

—20 BEST— SHORT NOVELS



ИНОСТРАННЫЙ ЯЗЫК: УЧИМСЯ У КЛАССИКОВ

20 лучших повестей на английском

ORIGINAL

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Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков

Collective work

**20 лучших повестей на
английском / 20 Best Short Novels**

«ЭКСМО»

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20 лучших повестей на английском / 20 Best Short Novels /
. Collective work — «Эксмо», — (Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков)

«Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков» – это только оригинальные тексты лучших произведений мировой литературы. Эти книги станут эффективным и увлекательным пособием для изучающих иностранный язык на хорошем «продолжающем» и «продвинутом» уровне. Они помогут эффективно расширить словарный запас, подскажут, где и как правильно употреблять устойчивые выражения и грамматические конструкции, просто подарят радость от чтения. В конце книги дана краткая информация о культуроведческих, страноведческих, исторических и географических реалиях описываемого периода, которая поможет лучше ориентироваться в тексте произведения. Серия «Иностранный язык: учимся у классиков» адресована широкому кругу читателей, хорошо владеющих английским языком и стремящихся к его совершенствованию.

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20 Best Short Novels

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* * *

Edward Bulwer Lytton

The Haunted and the Haunters; or, The House and the Brain

A friend of mine, who is a man of letters and a philosopher, said to me one day, as if between jest and earnest, 'Fancy! since we last met I have discovered a haunted house in the midst of London.'

'Really haunted, – and by what? – ghosts?'

'Well, I can't answer that question; all I know is this: six weeks ago my wife and I were in search of a furnished apartment. Passing a quiet street, we saw on the window of one of the houses a bill, "Apartments, Furnished." The situation suited us; we entered the house, liked the rooms, engaged them by the week, – and left them the third day. No power on earth could have reconciled my wife to stay longer; and I don't wonder at it.'

'What did you see?'

'Excuse me; I have no desire to be ridiculed as a superstitious dreamer, – nor, on the other hand, could I ask you to accept on my affirmation what you would hold to be incredible without the evidence of your own senses. Let me only say this, it was not so much what we saw or heard (in which you might fairly suppose that we were the dupes of our own excited fancy, or the victims of imposture in others) that drove us away, as it was an indefinable terror which seized both of us whenever we passed by the door of a certain unfurnished room, in which we neither saw nor heard anything. And the strangest marvel of all was, that for once in my life I agreed with my wife, silly woman though she be, – and allowed, after the third night, that it was impossible to stay a fourth in that house. Accordingly, on the fourth morning I summoned the woman who kept the house and attended on us, and told her that the rooms did not quite suit us, and we would not stay out our week. She said dryly, "I know why; you have stayed longer than any other lodger. Few ever stayed a second night; none before you a third. But I take it they have been very kind to you."

"They, – who?" I asked, affecting to smile.

"Why, they who haunt the house, whoever they are. I don't mind them. I remember them many years ago, when I lived in this house, not as a servant; but I know they will be the death of me some day. I don't care, – I'm old, and must die soon anyhow; and then I shall be with them, and in this house still.' The woman spoke with so dreary a calmness that really it was a sort of awe that prevented my conversing with her further. I paid for my week, and too happy were my wife and I to get off so cheaply."

'You excite my curiosity,' said I; 'nothing I should like better than to sleep in a haunted house. Pray give me the address of the one which you left so ignominiously.'

My friend gave me the address; and when we parted, I walked straight towards the house thus indicated.

It is situated on the north side of Oxford Street¹, in a dull but respectable thoroughfare. I found the house shut up, – no bill at the window, and no response to my knock. As I was turning away, a beer-boy, collecting pewter pots at the neighboring areas, said to me, 'Do you want any one at that house, sir?'

'Yes, I heard it was to be let.'

'Let! – why, the woman who kept it is dead, – has been dead these three weeks, and no one can be found to stay there, though Mr. J– offered ever so much. He offered mother, who chars for him, £1 a week just to open and shut the windows, and she would not.'

'Would not! – and why?'

¹ Oxford Street – one of the main streets in central London, a shopping centre of London

‘The house is haunted; and the old woman who kept it was found dead in her bed, with her eyes wide open. They say the devil strangled her.’

‘Pooh! You speak of Mr. J—. Is he the owner of the house?’

‘Yes.’

‘Where does he live?’

‘In G— Street, No.—.’

‘What is he? In any business?’

‘No, sir, – nothing particular; a single gentleman.’

I gave the pot-boy² the gratuity earned by his liberal information, and proceeded to Mr. J—, in G— Street, which was close by the street that boasted the haunted house. I was lucky enough to find Mr. J— at home, – an elderly man with intelligent countenance and prepossessing manners.

I communicated my name and my business frankly. I said I heard the house was considered to be haunted, – that I had a strong desire to examine a house with so equivocal a reputation; that I should be greatly obliged if he would allow me to hire it, though only for a night. I was willing to pay for that privilege whatever he might be inclined to ask. ‘Sir,’ said Mr. J—, with great courtesy, ‘the house is at your service, for as short or as long a time as you please. Rent is out of the question, – the obligation will be on my side should you be able to discover the cause of the strange phenomena³ which at present deprive it of all value. I cannot let it, for I cannot even get a servant to keep it in order or answer the door. Unluckily the house is haunted, if I may use that expression, not only by night, but by day; though at night the disturbances are of a more unpleasant and sometimes of a more alarming character. The poor old woman who died in it three weeks ago was a pauper whom I took out of a workhouse; for in her childhood she had been known to some of my family, and had once been in such good circumstances that she had rented that house of my uncle. She was a woman of superior education and strong mind, and was the only person I could ever induce to remain in the house. Indeed, since her death, which was sudden, and the coroner’s⁴ inquest, which gave it a notoriety in the neighborhood, I have so despaired of finding any person to take charge of the house, much more a tenant, that I would willingly let it rent free for a year to any one who would pay its rates and taxes.’

‘How long is it since the house acquired this sinister character?’

‘That I can scarcely tell you, but very many years since. The old woman I spoke of, said it was haunted when she rented it between thirty and forty years ago. The fact is, that my life has been spent in the East Indies, and in the civil service of the Company⁵. I returned to England last year, on inheriting the fortune of an uncle, among whose possessions was the house in question. I found it shut up and uninhabited. I was told that it was haunted, that no one would inhabit it. I smiled at what seemed to me so idle a story. I spent some money in repairing it, added to its old-fashioned furniture a few modern articles, – advertised it, and obtained a lodger for a year. He was a colonel on half-pay. He came in with his family, a son and a daughter, and four or five servants: they all left the house the next day; and, although each of them declared that he had seen something different from that which had scared the others, a something still was equally terrible to all. I really could not in conscience sue, nor even blame, the colonel for breach of agreement. Then I put in the old woman I have spoken of, and she was empowered to let the house in apartments. I never had one lodger who stayed more than three days. I do not tell you their stories, – to no two lodgers have there been exactly the same phenomena repeated. It is better that you should judge for yourself, than enter the house with an imagination influenced by previous narratives; only be prepared to see and to hear something or other, and take whatever precautions you yourself please.’

² **pot-boy** – a boy who works in a pub

³ **phenomena**– *pl.* from *phenomenon*– an unusual or remarkable thing, event, person, etc.

⁴ **coroner** – an official who investigates the cause of death if the circumstances of it seem unnatural

⁵ **the Company** – the East India Company formed in 1600 for the development of trade with India and Southeast Asia; later the Company became involved in politics as a British agent in the region

‘Have you never had a curiosity yourself to pass a night in that house?’ ‘Yes. I passed not a night, but three hours in broad daylight alone in that house. My curiosity is not satisfied, but it is quenched. I have no desire to renew the experiment. You cannot complain, you see, sir, that I am not sufficiently candid; and unless your interest be exceedingly eager and your nerves unusually strong, I honestly add, that I advise you *not* to pass a night in that house.’

‘My interest is exceedingly keen,’ said I; ‘and though only a coward will boast of his nerves in situations wholly unfamiliar to him, yet my nerves have been seasoned in such variety of danger that I have the right to rely on them, – even in a haunted house.’

Mr. J– said very little more; he took the keys of the house out of his bureau⁶, gave them to me, – and, thanking him cordially for his frankness, and his urbane concession to my wish, I carried off my prize.

Impatient for the experiment, as soon as I reached home, I summoned my confidential servant, – a young man of gay spirits, fearless temper, and as free from superstitious prejudice as any one I could think of.

‘F—,’ said I, ‘you remember in Germany how disappointed we were at not finding a ghost in that old castle, which was said to be haunted by a headless apparition? Well, I have heard of a house in London which, I have reason to hope, is decidedly haunted. I mean to sleep there to-night. From what I hear, there is no doubt that something will allow itself to be seen or to be heard, – something, perhaps, excessively horrible. Do you think if I take you with me, I may rely on your presence of mind, whatever may happen?’

‘Oh, sir, pray trust me,’ answered F—, grinning with delight.

‘Very well; then here are the keys of the house, – this is the address. Go now, – select for me any bedroom you please; and since the house has not been inhabited for weeks, make up a good fire, air the bed well, – see, of course, that there are candles as well as fuel. Take with you my revolver and my dagger, – so much for my weapons; arm yourself equally well; and if we are not a match for a dozen ghosts, we shall be but a sorry couple of Englishmen.’

I was engaged for the rest of the day on business so urgent that I had not leisure to think much on the nocturnal adventure to which I had plighted my honor. I dined alone, and very late, and while dining, read, as is my habit. I selected one of the volumes of Macaulay⁷’s Essays. I thought to myself that I would take the book with me; there was so much of healthfulness in the style, and practical life in the subjects, that it would serve as an antidote against the influences of superstitious fancy.

Accordingly, about half-past nine, I put the book into my pocket, and strolled leisurely towards the haunted house. I took with me a favorite dog: an exceedingly sharp, bold, and vigilant bull-terrier, – a dog fond of prowling about strange, ghostly corners and passages at night in search of rats; a dog of dogs for a ghost.

It was a summer night but chilly, the sky somewhat gloomy and overcast. Still there was a moon, faint and sickly but still a moon, and if the clouds permitted, after midnight it would be brighter.

I reached the house, knocked, and my servant opened with a cheerful smile.

‘All right, sir, and very comfortable.’

‘Oh!’ said I, rather disappointed; ‘have you not seen nor heard anything remarkable?’

‘Well, sir, I must own I have heard something queer.’

‘What? – what?’

‘The sound of feet pattering behind me; and once or twice small noises like whispers close at my ear, – nothing more.’

‘You are not at all frightened?’

⁶ **bureau** – a writing desk with drawers

⁷ **Macaulay**– Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859); an English politician, historian and essayist; he is best known for his ‘History of England’

‘I! not a bit of it, sir;’ and the man’s bold look reassured me on one point, – namely, that happen what might, he would not desert me.

We were in the hall, the street-door closed, and my attention was now drawn to my dog. He had at first run in eagerly enough, but had sneaked back to the door, and was scratching and whining to get out. After patting him on the head, and encouraging him gently, the dog seemed to reconcile himself to the situation, and followed me and F – through the house, but keeping close at my heels instead of hurrying inquisitively in advance, which was his usual and normal habit in all strange places. We first visited the subterranean apartments, – the kitchen and other offices, and especially the cellars, in which last there were two or three bottles of wine still left in a bin, covered with cobwebs, and evidently, by their appearance, undisturbed for many years. It was clear that the ghosts were not winebibbers. For the rest we discovered nothing of interest. There was a gloomy little backyard, with very high walls. The stones of this yard were very damp; and what with the damp, and what with the dust and smoke-grime on the pavement, our feet left a slight impression where we passed. And now appeared the first strange phenomenon witnessed by myself in this strange abode. I saw, just before me, the print of a foot suddenly form itself, as it were. I stopped, caught hold of my servant, and pointed to it. In advance of that footprint as suddenly dropped another. We both saw it. I advanced quickly to the place; the footprint kept advancing before me, a small footprint, – the foot of a child: the impression was too faint thoroughly to distinguish the shape, but it seemed to us both that it was the print of a naked foot. This phenomenon ceased when we arrived at the opposite wall, nor did it repeat itself on returning. We remounted the stairs, and entered the rooms on the ground-floor, a dining parlor, a small back-parlor, and a still smaller third room that had been probably appropriated to a footman, – all still as death. We then visited the drawing-rooms, which seemed fresh and new. In the front room I seated myself in an arm-chair. F – placed on the table the candlestick with which he had lighted us. I told him to shut the door. As he turned to do so a chair opposite to me moved from the wall quickly and noiselessly, and dropped itself about a yard from my own chair, immediately fronting it.

‘Why, this is better than the turning-tables,’ said I, with a half-laugh; and as I laughed, my dog put back his head and howled.

F—, coming back, had not observed the movement of the chair. He employed himself now in stilling the dog. I continued to gaze on the chair, and fancied I saw on it a pale, blue, misty outline of a human figure, but an outline so indistinct that I could only distrust my own vision. The dog now was quiet.

‘Put back that chair opposite to me,’ said I to F—; ‘put it back to the wall.’

F— obeyed. ‘Was that you, sir?’ said he, turning abruptly.

‘I! – what?’

‘Why, something struck me. I felt it sharply on the shoulder, – just here.’

‘No,’ said I. ‘But we have jugglers⁸ present, and though we may not discover their tricks, we shall catch *them* before they frighten *us*.’

We did not stay long in the drawing-rooms, – in fact, they felt so damp and so chilly that I was glad to get to the fire upstairs. We locked the doors of the drawing-rooms, – a precaution which, I should observe, we had taken with all the rooms we had searched below. The bedroom my servant had selected for me was the best on the floor, – a large one, with two windows fronting the street. The four-posted bed, which took up no inconsiderable space, was opposite to the fire, which burned clear and bright; a door in the wall to the left, between the bed and the window, communicated with the room which my servant appropriated to himself. This last was a small room with a sofa-bed, and had no communication with the landing-place, – no other door but that which conducted to the bedroom I was to occupy. On either side of my fireplace was a cupboard without locks, flush with the wall,

⁸ jugglers – persons who perform tricks to amuse people

and covered with the same dull-brown paper. We examined these cupboards, – only hooks to suspend female dresses, nothing else; we sounded the walls, – evidently solid, the outer walls of the building. Having finished the survey of these apartments, warmed myself a few moments, and lighted my cigar, I then, still accompanied by F—, went forth to complete my reconnoitre. In the landing-place there was another door; it was closed firmly. ‘Sir,’ said my servant, in surprise, ‘I unlocked this door with all the others when I first came; it cannot have got locked from the inside, for—’

Before he had finished his sentence, the door, which neither of us then was touching, opened quietly of itself. We looked at each other a single instant. The same thought seized both, – some human agency might be detected here. I rushed in first, my servant followed. A small, blank, dreary room without furniture; a few empty boxes and hampers in a corner; a small window; the shutters closed; not even a fireplace; no other door but that by which we had entered; no carpet on the floor, and the floor seemed very old, uneven, worm-eaten, mended here and there, as was shown by the whiter patches on the wood; but no living being, and no visible place in which a living being could have hidden. As we stood gazing round, the door by which we had entered closed as quietly as it had before opened; we were imprisoned.

For the first time I felt a creep of indefinable horror. Not so my servant. ‘Why, they don’t think to trap us, sir; I could break that trumpery door with a kick of my foot.’

‘Try first if it will open to your hand,’ said I, shaking off the vague apprehension that had seized me, ‘while I unclosed the shutters and see what is without.’

I unbarred the shutters, – the window looked on the little backyard I have before described; there was no ledge without, – nothing to break the sheer descent of the wall. No man getting out of that window would have found any footing till he had fallen on the stones below.

F—, meanwhile, was vainly attempting to open the door. He now turned round to me and asked my permission to use force. And I should here state, in justice to the servant, that, far from evincing any superstitious terrors, his nerve, composure, and even gayety amidst circumstances so extraordinary, compelled my admiration, and made me congratulate myself on having secured a companion in every way fitted to the occasion. I willingly gave him the permission he required. But though he was a remarkably strong man, his force was as idle as his milder efforts; the door did not even shake to his stoutest kick. Breathless and panting, he desisted. I then tried the door myself, equally in vain. As I ceased from the effort, again that creep of horror came over me; but this time it was more cold and stubborn. I felt as if some strange and ghastly exhalation were rising up from the chinks of that rugged floor, and filling the atmosphere with a venomous influence hostile to human life. The door now very slowly and quietly opened as of its own accord. We precipitated ourselves into the landing-place. We both saw a large, pale light – as large as the human figure, but shapeless and unsubstantial – move before us, and ascend the stairs that led from the landing into the attics. I followed the light, and my servant followed me. It entered, to the right of the landing, a small garret, of which the door stood open. I entered in the same instant. The light then collapsed into a small globule, exceedingly brilliant and vivid, rested a moment on a bed in the corner, quivered, and vanished. We approached the bed and examined it, – a half-tester, such as is commonly found in attics devoted to servants. On the drawers that stood near it we perceived an old faded silk kerchief, with the needle still left in a rent half repaired. The kerchief was covered with dust; probably it had belonged to the old woman who had last died in that house, and this might have been her sleeping-room. I had sufficient curiosity to open the drawers: there were a few odds and ends of female dress, and two letters tied round with a narrow ribbon of faded yellow. I took the liberty to possess myself of the letters. We found nothing else in the room worth noticing, – nor did the light reappear; but we distinctly heard, as we turned to go, a pattering footfall on the floor, just before us. We went through the other attics⁹ (in all four), the footfall still preceding us. Nothing to be seen, – nothing

⁹ **attics**– an *attic* is a space under the roof of the house

but the footfall heard. I had the letters in my hand; just as I was descending the stairs I distinctly felt my wrist seized, and a faint, soft effort made to draw the letters from my clasp. I only held them the more tightly, and the effort ceased.

We regained the bedchamber appropriated to myself, and I then remarked that my dog had not followed us when we had left it. He was thrusting himself close to the fire, and trembling. I was impatient to examine the letters; and while I read them, my servant opened a little box in which he had deposited the weapons I had ordered him to bring, took them out, placed them on a table close at my bed-head, and then occupied himself in soothing the dog, who, however, seemed to heed him very little.

The letters were short, – they were dated; the dates exactly thirty-five years ago. They were evidently from a lover to his mistress, or a husband to some young wife. Not only the terms of expression, but a distinct reference to a former voyage, indicated the writer to have been a seafarer. The spelling and handwriting were those of a man imperfectly educated, but still the language itself was forcible. In the expressions of endearment there was a kind of rough, wild love; but here and there were dark unintelligible hints at some secret not of love, – some secret that seemed of crime. ‘We ought to love each other,’ was one of the sentences I remember, ‘for how every one else would execrate us if all was known.’ Again: ‘Don’t let any one be in the same room with you at night, – you talk in your sleep.’ And again: ‘What’s done can’t be undone; and I tell you there’s nothing against us unless the dead could come to life.’ Here there was underlined in a better handwriting (a female’s), ‘They do!’ At the end of the letter latest in date the same female hand had written these words: ‘Lost at sea the 4th of June, the same day as—’

I put down the letters, and began to muse over their contents.

Fearing, however, that the train of thought into which I fell might unsteady my nerves, I fully determined to keep my mind in a fit state to cope with whatever of marvellous the advancing night might bring forth. I roused myself; laid the letters on the table; stirred up the fire, which was still bright and cheering; and opened my volume of Macaulay. I read quietly enough till about half-past eleven. I then threw myself dressed upon the bed, and told my servant he might retire to his own room, but must keep himself awake. I bade him leave open the door between the two rooms. Thus alone, I kept two candles burning on the table by my bed-head. I placed my watch beside the weapons, and calmly resumed my Macaulay. Opposite to me the fire burned clear; and on the hearthrug, seemingly asleep, lay the dog. In about twenty minutes I felt an exceedingly cold air pass by my cheek, like a sudden draught. I fancied the door to my right, communicating with the landing-place, must have got open; but no, – it was closed. I then turned my glance to my left, and saw the flame of the candles violently swayed as by a wind. At the same moment the watch beside the revolver softly slid from the table, – softly, softly; no visible hand, – it was gone. I sprang up, seizing the revolver with the one hand, the dagger with the other; I was not willing that my weapons should share the fate of the watch. Thus armed, I looked round the floor, – no sign of the watch. Three slow, loud, distinct knocks were now heard at the bed-head; my servant called out, ‘Is that you, sir?’

‘No; be on your guard.’

The dog now roused himself and sat on his haunches, his ears moving quickly backwards and forwards. He kept his eyes fixed on me with a look so strange that he concentrated all my attention on himself. Slowly he rose up, all his hair bristling, and stood perfectly rigid, and with the same wild stare. I had no time, however, to examine the dog. Presently my servant emerged from his room; and if ever I saw horror in the human face, it was then. I should not have recognized him had we met in the street, so altered was every lineament. He passed by me quickly, saying, in a whisper that seemed scarcely to come from his lips, ‘Run, run! it is after me!’ He gained the door to the landing, pulled it open, and rushed forth. I followed him into the landing involuntarily, calling him to stop;

but, without heeding me, he bounded down the stairs, clinging to the balusters¹⁰, and taking several steps at a time. I heard, where I stood, the street-door open, – heard it again clap to. I was left alone in the haunted house.

It was but for a moment that I remained undecided whether or not to follow my servant; pride and curiosity alike forbade so dastardly a flight. I re-entered my room, closing the door after me, and proceeded cautiously into the interior chamber. I encountered nothing to justify my servant's terror. I again carefully examined the walls, to see if there were any concealed door. I could find no trace of one, – not even a seam in the dull-brown paper with which the room was hung. How, then, had the THING, whatever it was, which had so scared him, obtained ingress except through my own chamber?

I returned to my room, shut and locked the door that opened upon the interior one, and stood on the hearth, expectant and prepared. I now perceived that the dog had slunk into an angle of the wall, and was pressing himself close against it, as if literally striving to force his way into it. I approached the animal and spoke to it; the poor brute was evidently beside itself with terror. It showed all its teeth, the slaver dropping from its jaws, and would certainly have bitten me if I had touched it. It did not seem to recognize me. Whoever has seen at the Zoological Gardens a rabbit, fascinated by a serpent, cowering in a corner, may form some idea of the anguish which the dog exhibited. Finding all efforts to soothe the animal in vain, and fearing that his bite might be as venomous in that state as in the madness of hydrophobia¹¹, I left him alone, placed my weapons on the table beside the fire, seated myself, and recommenced my Macaulay.

Perhaps, in order not to appear seeking credit for a courage, or rather a coolness, which the reader may conceive I exaggerate, I may be pardoned if I pause to indulge in one or two egotistical remarks.

As I hold presence of mind, or what is called courage, to be precisely proportioned to familiarity with the circumstances that lead to it, so I should say that I had been long sufficiently familiar with all experiments that appertain to the marvellous. I had witnessed many very extraordinary phenomena in various parts of the world, – phenomena that would be either totally disbelieved if I stated them, or ascribed to supernatural agencies. Now, my theory is that the supernatural is the impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of Nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, 'So, then, the supernatural is possible;' but rather, 'So, then, the apparition of a ghost, is, contrary to received opinion, within the laws of Nature, – that is, not supernatural.'

Now, in all that I had hitherto witnessed, and indeed in all the wonders which the amateurs of mystery in our age record as facts, a material living agency is always required. On the Continent you will find still magicians who assert that they can raise spirits. Assume for the moment that they assert truly, still the living material form of the magician is present; and he is the material agency by which, from some constitutional peculiarities, certain strange phenomena are represented to your natural senses.

