"We moved it last year, and quite an operation it was, too," Mr. Carlin said as they mounted the stairs. "Had to move it by hand, of course. No other way. We insured it against accident with Lloyd's before we even took it out of the case in the drawing room. Only firm that would insure for the sum we had in mind."

Spangler said nothing. The man was a fool. Johnson Spangler had learned a long time ago that the only way to talk to a fool was to ignore him.

"Insured it for a quarter of a million dollars," Mr. Carlin resumed when they reached the second-floor landing. His mouth quirked in a half-bitter, half-humorous line. "And a pretty penny it cost, too. He was a little man, not quite fat, with rimless glasses and a tanned baldhead that shone like a varnished volleyball. A suit of armor, guarding the mahogany shadows of the second-floor corridor, stared at them impassively.

It was a long corridor, and Spangler eyed the walls and hangings with a cool professional eye. Samuel Claggert had bought in copious quantities, but he had not bought well. Like so many of the self-made industry emperors of the late 1800's, he had been little more than a pawnshop rooker masquerading in collector's clothing, a connoisseur of canvas monstrosities, trashy novels and poetry collections in expensive cowhide bindings, and atrocious pieces of sculpture, all of which he considered Art.

Up here the walls were hung -- festooned was perhaps a better word -- with imitation Moroccan drapes, numberless (and, no doubt, anonymous) madonnas holding numberless haloed babes while numberless angels flitted hither and thither in the background, grotesque scroolled candelabra, and one monstrous and obscenely ornate chandelier surmounted by a salaciously grinig nymphet.

Of course the old pirate had come up with a few interesting items; the law of averages demanded it. And if the Samuel Claggert Memorial Private Museum (Guided Tours on the Hour -- Admission $1.00 Adults, $.50 Children -- nauseating) was 98 percent blatant junk, there was always that other two percent, things like the Coombs long rifle over the hearth in the kitchen, the strange little camera obscure in the parlor, and of course the --

"The Deliver looking-glass was removed from downstairs after a rather unfortunate... incident," Mr. Carlin said abruptly, motivated apparently by a ghastly glaring portrait of no one in particular at the base of the next staircase. "There had been others -- harsh words, wild statements -- but this was an attempt to actually destroy the mirror. The woman, a Miss Sandra Bates, came in with a rock in her pocket. Fortunately her aim was bad and she only cracked a corner of the case. The mirror was unharmed. The Bates girl had a brother --

"No need to give me the dollar tour," Spangler said quietly. "I'm conversant with the history of the Deliver glass."

"Fascinating, isn't it?" Carlin cast him an odd, oblique look. "There was that English duchess in 1709... and the Pennsylvania rug merchant in 1746... not to mention --

"I'm conversant with the history," Spangler repeated quietly. "It's the workmanship I'm interested in. And then, of course, there's the question of authenticity --

"Authenticity!" Mr. Carlin chuckled, a dry sound, as if bones had stirred in a cupboard below the stairs. "It's been examined by experts, Mr. Spangler." "So was the Lemlir Stradivarius." "So true," Mr. Carlin said with a sigh. "But no Stradivarius ever had quite the... the unsettling effect of the Deliver glass."

"Yes, quite," Spangler said in his softly contemptuous voice. He understood now that there would be no stopping Carlin; he had a mind, which was perfectly in tune with the age. "Quite."

They climbed the third and fourth flights in silence. As they drew closer to the roof of the rambling structure, it became oppressively hot in the dark upper galleries, with the heat came a creeping stench that Spangler knew well, for he had spent all his adult life working in it -- a smell of long-dead flies in shadowy corners, of wet rot and creeping wood lice behind the plaster. The smell of age. It was a smell common only to museums and mausoleums. He imagined much the same smell might arise from the grave of a virginal young girl, forty years dead.

Up here the relics were piled helter-skelter in true junk-shop profusion; Mr. Carlin led Spangler through a maze of statuary, frame-splintered portraits, pompous...
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