

Le Fanu Joseph Sheridan

# Guy Deverell. Volume 1 of 2



Joseph Le Fanu

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## Guy Deverell, v. 1 of 2

### CHAPTER I

#### Sir Jekyl Marlowe at the Plough Inn

The pretty little posting station, known as the Plough Inn, on the Old London Road, where the Sterndale Road crosses it, was in a state of fuss and awe, at about five o'clock on a fine sharp October evening, for Sir Jekyl Marlowe, a man of many thousand acres, and M.P. for the county, was standing with his back to the fire, in the parlour, whose bow-window looks out on the ancient thoroughfare I have mentioned, over the row of scarlet geraniums which beautify the window-stone.

"Hollo!" cried the Baronet, as the bell-rope came down in answer to an energetic but not angry pull, and he received Mrs. Jones, his hostess, who entered at the moment, with the dismantled bell-handle still in his hand. "At my old tricks, you see. I've been doing you a mischief, hey? but we'll set it right in the bill, you know. How devilish well you look! wonderful girl, by Jove! Come in, my dear, and shut the door. Not afraid of me. I want to talk of ducks and mutton-chops. I've had no luncheon, and I'm awfully hungry," said the comely Baronet in a continued chuckle.

The Baronet was, by that awful red-bound volume of dates, which is one of the melancholy drawbacks of aristocracy, set down just then, and by all whom it might concern, ascertainable to be precisely forty-nine years and three months old; but so well had he worn, and so cleverly was he got up, that he might have passed for little more than forty.

He was smiling, with very white teeth, and a gay leer on pretty Mrs. Jones, an old friend, with black eyes and tresses, and pink cheeks, who bore her five-and-thirty years as well almost as he did his own burthen. The slanting autumnal sun became her, and she simpered and courtesied and blushed the best she could.

"Well, you pretty little devil, what can you do for me – hey? You know we're old friends – hey? What have you got for a hungry fellow? and don't stand at the door there, hang it – come in, can't you? and let me hear what you say."

So Mrs. Jones, with a simpering bashfulness, delivered her bill of fare off book.

The Baronet was a gallant English gentleman, and came of a healthy race, though there were a 'beau' and an archbishop in the family; he could rough it good-humouredly on beefsteak and port, and had an accommodating appetite as to hours.

"That will do very nicely, my dear, thank you. You're just the same dear hospitable little rogue I remember you – how long is it, by Jove, since I stopped here that day, and the awful thunderstorm at night, don't you recollect? and the whole house in such a devil of a row, egad!" And the Baronet chuckled and leered, with his hands in his pockets.

"Three years, by Jove, I think – eh?"

"Four years in August last, Sir Jekyl," she answered, with a little toss of her head and a courtesy.

"Four years, my dear – four devils! Is it possible? why upon my life it has positively improved you." And he tapped her cheek playfully with his finger. "And what o'clock is it?" he continued, looking at his watch, "just five. Well, I suppose you'll be ready in half-an-hour – eh, my dear?"

"Sooner, if you wish, Sir Jekyl."

"No, thank you, dear, that will do very nicely; and stay," he added, with a pluck at her pink ribbon, as she retreated: "you've some devilish good port here, unless it's all out – old Lord Hogwood's stock – eh?"

"More than two dozen left, Sir Jekyl; would you please some?"

"You've hit it, you wicked little conjurer – a bottle; and you must give me a few minutes after dinner, and a cup of coffee, and tell me all the news – eh?"

The Baronet, standing on the threadbare hearthrug, looked waggishly, as it were, through the panels of the shut door, after the fluttering cap of his pretty landlady. Then he turned about and reviewed himself in the sea-green mirror over the chimneypiece, adjusted his curls and whiskers with a touch or two of his fingers' ends, and plucked a little at his ample silk necktie, and shook out his tresses, with his chin a little up, and a saucy simper.

But a man tires even of that prospect; and he turned on his heel, and whistled at the smoky mezzotint of George III. on the opposite wall. Then he turned his head, and looked out through the bow-window, and his whistling stopped in the middle of a bar, at sight of a young man whom he espied, only a yard or two before the covered porch of the little inn.

This young gentleman was, it seemed, giving a parting direction to some one in the doorway. He was tall, slender, rather dark, and decidedly handsome. There were, indeed, in his air, face, and costume, that indescribable elegance and superiority which constitute a man "distinguished looking."

When Sir Jekyl beheld this particularly handsome young man, it was with a disagreeable shock, like the tap on a big drum, upon his diaphragm. If anyone had been there he would have witnessed an odd and grizzly change in the pleasant Baronet's countenance. For a few seconds he did not move. Then he drew back a pace or two, and stood at the further side of the fire, with the mantelpiece partially between him and the young gentleman who spoke his parting directions, all unconscious of the haggard stare which made Sir Jekyl look a great deal less young and good-natured than was his wont.

This handsome young stranger, smiling, signalled with his cane, as it seemed, to a companion, who had preceded him, and ran in pursuit.

For a time Sir Jekyl did not move a muscle, and then, with a sudden pound on the chimneypiece, and a great oath, he exclaimed —

"I could not have believed it! What the devil can it mean?"

Then the Baronet bethought him — "What confounded stuff one does talk and think, sometimes! Half the matter dropt out of my mind. Twenty years ago, by Jove, too. *More* than that, egad! How could I be such an ass?"

And he countermarched, and twirled on his heel into his old place, with his back to the fire, and chuckled and asked again —

"How the plague *could* I be such a fool?"

And after some more of this sort of catechism he began to ruminate oddly once more, and, said he —

"It's plaguy *odd*, for all that."

And he walked to the window, and, with his face close to the glass, tried in vain to see the stranger again. The bow-window did not command the road far enough to enable him to see any distance; and he stuck his hat on his head, and marched by the bar, through the porch, and, standing upon the road itself, looked shrewdly in the same direction.

But the road makes a bend about there, and between the hedgerows of that wooded country the vista was not far.

With a cheerful air of carelessness, Sir Jekyl returned and tapped on the bar window.

"I say, Mrs. Jones, who's that good-looking young fellow that went out just now?"

"The gentleman in the low-crowned hat, sir, with the gold-headed cane, please?"

"Yes, a tall young fellow, with large dark eyes, and brown hair."

"That will be Mr. Strangers, Sir Jekyl."

"Does he sleep here to-night?"

"Yes, sir, please."

"And what's his business?"

"Oh, dear! No business, Sir Jekyl, please. He's a real gentleman, and no end of money."

"I mean, how does he amuse himself?"

"A looking after prospects, and old places, and such like, Sir Jekyl. Sometimes riding and sometimes a fly. Every day some place or other."

"Oh! pencils and paint-boxes – eh?"

"I haven't seen none, sir. I can't say how that will be."

"Well, and what is he about; where is he gone; where is he now?" demanded the Baronet.

"What way did Mr. Strangers go, Bill, just now?" the lady demanded of boots, who appeared at the moment.

"The Abbey, ma'am."

"The Abbey, please, Sir Jekyl."

"The Abbey – that's Wail Abbey – eh? How far is it?"

"How far will it be, Bill?"

"'Taint a mile all out, ma'am."

"Not quite a mile, Sir Jekyl."

"A good ruin – isn't it?" asked the Baronet.

"Well, they do say it's *very* much out of repair; but I never saw it myself, Sir Jekyl."

"Neither did I," said Sir Jekyl. "I say, my good fellow, you can point it out, I dare say, from the steps here?"

"Ay, please, Sir Jekyl."

"You'll have dinner put back, Sir – please, Sir Jekyl?" asked Mrs. Jones.

"Back or forward, *any* way, my dear child. Only I'll have my walk first."

And kissing and waving the tips of his fingers, with a smile to Mrs. Jones, who courtesied and simpered, though her heart was perplexed with culinary solitudes "how to keep the water from getting into the trout, and prevent the ducks of overroasting," the worthy Baronet, followed by Bill, stepped through the porch, and on the ridge of the old high-road, his own heart being oddly disturbed with certain cares which had given him a long respite; there he received Bill's directions as to the route to the Abbey.

It was a clear frosty evening. The red round sun by this time, near the horizon, looked as if a tall man on the summit of the western hill might have touched its edge with his finger. The Baronet looked on the declining luminary as he buttoned his loose coat across his throat, till his eyes were almost dazzled, thinking all the time of nothing but that handsome young man; and as he walked on briskly toward the Abbey, he saw little pale green suns dancing along the road and wherever else his eyes were turned.

"I'll see this fellow face to face, and talk a bit with him. I dare say if one were near he's not at all so like. It *is* devilish odd though; twenty-five years and not a relation on earth – and dead – hang him! Egad, it's like the Wandering Jew, and the what do you call 'em, *vitæ*. Ay, here it is."

He paused for a moment, looking at the pretty stile which led a little pathway across the fields to the wooded hollow by the river, where the ruin stands. Two old white stone, fluted piers, once a doorway, now tufted with grass, and stained and worn by time, and the stile built up between.

"I know, of course, there's nothing in it; but it's so odd – it *is* so *devilish* odd. I'd like to know all about it," said the Baronet, picking the dust from the fluting with the point of his walking-cane. "Where has he got, I wonder, by this time?" So he mounted the stile, and paused near the summit to obtain a commanding view.

"Well, I suppose he's got among the old walls and rubbish by this time. I'll make him out; he'll break cover."

And he skipped down the stile on the other side, and whistled a little, cutting gaily in the air with his cane as he went.

But for all he could do the same intensely uncomfortable curiosity pressed upon him as he advanced. The sun sank behind the distant hills, leaving the heavens flooded with a discoloured crimson, and the faint silver of the moon in the eastern sky glimmered coldly over the fading landscape, as he suddenly emerged from the hedged pathway on the rich meadow level by the slow river's brink, on which, surrounded by lofty timber, the ruined Abbey stands.

The birds had come home. Their vesper song had sunk with the setting sun, and in the sad solitude of twilight the grey ruins rose dimly before him.

"A devilish good spot for a picnic!" said he, making an effort to recover his usual agreeable vein of thought and spirits.

So he looked up and about him, and jauntily marched over the sward, and walked along the line of the grey walls until he found a doorway, and began his explorations.

