

## CONCERNING WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO READ

ENGLISH literature is punctuated by a series of inescapably titanic figures – one or two per century – who overwhelmingly defined the mood, tone, and standards of their eras. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, and Wordsworth dominated their respective eras, and the chief don of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870). His works are unrelentingly required for any survey of British literature during the period called the Victorian Era. His novels began with the Irvingian sketchbook of humoresques, *The Pickwick Papers*, followed by his socially conscious *Oliver Twist*, the anti-Malthusian social allegory, *A Christmas Carol*, the virtually autobiographical *David Copperfield*, an acidic attack on the ineptitude of British courts crying for legal reform in *Bleak House*, the stark and gloomy social criticisms of *Hard Times*, the historical meditation on parallelism and redemption, *A Tale of Two Cities*, and his world-weary bildungsroman, *Great Expectations*. Born to penny-poor middle classed parents, Dickens knew keenly what it was to feel on the fence between two existences: one secure and fashionable, and one chaotic and scandalous. It was this feverish play between poles that he fed into his supernatural fiction, investing it with a gravity that pulled between sanity and madness, good and evil, normal and uncanny, without ever securing a firm footing. He suffered from a scandalous love life which saw his wife abandoned, his mistresses scandalized, and his children divided; he endured lifelong bouts of manic-depression – sometimes in productive spurts, sometimes in paralyzing waves; he grew weary and jaded with industrial society, capitalism, and commercialism – forces he struggled against valiantly if vainly; and while keenly religious he loathed the hypocrisy of the church, the charlatanism of spiritualists, and the selfishness of affluent Christians. All of these passions and fears and resentments were gradually – then forcefully – channeled into his speculative fiction, resulting in a number of invasive ghost stories that entice with pleasant language and characters, but cling to the imagination like a baited barb.

Dickens enjoyed, for the better part of a century, a reputation as one of the greatest writers of ghost stories in the language. Aside from the obvious *Christmas Carol*, he was well known for his light hearted satires (“The Lawyer and the Ghost”), his dark humored allegories (“The Baron of Grogzweg”), and his conventional spiritualist episodes (“The Trial for Murder”). His tales were regularly anthologized alongside Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Wilkie Collins, Sir Walter Scott, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling. It is a reputation which he has unquestionably lost. As time has proceeded, these relatively conventional supernaturalists have fallen out of fashion in favor of masters of slow-burning terror and plot control such as M. R. James, Oliver Onions, E. F. Benson, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, Edith Wharton, and H. Russell Wakefield. Even among the Victorians, the great female writers (Amelia B.

Edwards, Mrs J. H. Riddell, Rhoda Broughton, Mrs Oliphant, Elizabeth Gaskell, Miss Braddon, Maria Louisa Molesworth, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, E. Nesbit, and Sarah Orne Jewett) have overwhelmingly dominated the respect and attention of contemporary critics. But Dickens contributions to the field of speculative fiction continue to prove considerable, from his influence on Edgar Allan Poe, M. R. James, and J. Sheridan Le Fanu, to his genuine masterpieces of horror – some four expert ghost stories (*To Be Read at Dusk*, *The Hanged Man's Bride*, *The Trial for Murder*, *The Signal-Man*), three still-effective supernatural allegories (*Baron Grogzwig*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Goblins Who Stole a Sexton*), and two grisly tales of psychological horror (*A Madman's Manuscript*, *The Mother's Eyes*). Dickens' tales – many of which were modelled after the whimsical, character-driven supernatural tales of Washington Irving and the historically-set Gothic episodes of Sir Walter Scott – were almost always either social satires, social allegories, or contained undercurrent social themes, causing them to tread the borderlands between pure supernatural fiction (like that of M. R. James) and pure social realism (like that of Thomas Hardy). Elizabeth Gaskell, Mrs Oliphant, and Edith Wharton would follow his example, generating some of the century's best socially conscious ghost stories. His early tales especially were concerned with basic human dignity, the plight of the poor, and humanist celebrations of life and loss, but as he aged his stories began to darken and broaden from social critiques to existential anxieties. His best ghost stories mourned the loss of divine justice, the impotence of the law, and the corruption of authority, concluding either with pyrrhic victories (the evil are punished, but only after true justice is impossible) or – as in “The Signal-Man” and “To Be Read at Dusk” – disturbing, mysterious riddles which refused to yield answers to their tragic plots. Almost Lovecraftian in their sinister worldview, these later stories draw far away from the jolting whimsy of his early tales, creating a chiaroscuro universe of deep shadow closing in around weak points of light.