Accept, again, as truthful, the tales of spirit-manifestation in America, – musical or other sounds; writings on paper, produced by no discernible hand; articles of furniture moved without apparent human agency; or the actual sight and touch of hands, to which no bodies seem to belong, – still there must be found the MEDIUM¹², or living being, with constitutional peculiarities capable of obtaining these signs. In fine, in all such marvels, supposing even that there is no imposture, there must be a human being like ourselves by whom, or through whom, the effects presented to human

¹⁰ **balusters**– construction details supporting a handrail

¹¹ **hydrophobia**– strong fear of water

¹² **medium**– a person who is able to receive information from the spirits of the dead

beings are produced. It is so with the now familiar phenomena of mesmerism¹³ or electro-biology; the mind of the person operated on is affected through a material living agent. Nor, supposing it true that a mesmerized¹⁴ patient can respond to the will or passes of a mesmerizer¹⁵ a hundred miles distant, is the response less occasioned by a material being; it may be through a material fluid – call it Electric, call it Odic, call it what you will – which has the power of traversing space and passing obstacles, that the material effect is communicated from one to the other. Hence, all that I had hitherto witnessed, or expected to witness, in this strange house, I believed to be occasioned through some agency or medium as mortal as myself; and this idea necessarily prevented the awe with which those who regard as supernatural things that are not within the ordinary operations of Nature, might have been impressed by the adventures of that memorable night.

As, then, it was my conjecture that all that was presented, or would be presented to my senses, must originate in some human being gifted by constitution with the power so to present them, and having some motive so to do, I felt an interest in my theory which, in its way, was rather philosophical than superstitious. And I can sincerely say that I was in as tranquil a temper for observation as any practical experimentalist could be in awaiting the effects of some rare, though perhaps perilous, chemical combination. Of course, the more I kept my mind detached from fancy, the more the temper fitted for observation would be obtained; and I therefore riveted eye and thought on the strong daylight sense in the page of my Macaulay.

I now became aware that something interposed between the page and the light, – the page was over-shadowed. I looked up, and I saw what I shall find it very difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe.

It was a Darkness shaping itself forth from the air in very undefined outline. I cannot say it was of a human form, and yet it had more resemblance to a human form, or rather shadow, than to anything else. As it stood, wholly apart and distinct from the air and the light around it, its dimensions seemed gigantic, the summit nearly touching the ceiling. While I gazed, a feeling of intense cold seized me. An iceberg before me could not more have chilled me; nor could the cold of an iceberg have been more purely physical. I feel convinced that it was not the cold caused by fear. As I continued to gaze, I thought – but this I cannot say with precision – that I distinguished two eyes looking down on me from the height. One moment I fancied that I distinguished them clearly, the next they seemed gone; but still two rays of a pale-blue light frequently shot through the darkness, as from the height on which I half believed, half doubted, that I had encountered the eyes.

I strove to speak, – my voice utterly failed me; I could only think to myself, ‘Is this fear? It *is not* fear!’ I strove to rise, – in vain; I felt as if weighed down by an irresistible force. Indeed, my impression was that of an immense and overwhelming Power opposed to my volition, – that sense of utter inadequacy to cope with a force beyond man’s, which one may feel *physically* in a storm at sea, in a conflagration, or when confronting some terrible wild beast, or rather, perhaps, the shark of the ocean, I felt *morally*. Opposed to my will was another will, as far superior to its strength as storm, fire, and shark are superior in material force to the force of man.

And now, as this impression grew on me, – now came, at last, horror, horror to a degree that no words can convey. Still I retained pride, if not courage; and in my own mind I said, ‘This is horror, but it is not fear; unless I fear I cannot be harmed; my reason rejects this thing; it is an illusion, – I do not fear.’ With a violent effort I succeeded at last in stretching out my hand towards the weapon on the table; as I did so, on the arm and shoulder I received a strange shock, and my arm fell to my side powerless. And now, to add to my horror, the light began slowly to wane from the candles, –

¹³ **mesmerizm** – a sort of hypnotism; named after Franz Mesmer (1734–1815) who was the first to use hypnotic trance in medical treatment

¹⁴ **mesmerize** = hypnotize

¹⁵ **mesmerizer** = hypnotizer

they were not, as it were, extinguished, but their flame seemed very gradually withdrawn; it was the same with the fire, – the light was extracted from the fuel; in a few minutes the room was in utter darkness. The dread that came over me, to be thus in the dark with that dark Thing, whose power was so intensely felt, brought a reaction of nerve. In fact, terror had reached that climax, that either my senses must have deserted me, or I must have burst through the spell. I did burst through it. I found voice, though the voice was a shriek. I remember that I broke forth with words like these, ‘I do not fear, my soul does not fear;’ and at the same time I found strength to rise. Still in that profound gloom I rushed to one of the windows; tore aside the curtain; flung open the shutters; my first thought was – LIGHT. And when I saw the moon high, clear, and calm, I felt a joy that almost compensated for the previous terror. There was the moon, there was also the light from the gas-lamps in the deserted slumberous street. I turned to look back into the room; the moon penetrated its shadow very palely and partially, – but still there was light. The dark Thing, whatever it might be, was gone, – except that I could yet see a dim shadow, which seemed the shadow of that shade, against the opposite wall.

My eye now rested on the table, and from under the table (which was without cloth or cover, – an old mahogany round-table) there rose a hand, visible as far as the wrist. It was a hand, seemingly, as much of flesh and blood as my own, but the hand of an aged person, lean, wrinkled, small too, – a woman’s hand. That hand very softly closed on the two letters that lay on the table; hand and letters both vanished. There then came the same three loud, measured knocks I had heard at the bed-head before this extraordinary drama had commenced.

As those sounds slowly ceased, I felt the whole room vibrate sensibly; and at the far end there rose, as from the floor, sparks or globules like bubbles of light, many colored, – green, yellow, fire-red, azure. Up and down, to and fro, hither, thither, as tiny Will-o’-the-Wisps¹⁶, the sparks moved, slow or swift, each at its own caprice. A chair (as in the drawing-room below) was now advanced from the wall without apparent agency, and placed at the opposite side of the table. Suddenly, as forth from the chair, there grew a shape, – a woman’s shape. It was distinct as a shape of life, – ghastly as a shape of death. The face was that of youth, with a strange, mournful beauty; the throat and shoulders were bare, the rest of the form in a loose robe of cloudy white. It began sleeking its long, yellow hair, which fell over its shoulders; its eyes were not turned towards me, but to the door; it seemed listening, watching, waiting. The shadow of the shade in the background grew darker; and again I thought I beheld the eyes gleaming out from the summit of the shadow, – eyes fixed upon that shape.

As if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out another shape, equally distinct, equally ghastly, – a man’s shape, a young man’s. It was in the dress of the last century, or rather in a likeness of such dress (for both the male shape and the female, though defined, were evidently unsubstantial, impalpable, – simulacra¹⁷, phantasms¹⁸); and there was something incongruous, grotesque, yet fearful, in the contrast between the elaborate finery, the courtly precision of that old-fashioned garb, with its ruffles and lace and buckles, and the corpse-like aspect and ghost-like stillness of the flitting wearer. Just as the male shape approached the female, the dark Shadow started from the wall, all three for a moment wrapped in darkness. When the pale light returned, the two phantoms¹⁹ were as if in the grasp of the Shadow that towered between them; and there was a blood-stain on the breast of the female; and the phantom male was leaning on its phantom sword, and blood seemed trickling fast from the ruffles, from the lace; and the darkness of the intermediate Shadow swallowed them up, – they were gone. And again the bubbles of light shot, and sailed, and undulated, growing thicker and thicker and more wildly confused in their movements.

¹⁶ **Will-o’-the Wisp**– a meteorological effect, a mysterious light seen over marshes due to ignition of methane, produced by the decomposition of plants

¹⁷ **simulacra**– *pl.* from *simulacrum* – shadowy likeness that is deceiving

¹⁸ **phantasm**– a phantom

¹⁹ **phantom**– a ghost, or smth. seen in a vision

The closet door to the right of the fireplace now opened, and from the aperture there came the form of an aged woman. In her hand she held letters, – the very letters over which I had seen *the* Hand close; and behind her I heard a footstep. She turned round as if to listen, and then she opened the letters and seemed to read; and over her shoulder I saw a livid face, the face as of a man long drowned, – bloated, bleached, seaweed tangled in its dripping hair; and at her feet lay a form as of a corpse; and beside the corpse there cowered a child, a miserable, squalid child, with famine in its cheeks and fear in its eyes. And as I looked in the old woman's face, the wrinkles and lines vanished, and it became a face of youth, – hard-eyed, stony, but still youth; and the Shadow darted forth, and darkened over these phantoms as it had darkened over the last.

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow, – malignant, serpent eyes. And the bubbles of light again rose and fell, and in their disordered, irregular, turbulent maze, mingled with the wan moonlight. And now from these globules themselves, as from the shell of an egg, monstrous things burst out; the air grew filled with them: larvae²⁰ so bloodless and so hideous that I can in no way describe them except to remind the reader of the swarming life which the solar microscope brings before his eyes in a drop of water, – things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each, other; forms like nought ever beheld by the naked eye. As the shapes were without symmetry, so their movements were without order. In their very vagrancies there was no sport; they came round me and round, thicker and faster and swifter, swarming over my head, crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings. Sometimes I felt myself touched, but not by them; invisible hands touched me. Once I felt the clutch as of cold, soft fingers at my throat. I was still equally conscious that if I gave way to fear I should be in bodily peril; and I concentrated all my faculties in the single focus of resisting stubborn will. And I turned my sight from the Shadow; above all, from those strange serpent eyes, – eyes that had now become distinctly visible. For there, though in nought else around me, I was aware that there was a WILL, and a will of intense, creative, working evil, which might crush down my own.

The pale atmosphere in the room began now to redden as if in the air of some near conflagration. The larvæ grew lurid as things that live in fire. Again the room vibrated; again were heard the three measured knocks; and again all things were swallowed up in the darkness of the dark Shadow, as if out of that darkness all had come, into that darkness all returned.

As the gloom receded, the Shadow was wholly gone. Slowly, as it had been withdrawn, the flame grew again into the candles on the table, again into the fuel in the grate. The whole room came once more calmly, healthfully into sight.

The two doors were still closed, the door communicating with the servant's room still locked. In the corner of the wall, into which he had so convulsively nighed himself, lay the dog. I called to him, – no movement; I approached, – the animal was dead: his eyes protruded; his tongue out of his mouth; the froth gathered round his jaws. I took him in my arms; I brought him to the fire. I felt acute grief for the loss of my poor favorite, – acute self-reproach; I accused myself of his death; I imagined he had died of fright. But what was my surprise on finding that his neck was actually broken. Had this been done in the dark? Must it not have been by a hand human as mine; must there not have been a human agency all the while in that room? Good cause to suspect it. I cannot tell. I cannot do more than state the fact fairly; the reader may draw his own inference.

Another surprising circumstance, – my watch was restored to the table from which it had been so mysteriously withdrawn; but it had stopped at the very moment it was so withdrawn, nor, despite all the skill of the watchmaker, has it ever gone since, – that is, it will go in a strange, erratic way for a few hours, and then come to a dead stop; it is worthless.

²⁰ **larvae**– insects in the first stage of their life cycle

Nothing more chanced for the rest of the night. Nor, indeed, had I long to wait before the dawn broke. Nor till it was broad daylight did I quit the haunted house. Before I did so, I revisited the little blind room in which my servant and myself had been for a time imprisoned. I had a strong impression – for which I could not account – that from that room had originated the mechanism of the phenomena, if I may use the term, which had been experienced in my chamber. And though I entered it now in the clear day, with the sun peering through the filmy window, I still felt, as I stood on its floors, the creep of the horror which I had first there experienced the night before, and which had been so aggravated by what had passed in my own chamber. I could not, indeed, bear to stay more than half a minute within those walls. I descended the stairs, and again I heard the footfall before me; and when I opened the street door, I thought I could distinguish a very low laugh. I gained my own home, expecting to find my runaway servant there; but he had not presented himself, nor did I hear more of him for three days, when I received a letter from him, dated from Liverpool²¹ to this effect: —

‘HONORED SIR, – I humbly entreat your pardon, though I can scarcely hope that you will think that I deserve it, unless – which Heaven forbid! – you saw what I did. I feel that it will be years before I can recover myself; and as to being fit for service, it is out of the question. I am therefore going to my brother-in-law at Melbourne²². The ship sails to-morrow. Perhaps the long voyage may set me up. I do nothing now but start and tremble, and fancy IT is behind me. I humbly beg you, honored sir, to order my clothes, and whatever wages are due to me, to be sent to my mother’s, at Walworth²³, – John knows her address.’

The letter ended with additional apologies, somewhat incoherent, and explanatory details as to effects that had been under the writer’s charge. This flight may perhaps warrant a suspicion that the man wished to go to Australia, and had been somehow or other fraudulently mixed up with the events of the night. I say nothing in refutation of that conjecture; rather, I suggest it as one that would seem to many persons the most probable solution of improbable occurrences. My belief in my own theory remained unshaken. I returned in the evening to the house, to bring away in a hack cab the things I had left there, with my poor dog’s body. In this task I was not disturbed, nor did any incident worth note befall me, except that still, on ascending and descending the stairs, I heard the same footfall in advance. On leaving the house, I went to Mr. J—’s. He was at home. I returned him the keys, told him that my curiosity was sufficiently gratified, and was about to relate quickly what had passed, when he stopped me, and said, though with much politeness, that he had no longer any interest in a mystery which none had ever solved.

I determined at least to tell him of the two letters I had read, as well as of the extraordinary manner in which they had disappeared; and I then inquired if he thought they had been addressed to the woman who had died in the house, and if there were anything in her early history which could possibly confirm the dark suspicions to which the letters gave rise. Mr. J— seemed startled, and, after musing a few moments, answered, ‘I am but little acquainted with the woman’s earlier history, except as I before told you, that her family were known to mine. But you revive some vague reminiscences to her prejudice. I will make inquiries, and inform you of their result. Still, even if we could admit the popular superstition that a person who had been either the perpetrator or the victim of dark crimes in life could revisit, as a restless spirit, the scene in which those crimes had been committed, I should observe that the house was infested by strange sights and sounds before the old woman died – you smile – what would you say?’

²¹ **Liverpool**– a city and port in the historic county of Lancashire in northwestern England

²² **Melbourne**– an important city and port on the southeastern coast of Australia

²³ **Walworth**– a historic village in Southwark, an inner borough of London; a borough is an incorporated town or district with special privileges.

‘I would say this, that I am convinced, if we could get to the bottom of these mysteries, we should find a living human agency.’

‘What! you believe it is all an imposture? For what object?’

‘Not an imposture in the ordinary sense of the word. If suddenly I were to sink into a deep sleep, from which you could not awake me, but in that sleep could answer questions with an accuracy which I could not pretend to when awake, – tell you what money you had in your pocket, nay, describe your very thoughts, – it is not necessarily an imposture, any more than it is necessarily supernatural. I should be, unconsciously to myself, under a mesmeric²⁴ influence, conveyed to me from a distance by a human being who had acquired power over me by previous *rapport*²⁵.’

‘But if a mesmerizer could so affect another living being, can you suppose that a mesmerizer could also affect inanimate objects: move chairs, – open and shut doors?’

‘Or impress our senses with the belief in such effects, – we never having been *en rapport*²⁶ with the person acting on us? No. What is commonly called mesmerism could not do this; but there may be a power akin to mesmerism, and superior to it, – the power that in the old days was called Magic. That such a power may extend to all inanimate objects of matter, I do not say; but if so, it would not be against Nature, – it would be only a rare power in Nature which might be given to constitutions with certain peculiarities, and cultivated by practice to an extraordinary degree. That such a power might extend over the dead, – that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain, – and compel, not that which ought properly to be called the SOUL, and which is far beyond human reach, but rather a phantom of what has been most earth-stained on earth, to make itself apparent to our senses, is a very ancient though obsolete theory upon which I will hazard no opinion. But I do not conceive the power would be supernatural. Let me illustrate what I mean from an experiment which Paracelsus²⁷ describes as not difficult, and which the author of the “Curiosities of Literature” cites as credible: A flower perishes; you burn it. Whatever were the elements of that flower while it lived are gone, dispersed, you know not whither; you can never discover nor re-collect them. But you can, by chemistry, out of the burned dust of that flower, raise a spectrum of the flower, just as it seemed in life. It may be the same with the human being. The soul has as much escaped you as the essence or elements of the flower. Still you may make a spectrum of it. And this phantom, though in the popular superstition it is held to be the soul of the departed, must not be confounded with the true soul; it is but the eidolon²⁸ of the dead form. Hence, like the best attested stories of ghosts or spirits, the thing that most strikes us is the absence of what we hold to be soul, – that is, of superior emancipated intelligence. These apparitions come for little or no object, – they seldom speak when they do come; if they speak, they utter no ideas above those of an ordinary person on earth. American spirit-seers have published volumes of communications, in prose and verse, which they assert to be given in the names of the most illustrious dead: Shakespeare, Bacon²⁹, – Heaven knows whom. Those communications, taking the best, are certainly not a whit of higher order than would be communications from living persons of fair talent and education; they are wondrously inferior to what Bacon, Shakespeare, and Plato³⁰ said and wrote when on earth. Nor, what is more noticeable, do they ever contain an idea that was not on the earth before. Wonderful, therefore, as such phenomena may be (granting them to be truthful), I see much that philosophy may question, nothing that it is incumbent on philosophy

²⁴ **mesmeric**– hypnotic

²⁵ **rapport** = relationship

²⁶ **en rapport** = in close relationship

²⁷ **Paracelsus** (1493–15410) – a Swiss doctor and alchemist who was the first to widely use the achievements of chemistry for treating patients

²⁸ **eidolon** – a ghost or phantom (*Greek*)

²⁹ **Bacon**– Francis Bacon (1561–1626), a famous English philosopher, statesman, essayist and speaker

³⁰ **Plato** (428 BC–348 BC) – an ancient Greek philosopher, founder of the Academy; he was the pupil of Socrates and the teacher of Aristotle.

to deny, – namely, nothing supernatural. They are but ideas conveyed somehow or other (we have not yet discovered the means) from one mortal brain to another. Whether, in so doing, tables walk of their own accord, or fiendlike shapes appear in a magic circle, or bodiless hands rise and remove material objects, or a Thing of Darkness, such as presented itself to me, freeze our blood, – still am I persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another. In some constitutions there is a natural chemistry, and those constitutions may produce chemic wonders, – in others a natural fluid, call it electricity, and these may produce electric wonders. But the wonders differ from Normal Science in this, – they are alike objectless, purposeless, puerile, frivolous. They lead on to no grand results; and therefore the world does not heed, and true sages have not cultivated them. But sure I am, that of all I saw or heard, a man, human as myself, was the remote originator; and I believe unconsciously to himself as to the exact effects produced, for this reason: no two persons, you say, have ever told you that they experienced exactly the same thing. Well, observe, no two persons ever experience exactly the same dream. If this were an ordinary imposture, the machinery would be arranged for results that would but little vary; if it were a supernatural agency permitted by the Almighty³¹, it would surely be for some definite end. These phenomena belong to neither class; my persuasion is, that they originate in some brain now far distant; that that brain had no distinct volition in anything that occurred; that what does occur reflects but its devious, motley, ever-shifting, half-formed thoughts; in short, that it has been but the dreams of such a brain put into action and invested with a semi-substance. That this brain is of immense power, that it can set matter into movement, that it is malignant and destructive, I believe; some material force must have killed my dog; the same force might, for aught I know, have sufficed to kill myself, had I been as subjugated by terror as the dog, – had my intellect or my spirit given me no countervailing resistance in my will.’

‘It killed your dog, – that is fearful! Indeed it is strange that no animal can be induced to stay in that house; not even a cat. Bats and mice are never found in it.’

‘The instincts of the brute creation detect influences deadly to their existence. Man’s reason has a sense less subtle, because it has a resisting power more supreme. But enough; do you comprehend my theory?’

‘Yes, though imperfectly, – and I accept any crotchet³² (pardon the word), however odd, rather than embrace at once the notion of ghosts and hobgoblins³³ we imbibed in our nurseries. Still, to my unfortunate house, the evil is the same. What on earth can I do with the house?’

‘I will tell you what I would do. I am convinced from my own internal feelings that the small, unfurnished room at right angles to the door of the bed-room which I occupied, forms a starting-point or receptacle for the influences which haunt the house; and I strongly advise you to have the walls opened, the floor removed, – nay, the whole room pulled down. I observe that it is detached from the body of the house, built over the small backyard, and could be removed without injury to the rest of the building.’

‘And you think, if I did that—’

‘You would cut off the telegraph wires. Try it. I am so persuaded that I am right, that I will pay half the expense if you will allow me to direct the operations.’

‘Nay, I am well able to afford the cost; for the rest allow me to write to you.’

About ten days after I received a letter from Mr. J—, telling me that he had visited the house since I had seen him; that he had found the two letters I had described, replaced in the drawer from which I had taken them; that he had read them with misgivings like my own; that he had instituted a cautious inquiry about the woman to whom I rightly conjectured they had been written. It seemed

³¹ the Almighty = God

³² crotchet– a strange and unreasonable idea

³³ hobgoblins– in English and Scottish folklore, small malicious fairies which inhabit houses, mislead travelers, frighten people, spoil things, etc.

that thirty-six years ago (a year before the date of the letters) she had married, against the wish of her relations, an American of very suspicious character; in fact, he was generally believed to have been a pirate. She herself was the daughter of very respectable tradespeople, and had served in the capacity of a nursery governess before her marriage. She had a brother, a widower, who was considered wealthy, and who had one child of about six years old. A month after the marriage the body of this brother was found in the Thames, near London Bridge; there seemed some marks of violence about his throat, but they were not deemed sufficient to warrant the inquest in any other verdict than that of 'found drowned.'

The American and his wife took charge of the little boy, the deceased brother having by his will left his sister the guardian of his only child, – and in event of the child's death the sister inherited. The child died about six months afterwards, – it was supposed to have been neglected and ill-treated. The neighbors deposed to have heard it shriek at night. The surgeon who had examined it after death said that it was emaciated as if from want of nourishment, and the body was covered with livid bruises. It seemed that one winter night the child had sought to escape; crept out into the backyard; tried to scale the wall; fallen back exhausted; and been found at morning on the stones in a dying state. But though there was some evidence of cruelty, there was none of murder; and the aunt and her husband had sought to palliate cruelty by alleging the exceeding stubbornness and perversity of the child, who was declared to be half-witted. Be that as it may, at the orphan's death the aunt inherited her brother's fortune. Before the first wedded year was out, the American quitted England abruptly, and never returned to it. He obtained a cruising vessel, which was lost in the Atlantic two years afterwards. The widow was left in affluence, but reverses of various kinds had befallen her: a bank broke; an investment failed; she went into a small business and became insolvent; then she entered into service, sinking lower and lower, from housekeeper down to maid-of-all-work, – never long retaining a place, though nothing decided against her character was ever alleged. She was considered sober, honest, and peculiarly quiet in her ways; still nothing prospered with her. And so she had dropped into the workhouse, from which Mr. J– had taken her, to be placed in charge of the very house which she had rented as mistress in the first year of her wedded life.