Through dark passages, up broken stairs, over grass-grown piles of rubbish, he peeped into all sorts of roofless chambers. Everything was silent and settling down into night. At last, by that narrow doorway, which in such buildings so oddly gives entrance here and there into vast apartments, he turned into that grand chamber, whose stone floor rests on the vaults beneath; and there the Baronet paused for a moment with a little start, for at the far end, looking towards him, but a little upward, with the faint reflected glow that entered through the tall row of windows, on the side of his face and figure, stood the handsome young man of whom he was in pursuit.

The Baronet being himself only a step or two from the screw stairs, and still under the shadow of the overhanging arch in the corner, the stranger saw nothing of him, and to announce his approach, though not much of a musician, he hummed a bar or two briskly as he entered, and marched across and about as if thinking of nothing but architecture or the picturesque.

"Charming ruin this, sir," exclaimed he, raising his hat, so soon as he had approached the stranger sufficiently near to make the address natural. "Although I'm a resident of this part of the world, I'm ashamed to say I never saw it before."

The young man raised his hat too, and bowed with a ceremonious grace, which, as well as his accent, had something foreign in it.

"While I, though a stranger, have been unable to resist its fascination, and have already visited it three times. You have reason to be proud of your county, sir, it is full of beauties."

The stranger's sweet, but peculiar, voice thrilled the Baronet with a recollection as vivid and detested. In fact this well-seasoned man of the world was so much shocked that he answered only with a bow, and cleared his voice, and chuckled after his fashion, but all the time felt a chill creeping over his back.

There was a broad bar of a foggy red light falling through the ivy-girt window, but the young man happened to stand at that moment in the shadow beside it, and when the Baronet's quick glance, instead of detecting some reassuring distinction of feature or expression, encountered only the ambiguous and obscure, he recoiled inwardly as from something abominable.

"Beautiful effect – beautiful sky!" exclaimed Sir Jekyl, not knowing very well what he was saying, and waving his cane upwards towards the fading tints of the sky.

The stranger emerged from his shadow and stood beside him, and such light as there was fell full upon his features, and as the Baronet beheld he felt as if he were in a dream.



## CHAPTER II

### The Baronet Visits Wardlock Manor

In fact Sir Jekyl would have been puzzled to know exactly what to say next, so odd were his sensations, and his mind so pre-occupied with a chain of extremely uncomfortable conjecture, had not the handsome young gentleman who stood beside him at the gaping window with its melancholy folds of ivy, said —

"I have often tried to analyse the peculiar interest of ruins like these – the mixture of melancholy and curiosity. I have seen very many monasteries abroad – perhaps as old as this, even older – still peopled with their monks, with very little interest indeed, and no sympathy; and yet here I feel a yearning after the bygone age of English monasticism, an anxiety to learn all about their ways and doings, and a sort of reverence and sadness I can't account for, unless it be an expression of that profound sympathy which mortals feel with every expression of decay and dissolution."

The Baronet fancied that he saw a lurking smile in the young man's face, and recoiled from psychologic talk about mortality.

"I dare say you're right, sir, but I am the worst metaphysician in the world." He thought the young man smiled again. "In your liking for the picturesque, however, I quite go with you. Do you intend extending your tour to Wales and Scotland?"

"I can hardly call this little excursion a tour. The fact is, my curiosity is pretty much limited to this county; there are old reasons which make me feel a very particular interest in it," said the young man, with a very pointed carelessness and a smile, which caused the Baronet inwardly to wince.

"I should be very happy," said Sir Jekyl, "if you would take Marlowe in your way: there are some pictures there, as well as some views you might like to see. I am Sir Jekyl Marlowe, and own two or three places in this county, which are thought pretty – and, may I give you my card?"

The snowy parallelogram was here presented and accepted with a mutual bow. The stranger was smiling oddly as Sir Jekyl introduced himself, with an expression which he fancied he could read in spite of the dark, as implying "rather old news you tell me."

"And – and – what was I going to say? – oh! – yes – if I can be of any use to you in procuring access to any house or place you wish to see, I shall be very happy. You are at present staying at my occasional quarters, the 'Plough.' I'm afraid you'll think me very impertinent and intrusive; but I should like to be able to mention your name to some of my friends, who don't usually allow strangers to see their places."

This was more like American than English politeness; but the Baronet was determined to know all about the stranger, commencing with his name, and the laws of good breeding, though he knew them very well, were not likely to stand long in his way when he had made up his mind to accomplish an object.

"My name is Guy Strangways," said the stranger.

"O – ho – it's very odd!" exclaimed the Baronet, in a sharp snarl, quite unlike his previous talk. I think the distance between them was a little increased, and he was looking askance upon the young gentleman, who made him a very low foreign bow.

There was a silence, and just then a deep metallic voice from below called, "Guy – hollo!"

"Excuse me – just a moment," and the young man was gone. The Baronet waited.

"He'll be back," muttered Sir Jekyl, "in a minute."

But the Baronet was mistaken. He waited at that open window, whistling out upon the deepening twilight, till the edges of the ivy began to glitter in the moonbeams, and the bats to trace their zigzags in the air; and at last he gave over expecting.

He looked back into the gloomy void of that great chamber, and listened, and felt rather angry at his queer sensations. He had not turned about when the stranger withdrew, and did not know the process of his vanishing, and for the first time it struck him, "who the plague could the fellow who *called* him be?"

On the whole he wished himself away, and he lighted a cigar for the sake of its vulgar associations, and made his way out of the ruins, and swiftly through darkened fields toward the Old London Road; and was more comfortable than he cared to say, when he stepped through the porch into the open hall of the "Plough," and stopped before the light at the bar, to ask his hostess once more, quite in his old way, whether Mr. Strangways had returned.

"No, not yet; always uncertain; his dinner mostly overdone."

"Has he a friend with him?"

"Yes, sir, sure."

"And what is he like?"

"Older man, Sir Jekyl, a long way than young Mr. Guy Strangways; some relation I do think."

"When do they leave you?"

"To-morrow evening, with a chaise and pair for Aukworth."

"Aukworth? why, that's another of my properties! – ha, ha, ha, by Jove! Does he know the Abbey here is mine?"

"I rayther think not, Sir Jekyl. Would you please to wish dinner?"

"To be sure, you dear little quiz, dinner by all means; and let them get my horses to in half-an-hour; and if Mr. Strangways should return before I go, I'd like to see him, and don't fail to let me know – do ye see?"

Dinner came and went, but Mr. Strangways did not return, which rather vexed Sir Jekyl, who, however, left his card for that gentleman, together with an extremely polite note, which he wrote at the bar with his hat on, inviting him and his companion to Marlowe, where he would be at home any time for the next two months, and trusted they would give him a week before they left the country.

It was now dark, and Sir Jekyl loitered under the lamplight of his chaise for a while, in the hope that Mr. Strangways would turn up. But he did not; and the Baronet jumped into the vehicle, which was forthwith in motion.

He sat in the corner, with one foot on the cushion, and lighted a cigar. His chuckling was all over, and his quizzing, for the present. Mrs. Jones had not a notion that he was in the least uneasy, or on any but hospitable thoughts intent. But anyone who now looked in his face would have seen at a glance how suddenly it had become overcast with black care.

"Guy Strangways!" he thought; "those two names, and his wonderful likeness! Prowling about this county! Why this more than another? He seemed to take a triumphant pleasure in telling me of his special fancy for this county. And his voice – a tenor they call it – I hate that sweet sort of voice. Those d – singing fellows. I dare say he sings. They never do a bit of good. It's very odd. It's the same voice. I forgot that odd silvery sound. The *same*, by Jove! I'll come to the bottom of the whole thing. D – me, I will!"

Then the Baronet puffed away fast and earnestly at his cigar, and then lighted another, and after that a third. They steadied him, I dare say, and helped to oil the mechanism of thought. But he had not recovered his wonted cheer of mind when the chaise drew up at a pair of time-worn fluted piers, with the gable of an old-fashioned dwelling-house overlooking the road at one side. An iron gate admitted to a courtyard, and the hall door of the house was opened by an old-fashioned footman, with some flour on the top of his head.

Sir Jekyl jumped down.

"Your mistress quite well, hey? My daughter ready?" inquired the Baronet. "Where are they? No, I'll not go up, thank you; I'll stay here," and he entered the parlour. "And, do you see, you just go up and ask your mistress if she wishes to see me."

By this time Sir Jekyl was poking up the fire and frowning down on the bars, with the flickering glare shooting over his face.

"Can the old woman have anything to do with it? Pooh! no. I'd like to see her. But who knows what sort of a temper she's in?"

As he thus ruminated, the domestic with the old-fashioned livery and floured head returned to say that his mistress would be happy to see him.

The servant conducted him up a broad stair with a great oak banister, and opening a drawing-room door, announced —

"Sir Jekyl Marlowe."

He was instantly in the room, and a tall, thin old lady, with a sad and stately mien, rose up to greet him.

"How is little mamma?" cried the Baronet, with his old chuckle. "An age since we met, hey? How well you look!"

The old lady gave her thin mittened hand to her son-in-law, and looked a grim and dubious sort of welcome upon him.

"Yes, Jekyl, an age; and only that Beatrix is here, I suppose another age would have passed without my seeing you. And an old woman at my years has not many ages between her and the grave."

The old lady spoke not playfully, but sternly, like one who had suffered long and horribly, and who associated her sufferings with her visitor; and in her oblique glance was something of deep-seated antipathy.

"Egad! you're younger than I, though you count more years. You live by clock and rule, and you show it. You're as fresh as that bunch of flowers there; while I am literally knocking myself to pieces — and I know it — by late hours, and all sorts of nonsense. So you must not be coming the old woman over me, you know, unless you want to frighten me. And how is Beatrix? How do, Beatrix? All ready, I see. Good child."

Beatrix at this moment was entering. She was tall and slightly formed, with large dark eyes, hair of soft shadowy black, and those tints of pure white and rich clear blush, scarlet lips, and pearly teeth, and long eyelashes, which are so beautiful in contrast and in harmony. She had the prettiest little white nose, and her face was formed in that decided oval which so heightens the charm of the features. She was not a tragic heroine. Her smile was girlish and natural — and the little ring of pearls between her lips laughed beautifully — and her dimples played on chin and cheek as she smiled.

Her father kissed her, and looked at her with a look of gratification, as he might on a good picture that belonged to him; and turning her smiling face, with his finger and thumb upon her little dimpled chin, toward Lady Alice, he said —

"Pretty well, this girl, hey?"

