relatives, and so on.

THEODORA. (*With a glance at Eleanor.*) How nice.

ARTHUR. (*Gravely.*) She's not seriously ill, you understand.

Merrigot was most reassuring.

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Leaning over Arthur's shoulder and running her finger down the page.*) Here it is. Arthur, you read the questions and I'll read the answers.

ARTHUR. (*Brightly.*) Off we go. (*Studying the page.*) Now—let me see—start right about here?

MRS. MONTAGUE. With "Who are you?"

ARTHUR. Check. (*He clears his throat.*) "Who are you?"

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Reading.*) "Nell." (*The others turn and listen. Eleanor frowns.*)

ELEANOR. (*Interrupting.*) Nell who?

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Casually.*) Eleanor Nellie Nell Nell. They sometimes do that. Repeat a word over and over to make sure it comes across all right. (*Eleanor appears unsatisfied by the answer. Mrs. Montague nudges Arthur to continue.*) Go on.

ARTHUR. (*Reading.*) "What do you want?"

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Reading.*) "Home."

ARTHUR. (*Reading.*) "Do you want to go home?" (*Theodora glances at Eleanor, who looks away. Luke and Dr. Montague listen attentively.*)

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Reading.*) "Want to be home."

ARTHUR. (*Reading.*) "What are you doing here?"

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Reading.*) "Waiting."

ARTHUR. (*Reading.*) "Waiting for what?"

MRS. MONTAGUE. (*Reading.*) "Home."

ARTHUR. (*Looking up.*) There it is again. If they like a word they use it over and over, just for the sound of it.

MRS. MONTAGUE. Ordinarily we never ask *why*. It tends to confuse planchette. But this time we were bold, and came right out with it. (*She taps Arthur on the shoulder.*) Arthur?

ARTHUR. (*Reading.*) "Why?"

Start

MRS. MONTAGUE. (Reading.) "Mother."
 ARTHUR. (Reading.) "Is Hill House your home?"
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Reading.) "Home." (Dr. Montague sighs.)
 ARTHUR. (Reading.) "Are you suffering?"
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Shaking her head.) No answer here. Sometimes they dislike admitting to pain.
 ARTHUR. (Glancing up at the others.) Stoical. (Reading.) "Can we help you?"
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Reading.) "No. Lost. Lost. Lost." (She looks up.) You see? One word repeated again. I've had one word go on to cover a whole page sometimes.
 ARTHUR. (Reading.) "What do you want?"
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Reading.) "Mother."
 ARTHUR. (Reading.) "Why?"
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Reading.) "Child."
 ARTHUR. (Reading.) "Where is your mother?"
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Reading.) "Home."
 ARTHUR. (Reading.) "Where is your home?"
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Reading.) "Lost. Lost. Lost." (She looks up.) After that there was nothing but gibberish. (Dr. Montague makes a wry face.)
 ARTHUR. (Confidentially.) Never known planchette so cooperative. Quite an experience, really.
 THEODORA. (Annoyed. Nodding towards Eleanor.) But why pick on Nell? Your fool planchette has no right to send messages to people without permission or—
 ARTHUR. (Defensively.) You'll never get results by abusing planchette—
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Turning quickly to Eleanor.) You're Nell? (She turns to Theodora.) We thought you were Nell.
 THEODORA. (Flippantly.) So?
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Irritably.) It doesn't affect our messages, of course, but I do think that we might have been correctly introduced. I am sure that planchette knew the difference between you—but I do not care to be misled.
 LUKE. (To Theodora.) Don't feel neglected. We'll bury you alive.
 THEODORA. When I get a message from that thing I want it to be about hidden treasure. None of this nonsense about sending flowers to an aunt.

End

ELEANOR. (After a pause. Quietly.) Why do you think all that was sent to me?
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Shrugging.) Really child, I couldn't begin to say. Perhaps you are more receptive psychically than you realize, although how you could be I don't know. All these days here without picking up the simplest message from beyond. (Eleanor glances at Theodora, and then looks away quickly.) The fire wants stirring.
 THEODORA. Nell doesn't want messages from beyond.
 LUKE. (Kindly.) Nell wants her warm bed and a little sleep.
 DR. MONTAGUE. And perhaps a spot of brandy first? What say we all have one? (Theodora nods affirmatively.)
 LUKE. Fine idea. (He rises and crosses u. towards the sideboard.) May I?
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (To Luke.) None for us, thanks. We must keep clear heads tonight. Arthur, we'd best be on our way.
 ARTHUR. (Rising. Looking pleased.) Righto.
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Turning to the others.) Arthur will patrol the house. Every hour, regularly, he will make a round of the upstairs rooms.
 ARTHUR. (Very serious.) I shall have a drawn revolver, a flashlight and a loud whistle, in case I should observe anything worth your notice, or require . . . ah . . . company. You may all sleep quietly, I assure you. I'm an excellent shot.
 MRS. MONTAGUE. And I shall be in the nursery. Awake. (Lyrically.) It is such a blessing to know that the beings in this house are only waiting for an opportunity to tell their stories and free themselves from the burden of their sorrow. (To Arthur.) Shall we go?
 DR. MONTAGUE. (Stepping towards her.) My dear, are you sure . . . ? I wonder whether you ought to have someone with you. (During this Luke fills four brandy glasses and places them on a tray. He serves them to Eleanor, Theodora and Dr. Montague and, after taking the fourth glass himself, puts the tray back on the sideboard.)
 MRS. MONTAGUE. (Amused.) Really, John. How many, many hours have I sat in a room with those who have passed beyond? How can I make you perceive that there is no danger where there is nothing but love and sympathetic understanding? I am here to help these unfortunate beings.