As previously mentioned, Dickens' influence on speculative fiction was sizeable. The most obvious benefactor was the American critic, poet, and Gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe, whose tales of madness and murder were undeniably impacted by Dickens' similarly themed “A Madman's Manuscript,” and “The Mother's Eyes” which presaged “The Black Cat,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “Berenice,” “Ligeia,” “Morella,” “The Imp of the Perverse,” and to degrees “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “William Wilson,” “Hop-Frog,” and “The Cask of Amontillado.” Dickens returned the favor by modelling his story “The Hanged Man's Bride” loosely off of “Metzengerstein” and “The Black Cat,” while “The Baron of Grogzwig” bears notable similarities to “Metzengerstein,” “Bon-Bon,” “The Devil in the Belfry,” and “Never Bet the Devil Your Head.” Other writers built on top of Dickens supernatural works (especially “Trial” and “Signal-Man”), but the most notable are his contemporary J. Sheridan Le Fanu – the unrivaled master of the Victorian ghost story – and the former's 20<sup>th</sup> century protégé, M. R. James. Le Fanu appears to have been inspired by “The Trial for Murder,” creating “Mr Justice Harbottle” while James constructed on top of both stories to forge his eerie courtroom drama “Martin's Close.” “The Hanged Man's Bride,” a decidedly

Lefanuvian tale of guardian abuse, greed, ghostly revenge, and just desserts heralds beves of Le Fanu stories (especially “The Haunted Baronet,” “Squire Toby’s Will,” “Harbottle,” “Madam Crowl’s Ghost,” and “Schalken the Painter”) and became reworked in many of James’ best known grotesqueries (particularly “The Ash Tree,” “Martin’s Close,” “The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance,” “Lost Hearts,” and “The Stalls of Barchester”). His influence is also clearly felt in E. F. Benson, Wilkie Collins, Amelia B. Edwards, H. Russell Wakefield, E. Nesbit, Mrs Oliphant, and drove more.

For his part, Dickens’ supernatural fiction was chiefly inspired by the earlier work of the American humorist, historian, and sketch writer Washington Irving and the Scottish writer of historical romances, Sir Walter Scott. Irving’s touch can be easily glimpsed in “The Bagman’s Uncle” – loosely formed in the model of the half-credible narratives of *Tales of a Traveler*, some of which are blatantly humorous distortions of the truth (the sex-themed “Adventure of My Grandfather”) while others offered mysterious suggestions of either madness or genuine horror (“The Adventure of My Uncle,” “The Adventure of the German Student”). “The Goblins Who Stole a Sexton” unabashedly suggests Irving’s two most popular tales – “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle” – consisting as it does of an antisocial ne’er-do-well who roams into a cemetery, is spirited away by the supernatural, becoming a legend in his own right when his affects are found abandoned hard by, and returns years later, a changed man. “The Baron of Grogzwig” bears stark similarities to several of Irving’s German tales (“The Spectre Bridegroom” especially), and the character of Fezziwig from *A Christmas Carol* is all but a caricature of Irving’s Christmas-loving Squire Bracebridge (*Bracebridge Hall*, with its nostalgic affection for Yuletide, inspired Dickens to write the *Carol*, and the two authors – with some help from Prince Albert – virtually singlehandedly revived Christmas in England after two centuries of dormancy).