"I dare say, Jekyl, she'll do very well; she's not formed yet, you know," — was stately Lady Alice's qualified assent. She was one of that school who are more afraid of spoiling people than desirous of pleasing them by admiration. "She promises to be like her darling mother; and that is a melancholy satisfaction to me, and, of course, to you. You'll have some tea, Jekyl?"

The Baronet was standing, hat in hand, with his outside coat on, and his back to the fire, and a cashmere muffler loosely about his throat.

"Well, as it is here, I don't mind."

"May I run down, grandmamma, and say good-bye to Ellen and old Mrs. Mason?"

"Surely — you mean, of course to the parlour? You may have them there."

"And you must not be all night about it, Beatrix. We'll be going in a few minutes. D'ye mind?"

"I'm quite ready, papa," said she; and as she glided from the room she stole a glance at her bright reflection in the mirror.

"You are always in a hurry, Jekyl, to leave me when you chance to come here. I should be sorry, however, to interfere with the pleasanter disposition of your time."

"Now, little mother, you mustn't be huffed with me. I have a hundred and fifty things to look after at Marlowe when I get there. I have not had a great deal of time, you know – first the session, then three months knocking about the world."

"You never wrote to me since you left Paris," said the old lady, grimly.

"Didn't I? That was very wrong! But you knew those were my holidays, and I detest writing, and you knew I could take care of myself; and it is so much better to tell one's adventures than to put them into letters, don't you think?"

"If one could tell them all in five minutes," replied the old lady, drily.

"Well, but you'll come over to Marlowe – you really must – and I'll tell you everything there – the truth, the whole truth, and as much more as you like."

This invitation was repeated every year, but like Don Juan's to the statue, was not expected to lead to a literal visit.

"You have haunted rooms there, Jekyl," she said, with an unpleasant smile and a nod. "You have not kept house in Marlowe for ten years, I think. Why do you go there now?"

"Caprice, whim, what you will," said the Baronet, combing out his favourite whisker with the tips of his fingers, while he smiled on himself in the glass upon the chimneypiece, "I wish *you'd* tell me, for *I* really don't know, except that I'm tired of Warton and Dartbroke, as I am of all monotony. I like change, you know."

"Yes; you *like change*," said the old lady, with a dignified sarcasm.

"I'm afraid it's a true bill," admitted Sir Jekyl, with a chuckle, "So you'll come to Marlowe and see us there – won't you?"

"No, Jekyl – certainly *not*," said the old lady, with intense emphasis.

A little pause ensued, during which the Baronet twiddled at his whisker, and continued to smile amusedly at himself in the glass.

"I wonder you could think of asking me to Marlowe, considering all that has happened there. I sometimes wonder at myself that I can endure to see you at all, Jekyl Marlowe; and I don't think, if it were not for that dear girl, who is so like her sainted mother, I should ever set eyes on you again."

"I'm glad we have that link. You make me love Beatrix better," he replied. He was now arranging the elaborate breast-pin with its tiny chain, which was at that date in vogue.

"And so you are going to keep house at Marlowe?" resumed the lady, stiffly, not heeding the sentiment of his little speech.

"Well, so I purpose."

"I don't like that house," said the old lady, with a subdued fierceness.

"Sorry it does not please you, little mother," replied Sir Jekyl.

"You know I don't like it," she repeated.

"In that case you need not have told me," he said.

"I choose to tell you. I'll say so as often as I see you – as often as I like."

It was an odd conference – back to back – the old lady stiff and high – staring pale and grimly at the opposite wall. The Baronet looking with a quizzical smile on his handsome face in the mirror – now plucking at a whisker – now poking at a curl with his finger-tip – and now in the same light way arranging the silken fall of his necktie.

"There's nothing my dear little mamma can say, I'll not listen to with pleasure."

"There is much I might say you could not listen to with pleasure." The cold was growing more intense, and bitter in tone and emphasis, as she addressed the Italian picture of Adonis and his two dogs hanging on the distant wall.

"Well, with *respect*, *not* with pleasure – no," said he, and tapped his white upper teeth with the nail of his middle finger.

"Assuming, then, that you speak truth, it is high time, Jekyl Marlowe, that you should alter your courses – here's your daughter, just come out. It is ridiculous, your affecting the vices of youth. Make up as you will – you're past the middle age – you're an elderly man now."

"You can't vex me that way, you dear old mamma," he said, with a chuckle, which looked for the first time a little vicious in the glass. "We baronets, you know, are all booked, and all the world can read our ages; but you women manage better – you and your two dear sisters, Winifred and Georgiana."

"They are *dead*," interrupted Lady Alice, with more asperity than pathos.

"Yes, I know, poor old souls – to be sure, peers' daughters die like other people, I'm afraid."

"And when they do, are mentioned, if not with sorrow, at least with decent respect, by persons, that is, who know how to behave themselves."

There was a slight quiver in Lady Alice's lofty tone that pleased Sir Jekyl, as you might have remarked had you looked over his shoulder into the glass.

"Well, you know, I was speaking not of deaths but births, and only going to say if you look in the peerage you'll find all the men, poor devils, pinned to their birthdays, and the women left at large, to exercise their veracity on the point; but you need not care – you have not pretended to youth for the last ten years I think."

"You are excessively impertinent, sir."

"I *know* it," answered Sir Jekyl, with a jubilant chuckle.

A very little more, the Baronet knew, and Lady Alice Redcliffe would have risen gray and grim, and sailed out of the room. Their partings were often after this sort.

But he did not wish matters to go quite that length at present. So he said, in a sprightly way, as if a sudden thought had struck him —

"By Jove, I believe I *am devilish* impertinent, without knowing it though – and you have forgiven me so often, I'm sure you *will* once more, and I am really so much obliged for your kindness to Beatrix. I am, indeed."

So he took her hand, and kissed it.

## CHAPTER III

### Concerning two Remarkable Persons who appeared in Wardlock Church

Lady Alice carried her thin Roman nose some degrees higher; but she said —

"If I say anything disagreeable, it is not for the pleasure of giving you pain, Jekyl Marlowe; but I understand that you mean to have old General Lennox and his artful wife to stay at your house, and if so, I think it an arrangement that had better be dispensed with. I don't think her an eligible acquaintance for Beatrix, and you know very well she's *not*— and it is not a respectable or creditable kind of thing."

"Now, what d – d fool, I beg pardon – but who the plague has been filling your mind with those ridiculous stories – my dear little mamma? You know how ready I am to confess; you *might* at least; I tell you everything; and I do assure you I *never* admired her. She's good looking, I know; but so are fifty pictures and statues I've seen, that don't please me."

"Then it's true, the General and his wife are going on a visit to Marlowe?" insisted Lady Alice, drily.

"No, they are not. D – me, I'm not thinking of the General and his wife, nor of any such d – d trumpery. I'd give something to know who the devil's taking these cursed liberties with my name."

"Pray, Jekyl Marlowe, command your language. It can't the least signify who tells me; but you see I do sometimes get a letter."

"Yes, and a precious letter too. Such a pack of lies did any human being ever hear fired off in a sentence before? I'm *épris* of Mrs. General Lennox. Thumper number one! She's a lady of – I beg pardon – easy virtue. Thumper number two! and I invite her and her husband down to Marlowe, to make love of course to her, and to fight the old General. Thumper number three!"

And the Baronet chuckled over the three "thumpers" merrily.

"Don't talk slang, if you please – gentlemen don't, at least in addressing ladies."

"Well, then, I won't; I'll speak just as you like, only you must not blow me up any more; for really there is no cause, and we here only two or three minutes together, you know; and I want to tell you something, or rather to ask you – do you ever hear anything of those *Deverells*, you know?"

Lady Alice looked quite startled, and turned quickly half round in her chair, with her eyes on Sir Jekyl's face. The Baronet's smile subsided, and he looked with a dark curiosity in hers. A short but dismal silence followed.

"You've heard from them?"

"No!" said the lady, with little change in the expression of her face.

"Well, *of* them?"

"No," she repeated; "but *why* do you ask? It's *very* strange!"

"*What's* strange? Come, now, you *have* something to say; tell me what it is."

"I wonder, Jekyl, you ask for them, in the first place."

"Well – well, of course; but what next?" murmured the Baronet, eagerly: "why is it so strange?"

"Only because I've been thinking of them – a great deal – for the last few days; and it seemed very odd your asking; and in fact I fancy the same thing has happened to us both."

"Well, may be; but what *is* it?" demanded the Baronet, with a sinister smile.

"I have been startled; most painfully and powerfully affected; I have seen the most extraordinary resemblance to my beautiful, *murdered* Guy."

She rose, and wept passionately, standing with her face buried in her handkerchief.

Sir Jekyl frowned with closed eyes and upturned face, waiting like a patient man bored to death, for the subsidence of the storm which he had conjured up. Very pale, too, was that countenance, and contracted for a few moments with intense annoyance.

"I saw the same fellow," said the Baronet, in a subdued tone, so soon as there was a subsidence, "this evening; he's at that little inn on the Sterndale Road. Guy Strangways he calls himself; I talked with him for a few minutes; a gentlemanly young man; and I don't know what to make of it. So I thought I'd ask you whether *you* could help me to a guess; and that's all."

The old lady shook her head.

"And I don't think you need employ quite such hard terms," he said.

"I don't want to speak of it at all," said she; "but if I do I can't say less; nor I won't – no, never!"

"You see it's very odd, those two names," said Sir Jekyl, not minding; "and as you say, the likeness so astonishing – I – I – what do *you* think of it?"

"Of course it's an accident," said the old lady.

"I'm glad you think so," said he, abruptly.

"Why, what could it be? you don't believe in apparitions?" she replied, with an odd sort of dryness.

"I rather think not," said he; "I meant he left no very near relation, and I fancied those Deverell people might have contrived some trick, or intended some personation, or something, and I thought that you, perhaps, had heard something of their movements."

"Nothing – what could they have done, or why should they have sought to make any such impression? I don't understand it. It is very extraordinary. But the likeness in church amazed and shocked me, and made me ill."

"In church, you say?" repeated Sir Jekyl.

"Yes, in church," and she told him in her own way, what I shall tell in mine, as follows: —

Last Sunday she had driven, in her accustomed state, with Beatrix, to Wardlock church. The church was hardly five hundred yards away, and the day bright and dry. But Lady Alice always arrived and departed in the coach, and sat in the Redcliffe seat, in the centre of the gallery. She and Beatrix sat face to face at opposite sides of the pew.