Mr. J– added that he had passed an hour alone in the unfurnished room which I had urged him to destroy, and that his impressions of dread while there were so great, though he had neither heard nor seen anything, that he was eager to have the walls bared and the floors removed as I had suggested. He had engaged persons for the work, and would commence any day I would name.

The day was accordingly fixed. I repaired to the haunted house, – we went into the blind, dreary room, took up the skirting, and then the floors. Under the rafters, covered with rubbish, was found a trap-door, quite large enough to admit a man. It was closely nailed down, with clamps and rivets of iron. On removing these we descended into a room below, the existence of which had never been suspected. In this room there had been a window and a flue, but they had been bricked over, evidently for many years. By the help of candles we examined this place; it still retained some mouldering furniture, – three chairs, an oak settle, a table, – all of the fashion of about eighty years ago. There was a chest of drawers against the wall, in which we found, half-rotted away, old-fashioned articles of a man's dress, such as might have been worn eighty or a hundred years ago by a gentleman of some rank; costly steel buckles and buttons, like those yet worn in court-dresses, a handsome court sword; in a waistcoat which had once been rich with gold-lace, but which was now blackened and foul with damp, we found five guineas, a few silver coins, and an ivory ticket, probably for some place of entertainment long since passed away. But our main discovery was in a kind of iron safe fixed to the wall, the lock of which it cost us much trouble to get picked.

In this safe were three shelves and two small drawers. Ranged on the shelves were several small bottles of crystal, hermetically stopped. They contained colorless, volatile essences, of the nature of which I shall only say that they were not poisons, – phosphor and ammonia entered into some of

them. There were also some very curious glass tubes, and a small pointed rod of iron, with a large lump of rock-crystal, and another of amber, – also a loadstone of great power.

In one of the drawers we found a miniature portrait set in gold, and retaining the freshness of its colors most remarkably, considering the length of time it had probably been there. The portrait was that of a man who might be somewhat advanced in middle life, perhaps forty-seven or forty-eight. It was a remarkable face, – a most impressive face. If you could fancy some mighty serpent transformed into man, preserving in the human lineaments the old serpent type, you would have a better idea of that countenance than long descriptions can convey: the width and flatness of frontal; the tapering elegance of contour disguising the strength of the deadly jaw; the long, large, terrible eye, glittering and green as the emerald, – and withal a certain ruthless calm, as if from the consciousness of an immense power.

Mechanically I turned round the miniature to examine the back of it, and on the back was engraved a pentacle³⁴; in the middle of the pentacle a ladder, and the third step of the ladder was formed by the date 1765. Examining still more minutely, I detected a spring; this, on being pressed, opened the back of the miniature as a lid. Within-side the lid were engraved, ‘Marianna to thee. Be faithful in life and in death to—.’ Here follows a name that I will not mention, but it was not unfamiliar to me. I had heard it spoken of by old men in my childhood as the name borne by a dazzling charlatan who had made a great sensation in London for a year or so, and had fled the country on the charge of a double murder within his own house, – that of his mistress and his rival. I said nothing of this to Mr. J—, to whom reluctantly I resigned the miniature.

We had found no difficulty in opening the first drawer within the iron safe; we found great difficulty in opening the second: it was not locked, but it resisted all efforts, till we inserted in the chinks the edge of a chisel. When we had thus drawn it forth, we found a very singular apparatus in the nicest order. Upon a small, thin book, or rather tablet, was placed a saucer of crystal; this saucer was filled with a clear liquid, – on that liquid floated a kind of compass, with a needle shifting rapidly round; but instead of the usual points of a compass were seven strange characters, not very unlike those used by astrologers to denote the planets. A peculiar but not strong nor displeasing odor came from this drawer, which was lined with a wood that we afterwards discovered to be hazel. Whatever the cause of this odor, it produced a material effect on the nerves. We all felt it, even the two workmen who were in the room, – a creeping, tingling sensation from the tips of the fingers to the roots of the hair. Impatient to examine the tablet, I removed the saucer. As I did so the needle of the compass went round and round with exceeding swiftness, and I felt a shock that ran through my whole frame, so that I dropped the saucer on the floor. The liquid was spilled; the saucer was broken; the compass rolled to the end of the room, and at that instant the walls shook to and fro, as if a giant had swayed and rocked them.

The two workmen were so frightened that they ran up the ladder by which we had descended from the trapdoor; but seeing that nothing more happened, they were easily induced to return.

Meanwhile I had opened the tablet: it was bound in plain red leather, with a silver clasp; it contained but one sheet of thick vellum³⁵, and on that sheet were inscribed, within a double pentacle, words in old monkish Latin, which are literally to be translated thus: ‘On all that it can reach within these walls, sentient or inanimate, living or dead, as moves the needle, so work my will! Accursed be the house, and restless be the dwellers therein.’

We found no more. Mr. J– burned the tablet and its anathema³⁶. He razed to the foundations the part of the building containing the secret room with the chamber over it. He had then the courage

³⁴ **pentacle**– a magic geometrical figure

³⁵ **vellum**– parchment

³⁶ **anathema**– a formal declaration of the Church condemning smb. or smth.; a curse

to inhabit the house himself for a month, and a quieter, better-conditioned house could not be found in all London. Subsequently he let it to advantage, and his tenant has made no complaints.

Wilkie Collins Dream Woman

The First Narrative Introductory statement of the facts by Percy Fairbank

I

‘Hullo, there! Hostler! Hullo-o-o!’

‘My dear! why don’t you look for the bell?’

‘I have looked – there is no bell.’

‘And nobody in the yard. How very extraordinary! Call again, dear.’

‘Hostler! Hullo, there! Hostler-r-r!’

My second call echoes through empty space, and rouses nobody – produces, in short, no visible result. I am at the end of my resources – I don’t know what to say or what to do next. Here I stand in the solitary inn yard of a strange town, with two horses to hold, and a lady to take care of. By way of adding to my responsibilities, it so happens that one of the horses is dead lame, and that the lady is my wife.

Who am I? – you will ask.

There is plenty of time to answer the question. Nothing happens; and nobody appears to receive us. Let me introduce myself and my wife.

I am Percy Fairbank – English gentleman – age (let us say) forty – no profession – moderate politics – middle height – fair complexion – easy character – plenty of money.

My wife is a French lady. She was Mademoiselle Clotilde Delorge – when I was first presented to her at her father’s house in France. I fell in love with her – I really don’t know why. It might have been because I was perfectly idle, and had nothing else to do at the time. Or it might have been because all my friends said she was the very last woman whom I ought to think of marrying. On the surface, I must own, there is nothing in common between Mrs. Fairbank and me. She is tall; she is dark; she is nervous, excitable, romantic; in all her opinions she proceeds to extremes. What could such a woman see in me? what could I see in her? I know no more than you do. In some mysterious manner we exactly suit each other. We have been man and wife for ten years, and our only regret is, that we have no children. I don’t know what you may think; I call that – upon the whole – a happy marriage.

So much for ourselves. The next question is – what has brought us into the inn yard? and why am I obliged to turn groom, and hold the horses?

We live for the most part in France – at the country house in which my wife and I first met. Occasionally, by way of variety, we pay visits to my friends in England. We are paying one of those visits now. Our host is an old college friend of mine, possessed of a fine estate in Somersetshire³⁷; and we have arrived at his house – called Farleigh Hall – toward the close of the hunting season.

On the day of which I am now writing – destined to be a memorable day in our calendar – the hounds meet at Farleigh Hall. Mrs. Fairbank and I are mounted on two of the best horses in my friend’s stables. We are quite unworthy of that distinction; for we know nothing and care nothing about hunting. On the other hand, we delight in riding, and we enjoy the breezy spring morning and the fair and fertile English landscape surrounding us on every side. While the hunt prospers, we follow the

³⁷ **Somersetshire** – a historic county in the southwest of England

hunt. But when a check occurs – when time passes and patience is sorely tried; when the bewildered dogs run hither and thither, and strong language falls from the lips of exasperated sportsmen – we fail to take any further interest in the proceedings. We turn our horses' heads in the direction of a grassy lane, delightfully shaded by trees. We trot merrily along the lane, and find ourselves on an open common. We gallop across the common, and follow the windings of a second lane. We cross a brook, we pass through a village, we emerge into pastoral solitude among the hills. The horses toss their heads, and neigh to each other, and enjoy it as much as we do. The hunt is forgotten. We are as happy as a couple of children; we are actually singing a French song – when in one moment our merriment comes to an end. My wife's horse sets one of his forefeet on a loose stone, and stumbles. His rider's ready hand saves him from falling. But, at the first attempt he makes to go on, the sad truth shows itself – a tendon is strained; the horse is lame.

What is to be done? We are strangers in a lonely part of the country. Look where we may, we see no signs of a human habitation. There is nothing for it but to take the bridle road up the hill, and try what we can discover on the other side. I transfer the saddles, and mount my wife on my own horse. He is not used to carry a lady; he misses the familiar pressure of a man's legs on either side of him; he fidgets, and starts, and kicks up the dust. I follow on foot, at a respectful distance from his heels, leading the lame horse. Is there a more miserable object on the face of creation than a lame horse? I have seen lame men and lame dogs who were cheerful creatures; but I never yet saw a lame horse who didn't look heartbroken over his own misfortune.

For half an hour my wife capers and curvets sideways along the bridle road. I trudge on behind her; and the heartbroken horse halts behind me. Hard by the top of the hill, our melancholy procession passes a Somersetshire peasant at work in a field. I summon the man to approach us; and the man looks at me stolidly, from the middle of the field, without stirring a step. I ask at the top of my voice how far it is to Farleigh Hall. The Somersetshire peasant answers at the top of his voice:

'Vourteen mile. Gi' oi a drap o' zyder.'

I translate (for my wife's benefit) from the Somersetshire language into the English language. We are fourteen miles from Farleigh Hall; and our friend in the field desires to be rewarded, for giving us that information, with a drop of cider. There is the peasant, painted by himself! Quite a bit of character, my dear! Quite a bit of character!

Mrs. Fairbank doesn't view the study of agricultural human nature with my relish. Her fidgety horse will not allow her a moment's repose; she is beginning to lose her temper.

'We can't go fourteen miles in this way,' she says. 'Where is the nearest inn? Ask that brute in the field!'

I take a shilling from my pocket and hold it up in the sun. The shilling exercises magnetic virtues. The shilling draws the peasant slowly toward me from the middle of the field. I inform him that we want to put up the horses and to hire a carriage to take us back to Farleigh Hall. Where can we do that? The peasant answers (with his eye on the shilling):

'At Oonderbridge, to be zure.' (At Underbridge, to be sure.)

'Is it far to Underbridge?'

The peasant repeats, 'Var to Oonderbridge?' – and laughs at the question. 'Hoo-hoo-hoo!' (Underbridge is evidently close by – if we could only find it.) 'Will you show us the way, my man?' 'Will you gi' oi a drap of zyder?' I courteously bend my head, and point to the shilling. The agricultural intelligence exerts itself. The peasant joins our melancholy procession. My wife is a fine woman, but he never once looks at my wife – and, more extraordinary still, he never even looks at the horses. His eyes are with his mind – and his mind is on the shilling.

We reach the top of the hill – and, behold on the other side, nestling in a valley, the shrine of our pilgrimage, the town of Underbridge! Here our guide claims his shilling, and leaves us to find out the inn for ourselves. I am constitutionally a polite man. I say 'Good morning' at parting. The guide looks at me with the shilling between his teeth to make sure that it is a good one. 'Marnin!'

he says savagely – and turns his back on us, as if we had offended him. A curious product, this, of the growth of civilization. If I didn't see a church spire at Underbridge, I might suppose that we had lost ourselves on a savage island.

II

Arriving at the town, we had no difficulty in finding the inn. The town is composed of one desolate street; and midway in that street stands the inn – an ancient stone building sadly out of repair. The painting on the sign-board is obliterated. The shutters over the long range of front windows are all closed. A cock and his hens are the only living creatures at the door. Plainly, this is one of the old inns of the stage-coach period, ruined by the railway. We pass through the open arched doorway, and find no one to welcome us. We advance into the stable yard behind; I assist my wife to dismount – and there we are in the position already disclosed to view at the opening of this narrative. No bell to ring. No human creature to answer when I call. I stand helpless, with the bridles of the horses in my hand. Mrs. Fairbank saunters gracefully down the length of the yard and does – what all women do, when they find themselves in a strange place. She opens every door as she passes it, and peeps in. On my side, I have just recovered my breath, I am on the point of shouting for the hostler for the third and last time, when I hear Mrs. Fairbank suddenly call to me:

'Percy! come here!'

Her voice is eager and agitated. She has opened a last door at the end of the yard, and has started back from some sight which has suddenly met her view. I hitch the horses' bridles on a rusty nail in the wall near me, and join my wife. She has turned pale, and catches me nervously by the arm.

'Good heavens!' she cries; 'look at that!'

I look – and what do I see? I see a dingy little stable, containing two stalls. In one stall a horse is munching his corn. In the other a man is lying asleep on the litter.

A worn, withered, woebegone man in a hostler's dress. His hollow wrinkled cheeks, his scanty grizzled hair, his dry yellow skin, tell their own tale of past sorrow or suffering. There is an ominous frown on his eyebrows – there is a painful nervous contraction on the side of his mouth. I hear him breathing convulsively when I first look in; he shudders and sighs in his sleep. It is not a pleasant sight to see, and I turn round instinctively to the bright sunlight in the yard. My wife turns me back again in the direction of the stable door.

'Wait!' she says. 'Wait! he may do it again.'

'Do what again?'

'He was talking in his sleep, Percy, when I first looked in. He was dreaming some dreadful dream. Hush! he's beginning again.'

I look and listen. The man stirs on his miserable bed. The man speaks in a quick, fierce whisper through his clinched teeth. 'Wake up! Wake up, there! Murder!'

There is an interval of silence. He moves one lean arm slowly until it rests over his throat; he shudders, and turns on his straw; he raises his arm from his throat, and feebly stretches it out; his hand clutches at the straw on the side toward which he has turned; he seems to fancy that he is grasping at the edge of something. I see his lips begin to move again; I step softly into the stable; my wife follows me, with her hand fast clasped in mine. We both bend over him. He is talking once more in his sleep – strange talk, mad talk, this time.

'Light gray eyes' (we hear him say), 'and a droop in the left eyelid – flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it – all right, mother! fair, white arms with a down on them – little, lady's hand, with a reddish look round the fingernails – the knife – the cursed knife – first on one side, then on the other – aha, you she-devil! where is the knife?'

He stops and grows restless on a sudden. We see him writhing on the straw. He throws up both his hands and gasps hysterically for breath. His eyes open suddenly. For a moment they look at

nothing, with a vacant glitter in them – then they close again in deeper sleep. Is he dreaming still? Yes; but the dream seems to have taken a new course. When he speaks next, the tone is altered; the words are few – sadly and imploringly repeated over and over again. ‘Say you love me! I am so fond of you. Say you love me! say you love me!’ He sinks into deeper and deeper sleep, faintly repeating those words. They die away on his lips. He speaks no more.

By this time Mrs. Fairbank has got over her terror; she is devoured by curiosity now. The miserable creature on the straw has appealed to the imaginative side of her character. Her illimitable appetite for romance hungers and thirsts for more. She shakes me impatiently by the arm.

‘Do you hear? There is a woman at the bottom of it, Percy! There is love and murder in it, Percy! Where are the people of the inn? Go into the yard, and call to them again.’

My wife belongs, on her mother’s side, to the South of France. The South of France breeds fine women with hot tempers. I say no more. Married men will understand my position. Single men may need to be told that there are occasions when we must not only love and honour – we must also obey – our wives.

I turn to the door to obey my wife, and find myself confronted by a stranger who has stolen on us unawares. The stranger is a tiny, sleepy, rosy old man, with a vacant pudding-face, and a shining bald head. He wears drab breeches and gaiters, and a respectable square-tailed ancient black coat. I feel instinctively that here is the landlord of the inn.

‘Good morning, sir,’ says the rosy old man. ‘I’m a little hard of hearing. Was it you that was a-calling just now in the yard?’

Before I can answer, my wife interposes. She insists (in a shrill voice, adapted to our host’s hardness of hearing) on knowing who that unfortunate person is sleeping on the straw. ‘Where does he come from? Why does he say such dreadful things in his sleep? Is he married or single? Did he ever fall in love with a murderess? What sort of a looking woman was she? Did she really stab him or not? In short, dear Mr. Landlord, tell us the whole story!’

Dear Mr. Landlord waits drowsily until Mrs. Fairbank has quite done – then delivers himself of his reply as follows:

‘His name’s Francis Raven. He’s an Independent Methodist³⁸. He was forty-five year old last birthday. And he’s my hostler. That’s his story.’

My wife’s hot southern temper finds its way to her foot, and expresses itself by a stamp on the stable yard.

The landlord turns himself sleepily round, and looks at the horses. ‘A fine pair of horses, them two in the yard. Do you want to put ‘em in my stables?’ I reply in the affirmative by a nod. The landlord, bent on making himself agreeable to my wife, addresses her once more. ‘I’m a-going to wake Francis Raven. He’s an Independent Methodist. He was forty-five year old last birthday. And he’s my hostler. That’s his story.’

Having issued this second edition of his interesting narrative, the landlord enters the stable. We follow him to see how he will wake Francis Raven, and what will happen upon that. The stable broom stands in a corner; the landlord takes it – advances toward the sleeping hostler – and coolly stirs the man up with a broom as if he was a wild beast in a cage. Francis Raven starts to his feet with a cry of terror – looks at us wildly, with a horrid glare of suspicion in his eyes – recovers himself the next moment – and suddenly changes into a decent, quiet, respectable serving-man.

‘I beg your pardon, ma’am. I beg your pardon, sir.’

The tone and manner in which he makes his apologies are both above his apparent station in life. I begin to catch the infection of Mrs. Fairbank’s interest in this man. We both follow him out into the yard to see what he will do with the horses. The manner in which he lifts the injured leg of

³⁸ **Methodist**– a member of the Methodist Church which separated from the Church of England in the 18th century and later developed into an autonomous church

the lame horse tells me at once that he understands his business. Quickly and quietly, he leads the animal into an empty stable; quickly and quietly, he gets a bucket of hot water, and puts the lame horse's leg into it. 'The warm water will reduce the swelling, sir. I will bandage the leg afterwards.' All that he does is done intelligently; all that he says, he says to the purpose.

Nothing wild, nothing strange about him now. Is this the same man whom we heard talking in his sleep? – the same man who woke with that cry of terror and that horrid suspicion in his eyes? I determine to try him with one or two questions.

III

'Not much to do here,' I say to the hostler.

'Very little to do, sir,' the hostler replies.

'Anybody staying in the house?'

'The house is quite empty, sir.'

'I thought you were all dead. I could make nobody hear me.'

'The landlord is very deaf, sir, and the waiter is out on an errand.'

'Yes; and you were fast asleep in the stable. Do you often take a nap in the daytime?'

The worn face of the hostler faintly flushes. His eyes look away from my eyes for the first time. Mrs. Fairbank furtively pinches my arm. Are we on the eve of a discovery at last? I repeat my question.

The man has no civil alternative but to give me an answer. The answer is given in these words:

'I was tired out, sir. You wouldn't have found me asleep in the daytime but for that.'

'Tired out, eh? You had been hard at work, I suppose?'

'No, sir.'

'What was it, then?'

He hesitates again, and answers unwillingly, 'I was up all night.'

'Up all night? Anything going on in the town?'

'Nothing going on, sir.'

'Anybody ill?'

'Nobody ill, sir.'

That reply is the last. Try as I may, I can extract nothing more from him. He turns away and busies himself in attending to the horse's leg. I leave the stable to speak to the landlord about the carriage which is to take us back to Farleigh Hall. Mrs. Fairbank remains with the hostler, and favors me with a look at parting. The look says plainly, 'I mean to find out why he was up all night. Leave him to Me.'

The ordering of the carriage is easily accomplished. The inn possesses one horse and one chaise³⁹. The landlord has a story to tell of the horse, and a story to tell of the chaise. They resemble the story of Francis Raven – with this exception, that the horse and chaise belong to no religious persuasion. 'The horse will be nine year old next birthday. I've had the shay for four-and-twenty year. Mr. Max, of Underbridge, he bred the horse; and Mr. Pooley, of Yeovil, he built the shay. It's my horse and my shay. And that's their story!' Having relieved his mind of these details, the landlord proceeds to put the harness on the horse. By way of assisting him, I drag the chaise into the yard. Just as our preparations are completed, Mrs. Fairbank appears. A moment or two later the hostler follows her out. He has bandaged the horse's leg, and is now ready to drive us to Farleigh Hall. I observe signs of agitation in his face and manner, which suggest that my wife has found her way into his confidence. I put the question to her privately in a corner of the yard. 'Well? Have you found out why Francis Raven was up all night?'

³⁹ **chaise** – a low carriage with two or four wheels

Mrs. Fairbank has an eye to dramatic effect. Instead of answering plainly, Yes or No, she suspends the interest and excites the audience by putting a question on her side.

‘What is the day of the month, dear?’

‘The day of the month is the first of March.’

‘The first of March, Percy, is Francis Raven’s birthday.’

I try to look as if I was interested – and don’t succeed.

‘Francis was born,’ Mrs. Fairbank proceeds gravely, ‘at two o’clock in the morning.’

I begin to wonder whether my wife’s intellect is going the way of the landlord’s intellect. ‘Is that all?’ I ask.

‘It is not all,’ Mrs. Fairbank answers. ‘Francis Raven sits up on the morning of his birthday because he is afraid to go to bed.’

‘And why is he afraid to go to bed?’

‘Because he is in peril of his life.’

‘On his birthday?’

‘On his birthday. At two o’clock in the morning. As regularly as the birthday comes round.’

There she stops. Has she discovered no more than that? No more this far. I begin to feel really interested by this time. I ask eagerly what it means. Mrs. Fairbank points mysteriously to the chaise – with Francis Raven (hitherto our hostler, now our coachman) waiting for us to get in. The chaise has a seat for two in front, and a seat for one behind. My wife casts a warning look at me, and places herself on the seat in front.

The necessary consequence of this arrangement is that Mrs. Fairbank sits by the side of the driver during a journey of two hours and more. Need I state the result? It would be an insult to your intelligence to state the result. Let me offer you my place in the chaise. And let Francis Raven tell his terrible story in his own words.

The Second Narrative

The Hostler's story – told by himself

IV

It is now ten years ago since I got my first warning of the great trouble of my life in the Vision of a Dream.

I shall be better able to tell you about it if you will please suppose yourselves to be drinking tea along with us in our little cottage in Cambridgeshire⁴⁰, ten years since.

The time was the close of day, and there were three of us at the table, namely, my mother, myself, and my mother's sister, Mrs. Chance. These two were Scotchwomen by birth, and both were widows. There was no other resemblance between them that I can call to mind. My mother had lived all her life in England, and had no more of the Scotch brogue⁴¹ on her tongue than I have. My aunt Chance had never been out of Scotland until she came to keep house with my mother after her husband's death. And when she opened her lips you heard broad Scotch, I can tell you, if you ever heard it yet!

As it fell out, there was a matter of some consequence in debate among us that evening. It was this: whether I should do well or not to take a long journey on foot the next morning.

Now the next morning happened to be the day before my birthday; and the purpose of the journey was to offer myself for a situation as groom at a great house in the neighboring county to ours. The place was reported as likely to fall vacant in about three weeks' time. I was as well fitted to fill it as any other man. In the prosperous days of our family, my father had been manager of a training stable, and he had kept me employed among the horses from my boyhood upward. Please to excuse my troubling you with these small matters. They all fit into my story farther on, as you will soon find out. My poor mother was dead against⁴² my leaving home on the morrow.