Dickens continued to write prolifically until the railroad accident which inspired “The Signal-Man.” After this life-shaking event, his moods worsened, and his creativity dried up rapidly. His son credited the horror of the crash with abbreviating his father’s life. On 9 June 1865, a boat train driving passengers from the Kentish coast to London was derailed near the town of Staplehurst when it crossed over a section of rail which had been removed during a sloppy repair process. A signalman had attempted to wave the train to a halt, but he was located half the legal distance from the repairs, and the engine could not stop in time. Dickens’ car was among the seven which derailed, and after he had rescued his mistress and her mother, he frantically began tending to the injured. Several died in his company, ten in total, while forty were injured. The event robbed him of his voice for two weeks, and left him scarred until his death five years later to the day.

His most important work remains literary fiction, social realism, and historical fiction, with horror and supernaturalism occupying a terribly small portion of his vast oeuvre. But those stories which continue to circulate in anthologies such as this do so because of their unmistakable artistry – whether due to their humor, their allegorical significance, their psychological depth, their existential vision, or – though rarely – their abject horror. His tales can

be charming, disturbing, haunting, and charismatic. They can be fine pieces to read to small children by cheery candlelight on October 31 (or December 24), or grim episodes to be mulled over by world-weary adults as they contemplate the role of fate, social responsibility, free will, and cosmic charity in their own lives. Like Irving whom he adored, and James who adored him, Dickens' supernatural work continues to charm and thrill regardless of its lack of octopoid aliens, fiery skeletons, or blood-drenched vivisections. He is not Stephen King. He is not H. P. Lovecraft. He is not Ramsey Campbell or Clive Barker or Dean Koontz. He is Dickens, Boz, and his speculative fiction is propelled, not by gore, or horror, or sadism, but by its subtle roots in the human unconscious – his stories which cause us to chuckle disarmingly while we read, but to furrow our brow in confused discomfort when we put the book aside and leave the room.

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*THIS tale is among the best of Dickens' straightforward ghost stories, standing ably alongside the psychological horrors of "A Madman's Manuscript" and "The Mother's Eyes," in something of a triumvirate of chilling murder tales. "The Hanged Man's Bride" begins on a humorous note – a ghost appears to two lazy rogues who fail to pick up on his obviously supernatural condition – but it rapidly deepens into a tale of emotional abuse, brutal homicide, and surging Poe-esque guilt. In fact, while Dickens has a undeniable claim on influencing Poe's major murder stories, it appears that by this point, after Poe's death, the worm had turned: "The Hanged Man's Bride" bears several striking similarities to "Metzengerstein," "The Tell-Tale Heart," and most especially "The Black Cat." Also influenced by Gothic masterpieces "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Schalken the Painter," this disturbing tale went on to inspire many of the ghost stories of J. Sheridan Le Fanu, Wilkie Collins, Algernon Blackwood, E. F. Benson, and M. R. James among others.*

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## THE HANGED MAN'S BRIDE

### Or, THE GHOST IN THE BRIDAL CHAMBER

EXCERPTED *from* THE LAZY TOUR OF TWO IDLE APPRENTICES, CHAPTER *Four*  
{1857}

NIGHT had come again, and they had been writing for two or three hours: writing, in short, a portion of the lazy notes from which these lazy sheets are taken. They had left off writing, and glasses were on the table between them. The house was closed and quiet. Around the head of Thomas Idle, as he lay upon his sofa, hovered light wreaths of fragrant smoke. The temples of Francis Goodchild, as he leaned back in his chair, with his two hands clasped behind his head, and his legs crossed, were similarly decorated.

They had been discussing several idle subjects of speculation, not omitting the strange old men, and were still so occupied, when Mr. Goodchild abruptly changed his attitude to wind up his watch. They were just becoming drowsy enough to be stopped in their talk by any such slight check. Thomas Idle, who was speaking at the moment, paused and said, 'How goes it?'

'One,' said Goodchild.