As Lady Alice looked with her cold and steady glance over the congregation in the aisle, during the interval of silence that precedes the commencement of the service, a tall and graceful young man, with an air of semi-foreign fashion, entered the church, accompanied by an elderly gentleman, of whom she took comparatively little note.

The young man and his friend were ushered into a seat confronting the gallery. Lady Alice gazed and gazed transfixed with astonishment and horror. The enamelled miniature on her bosom was like; but there, in that clear, melancholy face, with its large eyes and wavy hair, was a resurrection. In that animated sculpture were delicate tracings and touches of nature's chisel, which the artist had failed to represent, which even memory had neglected to fix, but which all now returned with the startling sense of identity in a moment.

She had put on her gold spectacles, as she always did on taking her seat, and opened her "Morning Service," bound in purple Russia, with its golden clasp and long ribbons fringed with the same precious metal, with the intent to mark the proper psalms and lessons at her haughty leisure. She therefore saw the moving image of her dead son before her, with an agonizing distinctness that told like a blight of palsy on her face.

She saw his elderly companion also distinctly. A round-shouldered man, with his short caped cloak still on. A grave man, with a large, high, bald forehead, a heavy, hooked nose, and great hanging moustache and beard. A dead and ominous face enough, except for the piercing glance of his full eyes, under very thick brows, and just the one you would have chosen out of a thousand portraits, for a plotting high-priest or an old magician.

This magus fixed his gaze on Lady Alice, not with an ostentation of staring, but sternly from behind the dark embrasure of his brows; and leaning a little sideways, whispered something in the ear of his young companion, whose glance at the same moment was turned with a dark and fixed interest upon the old lady.

It was a very determined stare on both sides, and of course ill-bred, but mellowed by distance. The congregation were otherwise like other country congregations, awaiting the offices of their pastor, decent, listless, while this great stare was going on, so little becoming the higher associations and solemn aspect of the place. It was, with all its conventional screening, a fierce, desperate scrutiny, cutting the dim air with a steady congreve fire that crossed and glared unintermittent by the ears of deceased gentlemen in ruffs and grimy doublets, at their posthumous devotions, and brazen knights praying on their backs, and under the eyes of all the gorgeous saints, with glories round their foreheads, in attitudes of benediction or meekness, who edified believers from the eastern window.

Lady Alice drew back in her pew. Beatrix was in a young-lady reverie, and did not observe what was going on. There was nothing indeed to make it very conspicuous. But when she looked at Lady Alice, she was shocked at her appearance, and instantly crossed, and said —

"I am afraid you are ill, grandmamma; shall we come away?"

The old lady made no answer, but got up and took the girl's arm, and left the seat very quietly. She got down the gallery stairs, and halted at the old window on the landing, and sate there a little, ghastly and still mute.

The cold air circulating upward from the porch revived her.

"I am better, child," said she, faintly.

"Thank Heaven," said the girl, whose terror at her state proved how intensely agitated the old lady must have been.

Mrs. Wrattles, the sextoness, emerging at that moment with repeated courtesies, and whispered condolence and inquiries, Lady Alice, with a stiff condescension, prayed her to call her woman, Mason, to her.

So Lady Alice, leaning slenderly on Mason's stout arm, insisted that Beatrix should return and sit out the service; and she herself, for the first time within the memory of man, returned from Wardlock church on foot, instead of in her coach. Beatrix waited until the congregation had nearly disgorged itself and dispersed, before making her solitary descent.

When she came down, without a chaperon, at the close of the rector's discourse, the floured footman in livery, with his gold-headed cane, stood as usual at the coach door only to receive her, and convey the order to the coachman, "home."

The churchyard gate, as is usual, I believe, in old places of that kind, opens at the south side, and the road to Wardlock manor leads along the churchyard wall and round the corner of it at a sharp angle just at the point where the clumsy old stone mausoleum or vault of the Deverell family overlooks the road, with its worn pilasters and beetle-browed cornice.

Now that was a Sunday of wonders. It had witnessed Lady Alice's pedestrian return from church, an act of humiliation, almost of penance, such as the memory of Wardlock could furnish no parallel to; and now it was to see another portent, for her ladyship's own gray horses, fat and tranquil beasts, who had pulled her to and from church for I know not how many years, under the ministration of the careful coachman, with exemplary sedateness, on this abnormal Sabbath took fright at a musical performance of two boys, one playing the Jew's harp and the other drumming tambourine-wise on his hat, and *suadente diabolio* and so forth, set off at a gallop, to the terror of all concerned, toward home. Making the sharp turn of the road, where the tomb of the Deverells overhangs it from the churchyard, the near-gray came down, and his off-neighbour reared and plunged frightfully.

The young lady did not scream, but, very much terrified, she made voluble inquiries of the air and hedges from the window, while the purple coachman pulled hard from the box, and spoke



comfortably to his horses, and the footman, standing out of reach of danger, talked also in his own vein.

Simultaneously with all this, as if emerging from the old mausoleum, there sprang over the churchyard fence, exactly under its shadow, that young man who had excited emotions so various in the Baronet and in Lady Alice, and seized the horse by the head with both hands, and so cooperated that in less than a minute the two horses were removed from the carriage, and he standing, hat in hand, before the window, to assure the young lady that all was quite safe now.

So she descended, and the grave footman, with the Bible and Prayer-book, followed her steps with his gold-headed rod of office, while the lithe and handsome youth, his hat still in air which stirred his rich curls, walked beside her with something of that romantic deference which in one so elegant and handsome has an inexpressible sentiment of the tender in it.

He walked to the door of Wardlock Manor, and I purposely omit all he said, because I doubt whether it would look as well in this unexceptionable type as it sounded from his lips in Beatrix Marlowe's pretty ear.

If the speaker succeed with his audience, what more can oratory do for him? Well! he was gone. There remained in Beatrix's ear a music; in her fancy a heaven-like image – a combination of tint, and outline, and elegance, which made every room and scene without it lifeless, and every other object homely. These little untold impressions are of course liable to fade and vanish pretty quickly in absence, and to be superseded even sooner. Therefore it would be unwarranted to say that she was in love, although I can't deny that she was haunted by that slightly foreign young gentleman.

This latter portion of the adventure was not divulged by old Lady Alice, because Beatrix, I suppose, forgot to tell her, and she really knew nothing about it. All the rest, her own observation and experience, she related with a grim and candid particularity.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Green Chamber at Marlowe

So the Baronet, with a rather dreary chuckle, said: —

"I don't think, to say truth, there is anything in it. I really can't see why the plague I should bore myself about it. You know your pew in the middle of the gallery, with that painted hatchment thing, you know..."

"Respect the dead," said Lady Alice, looking down with a dry severity on the table.

"Well, yes; I mean, you know, it is so confoundedly conspicuous, I can't wonder at the two fellows, the old and young, staring a bit at it, and, perhaps, at *you*, you know," said Sir Jekyl, in his impertinent vein. "But I agree with you they are no ghosts, and I really shan't trouble my head about them any more. I wonder I was such a fool — hey? But, as you say, you know, it is unpleasant to be reminded of — of those things; it can't be helped now, though."

"Now, nor ever," said Lady Alice, grimly.

"Exactly; neither now, nor ever," repeated Sir Jekyl; "and we both know it can't possibly be poor — I mean anyone concerned in that transaction; so the likeness must be accidental, and therefore of no earthly significance — eh?"

Lady Alice, with elevated brows, fiddled in silence with some crumbs on the table with the tip of her thin finger.

"I suppose Beatrix is ready; may I ring the bell?"

"Oh! here she is. Now, bid grandmamma good-night," said the Baronet.

So slim and pretty Beatrix, in her cloak, stooped down and placed her arms about the neck of the old lady, over whose face came a faint flush of tender sunset, and her old grey eyes looked very kindly on the beautiful young face that stooped over her, as she said, in a tone that, however, was stately —

"Good-bye, my dear child; you are warm enough — you are certain?"

"Oh! yes, dear grandmamma — my cloak, and this Cashmere thing."

"Well, darling, good-night. You'll not forget to write — you'll not fail? Good-night, Beatrix, dear — good-bye."

"Good-night," said the Baronet, taking the tips of her cold fingers together, and addressing himself to kiss her cheek, but she drew back in one of her whims, and said, stiffly, "There, not to-night. Good-bye, Jekyl."

"Well," chuckled he, after his wont, "another time; but mind, you're to come to Marlowe."

He did not care to listen to what she replied, but he called from the stairs, as he ran down after his daughter —

"Now, mind, I won't let you off this time; you really must come. Good-night, *au revoir*— good-night."

I really think that exemplary old lady hated the Baronet, who called her "little mamma," and invited her every year, without meaning it, most good-naturedly, to join his party under the ancestral roof-tree. He took a perverse sort of pleasure in these affectionate interviews, in fretting her not very placid temper — in patting her, as it were, wherever there was a raw, and in fondling her against the grain; so that his caresses were cruel, and their harmony, such as it was, amounted to no more than a flimsy deference to the scandalous world.

But Sir Jekyl knew that there was nothing in this quarter to be gained in love by a different tactic; there was a dreadful remembrance, which no poor lady has ostrich power to digest, in the way; it lay there, hard, cold, and irreducible; and the morbid sensation it produced was hatred. He knew that "little mamma," humanly speaking, ought to hate him. His mother indeed she was not;

but only the step-mother of his deceased wife. Mother-in-law is not always a very sweet relation, but with the prefix "step" the chances are, perhaps, worse.

There was, however, as you will by-and-by see, a terrible accident, or something, always remembered, gliding in and out of Wardlock Manor like the Baronet's double, walking in behind him when he visited her, like his evil genius, and when they met affectionately, standing by his shoulder, black and scowling, with clenched fist.

Now pretty Beatrix sat in the right corner of the chariot, and Sir Jekyl, her father, in the left. The lamps were lighted, and though there was moonlight, for they had a long stretch of road always dark, because densely embowered in the forest of Penlake. Tier over tier, file behind file, nodding together, the great trees bent over like plumed warriors, and made a solemn shadow always between their ranks.

Marlowe was quite new to Beatrix; but still too distant, twelve miles away, to tempt her to look out and make observations as she would on a nearer approach.

"You don't object to my smoking a cigar, Beatrix? The smoke goes out of the window, you know," said the Baronet, after they had driven about a mile in silence.