'You can never walk all the way there and all the way back again by to-morrow night,' she says. 'The end of it will be that you will sleep away from home on your birthday. You have never done that yet, Francis, since your father's death, I don't like your doing it now. Wait a day longer, my son – only one day.'

For my own part, I was weary of being idle, and I couldn't abide the notion of delay. Even one day might make all the difference. Some other man might take time by the forelock, and get the place.

'Consider how long I have been out of work,' I says, 'and don't ask me to put off the journey. I won't fail you, mother. I'll get back by to-morrow night, if I have to pay my last sixpence for a lift in a cart.'

My mother shook her head. 'I don't like it, Francis – I don't like it!' There was no moving her from that view. We argued and argued, until we were both at a deadlock. It ended in our agreeing to refer the difference between us to my mother's sister, Mrs. Chance.

While we were trying hard to convince each other, my aunt Chance sat as dumb as a fish, stirring her tea and thinking her own thoughts. When we made our appeal to her, she seemed as it were to wake up. 'Ye baith refer it to my puir judgment?' she says, in her broad Scotch. We both answered Yes. Upon that my aunt Chance first cleared the tea-table, and then pulled out from the pocket of her gown a pack of cards.

⁴⁰ **Cambridgeshire**– a historic county in eastern England

⁴¹ **brogue**– a local way of speaking English; a dialect

⁴² **was dead against smth.** = was strongly against smth.

Don't run away, if you please, with the notion that this was done lightly, with a view to amuse my mother and me. My aunt Chance seriously believed that she could look into the future by telling fortunes on the cards. She did nothing herself without first consulting the cards. She could give no more serious proof of her interest in my welfare than the proof which she was offering now. I don't say it profanely; I only mention the fact – the cards had, in some incomprehensible way, got themselves jumbled up together with her religious convictions. You meet with people nowadays who believe in spirits working by way of tables and chairs. On the same principle (if there is any principle in it) my aunt Chance believed in Providence⁴³ working by way of the cards.

'Whether you are right, Francie, or your mither – whether ye will do weel or ill, the morrow, to go or stay – the cairds will tell it. We are a' in the hands of Proavidence. The cairds will tell it.'

Hearing this, my mother turned her head aside, with something of a sour look in her face. Her sister's notions about the cards were little better than flat blasphemy to her mind. But she kept her opinion to herself. My aunt Chance, to own the truth, had inherited, through her late husband, a pension of thirty pounds a year. This was an important contribution to our housekeeping, and we poor relations were bound to treat her with a certain respect. As for myself, if my poor father never did anything else for me before he fell into difficulties, he gave me a good education, and raised me (thank God) above superstitions of all sorts. However, a very little amused me in those days; and I waited to have my fortune told, as patiently as if I believed in it too!

My aunt began her hocus pocus by throwing out all the cards in the pack under seven. She shuffled the rest with her left hand for luck; and then she gave them to me to cut. 'Wi' yer left hand, Francie. Mind that! Pet your trust in Proavidence – but dinna forget that your luck's in yer left hand!' A long and roundabout shifting of the cards followed, reducing them in number until there were just fifteen of them left, laid out neatly before my aunt in a half circle. The card which happened to lie outermost, at the right-hand end of the circle, was, according to rule in such cases, the card chosen to represent Me. By way of being appropriate to my situation as a poor groom out of employment, the card was – the King of Diamonds.

'I tak' up the King o' Diamants,' says my aunt. 'I count seven cairds fra' richt to left; and I humbly ask a blessing on what follows.' My aunt shut her eyes as if she was saying grace before meat, and held up to me the seventh card. I called the seventh card – the Queen of Spades. My aunt opened her eyes again in a hurry, and cast a sly look my way. 'The Queen o' Spades means a dairk woman. Ye'll be thinking in secret, Francie, of a dairk woman?'

When a man has been out of work for more than three months, his mind isn't troubled much with thinking of women – light or dark. I was thinking of the groom's place at the great house, and I tried to say so. My aunt Chance wouldn't listen. She treated my interpretation with contempt. 'Hoot-toot! there's the caird in your hand! If ye're no thinking of her the day, ye'll be thinking of her the morrow. Where's the harm of thinking of a dairk woman! I was ance a dairk woman myself, before my hair was gray. Haud yer peace, Francie, and watch the cairds.'

I watched the cards as I was told. There were seven left on the table. My aunt removed two from one end of the row and two from the other, and desired me to call the two outermost of the three cards now left on the table. I called the Ace of Clubs and the Ten of Diamonds. My aunt Chance lifted her eyes to the ceiling with a look of devout gratitude which sorely tried my mother's patience. The Ace of Clubs and the Ten of Diamonds, taken together, signified – first, good news (evidently the news of the groom's place); secondly, a journey that lay before me (pointing plainly to my journey to-morrow!); thirdly and lastly, a sum of money (probably the groom's wages!) waiting to find its way into my pockets. Having told my fortune in these encouraging terms, my aunt declined to carry the experiment any further. 'Eh, lad! it's a clean tempting o' Proavidence to ask mair o' the cairds than the cairds have tauld us noo. Gae yer ways to-morrow to the great hoose. A dairk woman will

⁴³ **Providence**– God or some power that intervenes in human lives and affairs of the world

meet ye at the gate; and she'll have a hand in getting ye the groom's place, wi' a' the gratifications and pairquisites appertaining to the same. And, mebbe, when yer poaket's full o' money, ye'll no' be forgetting yer aunt Chance, maintaining her ain unblemished widowhood – wi' Proavidence assisting – on thratty punds a year!

I promised to remember my aunt Chance (who had the defect, by the way, of being a terribly greedy person after money) on the next happy occasion when my poor empty pockets were to be filled at last. This done, I looked at my mother. She had agreed to take her sister for umpire between us, and her sister had given it in my favor. She raised no more objections. Silently, she got on her feet, and kissed me, and sighed bitterly – and so left the room. My aunt Chance shook her head. 'I doubt, Francie, yer puir mither has but a heathen notion of the vairtue of the cairds!'

By daylight the next morning I set forth on my journey. I looked back at the cottage as I opened the garden gate. At one window was my mother, with her handkerchief to her eyes. At the other stood my aunt Chance, holding up the Queen of Spades by way of encouraging me at starting. I waved my hands to both of them in token of farewell, and stepped out briskly into the road. It was then the last day of February. Be pleased to remember, in connection with this, that the first of March was the day and two o'clock in the morning the hour of my birth.

V

Now you know how I came to leave home. The next thing to tell is, what happened on the journey.

I reached the great house in reasonably good time considering the distance. At the very first trial of it, the prophecy of the cards turned out to be wrong. The person who met me at the lodge gate was not a dark woman – in fact, not a woman at all – but a boy. He directed me on the way to the servants' offices; and there again the cards were all wrong. I encountered, not one woman, but three – and not one of the three was dark. I have stated that I am not superstitious, and I have told the truth. But I must own that I did feel a certain fluttering at the heart when I made my bow to the steward, and told him what business had brought me to the house. His answer completed the discomfiture of aunt Chance's fortune-telling. My ill-luck still pursued me. That very morning another man had applied for the groom's place, and had got it.

I swallowed my disappointment as well as I could, and thanked the steward, and went to the inn in the village to get the rest and food which I sorely needed by this time.

Before starting on my homeward walk I made some inquiries at the inn, and ascertained that I might save a few miles, on my return, by following a new road. Furnished with full instructions, several times repeated, as to the various turnings I was to take, I set forth, and walked on till the evening with only one stoppage for bread and cheese. Just as it was getting toward dark, the rain came on and the wind began to rise; and I found myself, to make matters worse, in a part of the country with which I was entirely unacquainted, though I guessed myself to be some fifteen miles from home. The first house I found to inquire at, was a lonely roadside inn, standing on the outskirts of a thick wood. Solitary as the place looked, it was welcome to a lost man who was also hungry, thirsty, footsore, and wet. The landlord was civil and respectable-looking; and the price he asked for a bed was reasonable enough. I was grieved to disappoint my mother. But there was no conveyance to be had, and I could go no farther afoot that night. My weariness fairly forced me to stop at the inn.

I may say for myself that I am a temperate man. My supper simply consisted of some rashers of bacon, a slice of home-made bread, and a pint of ale. I did not go to bed immediately after this moderate meal, but sat up with the landlord, talking about my bad prospects and my long run of ill-luck, and diverging from these topics to the subjects of horse-flesh and racing. Nothing was said, either by myself, my host, or the few laborers who strayed into the tap-room, which could, in the

slightest degree, excite my mind, or set my fancy – which is only a small fancy at the best of times – playing tricks with my common sense.

At a little after eleven the house was closed. I went round with the landlord, and held the candle while the doors and lower windows were being secured. I noticed with surprise the strength of the bolts, bars, and iron-sheathed shutters.

‘You see, we are rather lonely here,’ said the landlord. ‘We never have had any attempts to break in yet, but it’s always as well to be on the safe side. When nobody is sleeping here, I am the only man in the house. My wife and daughter are timid, and the servant girl takes after her missuses. Another glass of ale, before you turn in? – No! – Well, how such a sober man as you comes to be out of a place is more than I can understand for one. – Here’s where you’re to sleep. You’re the only lodger to-night, and I think you’ll say my missus has done her best to make you comfortable. You’re quite sure you won’t have another glass of ale? – Very well. Good night.’

It was half-past eleven by the clock in the passage as we went upstairs to the bedroom. The window looked out on the wood at the back of the house.

I locked my door, set my candle on the chest of drawers, and wearily got me ready for bed. The bleak wind was still blowing, and the solemn, surging moan of it in the wood was very dreary to hear through the night silence. Feeling strangely wakeful, I resolved to keep the candle alight until I began to grow sleepy. The truth is, I was not quite myself. I was depressed in mind by my disappointment of the morning; and I was worn out in body by my long walk. Between the two, I own I couldn’t face the prospect of lying awake in the darkness, listening to the dismal moan of the wind in the wood.

Sleep stole on me before I was aware of it; my eyes closed, and I fell off to rest, without having so much as thought of extinguishing the candle.

The next thing that I remember was a faint shivering that ran through me from head to foot, and a dreadful sinking pain at my heart, such as I had never felt before. The shivering only disturbed my slumbers – the pain woke me instantly. In one moment I passed from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness – my eyes wide open – my mind clear on a sudden as if by a miracle. The candle had burned down nearly to the last morsel of tallow, but the unsnuffed wick had just fallen off, and the light was, for the moment, fair and full.

Between the foot of the bed and the closet door, I saw a person in my room. The person was a woman, standing looking at me, with a knife in her hand. It does no credit to my courage to confess it – but the truth is the truth. I was struck speechless with terror. There I lay with my eyes on the woman; there the woman stood (with the knife in her hand) with her eyes on me.

She said not a word as we stared each other in the face; but she moved after a little – moved slowly toward the left-hand side of the bed.

The light fell full on her face. A fair, fine woman, with yellowish flaxen hair, and light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. I noticed these things and fixed them in my mind, before she was quite round at the side of the bed. Without saying a word; without any change in the stony stillness of her face; without any noise following her footfall, she came closer and closer; stopped at the bed-head; and lifted the knife to stab me. I laid my arm over my throat to save it; but, as I saw the blow coming, I threw my hand across the bed to the right side, and jerked my body over that way, just as the knife came down, like lightning, within a hair’s breadth of my shoulder.

My eyes fixed on her arm and her hand – she gave me time to look at them as she slowly drew the knife out of the bed. A white, well-shaped arm, with a pretty gown lying lightly over the fair skin. A delicate lady’s hand, with a pink flush round the finger nails.

She drew the knife out, and passed back again slowly to the foot of the bed; she stopped there for a moment looking at me; then she came on without saying a word; without any change in the stony stillness of her face; without any noise following her footfall – came on to the side of the bed where I now lay.

Getting near me, she lifted the knife again, and I drew myself away to the left side. She struck, as before right into the mattress, with a swift downward action of her arm; and she missed me, as before; by a hair's breadth. This time my eyes wandered from her to the knife. It was like the large clasp knives which laboring men use to cut their bread and bacon with. Her delicate little fingers did not hide more than two thirds of the handle; I noticed that it was made of buckhorn, clean and shining as the blade was, and looking like new.

For the second time she drew the knife out of the bed, and suddenly hid it away in the wide sleeve of her gown. That done, she stopped by the bedside watching me. For an instant I saw her standing in that position – then the wick of the spent candle fell over into the socket. The flame dwindled to a little blue point, and the room grew dark.

A moment, or less, if possible, passed so – and then the wick flared up, smokily, for the last time. My eyes were still looking for her over the right-hand side of the bed when the last flash of light came. Look as I might, I could see nothing. The woman with the knife was gone.

I began to get back to myself again. I could feel my heart beating; I could hear the woeful moaning of the wind in the wood; I could leap up in bed, and give the alarm before she escaped from the house. 'Murder! Wake up there! Murder!'

Nobody answered to the alarm. I rose and groped my way through the darkness to the door of the room. By that way she must have got in. By that way she must have gone out.

The door of the room was fast locked, exactly as I had left it on going to bed! I looked at the window. Fast locked too!

Hearing a voice outside, I opened the door. There was the landlord, coming toward me along the passage, with his burning candle in one hand, and his gun in the other.

'What is it?' he says, looking at me in no very friendly way.

I could only answer in a whisper, 'A woman, with a knife in her hand. In my room. A fair, yellow-haired woman. She jabbed at me with the knife, twice over.'

He lifted his candle, and looked at me steadily from head to foot. 'She seems to have missed you – twice over.'

'I dodged the knife as it came down. It struck the bed each time. Go in, and see.'

The landlord took his candle into the bedroom immediately. In less than a minute he came out again into the passage in a violent passion.

'The devil fly away with you and your woman with the knife! There isn't a mark in the bedclothes anywhere. What do you mean by coming into a man's place and frightening his family out of their wits by a dream?'

A dream? The woman who had tried to stab me, not a living human being like myself? I began to shake and shiver. The horrors got hold of me at the bare thought of it.

'I'll leave the house,' I said. 'Better be out on the road in the rain and dark, than back in that room, after what I've seen in it. Lend me the light to get my clothes by, and tell me what I'm to pay.'

The landlord led the way back with his light into the bedroom. 'Pay?' says he. 'You'll find your score on the slate when you go downstairs. I wouldn't have taken you in for all the money you've got about you, if I had known your dreaming, screeching ways beforehand. Look at the bed – where's the cut of a knife in it? Look at the window – is the lock bursted? Look at the door (which I heard you fasten yourself) – is it broke in? A murdering woman with a knife in my house! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!'

My eyes followed his hand as it pointed first to the bed – then to the window – then to the door. There was no gainsaying it. The bed sheet was as sound as on the day it was made. The window was fast. The door hung on its hinges as steady as ever. I huddled my clothes on without speaking. We went downstairs together. I looked at the clock in the bar-room. The time was twenty minutes past two in the morning. I paid my bill, and the landlord let me out. The rain had ceased; but the night was dark, and the wind was bleaker than ever. Little did the darkness, or the cold, or the doubt

about the way home matter to me. My mind was away from all these things. My mind was fixed on the vision in the bedroom. What had I seen trying to murder me? The creature of a dream? Or that other creature from the world beyond the grave, whom men call ghost? I could make nothing of it as I walked along in the night; I had made nothing by it by midday – when I stood at last, after many times missing my road, on the doorstep of home.

VI

My mother came out alone to welcome me back. There were no secrets between us two. I told her all that had happened, just as I have told it to you. She kept silence till I had done. And then she put a question to me.

‘What time was it, Francis, when you saw the Woman in your Dream?’

I had looked at the clock when I left the inn, and I had noticed that the hands pointed to twenty minutes past two. Allowing for the time consumed in speaking to the landlord, and in getting on my clothes, I answered that I must have first seen the Woman at two o’clock in the morning. In other words, I had not only seen her on my birthday, but at the hour of my birth.

My mother still kept silence. Lost in her own thoughts, she took me by the hand, and led me into the parlor. Her writing-desk was on the table by the fireplace. She opened it, and signed to me to take a chair by her side.

‘My son! your memory is a bad one, and mine is fast failing me. Tell me again what the Woman looked like. I want her to be as well known to both of us, years hence, as she is now.’

I obeyed; wondering what strange fancy might be working in her mind. I spoke; and she wrote the words as they fell from my lips:

‘Light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. Flaxen hair, with a golden-yellow streak in it. White arms, with a down upon them. Little, lady’s hands, with a rosy-red look about the finger nails.’

‘Did you notice how she was dressed, Francis?’

‘No, mother.’

‘Did you notice the knife?’

‘Yes. A large clasp knife, with a buckhorn handle, as good as new.’

My mother added the description of the knife. Also the year, month, day of the week, and hour of the day when the Dream-Woman appeared to me at the inn. That done, she locked up the paper in her desk.

‘Not a word, Francis, to your aunt. Not a word to any living soul. Keep your Dream a secret between you and me.’

The weeks passed, and the months passed. My mother never returned to the subject again. As for me, time, which wears out all things, wore out my remembrance of the Dream. Little by little, the image of the Woman grew dimmer and dimmer. Little by little, she faded out of my mind.

VII

The story of the warning is now told. Judge for yourself if it was a true warning or a false, when you hear what happened to me on my next birthday.

In the Summer time of the year, the Wheel of Fortune turned the right way for me at last. I was smoking my pipe one day, near an old stone quarry at the entrance to our village, when a carriage accident happened, which gave a new turn, as it were, to my lot in life. It was an accident of the commonest kind – not worth mentioning at any length. A lady driving herself; a runaway horse; a cowardly man-servant in attendance, frightened out of his wits; and the stone quarry too near to be agreeable – that is what I saw, all in a few moments, between two whiffs of my pipe. I stopped the horse at the edge of the quarry, and got myself a little hurt by the shaft of the chaise. But that didn’t

matter. The lady declared I had saved her life; and her husband, coming with her to our cottage the next day, took me into his service then and there. The lady happened to be of a dark complexion; and it may amuse you to hear that my aunt Chance instantly pitched on that circumstance as a means of saving the credit of the cards. Here was the promise of the Queen of Spades performed to the very letter, by means of ‘a dark woman,’ just as my aunt had told me. ‘In the time to come, Francis, beware o’ pettin’ yer ain blinded intairpretation on the cairds. Ye’re ower ready, I trow, to murmur under dispensation of Proavidence that ye canna fathom – like the Eesraelites⁴⁴ of auld. I’ll say nae mair to ye. Mebbe when the mony’s powering into yer poackets, ye’ll no forget yer aunt Chance, left like a sparrow on the housetop, wi’ a sma’ annuitee o’ thratty punds a year.’

I remained in my situation (at the West-end⁴⁵ of London) until the Spring of the New Year. About that time, my master’s health failed. The doctors ordered him away to foreign parts, and the establishment was broken up. But the turn in my luck still held good. When I left my place, I left it – thanks to the generosity of my kind master – with a yearly allowance granted to me, in remembrance of the day when I had saved my mistress’s life. For the future, I could go back to service or not, as I pleased; my little income was enough to support my mother and myself.

My master and mistress left England toward the end of February. Certain matters of business to do for them detained me in London until the last day of the month. I was only able to leave for our village by the evening train, to keep my birthday with my mother as usual. It was bedtime when I got to the cottage; and I was sorry to find that she was far from well. To make matters worse, she had finished her bottle of medicine on the previous day, and had omitted to get it replenished, as the doctor had strictly directed. He dispensed his own medicines, and I offered to go and knock him up. She refused to let me do this; and, after giving me my supper, sent me away to my bed.

I fell asleep for a little, and woke again. My mother’s bed-chamber was next to mine. I heard my aunt Chance’s heavy footsteps going to and fro in the room, and, suspecting something wrong, knocked at the door. My mother’s pains had returned upon her; there was a serious necessity for relieving her sufferings as speedily as possible, I put on my clothes, and ran off, with the medicine bottle in my hand, to the other end of the village, where the doctor lived. The church clock chimed the quarter to two on my birthday just as I reached his house. One ring of the night bell brought him to his bedroom window to speak to me. He told me to wait, and he would let me in at the surgery door. I noticed, while I was waiting, that the night was wonderfully fair and warm for the time of year. The old stone quarry where the carriage accident had happened was within view. The moon in the clear heavens lit it up almost as bright as day.

In a minute or two the doctor let me into the surgery. I closed the door, noticing that he had left his room very lightly clad. He kindly pardoned my mother’s neglect of his directions, and set to work at once at compounding the medicine. We were both intent on the bottle; he filling it, and I holding the light – when we heard the surgery door suddenly opened from the street.

VIII

Who could possibly be up and about in our quiet village at the second hour of the morning?

The person who opened the door appeared within range of the light of the candle. To complete our amazement, the person proved to be a woman! She walked up to the counter, and standing side by side with me, lifted her veil. At the moment when she showed her face, I heard the church clock strike two. She was a stranger to me, and a stranger to the doctor. She was also, beyond all comparison, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life.

⁴⁴ **the Eesraelites**– the Israelites, people of Jewish origin, members of the twelve tribes of Israel; in the 10th century BC, ten tribes established the Kingdom of Israel, and two tribes the Kingdom of Judah

⁴⁵ **the West-end**– the fashionable part of London known for its palaces, mansions, parks and shops

‘I saw the light under the door,’ she said. ‘I want some medicine.’

She spoke quite composedly, as if there was nothing at all extraordinary in her being out in the village at two in the morning, and following me into the surgery to ask for medicine! The doctor stared at her as if he suspected his own eyes of deceiving him. ‘Who are you?’ he asked. ‘How do you come to be wandering about at this time in the morning?’

She paid no heed to his questions. She only told him coolly what she wanted. ‘I have got a bad toothache. I want a bottle of laudanum⁴⁶.’

The doctor recovered himself when she asked for the laudanum. He was on his own ground, you know, when it came to a matter of laudanum; and he spoke to her smartly enough this time.

‘Oh, you have got the toothache, have you? Let me look at the tooth.’

She shook her head, and laid a two-shilling piece on the counter. ‘I won’t trouble you to look at the tooth,’ she said. ‘There is the money. Let me have the laudanum, if you please.’

The doctor put the two-shilling piece back again in her hand. ‘I don’t sell laudanum to strangers,’ he answered. ‘If you are in any distress of body or mind, that is another matter. I shall be glad to help you.’

She put the money back in her pocket. ‘You can’t help me,’ she said, as quietly as ever. ‘Good morning.’

With that, she opened the surgery door to go out again into the street. So far, I had not spoken a word on my side. I had stood with the candle in my hand (not knowing I was holding it) – with my eyes fixed on her, with my mind fixed on her like a man bewitched. Her looks betrayed, even more plainly than her words, her resolution, in one way or another, to destroy herself. When she opened the door, in my alarm at what might happen I found the use of my tongue.

‘Stop!’ I cried out. ‘Wait for me. I want to speak to you before you go away.’ She lifted her eyes with a look of careless surprise and a mocking smile on her lips.

‘What can you have to say to me?’ She stopped, and laughed to herself. ‘Why not?’ she said. ‘I have got nothing to do, and nowhere to go.’ She turned back a step, and nodded to me. ‘You’re a strange man – I think I’ll humor you – I’ll wait outside.’ The door of the surgery closed on her. She was gone.