As if he had ordered One old man, and the order were promptly executed (truly, all orders were so, in that excellent hotel), the door opened, and One old man stood there.

He did not come in, but stood with the door in his hand.

'One of the six, Tom, at last!' said Mr. Goodchild, in a surprised whisper.—  
'Sir, your pleasure?'

'Sir, your pleasure?' said the One old man.

'I didn't ring.'

'The bell did,' said the One old man.

He said BELL, in a deep, strong way, that would have expressed the church Bell.

‘I had the pleasure, I believe, of seeing you, yesterday?’ said Goodchild.

‘I cannot undertake to say for certain,’ was the grim reply of the One old man.

‘I think you saw me? Did you not?’

‘Saw you?’ said the old man. ‘O yes, I saw you. But, I see many who never see me.’

A chilled, slow, earthy, fixed old man. A cadaverous old man of measured speech. An old man who seemed as unable to wink, as if his eyelids had been nailed to his forehead. An old man whose eyes—two spots of fire—had no more motion than if they had been connected with the back of his skull by screws driven through it, and rivetted and bolted outside, among his grey hair.

The night had turned so cold, to Mr. Goodchild’s sensations, that he shivered. He remarked lightly, and half apologetically, ‘I think somebody is walking over my grave.’

‘No,’ said the weird old man, ‘there is no one there.’

Mr. Goodchild looked at Idle, but Idle lay with his head enwreathed in smoke.

‘No one there?’ said Goodchild.

‘There is no one at your grave, I assure you,’ said the old man.

He had come in and shut the door, and he now sat down. He did not bend himself to sit, as other people do, but seemed to sink bolt upright, as if in water, until the chair stopped him.

‘My friend, Mr. Idle,’ said Goodchild, extremely anxious to introduce a third person into the conversation.

‘I am,’ said the old man, without looking at him, ‘at Mr. Idle’s service.’

‘If you are an old inhabitant of this place,’ Francis Goodchild resumed.

‘Yes.’

‘Perhaps you can decide a point my friend and I were in doubt upon, this morning. They hang condemned criminals at the Castle, I believe?’

‘I believe so,’ said the old man.

‘Are their faces turned towards that noble prospect?’

‘Your face is turned,’ replied the old man, ‘to the Castle wall. When you are tied up, you see its stones expanding and contracting violently, and a similar expansion and contraction seem to take place in your own head and breast. Then, there is a rush of fire and an earthquake, and the Castle springs into the air, and you tumble down a precipice.’

His cravat appeared to trouble him. He put his hand to his throat, and moved his neck from side to side. He was an old man of a swollen character of face, and his nose was immoveably hitched up on one side, as if by a little hook inserted in that nostril. Mr. Goodchild felt exceedingly uncomfortable, and began to think the night was hot, and not cold.

‘A strong description, sir,’ he observed.

‘A strong sensation,’ the old man rejoined.

Again, Mr. Goodchild looked to Mr. Thomas Idle; but Thomas lay on his back with his face attentively turned towards the One old man, and made no

sign. At this time Mr. Goodchild believed that he saw threads of fire stretch from the old man's eyes to his own, and there attach themselves. (Mr. Goodchild writes the present account of his experience, and, with the utmost solemnity, protests that he had the strongest sensation upon him of being forced to look at the old man along those two fiery films, from that moment.)

'I must tell it to you,' said the old man, with a ghastly and a stony stare.

'What?' asked Francis Goodchild.

'You know where it took place. Yonder!'

Whether he pointed to the room above, or to the room below, or to any room in that old house, or to a room in some other old house in that old town, Mr. Goodchild was not, nor is, nor ever can be, sure. He was confused by the circumstance that the right forefinger of the One old man seemed to dip itself in one of the threads of fire, light itself, and make a fiery start in the air, as it pointed somewhere. Having pointed somewhere, it went out.

'You know she was a Bride,' said the old man.

'I know they still send up Bride-cake,' Mr. Goodchild faltered. 'This is a very oppressive air.'