What young lady, so appealed to by a parent, ever did object? The fact is, Sir Jekyl did not give himself the trouble to listen to her answer, but was manifestly thinking of something quite different, as he lighted his match.

When he threw his last stump out of the window they were driving through Penlake Forest, and the lamplight gleamed on broken rows of wrinkled trunks and ivy.

"I suppose she told you all about it?" said he, suddenly pursuing his own train of thought.

"Who?" inquired Beatrix.

"I never was a particular favourite of her's, you know – grandmamma's, I mean. She does not love me, poor old woman! And she has a knack of making herself precious disagreeable, in which I try to imitate her, for peace' sake, you know; for, by George, if I was not uncivil now and then, we could never get on at all."

Sir Jekyl chuckled after his wont, as it were, between the bars of this recitative, and he asked

— "What were the particulars – the adventure on Sunday – that young fellow, you know?"

Miss Beatrix had heard no such interrogatory from her grandmamma, whose observations in the church-aisle were quite as unknown to her; and thus far the question of Sir Jekyl was a shock.

"Did not grandmamma tell you about it?" he pursued.

"About what, papa?" asked Beatrix, who was glad that it was dark.

"About her illness – a young fellow in a pew down in the aisle staring at her. By Jove! one would have fancied that sort of thing pretty well over. Tell me all about it."

The fact was that this was the first she had heard of it.

"Grandmamma told me nothing of it," said she.

"And did not you see what occurred? Did not you see him staring?" asked he.

Beatrix truly denied.

"You young ladies are always thinking of yourselves. So you saw nothing, and have nothing to tell? That will do," said Sir Jekyl, drily; and silence returned.

Beatrix was relieved on discovering that her little adventure was unsuspected. Very little was there in it, and nothing to reflect blame upon her. From her exaggeration of its importance, and her quailing as she fancied her father was approaching it, I conclude that the young gentleman had interested her a little.

And now, as Sir Jekyl in one corner of the rolling chariot brooded in the dark over his disappointed conjectures, so did pretty Beatrix in the other speculate on the sentences which had just fallen from his lips, and long to inquire some further particulars, but somehow dared not.

Could that tall and handsome young man, who had come to her rescue so unaccountably – the gentleman with those large, soft, dark eyes, which properly belong to heroes – have been the individual whose gaze had so mysteriously affected her grandmamma? What could the associations have been that were painful enough so to overcome that grim, white woman? Was he a relation? Was he an outcast member of that proud family? Or, was he that heir-at-law, or embodied Nemesis, that the yawning sea or grave will sometimes yield up to plague the guilty or the usurper?

For all or any of these parts he seemed too young. Yet Beatrix fancied instinctively that he could be no other than the basilisk who had exercised so strange a spell over her grim, but withal kind old kinswoman.

Was there not, she thought, something peculiar in the look he threw across the windows of old stone-fronted Wardlock manor – reserved, curious, half-smiling – as if he looked on an object which he had often heard described, and had somehow, from personal associations or otherwise, an interest in? It was but a momentary glance just as he took his leave; but there was, she thought, that odd character in it.

By this time the lamps were flashing on the village windows and shop-fronts; and at the end of the old gabled street, under a canopy of dark trees, stood the great iron gate of Marlowe.

Sir Jekyl rubbed the glass and looked out when they halted at the gate. The structures of his fancy had amused him, rather fearfully indeed, and he was surprised to find that they were entering the grounds of Marlowe so soon.

He did not mind looking out, or speaking to the old gamekeeper, who pulled open the great barriers, but lay back in his corner sullenly, in the attitude of a gentleman taking a nap.

Beatrix, however, looked out inquisitively, and saw by the misty moonlight a broad level studded with majestic timber – singly, in clumps, and here and there in solemn masses; and soon rose the broad-fronted gabled house before them, with its steep roofs and its hospitable clumps of twisted chimneys showing black against the dim sky.

Miss Marlowe's maid, to whom the scene was quite as new as to her mistress, descended from the back seat, in cloaks and mufflers, and stood by the hall-door steps, that shone white in the moonlight, before their summons had been answered.

Committing his daughter to her care, the Baronet – who was of a bustling temperament, and never drank tea except from motives of gallantry – called for Mrs. Gwynn, the housekeeper, who presently appeared.

She was an odd-looking woman – some years turned of fifty, thin, with a longish face and a fine, white, glazed skin. There was something queer about her eyes: you soon discovered it to arise from their light colour and something that did not quite match in their pupils.

On entering the hall, where the Baronet had lighted a candle, having thrown his hat on the table, and merely loosed his muffler and one or two buttons of his outside coat, she smiled a chill gleam of welcome with her pale lips, and dropped two sharp little courtesies.

"Well, old Donica, and how do ye do?" said the Baronet, smiling, with a hand on each thin grey silk shoulder. "Long time since I saw you. But, egad! you grow younger and younger, you pretty old rogue;" and he gave her pale, thin cheek a playful tap with his fingers.

"Pretty well, please, Sir Jekyl, thank ye," she replied, receding a little with dry dignity. "Very welcome, sir, to Marlowe. Miss Beatrix looks very well, I am happy to see; and you, sir, also."

"And you're glad to see us, I know?"

"Certainly, sir, glad to see you," said Mrs. Gwynn, with another short courtesy.

"The servants not all come? No, nor Ridley with the plate. He'll arrive to-morrow; and – and we shall have the house full in little more than a week. Let us go up and look at the rooms; I forget them almost, by Jove – I really do – it's so long since. Light you another, and we'll do very well."

"You'll see them better by daylight, sir. I kept everything well aired and clean. The house looks wonderful – it do," replied Mrs. Gwynn, accompanying the Baronet up the broad oak stairs.

"If it looks as fresh as you, Donica, it's a miracle of a house – egad! you're a wonder. How you skip by my side, with your little taper, like a sylph in a ballet, egad!"

"You wear pretty well yourself, Sir Jekyl," drily remarked the white-faced sylph, who had a sharp perpendicular line between her eyebrows, indicative of temper.

"So they tell me, by Jove. We're pretty well on though, Donnie – eh? Everyone knows my age – printed, you know, in the red book. You've the advantage of me there – eh, Don?"

"I'm just fifty-six, sir, and I don't care if all the world knewd it."

"All the world's curious, I dare say, on the point; but I shan't tell them, old Gwynn," said Sir Jekyl.

"Curious or no, sir, it's just the truth, and I don't care to hide it. Past that folly now, sir, and I don't care if I wor seventy, and a steppin' like a – "

"A sylph," supplied he.

"Yes – a sylph – into my grave. It's a bad world, and them that's suffered in it soon tires on it, sir."

"*You* have not had a great deal to trouble you. Neither chick, nor child, nor husband, egad! So here we are."

They were now standing on the gallery, at the head of the great staircase.

"These are the rooms your letter says are not furnished – eh? Let us come to the front gallery."

So, first walking down the gallery in which they were, to the right, and then entering a passage by a turn on the left, they reached the front gallery which runs parallel to that at the head of the stairs.

"Where have you put Beatrix?"

"She wished the room next mine, please, sir, up-stairs," answered the housekeeper.

"Near the front – eh?"

"The left side, please, sir, as you look from the front," replied she.

"*From* the front?" he repeated.

"From the front," she reiterated.

"Over there, then?" he said, pointing upward to the left.

"That will be about it, sir," she answered.

"How many rooms have we here in a row?" he asked, facing down the gallery, with its file of doors at each side.

"Four bed-rooms and three dressing-rooms at each side."

"Ay, well now, I'll tell you who's coming, and how to dispose of them."

So Sir Jekyl quartered his friends, as he listed, and then said he —

"And the large room at the other end, here to the right – come along."

And Sir Jekyl marched briskly in the direction indicated.

"Please, sir," said the slim, pale housekeeper, with the odd leer in her eye, overtaking him quietly.

"Ay, here it is," said he, not minding her, and pushing open the door of a dressing-room at the end of the gallery. "Inside this, I remember."

"But that's the green chamber, sir," continued Mrs. Gwynn, gliding beside him as he traversed the floor.

"The room we call Sir Harry's room, I know – capital room – eh?"

"I don't suppose," began the pale lady, with a sinister sharpness.

"Well?" he demanded, looking down in her face a little grimly.

"It's the green chamber, sir," she said, with a hard emphasis.

"You said so before, eh?" he replied.

"And I did not suppose, sir, you'd think of putting anyone there," she continued.

"Then you're just as green as the chamber," said Sir Jekyl, with a chuckle.

And he entered the room, holding the candle high in air, and looking about him a little curiously, the light tread and sharp pallid face of Donica Gwynn following him.

## CHAPTER V

### Sir Jekyl bethinks him of Pelter and Crowe

The Baronet held his candle high in air, as I have said, as he gazed round him inquisitively. The thin housekeeper, with her pale lips closed, and her odd eyes dropped slantingly toward the floor, at the corner of the room, held hers demurely in her right finger and thumb, her arms being crossed.

The room was large, and the light insufficient. Still you could not help seeing at a glance that it must be, in daylight, a tolerably cheerful one. It was roomy and airy, with a great bow-window looking to the front of the building, of which it occupied the extreme left, reaching about ten feet from the level of the more ancient frontage of the house. The walls were covered with stamped leather, chiefly green and gold, and the whole air of the room, even in its unarranged state, though somewhat quaint and faded, was wonderfully gay and cozy.

"This is the green chamber, sir," she repeated, with her brows raised and her eyes still lowered askance, and some queer wrinkles on her forehead as she nodded a sharp bitter emphasis.

"To be sure it is, damme! – why not?" he said, testily, and then burst into a short laugh.

"You're not a going, I suppose, Sir Jekyl, to put anyone into it?" said she.

"I don't see, for the life of me, why I should not – eh? a devilish comfortable room."

"Hem! I can't but suppose you are a joking me, Sir Jekyl," persisted the gray silk phantom.

"Egad! you forget how old we're growing; why the plague should I quiz you! I want the room for old General Lennox, that's all – though I'm not bound to tell you for whom I want it – am I?"

"There's a plenty o' rooms without this one, Sir Jekyl," persevered the lady, sternly.

"Plenty, of course; but none so good," said he, carelessly.

"No one ever had luck that slept in it," answered the oracle, lifting her odd eyes and fixing them on Sir Jekyl.