I am ashamed to own what happened next. The only excuse for me is that I was really and truly a man bewitched. I turned me round to follow her out, without once thinking of my mother. The doctor stopped me.

‘Don’t forget the medicine,’ he said. ‘And if you will take my advice, don’t trouble yourself about that woman. Rouse up the constable. It’s his business to look after her – not yours.’

I held out my hand for the medicine in silence: I was afraid I should fail in respect if I trusted myself to answer him. He must have seen, as I saw, that she wanted the laudanum to poison herself. He had, to my mind, taken a very heartless view of the matter. I just thanked him when he gave me the medicine – and went out.

She was waiting for me as she had promised; walking slowly to and fro – a tall, graceful, solitary figure in the bright moonbeams. They shed over her fair complexion, her bright golden hair, her large gray eyes, just the light that suited them best. She looked hardly mortal when she first turned to speak to me.

‘Well?’ she said. ‘And what do you want?’

In spite of my pride, or my shyness, or my better sense – whichever it might be – all my heart went out to her in a moment. I caught hold of her by the hands, and owned what was in my thoughts, as freely as if I had known her for half a lifetime.

‘You mean to destroy yourself,’ I said. ‘And I mean to prevent you from doing it. If I follow you about all night, I’ll prevent you from doing it.’

⁴⁶ **laudanum** – a sedative made from opium

She laughed. 'You saw yourself that he wouldn't sell me the laudanum. Do you really care whether I live or die?' She squeezed my hands gently as she put the question: her eyes searched mine with a languid, lingering look in them that ran through me like fire. My voice died away on my lips; I couldn't answer her.

She understood, without my answering. 'You have given me a fancy for living, by speaking kindly to me,' she said. 'Kindness has a wonderful effect on women, and dogs, and other domestic animals. It is only men who are superior to kindness. Make your mind easy – I promise to take as much care of myself as if I was the happiest woman living! Don't let me keep you here, out of your bed. Which way are you going?'

Miserable wretch that I was, I had forgotten my mother – with the medicine in my hand! 'I am going home,' I said. 'Where are you staying? At the inn?'

She laughed her bitter laugh, and pointed to the stone quarry. 'There is my inn for to-night,' she said. 'When I got tired of walking about, I rested there.'

We walked on together, on my way home. I took the liberty of asking her if she had any friends.

'I thought I had one friend left,' she said, 'or you would never have met me in this place. It turns out I was wrong. My friend's door was closed in my face some hours since; my friend's servants threatened me with the police. I had nowhere else to go, after trying my luck in your neighborhood; and nothing left but my two-shilling piece and these rags on my back. What respectable innkeeper would take me into his house? I walked about, wondering how I could find my way out of the world without disfiguring myself, and without suffering much pain. You have no river in these parts. I didn't see my way out of the world, till I heard you ringing at the doctor's house. I got a glimpse at the bottles in the surgery, when he let you in, and I thought of the laudanum directly. What were you doing there? Who is that medicine for? Your wife?'

'I am not married!'

She laughed again. 'Not married! If I was a little better dressed there might be a chance for ME. Where do you live? Here?'

We had arrived, by this time, at my mother's door. She held out her hand to say good-by. Houseless and homeless as she was, she never asked me to give her a shelter for the night. It was my proposal that she should rest, under my roof, unknown to my mother and my aunt. Our kitchen was built out at the back of the cottage: she might remain there unseen and unheard until the household was astir in the morning. I led her into the kitchen, and set a chair for her by the dying embers of the fire. I dare say I was to blame – shamefully to blame, if you like. I only wonder what you would have done in my place. On your word of honor as a man, would you have let that beautiful creature wander back to the shelter of the stone quarry like a stray dog? God help the woman who is foolish enough to trust and love you, if you would have done that!

I left her by the fire, and went to my mother's room.

IX

If you have ever felt the heartache, you will know what I suffered in secret when my mother took my hand, and said, 'I am sorry, Francis, that your night's rest has been disturbed through me.' I gave her the medicine; and I waited by her till the pains abated. My aunt Chance went back to her bed; and my mother and I were left alone. I noticed that her writing-desk, moved from its customary place, was on the bed by her side. She saw me looking at it. 'This is your birthday, Francis,' she said. 'Have you anything to tell me?' I had so completely forgotten my Dream, that I had no notion of what was passing in her mind when she said those words. For a moment there was a guilty fear in me that she suspected something. I turned away my face, and said, 'No, mother; I have nothing to tell.' She signed to me to stoop down over the pillow and kiss her. 'God bless you, my love!' she said;

‘and many happy returns of the day.’ She patted my hand, and closed her weary eyes, and, little by little, fell off peaceably into sleep.

I stole downstairs again. I think the good influence of my mother must have followed me down. At any rate, this is true: I stopped with my hand on the closed kitchen door, and said to myself: ‘Suppose I leave the house, and leave the village, without seeing her or speaking to her more?’

Should I really have fled from temptation in this way, if I had been left to myself to decide? Who can tell? As things were, I was not left to decide. While my doubt was in my mind, she heard me, and opened the kitchen door. My eyes and her eyes met. That ended it.

We were together, unsuspected and undisturbed, for the next two hours. Time enough for her to reveal the secret of her wasted life. Time enough for her to take possession of me as her own, to do with me as she liked. It is needless to dwell here on the misfortunes which had brought her low; they are misfortunes too common to interest anybody.

Her name was Alicia Warlock. She had been born and bred a lady. She had lost her station, her character, and her friends. Virtue shuddered at the sight of her; and Vice had got her for the rest of her days. Shocking and common, as I told you. It made no difference to me. I have said it already – I say it again – I was a man bewitched. Is there anything so very wonderful in that? Just remember who I was. Among the honest women in my own station in life, where could I have found the like of her? Could they walk as she walked? and look as she looked? When they gave me a kiss, did their lips linger over it as hers did? Had they her skin, her laugh, her foot, her hand, her touch? She never had a speck of dirt on her: I tell you her flesh was a perfume. When she embraced me, her arms folded round me like the wings of angels; and her smile covered me softly with its light like the sun in heaven. I leave you to laugh at me, or to cry over me, just as your temper may incline. I am not trying to excuse myself – I am trying to explain. You are gentle-folks; what dazzled and maddened me, is everyday experience to you. Fallen or not, angel or devil, it came to this – she was a lady; and I was a groom.

Before the house was astir, I got her away (by the workmen’s train) to a large manufacturing town in our parts.

Here – with my savings in money to help her – she could get her outfit of decent clothes and her lodging among strangers who asked no questions so long as they were paid. Here – now on one pretense and now on another – I could visit her, and we could both plan together what our future lives were to be. I need not tell you that I stood pledged to make her my wife. A man in my station always marries a woman of her sort.

Do you wonder if I was happy at this time? I should have been perfectly happy but for one little drawback. It was this: I was never quite at my ease in the presence of my promised wife.

I don’t mean that I was shy with her, or suspicious of her, or ashamed of her. The uneasiness I am speaking of was caused by a faint doubt in my mind whether I had not seen her somewhere, before the morning when we met at the doctor’s house. Over and over again, I found myself wondering whether her face did not remind me of some other face – what other I never could tell. This strange feeling, this one question that could never be answered, vexed me to a degree that you would hardly credit. It came between us at the strangest times – oftenest, however, at night, when the candles were lit. You have known what it is to try and remember a forgotten name – and to fail, search as you may, to find it in your mind. That was my case. I failed to find my lost face, just as you failed to find your lost name.

In three weeks we had talked matters over, and had arranged how I was to make a clean breast of it at home. By Alicia’s advice, I was to describe her as having been one of my fellow servants during the time I was employed under my kind master and mistress in London. There was no fear now of my mother taking any harm from the shock of a great surprise. Her health had improved during the three weeks’ interval. On the first evening when she was able to take her old place at tea time, I summoned my courage, and told her I was going to be married. The poor soul flung her arms round

my neck, and burst out crying for joy. 'Oh, Francis!' she says, 'I am so glad you will have somebody to comfort you and care for you when I am gone!' As for my aunt Chance, you can anticipate what she did, without being told. Ah, me! If there had really been any prophetic virtue in the cards, what a terrible warning they might have given us that night! It was arranged that I was to bring my promised wife to dinner at the cottage on the next day.

X

I own I was proud of Alicia when I led her into our little parlor at the appointed time. She had never, to my mind, looked so beautiful as she looked that day. I never noticed any other woman's dress – I noticed hers as carefully as if I had been a woman myself! She wore a black silk gown, with plain collar and cuffs, and a modest lavender-colored bonnet, with one white rose in it placed at the side. My mother, dressed in her Sunday best, rose up, all in a flutter, to welcome her daughter-in-law that was to be. She walked forward a few steps, half smiling, half in tears – she looked Alicia full in the face – and suddenly stood still. Her cheeks turned white in an instant; her eyes stared in horror; her hands dropped helplessly at her sides. She staggered back, and fell into the arms of my aunt, standing behind her. It was no swoon – she kept her senses. Her eyes turned slowly from Alicia to me. 'Francis,' she said, 'does that woman's face remind you of nothing?'

Before I could answer, she pointed to her writing-desk on the table at the fireside. 'Bring it!' she cried, 'bring it!'

At the same moment I felt Alicia's hand on my shoulder, and saw Alicia's face red with anger – and no wonder!

'What does this mean?' she asked. 'Does your mother want to insult me?'

I said a few words to quiet her; what they were I don't remember – I was so confused and astonished at the time. Before I had done, I heard my mother behind me.

My aunt had fetched her desk. She had opened it; she had taken a paper from it. Step by step, helping herself along by the wall, she came nearer and nearer, with the paper in her hand. She looked at the paper – she looked in Alicia's face – she lifted the long, loose sleeve of her gown, and examined her hand and arm. I saw fear suddenly take the place of anger in Alicia's eyes. She shook herself free of my mother's grasp. 'Mad!' she said to herself, 'and Francis never told me!' With those words she ran out of the room.

I was hastening out after her, when my mother signed to me to stop. She read the words written on the paper. While they fell slowly, one by one, from her lips, she pointed toward the open door.

'Light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. Flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it. White arms, with a down upon them. Little, lady's hand, with a rosy-red look about the finger nails. The Dream Woman, Francis! The Dream Woman!'

Something darkened the parlor window as those words were spoken. I looked sidelong at the shadow. Alicia Warlock had come back! She was peering in at us over the low window blind. There was the fatal face which had first looked at me in the bedroom of the lonely inn. There, resting on the window blind, was the lovely little hand which had held the murderous knife. I had seen her before we met in the village. The Dream Woman! The Dream Woman!

XI

I expect nobody to approve of what I have next to tell of myself. In three weeks from the day when my mother had identified her with the Woman of the Dream, I took Alicia Warlock to church, and made her my wife. I was a man bewitched. Again and again I say it – I was a man bewitched!

During the interval before my marriage, our little household at the cottage was broken up. My mother and my aunt quarreled. My mother, believing in the Dream, entreated me to break off my engagement. My aunt, believing in the cards, urged me to marry.

This difference of opinion produced a dispute between them, in the course of which my aunt Chance – quite unconscious of having any superstitious feelings of her own – actually set out the cards which prophesied happiness to me in my married life, and asked my mother how anybody but ‘a blinded heathen could be fule enough, after seeing those cairds, to believe in a dream!’ This was, naturally, too much for my mother’s patience; hard words followed on either side; Mrs. Chance returned in dudgeon to her friends in Scotland. She left me a written statement of my future prospects, as revealed by the cards, and with it an address at which a post-office order would reach her. ‘The day was not that far off,’ she remarked, ‘when Francie might remember what he owed to his aunt Chance, maintaining her ain unbleemished widowhood on thratty punds a year.’

Having refused to give her sanction to my marriage, my mother also refused to be present at the wedding, or to visit Alicia afterwards. There was no anger at the bottom of this conduct on her part. Believing as she did in this Dream, she was simply in mortal fear of my wife. I understood this, and I made allowances for her. Not a cross word passed between us. My one happy remembrance now – though I did disobey her in the matter of my marriage – is this: I loved and respected my good mother to the last.

As for my wife, she expressed no regret at the estrangement between her mother-in-law and herself. By common consent, we never spoke on that subject. We settled in the manufacturing town which I have already mentioned, and we kept a lodging-house. My kind master, at my request, granted me a lump sum in place of my annuity. This put us into a good house, decently furnished. For a while things went well enough. I may describe myself at this time of my life as a happy man.

My misfortunes began with a return of the complaint with which my mother had already suffered. The doctor confessed, when I asked him the question, that there was danger to be dreaded this time. Naturally, after hearing this, I was a good deal away at the cottage. Naturally also, I left the business of looking after the house, in my absence, to my wife. Little by little, I found her beginning to alter toward me. While my back was turned, she formed acquaintances with people of the doubtful and dissipated sort. One day, I observed something in her manner which forced the suspicion on me that she had been drinking. Before the week was out, my suspicion was a certainty. From keeping company with drunkards, she had grown to be a drunkard herself.

I did all a man could do to reclaim her. Quite useless! She had never really returned the love I felt for her: I had no influence; I could do nothing. My mother, hearing of this last worse trouble, resolved to try what her influence could do. Ill as she was, I found her one day dressed to go out.

‘I am not long for this world, Francis,’ she said. ‘I shall not feel easy on my deathbed, unless I have done my best to the last to make you happy. I mean to put my own fears and my own feelings out of the question, and go with you to your wife, and try what I can do to reclaim her. Take me home with you, Francis. Let me do all I can to help my son, before it is too late.’

How could I disobey her? We took the railway to the town: it was only half an hour’s ride. By one o’clock in the afternoon we reached my house. It was our dinner hour, and Alicia was in the kitchen. I was able to take my mother quietly into the parlor and then to prepare my wife for the visit. She had drunk but little at that early hour; and, luckily, the devil in her was tamed for the time.

She followed me into the parlor, and the meeting passed off better than I had ventured to forecast; with this one drawback, that my mother – though she tried hard to control herself – shrank from looking my wife in the face when she spoke to her. It was a relief to me when Alicia began to prepare the table for dinner.

She laid the cloth, brought in the bread tray, and cut some slices for us from the loaf. Then she returned to the kitchen. At that moment, while I was still anxiously watching my mother, I was

startled by seeing the same ghastly change pass over her face which had altered it in the morning when Alicia and she first met. Before I could say a word, she started up with a look of horror.

‘Take me back! – home, home again, Francis! Come with me, and never go back more!’

I was afraid to ask for an explanation; I could only sign her to be silent, and help her quickly to the door. As we passed the bread tray on the table, she stopped and pointed to it.

‘Did you see what your wife cut your bread with?’ she asked.

‘No, mother; I was not noticing. What was it?’

‘Look!’

I did look. A new clasp knife, with a buckhorn handle, lay with the loaf in the bread tray. I stretched out my hand to possess myself of it. At the same moment, there was a noise in the kitchen, and my mother caught me by the arm.

‘The knife of the Dream! Francis, I’m faint with fear – take me away before she comes back!’

I couldn’t speak to comfort or even to answer her. Superior as I was to superstition, the discovery of the knife staggered me. In silence, I helped my mother out of the house; and took her home.

I held out my hand to say good-by. She tried to stop me.

‘Don’t go back, Francis! don’t go back!’.

‘I must get the knife, mother. I must go back by the next train.’ I held to that resolution. By the next train I went back.

XII

My wife had, of course, discovered our secret departure from the house. She had been drinking. She was in a fury of passion. The dinner in the kitchen was flung under the grate; the cloth was off the parlor table. Where was the knife?

I was foolish enough to ask for it. She refused to give it to me. In the course of the dispute between us which followed, I discovered that there was a horrible story attached to the knife. It had been used in a murder – years since – and had been so skillfully hidden that the authorities had been unable to produce it at the trial. By help of some of her disreputable friends, my wife had been able to purchase this relic of a bygone crime. Her perverted nature set some horrid unacknowledged value on the knife. Seeing there was no hope of getting it by fair means, I determined to search for it, later in the day, in secret. The search was unsuccessful. Night came on, and I left the house to walk about the streets. You will understand what a broken man I was by this time, when I tell you I was afraid to sleep in the same room with her!

Three weeks passed. Still she refused to give up the knife; and still that fear of sleeping in the same room with her possessed me. I walked about at night, or dozed in the parlor, or sat watching by my mother’s bedside. Before the end of the first week in the new month, the worst misfortune of all befell me – my mother died. It wanted then but a short time to my birthday. She had longed to live till that day. I was present at her death. Her last words in this world were addressed to me. ‘Don’t go back, my son – don’t go back!’

I was obliged to go back, if it was only to watch my wife. In the last days of my mother’s illness she had spitefully added a sting to my grief by declaring she would assert her right to attend the funeral. In spite of all that I could do or say, she held to her word. On the day appointed for the burial she forced herself, inflamed and shameless with drink, into my presence, and swore she would walk in the funeral procession to my mother’s grave.

This last insult – after all I had gone through already – was more than I could endure. It maddened me. Try to make allowances for a man beside himself. I struck her.

The instant the blow was dealt, I repented it. She crouched down, silent, in a corner of the room, and eyed me steadily. It was a look that cooled my hot blood in an instant. There was no time

now to think of making atonement. I could only risk the worst, and make sure of her till the funeral was over. I locked her into her bedroom.

When I came back, after laying my mother in the grave, I found her sitting by the bedside, very much altered in look and bearing, with a bundle on her lap. She faced me quietly; she spoke with a curious stillness in her voice – strangely and unnaturally composed in look and manner.

‘No man has ever struck me yet,’ she said. ‘My husband shall have no second opportunity. Set the door open, and let me go.’

She passed me, and left the room. I saw her walk away up the street. Was she gone for good?

All that night I watched and waited. No footstep came near the house. The next night, overcome with fatigue, I lay down on the bed in my clothes, with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning. My slumber was not disturbed. The third night, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, passed, and nothing happened. I lay down on the seventh night, still suspicious of something happening; still in my clothes; still with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning.

My rest was disturbed. I awoke twice, without any sensation of uneasiness. The third time, that horrid shivering of the night at the lonely inn, that awful sinking pain at the heart, came back again, and roused me in an instant. My eyes turned to the left-hand side of the bed. And there stood, looking at me —

The Dream Woman again? No! My wife. The living woman, with the face of the Dream – in the attitude of the Dream – the fair arm up; the knife clasped in the delicate white hand.

I sprang upon her on the instant; but not quickly enough to stop her from hiding the knife. Without a word from me, without a cry from her, I pinioned her in a chair. With one hand I felt up her sleeve; and there, where the Dream Woman had hidden the knife, my wife had hidden it – the knife with the buckhorn handle, that looked like new.

What I felt when I made that discovery I could not realize at the time, and I can’t describe now. I took one steady look at her with the knife in my hand. ‘You meant to kill me?’ I said.

‘Yes,’ she answered; ‘I meant to kill you.’ She crossed her arms over her bosom, and stared me coolly in the face. ‘I shall do it yet,’ she said. ‘With that knife.’

I don’t know what possessed me – I swear to you I am no coward; and yet I acted like a coward. The horrors got hold of me. I couldn’t look at her – I couldn’t speak to her. I left her (with the knife in my hand), and went out into the night.

There was a bleak wind abroad, and the smell of rain was in the air. The church clocks chimed the quarter as I walked beyond the last house in the town. I asked the first policeman I met what hour that was, of which the quarter past had just struck.

The man looked at his watch, and answered, ‘Two o’clock.’ Two in the morning. What day of the month was this day that had just begun? I reckoned it up from the date of my mother’s funeral. The horrid parallel between the dream and the reality was complete – it was my birthday!

Had I escaped, the mortal peril which the dream foretold? or had I only received a second warning? As that doubt crossed my mind I stopped on my way out of the town. The air had revived me – I felt in some degree like my own self again. After a little thinking, I began to see plainly the mistake I had made in leaving my wife free to go where she liked and to do as she pleased.

I turned instantly, and made my way back to the house. It was still dark. I had left the candle burning in the bedchamber. When I looked up to the window of the room now, there was no light in it. I advanced to the house door. On going away, I remembered to have closed it; on trying it now, I found it open.

I waited outside, never losing sight of the house till daylight. Then I ventured indoors – listened, and heard nothing – looked into the kitchen, scullery, parlor, and found nothing – went up at last into the bedroom. It was empty.

A picklock lay on the floor, which told me how she had gained entrance in the night. And that was the one trace I could find of the Dream Woman.

XIII

I waited in the house till the town was astir for the day, and then I went to consult a lawyer. In the confused state of my mind at the time, I had one clear notion of what I meant to do: I was determined to sell my house and leave the neighborhood. There were obstacles in the way which I had not counted on. I was told I had creditors to satisfy before I could leave – I, who had given my wife the money to pay my bills regularly every week! Inquiry showed that she had embezzled every farthing of the money I had entrusted to her. I had no choice but to pay over again.

Placed in this awkward position, my first duty was to set things right, with the help of my lawyer. During my forced sojourn in the town I did two foolish things. And, as a consequence that followed, I heard once more, and heard for the last time, of my wife.

In the first place, having got possession of the knife, I was rash enough to keep it in my pocket. In the second place, having something of importance to say to my lawyer, at a late hour of the evening, I went to his house after dark – alone and on foot. I got there safely enough. Returning, I was seized on from behind by two men, dragged down a passage and robbed – not only of the little money I had about me, but also of the knife. It was the lawyer's opinion (as it was mine) that the thieves were among the disreputable acquaintances formed by my wife, and that they had attacked me at her instigation. To confirm this view I received a letter the next day, without date or address, written in Alicia's hand. The first line informed me that the knife was back again in her possession. The second line reminded me of the day when I struck her. The third line warned me that she would wash out the stain of that blow in my blood, and repeated the words, 'I shall do it with the knife!'

These things happened a year ago. The law laid hands on the men who had robbed me; but from that time to this, the law has failed completely to find a trace of my wife.

My story is told. When I had paid the creditors and paid the legal expenses, I had barely five pounds left out of the sale of my house; and I had the world to begin over again. Some months since – drifting here and there – I found my way to Underbridge. The landlord of the inn had known something of my father's family in times past. He gave me (all he had to give) my food, and shelter in the yard. Except on market days, there is nothing to do. In the coming winter the inn is to be shut up, and I shall have to shift for myself. My old master would help me if I applied to him – but I don't like to apply: he has done more for me already than I deserve. Besides, in another year who knows but my troubles may all be at an end? Next winter will bring me nigh to my next birthday, and my next birthday may be the day of my death. Yes! it's true I sat up all last night; and I heard two in the morning strike: and nothing happened. Still, allowing for that, the time to come is a time I don't trust. My wife has got the knife – my wife is looking for me. I am above superstition, mind! I don't say I believe in dreams; I only say, Alicia Warlock is looking for me. It is possible I may be wrong. It is possible I may be right. Who can tell?

The Third Narrative

The story continued by Percy Fairbank

XIV

We took leave of Francis Raven at the door of Farleigh Hall, with the understanding that he might expect to hear from us again.

The same night Mrs. Fairbank and I had a discussion in the sanctuary of our own room. The topic was 'The Hostler's Story'; and the question in dispute between us turned on the measure of charitable duty that we owed to the hostler himself.

The view I took of the man's narrative was of the purely matter-of-fact kind. Francis Raven had, in my opinion, brooded over the misty connection between his strange dream and his vile wife, until his mind was in a state of partial delusion⁴⁷ on that subject. I was quite willing to help him with a trifle of money, and to recommend him to the kindness of my lawyer, if he was really in any danger and wanted advice. There my idea of my duty toward this afflicted person began and ended.