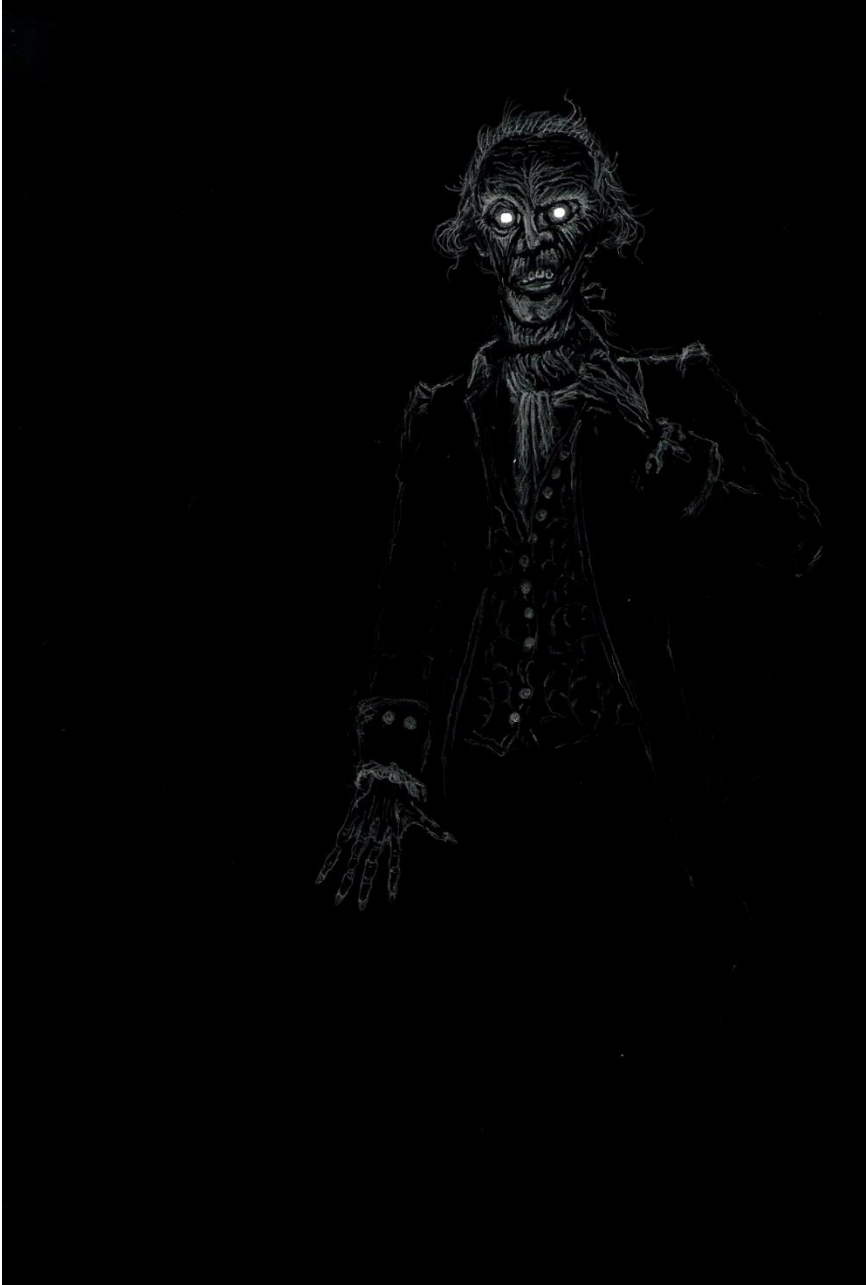
'She was a Bride,' said the old man. 'She was a fair, flaxen-haired, large-eyed girl, who had no character, no purpose. A weak, credulous, incapable, helpless nothing. Not like her mother. No, no. It was her father whose character she reflected.