"I don't put them here for luck. We want to make them comfortable," answered Sir Jekyl, poking at the furniture as he spoke.

"You know what was your father's wish about it, sir?" she insisted.

"My father's wish – egad, he did not leave many of his wishes unsatisfied – eh?" he answered, with another chuckle.

"And your poor lady's wish," she said, a good deal more sharply.

"I don't know why the devil I'm talking to you, old Gwynn," said the Baronet, turning a little fiercely about.

"*Dying* wishes," emphasised she.

"It is time, Heaven knows, all that stuff should stop. You slept in it yourself, in my father's time. I remember you, here, Donica, and I don't think I ever heard that you saw a ghost – did I?" he said, with a sarcastic chuckle.

She darted a ghastly look to the far end of the chamber, and then, with a strange, half-frozen fury, she said —

"I wish you good-night, Sir Jekyl," and glided like a shadow out of the room.

"Saucy as ever, by Jupiter," he ejaculated, following her with his glance, and trying to smile; and as the door shut, he looked again down the long apartment as she had just done, raising the candle again.

The light was not improved of course by the disappearance of Mrs. Gwynn's candle, and the end of the room was dim and unsatisfactory. The great four-poster, with dark curtains, and a plume at each corner, threw a vague shadow on the back wall and up to the ceiling, as he moved his

candle, which at the distance gave him an uncomfortable sensation, and he stood for a few seconds sternly there, and then turned on his heel and quitted the room, saying aloud, as he did so —

"What a d — d fool that old woman is — always *was*!"

If there was a ghost there, the Baronet plainly did not wish it to make its exit from the green chamber by the door, for he locked it on the outside, and put the key in his pocket. Then, crossing the dressing-room I have mentioned, he entered the passage which crosses the gallery in which he and Mrs. Gwynn, a few minutes before, had planned their dispositions. The dressing-room door is placed close to the window which opens at the end of the corridor in the front of the house. Standing with his back to this, he looked down the long passage, and smiled.

For a man so little given to the melodramatic, it was a very well expressed smile of mystery — the smile of a man who knows something which others don't suspect, and would be surprised to learn.

It was the Baronet's fancy, as it had been his father's and his grandfather's before him, to occupy very remote quarters in this old house. Solitary birds, their roost was alone.

Candle in hand, Sir Jekyl descended the stairs, marched down the long gaunt passage, which strikes rearward so inflexibly, and at last reaches the foot of a back staircase, after a march of a hundred and forty feet, which I have measured.

At top of this was a door at his left, which he opened, and found himself in his own bed-room.

You would have said on looking about you that it was the bed-room of an old campaigner or of a natty gamekeeper — a fellow who rather liked roughing it, and had formed tastes in the matter like the great Duke of Wellington. The furniture was slight and plain, and looked like varnished deal; a French bed, narrow, with chintz curtains, and a plain white coverlet, like what one might expect in a barrack dormitory or an hospital; a little strip of carpet lying by the bed, and a small square of Turkey carpet under the table by the fire, hardly broke the shining uniformity of the dark oak floor; a pair of sporting prints decorated the sides of the chimneypiece, and an oil-portrait of a grey hunter hung in the middle. There were fishing-rods and gun-cases, I dare say the keys were lost of many, they looked so old and dingy.

The Baronet's luggage, relieved of its black japanned casings, lay on the floor, with his hat-case and travelling-desk. A pleasant fire burnt in the grate, and a curious abundance of wax-lights, without which Sir Jekyl, such was his peculiarity, could not exist, enlivened the chamber.

As he made his toilet at his homely little dressing-table, he bethought him suddenly, and rang the bell in his shirt-sleeves.

"My letters."

"Yes, sir."

And up came a salver well laden with letters, pamphlets, and newspapers, of all shapes and sizes.

"And tell Miss Beatrix I shan't have any tea, and get some brandy from Mrs. Gwynn, and cold water and a tumbler, and let them leave me alone — d'ye see? — and give me that."

It was a dressing-gown which Tomlinson's care had already liberated from its valise, and expanded before the fire.

The Baronet's tastes, as we might see, were simple. He could dine on a bit of roast mutton, and a few glasses of sherry. But his mutton was eight years old, and came all the way from Dartbroke, and his sherry cost more than other men's Madeira, and he now lighted one of those priceless cigars, which so many fellows envied, and inhaled the disembodied aroma of a tobacco which, perhaps, Jove smokes in his easy chair on Olympus, but which I have never smelt on earth, except when Sir Jekyl dispensed the inestimable treasures of his cigar-case.

Now, the Baronet stood over his table, with a weed between his lips, tall in his flowered silk dressing-gown, his open hands shoving apart the pile of letters, as a conjurer at an exhibition spreads his pack of cards.



"Ha! poor little thing!" he murmured, with a sly simper, in a petting tone, as he plucked an envelope, addressed in a lady's hand, between two fingers, caressingly, from the miscellaneous assortment.

He looked at it, but reserved it as a *bon-bouche* in his waistcoat pocket, and pursued his examination.

There were several from invited guests, who were either coming or not, with the customary expressions, and were tossed together in a little isolated litter for conference with Mrs. Gwynn in the morning.

"Not a line from Pelter and Crowe! the d – d fellows don't waste their ink upon me, except when they furnish their costs. It's a farce paying fellows to look after one's business – no one ever does it but yourself. If those fellows were worth their bread and butter, they'd have known all about this thing, whatever it is, and I'd have had it all *here*, d – it, to-night."

Sir Jekyl, it must be confessed, was not quite consistent about this affair of the mysterious young gentleman; for, as we have seen, he himself had a dozen times protested against the possibility of there being anything in it, and now he was seriously censuring his respectable London attorneys for not furnishing him with the solid contents of this "windbag."

But it was only his talk that was contradictory. Almost from the moment of his first seeing that young gentleman, on the open way under the sign of the "Plough," there lowered a fantastic and cyclopean picture, drawn in smoke or vapour, volcanic and thunderous, all over his horizon, like those prophetic and retrospective pageants with which Doree loves to paint his mystic skies. It was wonderful, and presaged unknown evil; and only cowed him the more that it baffled analysis and seemed to mock at reason.

"Pretty fellows to keep a look-out! It's well I can do it for myself – who knows where we're driving to, or what's coming? Signs enough – whatever they mean – he that runs may read, egad! Not that there's anything in it *necessarily*. But it's not about drawing and ruins and that stuff – those fellows have come down here. Bosh! looking after my property. I'd take my oath they are advised by some lawyer; and if Pelter and Crowe were sharp, they'd know by whom, and all about it, by Jove!"

Sir Jekyl jerked the stump of his cigar over his shoulder into the grate as he muttered this, looking surlily down on the unprofitable papers that strewn the table.

He stood thinking, with his back to the fire, and looking rather cross and perplexed, and so he sat down and wrote a short letter. It was to Pelter and Crowe, but he began, as he did not care which got it, in his usual way —

"My dear Sir, – I have reason to suspect that those ill-disposed people, who have often threatened annoyance, are at last seriously intent on mischief. You will be good enough, therefore, immediately to set on foot inquiries, here and at the other side of the water, respecting the movements of the D – family, who, I fancy, are at the bottom of an absurd, though possibly troublesome, demonstration. I don't fear them, of course. But I think you will find that some members of that family are at present in this country, and disposed to be troublesome. You will see, therefore, the urgency of the affair, and will better know than I where and how to prosecute the necessary inquiries. I do not, of course, apprehend the least *danger* from their machinations; but you have always thought *annoyance* possible; and if any be in store for me, I should rather not have to charge it upon our supineness. You will, therefore, exert your vigilance and activity on my behalf, and be so good as to let me know, at the earliest possible day – which, I think, need not be later than

Wednesday next – the result of your inquiries through the old channels. I am a little disappointed, in fact, at not having heard from you before now on the subject.

*"Yours, my dear sir, very sincerely,*

*"Jekyl M. Marlowe."*

Sir Jekyl never swore on paper, and, as a rule, commanded his temper very creditably in that vehicle. But all people who had dealings with him knew very well that the rich Baronet was not to be trifled with. So, understanding that it was strong enough, he sealed it up for the post-office in the morning, and dropped it into the post-bag, and with it the unpleasant subject for the present.

And now, a little brandy and water, and the envelope in the well-known female hand; and he laughed a little over it, and looked at himself in the glass with a vaunting complacency, and shook his head playfully at the envelope. It just crossed his sunshine like the shadow of a flying vapour – "that cross-grained old Gwynn would not venture to meddle?" But the envelope was honestly closed, and showed no signs of having been fiddled with.

He made a luxury of this little letter, and read it in his easy chair, with his left leg over the arm, with the fragrant accompaniment of a weed.

"Jealous, by Jove!" he ejaculated, in high glee; "little fool, what's put that in your head?"

"Poor, little, fluttering, foolish thing!" sang the Baronet, and then laughed, not cynically, but indulgently rather.

"How audacious the little fools are upon paper! Egad, it's a wonder there is not twice as much mischief in the world as actually happens. We must positively burn this little extravagance."

But before doing so he read it over again; then smiling still, he gallantly touched it to his lips, and re-perused it, as he drew another cigar from the treasury of incense which he carried about him. He lighted the note, but did not apply it to his cigar, I am bound to say – partly from a fine feeling, and partly, I am afraid, because he thought that paper spoiled the flavour of his tobacco. So, with a sentimental smile, a gentle shrug, and a sigh of the Laurence Sterne pattern, he converted that dangerous little scrawl into ashes – and he thought, as he inhaled his weed —

"It is well for you, poor little fanatics, that we men take better care of you than you do of yourselves, sometimes!"

No doubt; and Sir Jekyl supposed he was thinking only of his imprudent little correspondent, although there was another person in whom he was nearly interested, who might have been unpleasantly compromised also, if that document had fallen into other hands.

## CHAPTER VI

### Sir Jekyl's Room is Visited

It was near one o'clock. Sir Jekyl yawned and wound his watch, and looked at his bed as if he would like to be in it without the trouble of getting there; and at that moment there came a sharp knock at his door, which startled him, for he thought all his people were asleep by that time.

"Who's there?" he demanded in a loud key.

"It's me, sir, please," said Donica Gwynn's voice.

"Come in, will you?" cried he; and she entered.

"Are you sick?" he asked.

"No, sir, thank you," she replied, with a sharp courtesy.