Confronted with this sensible view of the matter, Mrs. Fairbank's romantic temperament rushed, as usual, into extremes. 'I should no more think of losing sight of Francis Raven when his next birthday comes round,' says my wife, 'than I should think of laying down a good story with the last chapters unread. I am positively determined, Percy, to take him back with us when we return to France, in the capacity of groom. What does one man more or less among the horses matter to people as rich as we are?' In this strain the partner of my joys and sorrows ran on, perfectly impenetrable to everything that I could say on the side of common sense. Need I tell my married brethren how it ended? Of course I allowed my wife to irritate me, and spoke to her sharply.

Of course my wife turned her face away indignantly on the conjugal pillow, and burst into tears. Of course upon that, 'Mr.' made his excuses, and 'Mrs.' had her own way.

Before the week was out we rode over to Underbridge, and duly offered to Francis Raven a place in our service as supernumerary groom.

At first the poor fellow seemed hardly able to realize his own extraordinary good fortune. Recovering himself, he expressed his gratitude modestly and becomingly. Mrs. Fairbank's ready sympathies overflowed, as usual, at her lips. She talked to him about our home in France, as if the worn, gray-headed hostler had been a child. 'Such a dear old house, Francis; and such pretty gardens! Stables! Stables ten times as big as your stables here – quite a choice of rooms for you. You must learn the name of our house – Maison Rouge. Our nearest town is Metz⁴⁸. We are within a walk of the beautiful River Moselle⁴⁹. And when we want a change we have only to take the railway to the frontier, and find ourselves in Germany.'

Listening, so far, with a very bewildered face, Francis started and changed color when my wife reached the end of her last sentence. 'Germany?' he repeated.

'Yes. Does Germany remind you of anything?'

The hostler's eyes looked down sadly on the ground. 'Germany reminds me of my wife,' he replied.

'Indeed! How?'

'She once told me she had lived in Germany – long before I knew her – in the time when she was a young girl.'

⁴⁷ **delusion**– a false opinion that may be a symptom of madness

⁴⁸ **Metz**– a city in northeastern France; it was founded by a Gallic tribe and later fortified by the Romans

⁴⁹ **the River Moselle**– a river in northeastern France and western Germany, a tributary of the Rhine River

‘Was she living with relations or friends?’

‘She was living as governess in a foreign family.’

‘In what part of Germany?’

‘I don’t remember, ma’am. I doubt if she told me.’

‘Did she tell you the name of the family?’

‘Yes, ma’am. It was a foreign name, and it has slipped my memory long since. The head of the family was a wine grower in a large way of business – I remember that.’

‘Did you hear what sort of wine he grew? There are wine growers in our neighborhood. Was it Moselle wine⁵⁰?’

‘I couldn’t say, ma’am, I doubt if I ever heard.’

There the conversation dropped. We engaged to communicate with Francis Raven before we left England, and took our leave. I had made arrangements to pay our round of visits to English friends, and to return to Maison Rouge in the summer. On the eve of departure, certain difficulties in connection with the management of some landed property of mine in Ireland obliged us to alter our plans. Instead of getting back to our house in France in the Summer, we only returned a week or two before Christmas. Francis Raven accompanied us, and was duly established, in the nominal capacity of stable keeper, among the servants at Maison Rouge.

Before long, some of the objections to taking him into our employment, which I had foreseen and had vainly mentioned to my wife, forced themselves on our attention in no very agreeable form. Francis Raven failed (as I had feared he would) to get on smoothly with his fellow-servants. They were all French; and not one of them understood English. Francis, on his side, was equally ignorant of French. His reserved manners, his melancholy temperament, his solitary ways – all told against him. Our servants called him ‘the English Bear.’ He grew widely known in the neighborhood under his nickname. Quarrels took place, ending once or twice in blows. It became plain, even to Mrs. Fairbank herself, that some wise change must be made. While we were still considering what the change was to be, the unfortunate hostler was thrown on our hands for some time to come by an accident in the stables. Still pursued by his proverbial ill-luck, the poor wretch’s leg was broken by a kick from a horse.

He was attended to by our own surgeon, in his comfortable bedroom at the stables. As the date of his birthday drew near, he was still confined to his bed.

Physically speaking, he was doing very well. Morally speaking, the surgeon was not satisfied. Francis Raven was suffering under some mysterious mental disturbance, which interfered seriously with his rest at night. Hearing this, I thought it my duty to tell the medical attendant what was preying on the patient’s mind. As a practical man, he shared my opinion that the hostler was in a state of delusion on the subject of his Wife and his Dream. ‘Curable delusion, in my opinion,’ the surgeon added, ‘if the experiment could be fairly tried.’

‘How can it be tried?’ I asked. Instead of replying, the surgeon put a question to me, on his side.

‘Do you happen to know,’ he said, ‘that this year is Leap Year?’

‘Mrs. Fairbank reminded me of it yesterday,’ I answered. ‘Otherwise I might not have known it.’

‘Do you think Francis Raven knows that this year is Leap Year?’

(I began to see dimly what my friend was driving at.)

‘It depends,’ I answered, ‘on whether he has got an English almanac. Suppose he has not got the almanac – what then?’

‘In that case,’ pursued the surgeon, ‘Francis Raven is innocent of all suspicion that there is a twenty-ninth day in February this year. As a necessary consequence – what will he do? He will anticipate the appearance of the Woman with the Knife, at two in the morning of the twenty-ninth of February, instead of the first of March. Let him suffer all his superstitious terrors on the wrong day.’

⁵⁰ **Moselle wine**– famous wine produced in Germany from the vineyards on the banks of the Moselle River

Leave him, on the day that is really his birthday, to pass a perfectly quiet night, and to be as sound asleep as other people at two in the morning. And then, when he wakes comfortably in time for his breakfast, shame him out of his delusion by telling him the truth.'

I agreed to try the experiment. Leaving the surgeon to caution Mrs. Fairbank on the subject of Leap Year, I went to the stables to see Mr. Raven.

XV

The poor fellow was full of forebodings of the fate in store for him on the ominous first of March. He eagerly entreated me to order one of the men servants to sit up with him on the birthday morning. In granting his request, I asked him to tell me on which day of the week his birthday fell. He reckoned the days on his fingers; and proved his innocence of all suspicion that it was Leap Year, by fixing on the twenty-ninth of February, in the full persuasion that it was the first of March. Pledged to try the surgeon's experiment, I left his error uncorrected, of course. In so doing, I took my first step blindfold toward the last act in the drama of the Hostler's Dream.

The next day brought with it a little domestic difficulty, which indirectly and strangely associated itself with the coming end.

My wife received a letter, inviting us to assist in celebrating the 'Silver Wedding' of two worthy German neighbors of ours – Mr. and Mrs. Beldheimer. Mr. Beldheimer was a large wine grower on the banks of the Moselle. His house was situated on the frontier line of France and Germany; and the distance from our house was sufficiently considerable to make it necessary for us to sleep under our host's roof. Under these circumstances, if we accepted the invitation, a comparison of dates showed that we should be away from home on the morning of the first of March. Mrs. Fairbank – holding to her absurd resolution to see with her own eyes what might, or might not, happen to Francis Raven on his birthday – flatly declined to leave Maison Rouge. 'It's easy to send an excuse,' she said, in her off-hand manner.

I failed, for my part, to see any easy way out of the difficulty. The celebration of a 'Silver Wedding' in Germany is the celebration of twenty-five years of happy married life; and the host's claim upon the consideration of his friends on such an occasion is something in the nature of a royal 'command.' After considerable discussion, finding my wife's obstinacy invincible, and feeling that the absence of both of us from the festival would certainly offend our friends, I left Mrs. Fairbank to make her excuses for herself, and directed her to accept the invitation so far as I was concerned. In so doing, I took my second step, blindfold, toward the last act in the drama of the Hostler's Dream.

A week elapsed; the last days of February were at hand. Another domestic difficulty happened; and, again, this event also proved to be strangely associated with the coming end.

My head groom at the stables was one Joseph Rigobert. He was an ill-conditioned fellow, inordinately vain of his personal appearance, and by no means scrupulous in his conduct with women. His one virtue consisted of his fondness for horses, and in the care he took of the animals under his charge. In a word, he was too good a groom to be easily replaced, or he would have quitted my service long since. On the occasion of which I am now writing, he was reported to me by my steward as growing idle and disorderly in his habits. The principal offense alleged against him was, that he had been seen that day in the city of Metz, in the company of a woman (supposed to be an Englishwoman), whom he was entertaining at a tavern, when he ought to have been on his way back to Maison Rouge. The man's defense was that 'the lady' (as he called her) was an English stranger, unacquainted with the ways of the place, and that he had only shown her where she could obtain some refreshments at her own request. I administered the necessary reprimand, without troubling myself to inquire further into the matter. In failing to do this, I took my third step, blindfold, toward the last act in the drama of the Hostler's Dream.

On the evening of the twenty-eighth, I informed the servants at the stables that one of them must watch through the night by the Englishman's bedside. Joseph Rigobert immediately volunteered for the duty – as a means, no doubt, of winning his way back to my favor. I accepted his proposal.

That day the surgeon dined with us. Toward midnight he and I left the smoking room, and repaired to Francis Raven's bedside. Rigobert was at his post, with no very agreeable expression on his face. The Frenchman and the Englishman had evidently not got on well together so far. Francis Raven lay helpless on his bed, waiting silently for two in the morning and the Dream Woman.

'I have come, Francis, to bid you good night,' I said, cheerfully. 'To-morrow morning I shall look in at breakfast time, before I leave home on a journey.'

'Thank you for all your kindness, sir. You will not see me alive to-morrow morning. She will find me this time. Mark my words – she will find me this time.'

'My good fellow! she couldn't find you in England. How in the world is she to find you in France?'

'It's borne in on my mind, sir, that she will find me here. At two in the morning on my birthday I shall see her again, and see her for the last time.'

'Do you mean that she will kill you?'

'I mean that, sir, she will kill me – with the knife.'

'And with Rigobert in the room to protect you?'

'I am a doomed man. Fifty Rigoberts couldn't protect me.'

'And you wanted somebody to sit up with you?'

'Mere weakness, sir. I don't like to be left alone on my deathbed.'

I looked at the surgeon. If he had encouraged me, I should certainly, out of sheer compassion, have confessed to Francis Raven the trick that we were playing him. The surgeon held to his experiment; the surgeon's face plainly said – 'No.'

The next day (the twenty-ninth of February) was the day of the 'Silver Wedding.' The first thing in the morning, I went to Francis Raven's room. Rigobert met me at the door.

'How has he passed the night?' I asked.

'Saying his prayers, and looking for ghosts,' Rigobert answered. 'A lunatic asylum⁵¹ is the only proper place for him.'

I approached the bedside. 'Well, Francis, here you are, safe and sound, in spite of what you said to me last night.'

His eyes rested on mine with a vacant, wondering look.

'I don't understand it,' he said.

'Did you see anything of your wife when the clock struck two?'

'No, sir.'

'Did anything happen?'

'Nothing happened, sir.'

'Doesn't this satisfy you that you were wrong?'

His eyes still kept their vacant, wondering look. He only repeated the words he had spoken already: 'I don't understand it.'

I made a last attempt to cheer him. 'Come, come, Francis! keep a good heart. You will be out of bed in a fortnight.'

He shook his head on the pillow. 'There's something wrong,' he said. 'I don't expect you to believe me, sir. I only say there's something wrong – and time will show it.'

I left the room. Half an hour later I started for Mr. Beldheimer's house; leaving the arrangements for the morning of the first of March in the hands of the doctor and my wife.

⁵¹ **lunatic asylum** – a mental hospital for the care and treatment of mental patients

XVI

The one thing which principally struck me when I joined the guests at the 'Silver Wedding' is also the one thing which it is necessary to mention here. On this joyful occasion a noticeable lady present was out of spirits. That lady was no other than the heroine of the festival, the mistress of the house!

In the course of the evening I spoke to Mr. Beldheimer's eldest son on the subject of his mother. As an old friend of the family, I had a claim on his confidence which the young man willingly recognized.

'We have had a very disagreeable matter to deal with,' he said; 'and my mother has not recovered the painful impression left on her mind. Many years since, when my sisters were children, we had an English governess in the house. She left us, as we then understood, to be married. We heard no more of her until a week or ten days since, when my mother received a letter, in which our ex-governess described herself as being in a condition of great poverty and distress. After much hesitation she had ventured – at the suggestion of a lady who had been kind to her – to write to her former employers, and to appeal to their remembrance of old times. You know my mother: she is not only the most kind-hearted, but the most innocent of women – it is impossible to persuade her of the wickedness that there is in the world. She replied by return of post, inviting the governess to come here and see her, and inclosing the money for her traveling expenses. When my father came home, and heard what had been done, he wrote at once to his agent in London to make inquiries, inclosing the address on the governess' letter. Before he could receive the agent's reply the governess, arrived. She produced the worst possible impression on his mind. The agent's letter, arriving a few days later, confirmed his suspicions. Since we had lost sight of her, the woman had led a most disreputable life. My father spoke to her privately: he offered – on condition of her leaving the house – a sum of money to take her back to England. If she refused, the alternative would be an appeal to the authorities and a public scandal. She accepted the money, and left the house. On her way back to England she appears to have stopped at Metz. You will understand what sort of woman she is when I tell you that she was seen the other day in a tavern, with your handsome groom, Joseph Rigobert.'

While my informant was relating these circumstances, my memory was at work. I recalled what Francis Raven had vaguely told us of his wife's experience in former days as governess in a German family. A suspicion of the truth suddenly flashed across my mind. 'What was the woman's name?' I asked.

Mr. Beldheimer's son answered: 'Alicia Warlock.'

I had but one idea when I heard that reply – to get back to my house without a moment's needless delay. It was then ten o'clock at night – the last train to Metz had left long since. I arranged with my young friend – after duly informing him of the circumstances – that I should go by the first train in the morning, instead of staying to breakfast with the other guests who slept in the house.

At intervals during the night I wondered uneasily how things were going on at Maison Rouge. Again and again the same question occurred to me, on my journey home in the early morning – the morning of the first of March. As the event proved, but one person in my house knew what really happened at the stables on Francis Raven's birthday. Let Joseph Rigobert take my place as narrator, and tell the story of the end to You – as he told it, in times past, to his lawyer and to Me.

The Fourth Narrative

Statement of Joseph Rigobert: addressed to the advocate who defended him at his trial

Respected Sir, – On the twenty-seventh of February I was sent, on business connected with the stables at Maison Rouge, to the city of Metz. On the public promenade I met a magnificent woman. Complexion, blond. Nationality, English. We mutually admired each other; we fell into conversation. (She spoke French perfectly – with the English accent.) I offered refreshment; my proposal was accepted. We had a long and interesting interview – we discovered that we were made for each other. So far, who is to blame?

Is it my fault that I am a handsome man – universally agreeable as such to the fair sex? Is it a criminal offense to be accessible to the amiable weakness of love? I ask again, who is to blame? Clearly, nature. Not the beautiful lady – not my humble self.

To resume. The most hard-hearted person living will understand that two beings made for each other could not possibly part without an appointment to meet again.

I made arrangements for the accommodation of the lady in the village near Maison Rouge. She consented to honor me with her company at supper, in my apartment at the stables, on the night of the twenty-ninth. The time fixed on was the time when the other servants were accustomed to retire – eleven o'clock.

Among the grooms attached to the stables was an Englishman, laid up with a broken leg. His name was Francis. His manners were repulsive; he was ignorant of the French language. In the kitchen he went by the nickname of the 'English Bear.' Strange to say, he was a great favorite with my master and my mistress. They even humored certain superstitious terrors to which this repulsive person was subject – terrors into the nature of which I, as an advanced freethinker, never thought it worth my while to inquire.

On the evening of the twenty-eighth the Englishman, being a prey to the terrors which I have mentioned, requested that one of his fellow servants might sit up with him for that night only. The wish that he expressed was backed by Mr. Fairbank's authority. Having already incurred my master's displeasure – in what way, a proper sense of my own dignity forbids me to relate – I volunteered to watch by the bedside of the English Bear. My object was to satisfy Mr. Fairbank that I bore no malice, on my side, after what had occurred between us. The wretched Englishman passed a night of delirium⁵². Not understanding his barbarous language, I could only gather from his gesture that he was in deadly fear of some fancied apparition at his bedside. From time to time, when this madman disturbed my slumbers, I quieted him by swearing at him. This is the shortest and best way of dealing with persons in his condition.

On the morning of the twenty-ninth, Mr. Fairbank left us on a journey. Later in the day, to my unspeakable disgust, I found that I had not done with the Englishman yet. In Mr. Fairbank's absence, Mrs. Fairbank took an incomprehensible interest in the question of my delirious fellow servant's repose at night. Again, one or the other of us was to watch at his bedside, and report it, if anything happened. Expecting my fair friend to supper, it was necessary to make sure that the other servants at the stables would be safe in their beds that night. Accordingly, I volunteered once more to be the man who kept watch. Mrs. Fairbank complimented me on my humanity. I possess great command over my feelings. I accepted the compliment without a blush.

Twice, after nightfall, my mistress and the doctor (the last staying in the house in Mr. Fairbank's absence) came to make inquiries. Once before the arrival of my fair friend – and once after. On

⁵² **delirium**– mental excitement during illness (usually fever) accompanied by senseless, incoherent speech

the second occasion (my apartment being next door to the Englishman's) I was obliged to hide my charming guest in the harness room. She consented, with angelic resignation, to immolate her dignity to the servile necessities of my position. A more amiable woman (so far) I never met with!

After the second visit I was left free. It was then close on midnight. Up to that time there was nothing in the behavior of the mad Englishman to reward Mrs. Fairbank and the doctor for presenting themselves at his bedside. He lay half awake, half asleep, with an odd wondering kind of look in his face. My mistress at parting warned me to be particularly watchful of him toward two in the morning. The doctor (in case anything happened) left me a large hand bell to ring, which could easily be heard at the house.

Restored to the society of my fair friend, I spread the supper table. A pâté⁵³, a sausage, and a few bottles of generous Moselle wine, composed our simple meal. When persons adore each other, the intoxicating illusion of Love transforms the simplest meal into a banquet. With immeasurable capacities for enjoyment, we sat down to table. At the very moment when I placed my fascinating companion in a chair, the infamous Englishman in the next room took that occasion, of all others, to become restless and noisy once more. He struck with his stick on the floor; he cried out, in a delirious access of terror, 'Rigobert! Rigobert!'

The sound of that lamentable voice, suddenly assailing our ears, terrified my fair friend. She lost all her charming color in an instant. 'Good heavens!' she exclaimed. 'Who is that in the next room?'

'A mad Englishman.'

'An Englishman?'

'Compose yourself, my angel. I will quiet him.'

The lamentable voice called out on me again, 'Rigobert! Rigobert!'

My fair friend caught me by the arm. 'Who is he?' she cried. 'What is his name?'

Something in her face struck me as she put that question. A spasm of jealousy shook me to the soul. 'You know him?' I said.

'His name!' she vehemently repeated; 'his name!'

'Francis,' I answered.

'Francis – what?'

I shrugged my shoulders. I could neither remember nor pronounce the barbarous English surname. I could only tell her it began with an 'R.'

She dropped back into the chair. Was she going to faint? No: she recovered, and more than recovered, her lost color. Her eyes flashed superbly. What did it mean? Profoundly as I understand women in general, I was puzzled by this woman!

'You know him?' I repeated.

She laughed at me. 'What nonsense! How should I know him? Go and quiet the wretch.'

My looking-glass was near. One glance at it satisfied me that no woman in her senses could prefer the Englishman to Me. I recovered my self-respect. I hastened to the Englishman's bedside.

The moment I appeared he pointed eagerly toward my room. He overwhelmed me with a torrent of words in his own language. I made out, from his gestures and his looks, that he had, in some incomprehensible manner, discovered the presence of my guest; and, stranger still, that he was scared by the idea of a person in my room. I endeavored to compose him on the system which I have already mentioned – that is to say, I swore at him in my language. The result not proving satisfactory, I own I shook my fist in his face, and left the bedchamber.

Returning to my fair friend, I found her walking backward and forward in a state of excitement wonderful to behold. She had not waited for me to fill her glass – she had begun the generous Moselle in my absence. I prevailed on her with difficulty to place herself at the table. Nothing would induce her to eat. 'My appetite is gone,' she said. 'Give me wine.'

⁵³ pâté = paste

The generous Moselle deserves its name – delicate on the palate, with prodigious ‘body.’ The strength of this fine wine produced no stupefying effect on my remarkable guest. It appeared to strengthen and exhilarate her – nothing more. She always spoke in the same low tone, and always, turn the conversation as I might, brought it back with the same dexterity to the subject of the Englishman in the next room. In any other woman this persistency would have offended me. My lovely guest was irresistible; I answered her questions with the docility of a child. She possessed all the amusing eccentricity of her nation. When I told her of the accident which confined the Englishman to his bed, she sprang to her feet. An extraordinary smile irradiated her countenance. She said, ‘Show me the horse who broke the Englishman’s leg! I must see that horse!’ I took her to the stables. She kissed the horse – on my word of honor, she kissed the horse! That struck me. I said, ‘You do know the man; and he has wronged you in some way.’ No! she would not admit it, even then. ‘I kiss all beautiful animals,’ she said. ‘Haven’t I kissed you?’ With that charming explanation of her conduct, she ran back up the stairs. I only remained behind to lock the stable door again. When I rejoined her, I made a startling discovery. I caught her coming out of the Englishman’s room.

‘I was just going downstairs again to call you,’ she said. ‘The man in there is getting noisy once more.’

The mad Englishman’s voice assailed our ears once again. ‘Rigobert! Rigobert!’

He was a frightful object to look at when I saw him this time. His eyes were staring wildly; the perspiration was pouring over his face. In a panic of terror he clasped his hands; he pointed up to heaven. By every sign and gesture that a man can make, he entreated me not to leave him again. I really could not help smiling. The idea of my staying with him, and leaving my fair friend by herself in the next room!

I turned to the door. When the mad wretch saw me leaving him he burst out into a screech of despair – so shrill that I feared it might awaken the sleeping servants.

My presence of mind in emergencies is proverbial among those who know me. I tore open the cupboard in which he kept his linen – seized a handful of his handkerchiefs – gagged him with one of them, and secured his hands with the others. There was now no danger of his alarming the servants. After tying the last knot, I looked up.

The door between the Englishman’s room and mine was open. My fair friend was standing on the threshold – watching him as he lay helpless on the bed; watching me as I tied the last knot.

‘What are you doing there?’ I asked. ‘Why did you open the door?’

She stepped up to me, and whispered her answer in my ear, with her eyes all the time upon the man on the bed:

‘I heard him scream.’

‘Well?’

‘I thought you had killed him.’

I drew back from her in horror. The suspicion of me which her words implied was sufficiently detestable in itself. But her manner when she uttered the words was more revolting still. It so powerfully affected me that I started back from that beautiful creature as I might have recoiled from a reptile crawling over my flesh.

Before I had recovered myself sufficiently to reply, my nerves were assailed by another shock. I suddenly heard my mistress’s voice calling to me from the stable yard.

There was no time to think – there was only time to act. The one thing needed was to keep Mrs. Fairbank from ascending the stairs, and discovering – not my lady guest only – but the Englishman also, gagged and bound on his bed. I instantly hurried to the yard. As I ran down the stairs I heard the stable clock strike the quarter to two in the morning.

