

The Hallway was Silent

The hallway was silent. It was not just that no sounds could heard; this was a silence that one could feel, a silence that had long been brooding there and was not going to suffer any sound to disturb it.

I thought 'Why am here? Why did I come?'

I had heard of the reputation of the place, yet I had been drawn here. Even now, I thought, I could turn and run back out through the door I had just entered; yet I knew I could not. I could no more leave than I could have not come.

Was this mansion really empty? I tried to call out. But my voice just dried in my throat. I felt the silence had been disturbed from its long brooding, and was annoyed. The sense of menace grew.

Then I saw the grand staircase and the light pouring in through the tall window on the landing halfway up. Slowly I made my way towards the stairs, drawn by the intensely bright light.

I dreaded every step yet I could not retreat. I wanted to scream, to call out "Stop! Let me go!" – but I could not.

The silence swallowed up any sound I attempted to make. In any case, who or what would I be calling out to? Who or what would make me stop?

Inexorably I began the climb up the staircase, with the blinding light dazzling me. I felt a throbbing through my whole being as though the throbbing came from the building itself. The building felt like some gigantic and gross living organism that had swallowed me.

The throbbing became more intense and the silence was oppressive; it seem to weigh down on my ears, wanting to stop them forever, while the light seared through my eyes and pierced my brain.

I must have fallen unconscious at this point. Did I dream what followed next? It certainly felt like no dream and yet, looking back, the events seem so strange and incredible. I will tell what I remember.

When I woke I felt as though I was in some enclosed space, and there were strange creatures all around me. They were more like termites than anything else, but much larger than any normal termites. I seemed to be in the nest or hive of these alien creatures and they were going over me and seemed to be in communication with one another. But how they communicated, I could not tell. I heard no speaking nor saw any overt sign-making.

But I began to pick up fragments of conversation. They were not, of course, speaking English or, indeed, any other human language. But by some means or other I began picking up odd fragments of their conversation. They appeared to be taking measurements, presumably of me or parts of my body, or of functions of my body. Why were they doing this? Was it just for scientific knowledge?

Then I became aware of another "voice" or communication channel or something that was in the background, both receiving information from the termites and directing them. In what follows I represent this, which I term the Hive Voice, and the individual termites in English.

"It seems quite promising," said the Hive Voice. "It should be useful for a good few years, slaving in the mines."

A Slave! In the mines! I did not like the sound of that. Then I noticed in the hive some humanoid creatures whose eyes were vacant and who seem to have no wills of their own but to move around the hive as zombies.

'So those are their slaves,' I thought. 'No thank you – I do not want to be

one of those!

"OK," said the Hive Voice, "get the remaining measurements and checks done."

I noticed that two or three of the termites seemed to be behaving erratically.

"Help!" one cried, "I'm getting interference; I'm not receiving you properly."

"Nor am I!" cried another., "something's interfering."

"The human is picking up our communications," they started to say.

"Nonsense," said the Hive Voice, "their brains are not well enough developed to pick up our communications; that's why they make such good slaves. Now, hurry up and get those checks done and we can begin erasing its memories."

'No,' I thought, 'there's no way you're going to erase my memories - not without a good fight.'

I began putting up mental resistance.

Suddenly the Hive Voice broke in again, and there was an urgency in it.

"Enough!" it called, "stop the checks. We've done enough. It really is beginning to interfere with our communications. Start erasing its memories now! Start now - before it's too late. Wipe its mind clean!"

There was feverish activity. I felt that my whole being was under attack. It was a battle of wills. I had to hold on; I had to.

The pain in my head was increasing; it was excruciating. I could see that many of the termites were getting distressed and one or two seemed to drop dead with fatigue.

The Hive Voice was crying: "Quickly, quickly. Erase its mind. Wipe it clean."

I battled on; there was a stirring in the whole hive. Some of the slaves began looking less zombielike and an alertness began to dawn in their eyes.

"Quickly, quickly," cried the Hive Voice. "It's starting to infect the others! Quickly! Numb its brain! Erase its mind! Quickly."

I resisted with all the will I could muster. The pain was now not just in my head but throbbed through my whole body. I would die rather than be one of their slaves. I would die rather than have my mind wiped clean.

The hive, I could feel, was in a frenzy and the slaves were beginning to wake up and termites were shriveling up around me.

"Too dangerous!" cried the Hive Voice. "Eject him! Eject him! Eject him!"

What did it mean by eject? From what? From life?

My pain grew, but my will held. I was not going to give in. I was not going to have my mind erased - not going to become a zombie slave to a bunch of overgrown termites. I would die rather than that.

My head felt as though it would split apart and my whole body throbbed with the most intense pain imaginable. This was surely the end.

Did I pass out? I do not know. But the next thing I remember is being alone in the garden behind the house. There I was lying on the grass of an overgrown lawn in a neglected garden in the late afternoon sun.

I looked back at the great house that had been uninhabited for as long as I remembered. It was said in the neighborhood that it was haunted and certainly most people gave it a wide berth.

Some people claimed to have known of someone who had gone into the house and had never come out again. People had generally laughed at their stories as, indeed, I had done. But I wondered now if those stories had been true. Had those people become zombie slaves to the hive of overgrown termites (or

whatever creatures they were)?

But that was absurd, was it not? Surely I had passed out and had had a terrible dream? But how had I come to be in the garden? Is that where I had been ejected? Who or what had put me there?

I looked at the house again and shuddered. Why had I gone there in the first place? Had it really been just curiosity about a place that was supposed to be haunted that had drawn me there? Or had something more sinister drawn me and had now rejected me?

Whatever the truth, I did not want to be there as the sun was going down. I made my way back to the town as quickly as I could.

Some people seemed genuinely surprised to see me again.

"Is it it really haunted?" they asked. "Did you see any ghosts?"

"No," I said, "no ghosts. There's something worse than ghosts there."

I would say no more.

Besides, it occurred to me that if I had told of ghosts, some would have believed me and many others, probably most, would have half-believed me; I would not have been thought particularly odd. But if I had talked about a hive of overgrown termites, who would have believed me? Indeed, even *I* did not know if what I remembered was really true or whether it had been a nightmare inspired by some more terrible menace.

If it had not been a dream, where were the termites and their hive? Had they actually been inside that old mansion? Why had there been no visible signs of such activity from outside? Was that mansion a portal to some other part of our universe or, indeed, to some other universe? Had I been the object of alien abduction? I had read of such things and people who had claimed to have been abducted, but I had dismissed such stories as fancies of deluded imaginations.

I did not and still do not know the truth; and although this happened a long time ago, the memory of the horror and the pain of it all has haunted me down the years. Maybe by having now written my story down, I shall at last have exorcised that memory with all its fear and pain and can end my days in peace.