"You look so plaguy pale. Well, I'm glad you're not. But what the deuce can you want of me at this hour of night? Eh?"

"It's only about that room, sir."

"Oh, curse the room! Talk about it in the morning. You ought to have been in your bed an hour ago."

"So I was, sir; but I could not sleep, sir, for thinking of it."

"Well, go back and think of it, if you must. How can I stop you? Don't be a fool, old Gwynn."

"No more I will, sir, please, if I can help, for fools we are, the most on us; but I could not sleep, as I said, for thinking o't; and so I thought I'd jist put on my things again, and come and try if you, sir, might be still up."

"Well, you see I'm up; but I want to get to bed, Gwynn, and not to talk here about solemn bosh; and you must not bore me about that green chamber – do you see? – to-night, like a good old girl; it will do in the morning – won't it?"

"So it will, sir; only I could not rest in my bed, until I said, seeing as you mean to sleep in this room, it would never do. It won't. I can't stand it."

"Stand what? Egad! it seems to me you're demented, my good old Donica."

"No, Sir Jekyl," she persisted, with a grim resolution to say out her say. "You know very well, sir, what's running in my head. You know it's for no good anyone sleeps there. General Lennox, ye say; well an' good. You know well what a loss Mr. Deverell met with in that room in Sir Harry, your father's time."

"And you slept in it, did not you, and saw something? Eh?"

"Yes, I *did*" she said, in a sudden fury, with a little stamp on the floor, and a pale, staring frown.

After a breathless pause of a second or two she resumed.

"And you know what your poor lady saw there, and never held up her head again. And well you know, sir, how your father, Sir Harry, on his death-bed, desired it should be walled up, when you were no more than a boy; and your good lady did the same many a year after, when *she* was a dying. And I tell ye, Sir Jekyl, ye'll sup sorrow yourself yet if you don't. And take a fool's counsel, and shut up that door, and never let no one, friend or foe, sleep there; for well I know it's not for nothing, with your dead father's dying command, and your poor dear lady's dying entreaty against it, that you put anyone to sleep there. I don't know who this General Lennox may be – a good gentleman or a bad; but I'm sure it's for no righteous reason he's to lie there. You would not do it for nothing."

This harangue was uttered with a volubility, which, as the phrase is, took Sir Jekyl aback. He was angry, but he was also perplexed and a little stunned by the unexpected vehemence of his old housekeeper's assault, and he stared at her with a rather bewildered countenance.

"You're devilish impertinent," at last he said, with an effort. "You rant there like a madwoman, just because I like you, and you've been in our family, I believe, since before I was born; you think you may say what you like. The house is mine, I believe, and I rather think I'll do what I think best in it while I'm here."

"And you going to sleep in this room!" she broke in. "What else can it be?"

"You mean – what the devil do you mean?" stammered the Baronet again, unconsciously assuming the defensive.

"I mean you know very well *what*, Sir Jekyl," she replied.

"It was my father's room, hey? – when I was a boy, as you say. It's good enough for his son, I suppose; and I don't ask *you* to lie in the green chamber."

"*I'll* be no party, sir, if you please, to any one lying there," she observed, with a stiff courtesy, and a sudden hectic in her cheek.

"Perhaps you mean because my door's a hundred and fifty feet away from the front of the house, if any mischief should happen, I'm too far away – as others were before me – to prevent it, eh?" said he, with a flurried sneer.

"What I mean, I mean, sir – you ought not; that's all. You won't take it amiss, Sir Jekyl – I'm an old servant – I'm sorry, sir; but I've made up my mind what to do."

"You're not thinking of any folly, surely? You seemed to me always too much afraid, or whatever you call it, of the remembrance, you know, of what you *saw* there – eh? — *I* don't know, of course, *what* – to speak of it to me. I never pressed you, because you seemed – you know you did – to have a horror; and surely you're not going now to talk among the servants or other people. You can't be far from five-and-thirty years in the family."

"Four-and-thirty, Sir Jekyl, next April. It's a good while; but I won't see no more o' that; and unless the green chamber be locked up, at the least, and used no more for a bed-room, I'd rather go, sir. Nothing may happen, of course, Sir Jekyl – it's a hundred to one nothing *would* happen; but ye see, sir, I've a feeling about it, sir; and there has been these things ordered by your father that was, and by your poor lady, as makes me feel queer. Nothing being done accordingly, and I could not rest upon it, for sooner or later it would come to this, and stay I could not. I judge no one – Heaven forbid, – Sir Jekyl – oh, no! my own conscience is as much as I can look to; so sir, if you please, so soon as you can suit yourself I'll leave, sir."

"Stuff! old Gwynn; don't mind talking to-night," said the Baronet, more kindly than he had spoken before; "we'll see about it in the morning. Good-night. We must not quarrel about nothing. I was only a school-boy when you came to us, you know."

But in the morning "old Gwynn" was resolute. She was actually going, so soon as the master could suit himself. She was not in a passion, nor in a panic, but in a state of gloomy and ominous obstinacy.

"Well, you'll give me a little time, won't you, to look about me?" said the Baronet, peevishly.

"Such is my intention, sir."

"And see, Gwynn, not a word about that – that green chamber, you know, to Miss Beatrix."

"As you please, sir."

"Because if you begin to talk, they'll all think we are haunted."

"Whatever you please to order, sir."

"And it was not – it was my grandfather, you know, who built it."

"Ah, so it was, sir;" and Gwynn looked astonished and shook her head, as though cowed by the presence of a master-spirit of evil.

"One would fancy you saw his ghost, Gwynn; but he was not such a devil as your looks would make him, only a bit wild, and a favourite with the women, Gwynn – always the best judge of merit – hey? Beau Marlowe they called him – the best dressed man of his day. How the devil could such a fellow have any harm in him?"

There is a fine picture, full length, of Beau Marlowe, over the chimneypiece of the great hall of Marlowe. He has remarkably gentlemanlike hands and legs; the gloss is on his silk stockings still. His features are handsome, of that type which we conventionally term aristocratic; high, and smiling with a Louis-Quatorze insolence. He wears a very fine coat of cut velvet, of a rich, dusky red, the technical name of which I forget. He was of the gilded and powdered youth of his day.

He certainly was a handsome fellow, this builder of the "green chamber," and he has not placed his candle under a bushel. He shines in many parts of the old house, and has repeated himself in all manner of becoming suits. You see him, three-quarters, in the parlour, in blue and silver; you meet him in crayon, and again in small oil, oval; and you have him in half a dozen miniatures.

We mention this ancestor chiefly because when his aunt, Lady Mary, left him a legacy, he added the green chamber to the house.

It seems odd that Sir Jekyl, not fifty yet, should have had a grandfather who was a fashionable and wicked notoriety of mature years, and who had built an addition to the family mansion so long as a hundred and thirty years ago. But this gentleman had married late, as rakes sometimes do, and his son, Sir Harry, married still later – somewhere about seventy; having been roused to this uncomfortable exertion by the proprietorial airs of a nephew who was next in succession. To this matrimonial explosion Sir Jekyl owed his entrance and agreeable sojourn upon the earth.

"I won't ask you to stay now; you're in a state. I'll write to town for Sinnott, as you insist on it, but you won't leave us in confusion, and you'll make her *au fait*– won't you? Give her any hints she may require; and I know I shall have you back again when you cool a little, or at all events when we go back to Dartbroke; for I don't think I shall like this place."

So Donica Gwynn declared herself willing to remain till Mrs. Sinnott should arrive from London; and preparations for the reception of guests proceeded with energy.

## CHAPTER VII

### The Baronet Pursues

Sir Jekyl Marlowe was vexed when the letters came, and none from Pelter and Crowe. There are people who expect miracles from their doctors and lawyers, and, in proportion to their accustomed health and prosperity, are unreasonable when anything goes wrong. The Baronet's notion was that the legal firm in question ought to think and even dream of nothing else than his business. It was an impertinence their expecting *him* to think about it. What were *they* there for? He knew that London was a pretty large place, and England still larger; and that it was not always easy to know what everybody was about in either, and still less what each man was doing on the Continent. Pelter and Crowe had some other clients too on their hands, and had hitherto done very satisfactorily. But here was a serious-looking thing – the first really uncomfortable occurrence which had taken place under his reign – the first opportunity for exhibiting common vigilance – and he ventured to say those fellows did not know these Strangways people were in these kingdoms at all!

Sir Jekyl, though an idle fellow, was a man of action, so he ordered his horse, and rode nine miles to the "Plough Inn," where he hoped to see Mr. Strangways again, improve his intimacy, and prevail with the gentlemen to return with him to Marlowe, and spend a fortnight there, when, or the devil was in it, he should contrive to get at the bottom of their plans.

He looked shrewdly in at the open door as he rode up, and halloed for some one to take his horse. The little porch smiled pleasantly, and the two gables and weather-cock, in the sunlight; and the farmer on the broad and dingy panel, in his shirt-sleeves, low-crowned, broad-leafed hat, crimson waistcoat, canary-coloured shorts, and blue stockings, and flaxen wig, was driving his plump horses, and guiding his plough undiscouraged, as when last he saw him.

Boots and Mrs. Jones came out. Sir Jekyl was too eager to wait to get down; so from the saddle he accosted his buxom hostess, in his usual affable style. The Baronet was not accustomed to be crossed and thwarted as much as, I have been told, men with less money sometimes are; and he showed his mortification in his face when he learned that the two gentlemen had left very early that morning.

"This morning! Why you said yesterday they would not go till *evening*. Hang it, I wish you could tell it right; and what the d – I do you mean by Strangers? Call him Strangways, can't you. It's odd people can't say names."

He must have been very much vexed to speak so sharply; and he saw, perhaps, how much he had forgotten himself in the frightened look which good Mrs. Jones turned upon him.

"I don't mean you, my good little soul. It's *their* fault; and where are they gone to? I wanted to ask them both over to Marlowe. Have you a notion?"

"They took our horses as far as the 'Bell and Horns,' at Slowton." She called shrilly to Boots, "They're not stoppin' at the 'Bell and Horns,' sure. Come here, and tell Sir Jekyl Marlowe about Mr. Strangers."

"You said last night they were going to Awkworth;" and Sir Jekyl chuckled scornfully, for he was vexed.

"They changed their minds, sir."