My mistress was eager and agitated. The doctor (in attendance on her) was smiling to himself, like a man amused at his own thoughts.

‘Is Francis awake or asleep?’ Mrs. Fairbank inquired.

‘He has been a little restless, madam. But he is now quiet again. If he is not disturbed’ (I added those words to prevent her from ascending the stairs), ‘he will soon fall off into a quiet sleep.’

‘Has nothing happened since I was here last?’

‘Nothing, madam.’

The doctor lifted his eyebrows with a comical look of distress. ‘Alas, alas, Mrs. Fairbank!’ he said. ‘Nothing has happened! The days of romance are over!’

‘It is not two o’clock yet,’ my mistress answered, a little irritably.

The smell of the stables was strong on the morning air. She put her handkerchief to her nose and led the way out of the yard by the north entrance – the entrance communicating with the gardens and the house. I was ordered to follow her, along with the doctor. Once out of the smell of the stables she began to question me again. She was unwilling to believe that nothing had occurred in her absence. I invented the best answers I could think of on the spur of the moment; and the doctor stood by laughing. So the minutes passed till the clock struck two. Upon that, Mrs. Fairbank announced her intention of personally visiting the Englishman in his room. To my great relief, the doctor interfered to stop her from doing this.

‘You have heard that Francis is just falling asleep,’ he said. ‘If you enter his room you may disturb him. It is essential to the success of my experiment that he should have a good night’s rest, and that he should own it himself, before I tell him the truth. I must request, madam, that you will not disturb the man. Rigobert will ring the alarm bell if anything happens.’

My mistress was unwilling to yield. For the next five minutes, at least, there was a warm discussion between the two. In the end Mrs. Fairbank was obliged to give way – for the time. ‘In half an hour,’ she said, ‘Francis will either be sound asleep, or awake again. In half an hour I shall come back.’ She took the doctor’s arm. They returned together to the house.

Left by myself, with half an hour before me, I resolved to take the Englishwoman back to the village – then, returning to the stables, to remove the gag and the bindings from Francis, and to let him screech to his heart’s content. What would his alarming the whole establishment matter to me after I had got rid of the compromising presence of my guest?

Returning to the yard I heard a sound like the creaking of an open door on its hinges. The gate of the north entrance I had just closed with my own hand. I went round to the west entrance, at the back of the stables. It opened on a field crossed by two footpaths in Mr. Fairbank’s grounds. The nearest footpath led to the village. The other led to the highroad and the river.

Arriving at the west entrance I found the door open – swinging to and fro slowly in the fresh morning breeze. I had myself locked and bolted that door after admitting my fair friend at eleven o’clock. A vague dread of something wrong stole its way into my mind. I hurried back to the stables.

I looked into my own room. It was empty. I went to the harness room. Not a sign of the woman was there. I returned to my room, and approached the door of the Englishman’s bedchamber. Was it possible that she had remained there during my absence? An unaccountable reluctance to open the door made me hesitate, with my hand on the lock. I listened. There was not a sound inside. I called softly. There was no answer. I drew back a step, still hesitating. I noticed something dark moving slowly in the crevice between the bottom of the door and the boarded floor. Snatching up the candle from the table, I held it low, and looked. The dark, slowly moving object was a stream of blood!

That horrid sight roused me. I opened the door. The Englishman lay on his bed – alone in the room. He was stabbed in two places – in the throat and in the heart. The weapon was left in the second wound. It was a knife of English manufacture, with a handle of buckhorn as good as new.

I instantly gave the alarm. Witnesses can speak to what followed. It is monstrous to suppose that I am guilty of the murder. I admit that I am capable of committing follies: but I shrink from the bare idea of a crime. Besides, I had no motive for killing the man. The woman murdered him in my absence. The woman escaped by the west entrance while I was talking to my mistress. I have

no more to say. I swear to you what I have here written is a true statement of all that happened on the morning of the first of March.

Accept, sir, the assurance of my sentiments of profound gratitude and respect.

JOSEPH RIGOBERT.

Last lines – added by Percy Fairbank

Tried for the murder of Francis Raven, Joseph Rigobert was found Not Guilty; the papers of the assassinated man presented ample evidence of the deadly animosity felt toward him by his wife.

The investigations pursued on the morning when the crime was committed showed that the murderess, after leaving the stable, had taken the footpath which led to the river. The river was dragged – without result. It remains doubtful to this day whether she died by drowning or not. The one thing certain is – that Alicia Warlock was never seen again.

So – beginning in mystery, ending in mystery – the Dream Woman passes from your view. Ghost; demon⁵⁴; or living human creature – say for yourselves which she is. Or, knowing what unfathomed wonders are around you, what unfathomed wonders are in you, let the wise words of the greatest of all poets be explanation enough:

‘We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with, a sleep.’

⁵⁴ **demon**– a wicked or cruel spirit or supernatural creature

Arthur Conan Doyle

A Study in Scarlet

Part I

Chapter I

Mr. Sherlock Holmes

In the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London, and proceeded to Netley to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the army. Having completed my studies there, I was duly attached to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers as Assistant Surgeon. The regiment was stationed in India at the time, and before I could join it, the second Afghan war had broken out. On landing at Bombay⁵⁵, I learned that my corps had advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy's country. I followed, however, with many other officers who were in the same situation as myself, and succeeded in reaching Candahar⁵⁶ in safety, where I found my regiment, and at once entered upon my new duties. The campaign brought honours and promotion to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster; I was removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires⁵⁷, with whom I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis⁵⁸ had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly, who threw me across a pack-horse, and succeeded in bringing me safely to the British lines.

Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawur⁵⁹. Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the verandah, when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England. I was despatched, accordingly, in the troopship *Orontes*, and landed a month later on Portsmouth⁶⁰ jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.

I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air – or as free as an income of eleven shillings and six-pence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably more freely than I ought. So alarming did the state of my finances become, that I soon realized that I must either leave the

⁵⁵ **Bombay** – now Mumbai, a large city in southwestern India, India's commercial, financial and religious centre, the main port on the Arabic Sea

⁵⁶ **Candahar** – Kandahar, a city in south-central Afghanistan on the way to India; the city has a long history of wars and conquests

⁵⁷ **the Berkshires** – soldiers from the county of Berkshire

⁵⁸ **Ghazis** – *hist.* warriors for the Islamic faith

⁵⁹ **Peshawur** – a city and capital of province in northern Pakistan

⁶⁰ **Portsmouth** – a city on the English Channel, in the historic county of Hampshire

metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel, and to take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile.

On the very day that I had come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Criterion Bar, when some one tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I recognized young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Barts⁶¹. The sight of a friendly face in the great wilderness of London is a pleasant thing indeed to a lonely man. In old days Stamford had never been a particular crony of mine, but now I hailed him with enthusiasm, and he, in his turn, appeared to be delighted to see me. In the exuberance of my joy, I asked him to lunch with me at the Holborn, and we started off together in a hansom.

‘Whatever have you been doing with yourself, Watson?’ he asked in undisguised wonder, as we rattled through the crowded London streets. ‘You are as thin as a lath and as brown as a nut.’

I gave him a short sketch of my adventures, and had hardly concluded it by the time that we reached our destination.

‘Poor devil!’ he said, commiseratingly, after he had listened to my misfortunes. ‘What are you up to now?’

‘Looking for lodgings,’ I answered. ‘Trying to solve the problem as to whether it is possible to get comfortable rooms at a reasonable price.’

‘That’s a strange thing,’ remarked my companion; ‘you are the second man to-day that has used that expression to me.’

‘And who was the first?’ I asked.

‘A fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital. He was bemoaning himself this morning because he could not get some one to go halves with him in some nice rooms which he had found, and which were too much for his purse.’

‘By Jove!’⁶² I cried; ‘if he really wants some one to share the rooms and the expense, I am the very man for him. I should prefer having a partner to being alone.’

Young Stamford looked rather strangely at me over his wine-glass. ‘You don’t know Sherlock Holmes yet,’ he said; ‘perhaps you would not care for him as a constant companion.’

‘Why, what is there against him?’

‘Oh, I didn’t say there was anything against him. He is a little queer in his ideas – an enthusiast in some branches of science; As far as I know he is a decent fellow enough.’

‘A medical student, I suppose?’ said I.

‘No – I have no idea what he intends to go in for. I believe he is well up in anatomy, and he is a first-class chemist; but, as far as I know, he has never taken out any systematic medical classes. His studies are very desultory and eccentric, but he has amassed a lot of out-of-the-way knowledge which would astonish his professors.’

‘Did you never ask him what he was going in for?’ I asked.

‘No; he is not a man that it is easy to draw out, though he can be communicative enough when the fancy seizes him.’

‘I should like to meet him,’ I said. ‘If I am to lodge with any one, I should prefer a man of studious and quiet habits. I am not strong enough yet to stand much noise or excitement: I had enough of both in Afghanistan to last me for the remainder of my natural existence. How could I meet this friend of yours?’

‘He is sure to be at the laboratory,’ returned my companion. ‘He either avoids the place for weeks, or else he works there from morning till night. If you like we will drive round together after luncheon.’

⁶¹ **Barts** – Saint Bartholomew’s Hospital, the oldest hospital in London founded in 1123

⁶² **By Jove!** – an exclamation of surprise

‘Certainly,’ I answered, and the conversation drifted away into other channels.

As we made our way to the hospital after leaving the Holborn, Stamford gave me a few more particulars about the gentleman whom I proposed to take as a fellow-lodger.

‘You mustn’t blame me if you don’t get on with him,’ he said; ‘I know nothing more of him than I have learned from meeting him occasionally in the laboratory. You proposed this arrangement so you must not hold me responsible.’

‘If we don’t get on it will be easy to part company,’ I answered. ‘It seems to me, Stamford,’ I added, looking hard at my companion, ‘that you have some reason for washing your hands of the matter. Is this fellow’s temper so formidable, or what is it? Don’t be mealy mouthed about it.’

‘It is not easy to express the inexpressible,’ he answered with a laugh. ‘Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes – it approaches to cold-bloodedness. I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness. He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge.’

‘Very right too.’

‘Yes, but it may be pushed to excess. When it comes to beating the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick, it is certainly taking rather a bizarre shape.’

‘Beating the subjects!’

‘Yes, to verify how far bruises may be produced after death; I saw him at it with my own eyes.’

‘And yet you say he is not a medical student?’

‘No. Heaven knows what the objects of his studies are. But here we are, and you must form your own impressions about him.’ As he spoke, we turned down a narrow lane and passed through a small side-door, which opened into a wing of the great hospital: It was familiar ground to me, and I needed no guiding as we ascended the bleak stone staircase and made our way down the long corridor with its vista of whitewashed wall and dun-coloured doors. Near the farther end a low arched passage branched away from it and led to the chemical laboratory.

This was a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps, with their blue flickering flames. There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work. At the sound of our steps he glanced round and sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure: ‘I’ve found it! I’ve found it,’ he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. ‘I have found a re-agent which is precipitated by hæmoglobin, and by nothing else.’ Had he discovered a gold mine, greater delight could not have shone upon his features.

‘Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,’ said Stamford, introducing us.

‘How are you?’ he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should hardly have given him credit. ‘You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive.’

‘How on earth did you know that?’ I asked in astonishment.

‘Never mind,’ said he, chuckling to himself. ‘The question now is about hæmoglobin. No doubt you see the significance of this discovery of mine?’

‘It is interesting, chemically, no doubt,’ I answered, ‘but practically—’

‘Why, man, it is the most practical medico-legal discovery for years. Don’t you see that it gives us an infallible test for blood stains. Come over here now!’ He seized me by the coat sleeve in his eagerness, and drew me over to the table at which he had been working. ‘Let us have some fresh blood,’ he said, digging a long bodkin into his finger, and drawing off the resulting drop of blood in a chemical pipette. ‘Now, I add this small quantity of blood to a litre of water. You perceive that the resulting mixture has the appearance of pure water. The proportion of blood cannot be more than one in a million. I have no doubt, however, that we shall be able to obtain the characteristic reaction.’ As he spoke, he threw into the vessel a few white crystals, and then added some drops of

a transparent fluid. In an instant the contents assumed a dull mahogany colour, and a brownish dust was precipitated to the bottom of the glass jar.

‘Ha! ha!’ he cried, clapping his hands, and looking as delighted as a child with a new toy.

‘What do you thing of that?’

‘It seems to be a very delicate test,’ I remarked.

‘Beautiful! beautiful! The old guaiacum test was very clumsy and uncertain. So is the microscopic examination for blood corpuscles. The latter is valueless if the stains are a few hours old. Now, this appears to act as well whether the blood is old or new. Had this test been invented, there are hundreds of men now walking the earth who would long ago have paid the penalty of their crimes.’

‘Indeed!’ I murmured.

‘Criminal cases are continually hinging upon that one point. A man is suspected of a crime months perhaps after it has been committed. His linen or clothes are examined and brownish stains discovered upon them. Are they blood stains, or mud stains, or rust stains, or fruit stains, or what are they? That is a question which has puzzled many an expert, and why? Because there was no reliable test. Now we have the Sherlock Holmes’ test, and there will no longer be any difficulty.’

His eyes fairly glittered as he spoke, and he put his hand over his heart and bowed as if to some applauding crowd conjured up by his imagination.

‘You are to be congratulated,’ I remarked, considerably surprised at his enthusiasm.

‘There was the case of Von Bischoff at Frankfort last year. He would certainly have been hung had this test been in existence. Then there was Mason of Bradford, and the notorious Muller, and Lefevre of Montpellier, and Samson of New Orleans. I could name a score of cases in which it would have been decisive.’

‘You seem to be a walking calendar of crime,’ said Stamford with a laugh. ‘You might start a paper on those lines. Call it the *Police News of the Past*.’

‘Very interesting reading it might be made, too,’ remarked Sherlock Holmes, sticking a small piece of plaster over the prick on his finger; ‘I have to be careful,’ he continued, turning to me with a smile, ‘for I dabble with poisons a good deal.’ He held out his hand as he spoke, and I noticed that it was all mottled over with similar pieces of plaster, and discoloured with strong acids.

‘We came here on business,’ said Stamford, sitting down on a high three-legged stool, and pushing another one in my direction with his foot. ‘My friend here wants to take diggings; and as you were complaining that you could get no one to go halves with you, I thought that I had better bring you together.’

Sherlock Holmes seemed delighted at the idea of sharing his rooms with me. ‘I have my eye on a suite in Baker Street,’ he said, ‘which would suit us down to the ground. You don’t mind the smell of strong tobacco, I hope?’

‘I always smoke ‘ship’s’ myself,’ I answered.

‘That’s good enough: I generally have chemicals about, and occasionally do experiments. Would that annoy you?’

‘By no means.’

‘Let me see – what are my other shortcomings. I get in the dumps at times, and don’t open my mouth for days on end. You must not think I am sulky when I do that. Just let me alone, and I’ll soon be right. What have you to confess now? It’s just as well for two fellows to know the worst of one another before they begin to live together.’

I laughed at this cross-examination. ‘I keep a bull pup,’ I said, ‘and I object to rows because my nerves are shaken, and I get up at all sorts of ungodly hours, and I am extremely lazy. I have another set of vices when I’m well, but those are the principal ones at present.’

‘Do you include violin playing in your category of rows?’ he asked, anxiously.

‘It depends on the player,’ I answered. ‘A well-played violin is a treat for the gods – a badly-played one—’

‘Oh, that’s all right,’ he cried, with a merry laugh. ‘I think we may consider the thing as settled – that is, if the rooms are agreeable to you.’

‘When shall we see them?’

‘Call for me here at noon tomorrow, and we’ll go together and settle everything,’ he answered.

‘All right – noon exactly,’ said I, shaking his hand.

We left him working among his chemicals, and we walked together towards my hotel.

‘By the way,’ I asked suddenly, stopping and turning upon Stamford, ‘how the deuce did he know that I had come from Afghanistan?’

My companion smiled an enigmatical smile. ‘That’s just his little peculiarity,’ he said. ‘A good many people have wanted to know how he finds things out.’

‘Oh! a mystery is it?’ I cried, rubbing my hands. ‘This is very piquant. I am much obliged to you for bringing us together. ‘The proper study of mankind is man,’ you know.’

‘You must study him, then,’ Stamford said, as he bade me good-bye. ‘You’ll find him a knotty problem, though. I’ll wager he learns more about you than you about him. Good-bye.’

‘Good-bye,’ I answered, and strolled on to my hotel, considerably interested in my new acquaintance.

Chapter II

The science of deduction

We met next day as he had arranged and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting. They consisted of a couple of comfortable bedrooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Sherlock Holmes followed me with several boxes and portmanteaus. For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.

Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the city. Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.

As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as to his aims in life gradually deepened and increased. His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments.

The reader may set me down as a hopeless busybody, when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavoured to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself. Before pronouncing judgment, however, be it remembered, how objectless was my life, and how little there was to engage my attention. My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial, and I had no friends who would call upon me and break the monotony of my daily existence. Under these circumstances, I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavouring to unravel it.

He was not studying medicine. He had himself, in reply to a question, confirmed Stamford's opinion upon that point. Neither did he appear to have pursued any course of reading which might fit him for a degree in science or any other recognized portal which would give him an entrance into the learned world. Yet his zeal for certain studies was remarkable, and within eccentric limits his knowledge was so extraordinarily ample and minute that his observations have fairly astounded me. Surely no man would work so hard or attain such precise information unless he had some definite end in view. Desultory readers are seldom remarkable for the exactness of their learning. No man burdens his mind with small matters unless he has some very good reason for doing so.

His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. Upon my quoting Thomas Carlyle⁶³, he enquired in the naivest way who he might be and what he had done. My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory⁶⁴ and of the composition of the Solar System. That any civilized human being in this nineteenth century should not be aware that the earth travelled round the sun appeared to be to me such an extraordinary fact that I could hardly realize it.

'You appear to be astonished,' he said, smiling at my expression of surprise. 'Now that I do know it I shall do my best to forget it.'

'To forget it!'

'You see,' he explained, 'I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things, so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones.'

'But the Solar System!' I protested.

'What the deuce is it to me?' he interrupted impatiently; 'you say that we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me or to my work.'

I was on the point of asking him what that work might be, but something in his manner showed me that the question would be an unwelcome one. I pondered over our short conversation, however, and endeavoured to draw my deductions from it. He said that he would acquire no knowledge which did not bear upon his object. Therefore all the knowledge which he possessed was such as would be useful to him; I enumerated in my own mind all the various points upon which he had shown me

⁶³ **Thomas Carlyle** (1795–1881) – a famous British historian and essayist

⁶⁴ **the Copernican Theory** – the heliocentric or Sun-centred system; Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) was a Polish astronomer who said that the Sun is a fixed point, and the Earth and other planets orbit the Sun

that he was exceptionally well-informed. I even took a pencil and jotted them down. I could not help smiling at the document when I had completed it. It ran in this way: —

Sherlock Holmes —
his limits.

1. Knowledge of literature. – Nil.
2. Knowledge of Philosophy. – Nil.
3. Knowledge of Astronomy. – Nil.
4. Knowledge of Politics. – Feeble.
5. Knowledge of Botany. – Variable. Well up in belladonna⁶⁵, opium⁶⁶, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.
6. Knowledge of Geology. – Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.
7. Knowledge of Chemistry. – Profound.
8. Knowledge of Anatomy. – Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. Knowledge of Sensational Literature. – Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.
10. Plays the violin well.
11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
13. Has a good practical knowledge of British law.

When I got so far in my list I threw it into the fire in despair. ‘If I could only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments and discovering a calling which needs them all,’ I said to myself, ‘I may as well give up the attempt at once.’

I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn’s⁶⁷ *Lieder*⁶⁸, and other favourites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognised air. Leaning back in his arm-chair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy, was more than I could determine. I might have rebelled against these exasperating solos had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favourite airs as a slight compensation for the trial upon my patience.

During the first week or so we had no callers, and I had begun to think that my companion was as friendless a man as I was myself. Presently, however, I found that he had many acquaintances, and those in the most different classes of society. There was one little sallow, rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow, who was introduced to me as Mr. Lestrade, and who came three or four times in a single week. One morning a young girl called, fashionably dressed, and stayed for half an hour or more. The same afternoon brought a grey-headed, seedy visitor, looking like a Jew pedlar, who appeared to me to be much excited, and who was closely followed by a slipshod elderly woman. On another occasion an old white-haired gentleman had an interview with my companion; and on another, a railway porter in his velveteen uniform. When any of these non-descript individuals put in an appearance, Sherlock Holmes used to beg for the use of the sitting-room, and I would retire to my bedroom. He always

⁶⁵ **belladonna** – a drug made from a poisonous plant of the same name

⁶⁶ **opium** – a narcotic drug made from poppy and used to relieve pain

⁶⁷ **Mendelssohn** – Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847), a German composer, conductor and pianist of the Romantic period

⁶⁸ **Lieder** – songs (*German*)

apologized to me for putting me to this inconvenience. 'I have to use this room as a place of business,' he said, 'and these people are my clients.' Again I had an opportunity of asking him a point-blank question, and again my delicacy prevented me from forcing another man to confide in me. I imagined at the time that he had some strong reason for not alluding to it, but he soon dispelled the idea by coming round to the subject of his own accord.

It was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast. The landlady had become so accustomed to my late habits that my place had not been laid nor my coffee prepared. With the unreasonable petulance of mankind I rang the bell and gave a curt intimation that I was ready. Then I picked up a magazine from the table and attempted to while away the time with it, while my companion munched silently at his toast. One of the articles had a pencil mark at the heading, and I naturally began to run my eye through it.

Its somewhat ambitious title was 'The Book of Life,' and it attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way. It struck me as being a remarkable mixture of shrewdness and of absurdity. The reasoning was close and intense, but the deductions appeared to me to be far-fetched and exaggerated. The writer claimed by a momentary expression, a twitch of a muscle or a glance of an eye, to fathom a man's inmost thoughts. Deceit, according to him, was an impossibility in the case of one trained to observation and analysis. His conclusions were as infallible as so many propositions of Euclid⁶⁹. So startling would his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the processes by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him as a necromancer.

'From a drop of water,' said the writer, 'a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara⁷⁰ without having seen or heard of one of the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction⁷¹ and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study, nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the inquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. Let him on meeting a fellow-mortal learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation, and teaches one where to look and what to look for. By a man's finger-nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser-knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt-cuffs – by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent inquirer in any case is almost inconceivable.'

'What ineffable twaddle!' I cried, slapping the magazine down on the table; 'I never read such rubbish in my life.'

'What is it?' asked Sherlock Holmes.

'Why this article,' I said, pointing at it with my egg-spoon as I sat down to my breakfast.

'I see that you have read it since you have marked it. I don't deny that it is smartly written. It irritates me though. It is evidently the theory of some arm-chair lounge who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study. It is not practical. I should like to see him clapped down in a third-class carriage on the Underground, and asked to give the trades of all his fellow-travellers. I would lay a thousand to one against him.'

'You would lose your money,' Holmes remarked calmly. 'As for the article, I wrote it myself.'

⁶⁹ **Euclid** (the 2nd century BC) – an outstanding Greek mathematician of the antique period who is best known for his works in geometry

⁷⁰ **Niagara** – the Niagara River flowing from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario on the USA-Canadian frontier; the Niagara Falls lie on the border between Ontario, Canada and New York state

⁷¹ **deduction** – a conclusion made in the process of reasoning from the general to the particular

‘You!’

‘Yes; I have a turn both for observation and for deduction. The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical⁷², are really extremely practical – so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese.’

‘And how?’ I asked involuntarily.

‘Well, I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I’m a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault, they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the hold of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight. There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can’t unravel the thousand and first. Lestrade is a well-known detective. He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was what brought him here.’

‘And these other people?’

‘They are mostly sent on by private inquiry agencies. They are all people who are in trouble about something, and want a little enlightening. I listen to their story, they listen to my comments, and then I pocket my fee.’

‘But do you mean to say,’ I said, ‘that without leaving your room you can unravel some knot which other men can make nothing of, although they have seen every detail for themselves?’

‘Quite so. I have a kind of intuition that way. Now and again a case turns up which is a little more complex. Then I have to bustle about and see things with my own eyes. You see I have a lot of special knowledge which I apply to the problem, and which facilitates matters wonderfully. Those rules of deduction laid down in that article which aroused your scorn are invaluable to me in practical work. Observation with me is second nature. You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan.’

‘You were told, no doubt.’

‘Nothing of the sort. *Iknew* you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, ‘Here is a gentleman of the medical type, but with the air of a military man. Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured: He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.’ The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished.’

‘It is simple enough as you explain it,’ I said smiling. ‘You remind me of Edgar Allen Poe’s⁷³ Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories.’

Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. ‘No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin,’ he observed. ‘Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends’ thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour’s silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.’

‘Have you read Gaboriau’s⁷⁴ works?’ I asked. ‘Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?’

⁷² **chimerical** – unreal; from *chimera* – a horrible creature of imagination, or some impossible idea or fancy

⁷³ **Edgar Allan Poe** (1809–1849) – an American writer and poet who is best known as the author of tales of horror and detective stories

⁷⁴ **Gaboriau** – Émile Gaboriau (1833–1873), a French novelist, the father of the detective novel

Sherlock Holmes sniffed sardonically. 'Lecoq was a miserable bungler,' he said, in an angry voice; 'he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty-four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid.'

I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style. I walked over to the window, and stood looking out into the busy street. 'This fellow may be very clever,' I said to myself, 'but he is certainly very conceited.'

'There are no crimes and no criminals in these days,' he said, querulously. 'What is the use of having brains in our profession. I know well that I have it in me to make my name famous. No man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done. And what is the result? There is no crime to detect, or, at most, some bungling villainy with a motive so transparent that even a Scotland Yard official can see through it.'

I was still annoyed at his bumptious style of conversation; I thought it best to change the topic.

'I wonder what that fellow is looking for?' I asked, pointing to a stalwart, plainly-dressed individual who was walking slowly down the other side of the street, looking anxiously at the numbers. He had a large blue envelope in his hand, and was evidently the bearer of a message.

'You mean the retired sergeant of Marines,' said Sherlock Holmes.

'Brag and bounce!' thought I to myself. 'He knows that I cannot verify his guess.'

The thought had hardly passed through my mind when the man whom we were watching caught sight of the number on our door, and ran rapidly across the roadway. We heard a loud knock, a deep voice below, and heavy steps ascending the stairs.

'For Mr. Sherlock Holmes,' he said, stepping into the room and handing my friend the letter.

Here was an opportunity of taking the conceit out of him. He little thought of this when he made that random shot. 'May I ask, my lad,' I said, in the blandest voice, 'what your trade may be?'

'Commissionaire, sir,' he said, gruffly. 'Uniform away for repairs.'

'And you were?' I asked, with a slightly malicious glance at my companion.

'A sergeant, sir, Royal Marine Light Infantry, sir. No answer? Right, sir.'

He clicked his heels together, raised his hand in a salute, and was gone.

Chapter III

The Lauriston Gardens mystery

I confess that I was considerably startled by this fresh proof of the practical nature of my companion's theories. My respect for his power of analysis increased wondrously. There still remained some lurking suspicion in my mind, however, that the whole thing was a prearranged episode, intended to dazzle me, though what earthly object he could have in taking me in was past my comprehension. When I looked at him, he had finished reading the note, and his eyes had assumed the vacant, lack-lustre expression which showed mental abstraction.

'How in the world did you deduce that?' I asked.

'Deduce what?' said he, petulantly.

'Why, that he was a retired sergeant of Marines.'

'I have no time for trifles,' he answered, brusquely; then with a smile, 'Excuse my rudeness. You broke the thread of my thoughts; but perhaps it is as well. So you actually were not able to see that that man was a sergeant of Marines?'

'No, indeed.'

'It was easier to know it than to explain why I know it. If you were asked to prove that two and two made four, you might find some difficulty, and yet you are quite sure of the fact. Even across the street I could see a great blue anchor tattooed on the back of the fellow's hand. That smacked of the

sea. He had a military carriage, however, and regulation side whiskers. There we have the marine. He was a man with some amount of self-importance and a certain air of command. You must have observed the way in which he held his head and swung his cane. A steady, respectable, middle-aged man, too, on the face of him – all facts which led me to believe that he had been a sergeant.’

‘Wonderful!’ I ejaculated.

‘Commonplace,’ said Holmes, though I thought from his expression that he was pleased at my evident surprise and admiration. ‘I said just now that there were no criminals. It appears that I am wrong – look at this!’ He threw me over the note which the commissionaire had brought.

‘Why,’ I cried, as I cast my eye over it, ‘this is terrible!’

‘It does seem to be a little out of the common,’ he remarked, calmly. ‘Would you mind reading it to me aloud?’

This is the letter which I read to him, —

‘My dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes, —

‘There has been a bad business during the night at 3, Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. Our man on the beat saw a light there about two in the morning, and as the house was an empty one, suspected that something was amiss. He found the door open, and in the front room, which is bare of furniture, discovered the body of a gentleman, well dressed, and having cards in his pocket bearing the name of ‘Enoch J. Drebbler, Cleveland⁷⁵, Ohio⁷⁶, U.S.A.’ There had been no robbery, nor is there any evidence as to how the man met his death. There are marks of blood in the room, but there is no wound upon his person. We are at a loss as to how he came into the empty house; indeed, the whole affair is a puzzler. If you can come round to the house any time before twelve, you will find me there. I have left everything *in status quo*⁷⁷ until I hear from you. If you are unable to come, I shall give you fuller details, and would esteem it a great kindness if you would favour me with your opinion.

‘Yours faithfully, Tobias Gregson.’

‘Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders,’ my friend remarked; ‘he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. They are both quick and energetic, but conventional – shockingly so. They have their knives into one another, too. They are as jealous as a pair of professional beauties. There will be some fun over this case if they are both put upon the scent.’

I was amazed at the calm way in which he rippled on. ‘Surely there is not a moment to be lost,’ I cried; ‘shall I go and order you a cab?’

‘I’m not sure about whether I shall go. I am the most incurably lazy devil that ever stood in shoe leather – that is, when the fit is on me, for I can be spry enough at times.’

‘Why, it is just such a chance as you have been longing for.’

‘My dear fellow, what does it matter to me? Supposing I unravel the whole matter, you may be sure that Gregson, Lestrade, and Co. will pocket all the credit. That comes of being an unofficial personage.’

‘But he begs you to help him.’

‘Yes. He knows that I am his superior, and acknowledges it to me; but he would cut his tongue out before he would own it to any third person. However, we may as well go and have a look. I shall work it out on my own hook. I may have a laugh at them, if I have nothing else. Come on!’

He hustled on his overcoat, and bustled about in a way that showed that an energetic fit had superseded the apathetic one.

‘Get your hat,’ he said.

⁷⁵ **Cleveland** – a city and port in northeastern Ohio, the USA, on the southern shore of Lake Erie

⁷⁶ **Ohio** – a state in the Middle West of the USA

⁷⁷ **status quo** – the situation as it is now

‘You wish me to come?’

‘Yes, if you have nothing better to do.’ A minute later we were both in a hansom, driving furiously for the Brixton Road.

It was a foggy, cloudy morning, and a dun-coloured veil hung over the house-tops, looking like the reflection of the mud-coloured streets beneath. My companion was in the best of spirits, and prattled away about Cremona⁷⁸ fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius⁷⁹ and an Amati⁸⁰. As for myself, I was silent, for the dull weather and the melancholy business upon which we were engaged, depressed my spirits.

‘You don’t seem to give much thought to the matter in hand,’ I said at last, interrupting Holmes’ musical disquisition.

‘No data yet,’ he answered. ‘It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment.’

‘You will have your data soon,’ I remarked, pointing with my finger; ‘this is the Brixton Road, and that is the house, if I am not very much mistaken.’

‘So it is. Stop, driver, stop!’ We were still a hundred yards or so from it, but he insisted upon our alighting, and we finished our journey upon foot.

Number 3, Lauriston Gardens wore an ill-omened and minatory look. It was one of four which stood back some little way from the street, two being occupied and two empty. The latter looked out with three tiers of vacant melancholy windows, which were blank and dreary, save that here and there a ‘To Let’ card had developed like a cataract⁸¹ upon the bleared panes. A small garden sprinkled over with a scattered eruption of sickly plants separated each of these houses from the street, and was traversed by a narrow pathway, yellowish in colour, and consisting apparently of a mixture of clay and of gravel. The whole place was very sloppy from the rain which had fallen through the night. The garden was bounded by a three-foot brick wall with a fringe of wood rails upon the top, and against this wall was leaning a stalwart police constable, surrounded by a small knot of loafers, who craned their necks and strained their eyes in the vain hope of catching some glimpse of the proceedings within.

I had imagined that Sherlock Holmes would at once have hurried into the house and plunged into a study of the mystery. Nothing appeared to be further from his intention. With an air of nonchalance which, under the circumstances, seemed to me to border upon affectation, he lounged up and down the pavement, and gazed vacantly at the ground, the sky, the opposite houses and the line of railings. Having finished his scrutiny, he proceeded slowly down the path, or rather down the fringe of grass which flanked the path, keeping his eyes riveted upon the ground. Twice he stopped, and once I saw him smile, and heard him utter an exclamation of satisfaction. There were many marks of footsteps upon the wet clayey soil; but since the police had been coming and going over it, I was unable to see how my companion could hope to learn anything from it. Still I had had such extraordinary evidence of the quickness of his perceptive faculties, that I had no doubt that he could see a great deal which was hidden from me.

At the door of the house we were met by a tall, white-faced, flaxen-haired man, with a notebook in his hand, who rushed forward and wrung my companion’s hand with effusion. ‘It is indeed kind of you to come,’ he said, ‘I have had everything left untouched.’

⁷⁸ **Cremona** – a city in northern Italy, southwest of Milan, founded in 218 BC by the Romans; the city is famous for its school of violin making

⁷⁹ **Stradivarius** – Antonio Stradivari (1644–1737), a famous Italian violin maker whose violins are still considered the best

⁸⁰ **Amati** – a family of famous Italian violin makers in Cremona in the 16th-17th centuries; Nicolo Amati was the teacher of Stradivari.

⁸¹ **cataract** – a disease of the eye; the illness at eye

‘Except that!’ my friend answered, pointing at the pathway. ‘If a herd of buffaloes had passed along there could not be a greater mess. No doubt, however, you had drawn your own conclusions, Gregson, before you permitted this.’

‘I have had so much to do inside the house,’ the detective said evasively. ‘My colleague, Mr. Lestrade, is here. I had relied upon him to look after this.’

Holmes glanced at me and raised his eyebrows sardonically. ‘With two such men as yourself and Lestrade upon the ground, there will not be much for a third party to find out,’ he said.

Gregson rubbed his hands in a self-satisfied way. ‘I think we have done all that can be done,’ he answered; ‘it’s a queer case though, and I knew your taste for such things.’

‘You did not come here in a cab?’ asked Sherlock Holmes.

‘No, sir.’

‘Nor Lestrade?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Then let us go and look at the room.’ With which inconsequent remark he strode on into the house, followed by Gregson, whose features expressed his astonishment.

A short passage, bare-planked and dusty, led to the kitchen and offices. Two doors opened out of it to the left and to the right. One of these had obviously been closed for many weeks. The other belonged to the dining-room, which was the apartment in which the mysterious affair had occurred. Holmes walked in, and I followed him with that subdued feeling at my heart which the presence of death inspires.

It was a large square room, looking all the larger from the absence of all furniture. A vulgar flaring paper adorned the walls, but it was blotched in places with mildew; and here and there great strips had become detached and hung down, exposing the yellow plaster beneath. Opposite the door was a showy fireplace, surmounted by a mantelpiece of imitation white marble. On one corner of this was stuck the stump of a red wax candle. The solitary window was so dirty that the light was hazy and uncertain, giving a dull grey tinge to everything, which was intensified by the thick layer of dust which coated the whole apartment.

All these details I observed afterwards. At present my attention was centred upon the single, grim, motionless figure which lay stretched upon the boards, with vacant, sightless eyes staring up at the discoloured ceiling. It was that of a man about forty-three or forty-four years of age, middle-sized, broad-shouldered, with crisp curling black hair, and a short, stubbly beard. He was dressed in a heavy broadcloth frock coat and waistcoat, with light-coloured trousers, and immaculate collar and cuffs. A top hat, well brushed and trim, was placed upon the floor beside him. His hands were clenched and his arms thrown abroad, while his lower limbs were interlocked, as though his death struggle had been a grievous one. On his rigid face there stood an expression of horror, and as it seemed to me, of hatred, such as I have never seen upon human features. This malignant and terrible contortion, combined with the low forehead, blunt nose, and prognathous jaw, gave the dead man a singularly simious and ape-like appearance, which was increased by his writhing, unnatural posture. I have seen death in many forms, but never has it appeared to me in a more fearsome aspect than in that dark, grimy apartment, which looked out upon one of the main arteries of suburban London.

Lestrade, lean and ferret-like as ever, was standing by the door-way, and greeted my companion and myself.

‘This case will make a stir, sir,’ he remarked. ‘It beats anything I have seen, and I am no chicken.’

‘There is no clue?’ said Gregson.

‘None at all,’ chimed in Lestrade.

Sherlock Holmes approached the body, and kneeling down, examined it intently. ‘You are sure that there is no wound?’ he asked, pointing to numerous gouts and splashes of blood which lay all round.

‘Positive!’ cried both detectives.

‘Then, of course, this blood belongs to a second individual – presumably the murderer, if murder has been committed. It reminds me of the circumstances attendant on the death of Van Jansen, in Utrecht⁸², in the year ’34. Do you remember the case, Gregson?’

‘No, sir.’

‘Read it up – you really should. There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before.’

As he spoke, his nimble fingers were flying here, there, and everywhere, feeling, pressing, unbuttoning, examining, while his eyes wore the same far-away expression which I have already remarked upon. So swiftly was the examination made, that one would hardly have guessed the minuteness with which it was conducted. Finally, he sniffed the dead man’s lips, and then glanced at the soles of his patent leather boots.

‘He has not been moved at all?’ he asked.

‘No more than was necessary for the purposes of our examination.’

‘You can take him to the mortuary now,’ he said. ‘There is nothing more to be learned.’

Gregson had a stretcher and four men at hand. At his call they entered the room, and the stranger was lifted and carried out. As they raised him, a ring tinkled down and rolled across the floor. Lestrade grabbed it up and stared at it with mystified eyes.

‘There’s been a woman here,’ he cried. ‘It’s a woman’s wedding-ring.’

He held it out as he spoke, upon the palm of his hand. We all gathered round him and gazed at it. There could be no doubt that that circlet of plain gold had once adorned the finger of a bride.

‘This complicates matters,’ said Gregson. ‘Heaven knows, they were complicated enough before.’

‘You’re sure it doesn’t simplify them?’ observed Holmes. ‘There’s nothing to be learned by staring at it. What did you find in his pockets?’

‘We have it all here,’ said Gregson, pointing to a litter of objects upon one of the bottom steps of the stairs. ‘A gold watch, No. 97163, by Barraud, of London. Gold Albert chain, very heavy and solid. Gold ring, with masonic⁸³ device. Gold pin – bull-dog’s head, with rubies as eyes. Russian leather card-case, with cards of Enoch J. Drebber of Cleveland, corresponding with the E. J. D. upon the linen. No purse, but loose money to the extent of seven pounds thirteen. Pocket edition of Boccaccio⁸⁴’s *Decameron*⁸⁵, with name of Joseph Stangerson upon the fly-leaf. Two letters – one addressed to E. J. Drebber and one to Joseph Stangerson.’

‘At what address?’

‘American Exchange, Strand⁸⁶ – to be left till called for. They are both from the Guion Steamship Company, and refer to the sailing of their boats from Liverpool. It is clear that this unfortunate man was about to return to New York.’

‘Have you made any inquiries as to this man Stangerson?’

‘I did it at once, sir,’ said Gregson. ‘I have had advertisements sent to all the newspapers, and one of my men has gone to the American Exchange, but he has not returned yet.’

‘Have you sent to Cleveland?’

‘We telegraphed this morning.’

‘How did you word your inquiries?’

‘We simply detailed the circumstances, and said that we should be glad of any information which could help us.’

⁸² **Utrecht** – a city in the central Netherlands

⁸³ **masonic** – related to masons, a worldwide esoteric brotherhood; their teaching includes ancient wisdom, mysticism and religious beliefs of the past

⁸⁴ **Boccaccio** – Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), an Italian writer and poet of the early Renaissance period, the author of the famous ‘Decameron’

⁸⁵ **Decameron** – a book of tales written by Boccaccio in about 1350, a masterpiece of early Italian prose

⁸⁶ (the)**Strand** – one of the main streets in central London, between the West End and the City

‘You did not ask for particulars on any point which appeared to you to be crucial?’

‘I asked about Stangerson.’

‘Nothing else? Is there no circumstance on which this whole case appears to hinge? Will you not telegraph again?’

‘I have said all I have to say,’ said Gregson, in an offended voice.

Sherlock Holmes chuckled to himself, and appeared to be about to make some remark, when Lestrade, who had been in the front room while we were holding this conversation in the hall, reappeared upon the scene, rubbing his hands in a pompous and self-satisfied manner.

‘Mr. Gregson,’ he said, ‘I have just made a discovery of the highest importance, and one which would have been overlooked had I not made a careful examination of the walls.’

The little man’s eyes sparkled as he spoke, and he was evidently in a state of suppressed exultation at having scored a point against his colleague.

‘Come here,’ he said, bustling back into the room, the atmosphere of which felt clearer since the removal of its ghastly inmate.

‘Now stand there!’

He struck a match on his boot and held it up against the wall.

‘Look at that!’ he said, triumphantly.

I have remarked that the paper had fallen away in parts. In this particular corner of the room a large piece had peeled off, leaving a yellow square of coarse plastering. Across this bare space there was scrawled in blood-red letters a single word —

RACHE

‘What do you think of that?’ cried the detective, with the air of a showman exhibiting his show. ‘This was overlooked because it was in the darkest corner of the room, and no one thought of looking there. The murderer has written it with his or her own blood. See this smear where it has trickled down the wall! That disposes of the idea of suicide anyhow. Why was that corner chosen to write it on? I will tell you. See that candle on the mantelpiece. It was lit at the time, and if it was lit this corner would be the brightest instead of the darkest portion of the wall.’

‘And what does it mean now that you *have* found it?’ asked Gregson in a depreciatory voice.

‘Mean? Why, it means that the writer was going to put the female name Rachel, but was disturbed before he or she had time to finish. You mark my words, when this case comes to be cleared up, you will find that a woman named Rachel has something to do with it. It’s all very well for you to laugh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. You may be very smart and clever, but the old hound is the best, when all is said and done.’

‘I really beg your pardon!’ said my companion, who had ruffled the little man’s temper by bursting into an explosion of laughter. ‘You certainly have the credit of being the first of us to find this out and, as you say, it bears every mark of having been written by the other participant in last night’s mystery. I have not had time to examine this room yet, but with your permission I shall do so now.’

As he spoke he whipped a tape measure and a large round magnifying glass from his pocket. With these two implements he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a pure-blooded, well-trained foxhound as it dashes backwards and forwards through the covert, whining in its eagerness, until it comes across the lost scent. For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most exact care the distance between marks which were entirely invisible to me, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally incomprehensible manner. In one place he gathered up very carefully a little pile of grey dust from the floor, and packed it away in an envelope.

Finally he examined with his glass the word upon the wall, going over every letter of it with the most minute exactness. This done, he appeared to be satisfied, for he replaced his tape and his glass in his pocket.

‘They say that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains,’ he remarked with a smile. ‘It’s a very bad definition, but it does apply to detective work.’

Gregson and Lestrade had watched the manoeuvres of their amateur companion with considerable curiosity and some contempt. They evidently failed to appreciate the fact, which I had begun to realize, that Sherlock Holmes’ smallest actions were all directed towards some definite and practical end.

‘What do you think of it, sir?’ they both asked.

‘It would be robbing you of the credit of the case if I was to presume to help you,’ remarked my friend. ‘You are doing so well now that it would be a pity for any one to interfere.’ There was a world of sarcasm in his voice as he spoke. ‘If you will let me know how your investigations go,’ he continued, ‘I shall be happy to give you any help I can. In the meantime I should like to speak to the constable who found the body. Can you give me his name and address?’

Lestrade glanced at his notebook; ‘John Rance,’ he said. ‘He is off duty now. You will find him at 46, Audley Court, Kennington Park Gate.’

Holmes took a note of the address.

‘Come along, Doctor,’ he said ‘we shall go and look him up. I’ll tell you one thing which may help you in the case,’ he continued turning to the two detectives. ‘There has been murder done, and the murderer was a man. He was more than six feet high, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, square-toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly⁸⁷ cigar. He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off fore-leg. In all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the finger-nails of his right hand were remarkably long. These are only a few of the indications, but they may assist you.’

Lestrade and Gregson glanced at each other with an incredulous smile.

‘If this man was murdered, how was it done?’ asked the former.

‘Poison,’ said Sherlock Holmes curtly, and strode off. ‘One other thing, Lestrade,’ he added, turning round at the door: “‘Rache,’ is the German for “revenge”; so don’t lose your time looking for Miss Rachel.’

With which Parthian shot⁸⁸ he walked away, leaving the two rivals open-mouthed behind him.

Chapter IV

What John Rance had to tell

It was one o’clock when we left No. 3, Lauriston Gardens. Sherlock Holmes led me to the nearest telegraph office, whence he dispatched a long telegram. He then hailed a cab, and ordered the driver to take us to the address given us by Lestrade.

‘There is nothing like first-hand evidence,’ he remarked; ‘as a matter of fact, my mind is entirely made up upon the case, but still we may as well learn all that is to be learned.’

‘You amaze me, Holmes,’ said I. ‘Surely you are not as sure as you pretend to be of all those particulars which you gave.’

‘There’s no room for a mistake,’ he answered. ‘The very first thing which I observed on arriving there was that a cab had made two ruts with its wheels close to the curb. Now, up to last night, we have had no rain for a week, so that those wheels which left such a deep impression must have been there during the night. There were the marks of the horse’s hoofs, too, the outline of one of which

⁸⁷ **Trichinopoly**— a city in southeastern India

⁸⁸ **Parthian shot** – *idiom* smth. said or done as a final reply at parting

was far more clearly cut than that of the other three, showing that that was a new shoe. Since the cab was there after the rain began, and was not there at any time during the morning – I have Gregson's word for that – it follows that it must have been there during the night, and, therefore, that it brought those two individuals to the house.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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