"Well, we'll say so. You're a wonderful fascinating sex. Egad! if you could only carry anything right in your heads for ten minutes, you'd be too charming." And at this point Boots emerged, and Sir Jekyl continued, addressing him —

"Well, where are the gentlemen who left this morning?" asked he.

"They'll be at the 'Bell and Horns,' sir."

"Where's that?"

"Slowton, sir."

"I know. What hour did they go?"

"Eight o'clock, sir."

"Just seven miles. The Sterndale Road, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

And that was all Boots had to tell.

"Will ye please to come in, sir?" inquired Mrs. Jones.

"No, my good creature. I haven't time. The old gentleman – what's his name?"

"I don't know, Sir, please. He calls the young gentleman Guy, and the young gentleman calls him *sir*."

"And both the same name?"

"We calls 'em both Strangers, please, sir."

"I know. Servants, had they?"

"Yes, sir, please. But they sent 'em on."

"Rich – don't want for money, I suppose. Eh?"

"Oh! plenty money, sir."

"And the servants called the men Strangways, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes, Sir Jekyl, please; and so the letters came."

"You never happened to hear any other name?"

"No, Sir Jekyl."

"*Think*."

Mrs. Jones did think, but could recall nothing.

"Nothing with a D?"

"D, sir! What, sir?"

"No matter what," said the Baronet. "No name beginning with D – eh?"

"No, sir. You don't think they're going by a false name?" inquired the lady, curiously.

"What the devil puts that in your head? Take care of the law; you must not talk that way, you foolish little rogue."

"I did not know, sir," timidly answered Mrs. Jones, who saw in Sir Jekyl, the Parliament-man, Deputy-Lieutenant, and Grand Juror, a great oracle of the law.

"I only wanted to know whether you had happened to hear the name of the elder of the two gentlemen, and could recollect what letter it begins with."

"No, sir, please."

"So you've no more to tell me?"

"Nothing, sir."

"If they come back tell them I rode over to offer them some shooting, and to beg they'd remember to come to Marlowe. You won't forget?"

"No sir."

"Do they return here?"

"I think not, sir."

"Well, I believe there's nothing else," and the Baronet looked up reflectively, as if he expected to find a memorandum scribbled on the blue sky, leaning with his hand on the back of his horse.

"No, nothing. You won't forget my message, that's all. Good-bye, my dear."

And touching the tips of his gloves to his lips, with a smile and a nod he cantered down the Sterndale Road.

He pulled up at the "Bell and Horns," in the little town of Slowton, but was disappointed. The entire party, servants and all, had taken the train two hours before, at the station three miles away.

Now Sir Jekyl was blooded, and the spirit of the chase stirred within him. So he rode down in his jack-boots, and pulled up his steaming horse by the station, and he went in and made inquiry.

A man like him is received even at one of these cosmopolitan rallying-points within his own county with becoming awe. The station-master was awfully courteous, and the subaltern officials awfully active and obliging, and the resources of the establishment were at once placed at his sublime disposal. Unhappily, two branch lines converge at this point, causing the usual bustle, and there was consequently a conflict and confusion in the evidence; so that Sir Jekyl, who laughed and chatted agreeably amidst all the reverential zeal that surrounded him, could arrive at nothing conclusive, but leaned to the view that the party had actually gone to Awkworth, only by rail, instead of by road.

Sir Jekyl got on his horse and walked him through the town, uncertain what to do next. This check had cooled him; his horse had his long trot home still. It would not do to follow to Awkworth; to come in, after a four-and-twenty miles' ride, bespattered like a courier, merely to invite these gentlemen, *vivâ voce*, who had hardly had his note of invitation a score hours. It would be making too much of them with a vengeance.

As he found himself once more riding under the boughs of Marlowe, the early autumnal evening already closing in, Sir Jekyl experienced one of those qualms and sinkings of the heart, which overcome us with a vague anticipation of evil.

The point of the road which he had now gained, commands a view of the old hall of Marlowe, with that projecting addition, and its wide bow-window, every pane of which was now flaming in the sunset light, which indicated the green chamber.

The green chamber! Just at that moment the glare of its broad window flashed with a melancholy and vengeful light upon his brain, busied with painful retrospects and harassing conjecture.

Old Gwynn going away! It was an omen. Marlowe without old Gwynn. Troy without its palladium. Old Gwynn going with something like a denunciation on her lips! That stupid old woman at Wardlock, too, who really knew nothing about it, undertaking also to prophesy! Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings! There was no sense in it – scarcely articulation. Still it was the croak of the raven – the screech of the owl.

He looked across the gentle slope at the angle of the inauspicious room. Why should old General Lennox be placed within the unhallowed precincts of that chamber? The image of old Gwynn as she gabbled her grim protest on the preceding night, rose before him like a ghost. What business was it of hers, and how could she divine his motives? Still, if there was anything wrong, did not this vehement warning make the matter worse.

An old man he felt himself on a sudden that evening, and for the first time. There was some failure of the electric fire, and a subsidence of the system. His enterprise was gone. Why should he take guilt, if such it were, on his soul for vanity and vexation of spirit? If guilt it were, was it not of a kind inexcusably cold-blooded and long-headed. Old Gwynn, he did not like to lose you on those terms – just, too, as those unknown actors were hovering at the wing, and about to step upon the stage, this old man and young, who, instinctively he felt, were meditating mischief against him. Mischief —*what?* Such, perhaps, as might shatter the structure of his greatness, and strew its pinnacles in the dust. Perhaps all this gloom was but the depression of a long ride, and still longer fast. But he was accustomed to such occasional strains upon his strength without any such results. Ah, no! He had come within the edge of the shadow of judgment, and its darkness was stealing over him, and its chill touched his heart.

These were the dreamy surmisings with which he rode slowly toward the house, and a few good resolutions in a nebulous state hovered uncomfortably about him.

No letter of any interest had come by the early post, and Sir Jekyl sat down *tête-à-tête* with his pretty daughter, in very dismal spirits, to dinner.



## CHAPTER VIII

### The House begins to Fill

Beatrix was fond of her father, who was really a good-natured man, in the common acceptance of the term, that is to say, he had high animal spirits, and liked to see people pleasant about him, and was probably as kind as a tolerably selfish and vicious man can be, and had a liking, moreover, for old faces, which was one reason why he hated the idea of his housekeeper's leaving him. But Beatrix was also a little in awe of him, as girls often are of men of whom they see but little, especially if they have something of the masculine decision of temper.

"You may all go away now," said the Baronet suddenly to the servants, who had waited at dinner; and when the liveried phantoms had withdrawn, and the door had closed on the handsome calves of tall and solemn Jenkins, he said —

"Nothing all day — no adventure, or visitor, Trixie — not a word of news or fun, I dare say?"

"Nothing — not a creature, papa; only the birds and dogs, and some new music."

"Well, it is not much worse than Wardlock, I suppose; but we shall have a gay house soon — at all events plenty of people. Old General Lennox is coming. His nephew, Captain Drayton, is very rich; he will be Lord Tewkesbury — that is, if old Tewkesbury doesn't marry; and, at all events, he has a very nice property, and does not owe a guinea. You need not look modest, Trixie. You may do just as you please, only I'd be devilish glad you liked one another — there, don't be distressed, I say; I'll mention it no more if you don't like; but he'll be here in a few days, and you mayn't think him so bad."

After this the Baronet drank two glasses of sherry in silence, slowly, and with a gloomy countenance, and then, said he —

"I think, Trixie, if you were happily placed, I should give the whole thing up. I'm tired of that cursed House of Commons. You can't imagine what a bore it is, when a fellow does not want anything from them, going down there for their d — d divisions. I'm not fit for the hounds either. I can't ride as I used — egad! I'm as stiff as a rusty hinge when I get up in the morning. And I don't much like this place, and I'm tired to death of the other two. When you marry I'll let them, or, at all events, let them alone. I'm tired of all those servants. I know they're robbing me, egad! You would not believe what my gardens cost me last year, and, by Jove, I don't believe all that came to my table was worth two hundred pounds. I'll have quite a different sort of life. I haven't any time to myself, looking after all those confounded people one must keep about them. Keepers, and gardeners, and devil knows who beside. I don't like London half as well as the Continent. I hate dinner-parties, and the season, and all the racket. It doesn't pay, and I'm growing old — you'll not mind if I smoke it?" (he held a cigar between his fingers) — "a complaint that doesn't mend by time, you know. Oh! yes, I *am* old, you little rogue. Everybody knows I'm just fifty; and the fact is I'm tired of the whole thing, stock, lock, and barrel; and I believe what little is to be got of life is best had — that is, if you know how to look for it — abroad. A fellow like me who has got places and properties — egad! they expect him to live *pro bono publico*, and not to care or think twopence about himself — at least it comes to that. How is old Gwynn?"

"Very well, I think."

"And what has she to say for herself; what about things in general?"

"She's not very chatty, poor old Gwynn, and I think she seems a little — just ever so little — cross."

"So she does — damnably cross. She was always a bit of a vixen, and she isn't improving, poor old thing; but don't be afraid, I like old Donnie for all that, though I don't think I ever quite

understood her, and I don't expect either." These observations concluded the conversation subsided, and a long silence supervened.

"I wonder who the devil he is," said the Baronet abruptly, as he threw the stump of his cigar into the fire. "If it's a fluke, it's as like a miracle as anything I ever saw."

He recollected that he was talking without an interlocutor, and looked for a moment hesitatingly at his daughter.

"And your grandmamma told you nothing of her adventure in church?"

"No, papa – not a word."

"It seems to me, women can hold their tongues sometimes, but always in the wrong places."

Here he shook the ashes of his cigar into the grate.

"Old Granny's a fool – isn't she, Trixie, and a little bit vicious – eh?"

Sir Jekyl put his question dreamily, in a reverie, and it plainly needed no answer. So Beatrix was spared the pain of making one; which she was glad of, for Lady Alice was good to her after her way, and she was fond of her.

"We must ask her to come, you know. You write. Say I thought *you* would have a better chance of prevailing. She won't, you know; and so much the better."

So as the Baronet rose, and stood gloomily with his back to the fire; the young lady rose also, and ran away to the drawing-room and her desk; and almost at the same moment a servant entered the room, with a letter, which had come by the late post.

Oddly enough, it had the Slowton postmark.

"Devilish odd!" exclaimed Sir Jekyl, scowling eagerly on it; and seating himself hastily on the side of a chair, he broke it open and read at the foot the autograph, "Guy Strangways."

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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