'Her mother had taken care to secure everything to herself, for her own life, when the father of this girl (a child at that time) died—of sheer helplessness; no other disorder—and then He renewed the acquaintance that had once subsisted between the mother and Him. He had been put aside for the flaxen-haired, large-eyed man (or nonentity) with Money. He could overlook that for Money. He wanted compensation in Money.

'So, he returned to the side of that woman the mother, made love to her again, danced attendance on her, and submitted himself to her whims. She wreaked upon him every whim she had, or could invent. He bore it. And the more he bore, the more he wanted compensation in Money, and the more he was resolved to have it.

'But, lo! Before he got it, she cheated him. In one of her imperious states, she froze, and never thawed again. She put her hands to her head one night, uttered a cry, stiffened, lay in that attitude certain hours, and died. And he had got no compensation from her in Money, yet. Blight and Murrain on her! Not a penny.

'He had hated her throughout that second pursuit, and had longed for retaliation on her. He now counterfeited her signature to an instrument, leaving all she had to leave, to her daughter—ten years old then—to whom the property passed absolutely, and appointing himself the daughter's Guardian. When He slid it under the pillow of the bed on which she lay, He bent down in the deaf ear of Death, and whispered: "Mistress Pride, I have determined a long time that, dead or alive, you must make me compensation in Money.'





‘So, now there were only two left. Which two were, He, and the fair flaxen-haired, large-eyed foolish daughter, who afterwards became the Bride.

‘He put her to school. In a secret, dark, oppressive, ancient house, he put her to school with a watchful and unscrupulous woman. “My worthy lady,” he said, “here is a mind to be formed; will you help me to form it?” She accepted the trust. For which she, too, wanted compensation in Money, and had it.

‘The girl was formed in the fear of him, and in the conviction, that there was no escape from him. She was taught, from the first, to regard him as her future husband—the man who must marry her—the destiny that overshadowed her—the appointed certainty that could never be evaded. The poor fool was soft white wax in their hands, and took the impression that they put upon her. It hardened with time. It became a part of herself. Inseparable from herself, and only to be torn away from her, by tearing life away from her.

‘Eleven years she had lived in the dark house and its gloomy garden. He was jealous of the very light and air getting to her, and they kept her close. He stopped the wide chimneys, shaded the little windows, left the strong-stemmed ivy to wander where it would over the house-front, the moss to accumulate on the untrimmed fruit-trees in the red-walled garden, the weeds to over-run its green and yellow walks. He surrounded her with images of sorrow and desolation. He caused her to be filled with fears of the place and of the stories that were told of it, and then on pretext of correcting them, to be left in it in solitude, or made to shrink about it in the dark. When her mind was most depressed and fullest of terrors, then, he would come out of one of the hiding-places from which he overlooked her, and present himself as her sole resource.

‘Thus, by being from her childhood the one embodiment her life presented to her of power to coerce and power to relieve, power to bind and power to loose, the ascendancy over her weakness was secured. She was twenty-one years and twenty-one days old, when he brought her home to the gloomy house, his half-witted, frightened, and submissive Bride of three weeks.

‘He had dismissed the governess by that time—what he had left to do, he could best do alone—and they came back, upon a rain night, to the scene of her long preparation. She turned to him upon the threshold, as the rain was dripping from the porch, and said:

“‘O sir, it is the Death-watch ticking for me!”

“‘Well!” he answered. “And if it were?”

“‘O sir!” she returned to him, “look kindly on me, and be merciful to me! I beg your pardon. I will do anything you wish, if you will only forgive me!”

‘That had become the poor fool’s constant song: “I beg your pardon,” and “Forgive me!”

‘She was not worth hating; he felt nothing but contempt for her. But, she had long been in the way, and he had long been weary, and the work was near its end, and had to be worked out.

“‘You fool,” he said. “Go up the stairs!”

‘She obeyed very quickly, murmuring, “I will do anything you wish!” When he came into the Bride’s Chamber, having been a little retarded by the heavy

fastenings of the great door (for they were alone in the house, and he had arranged that the people who attended on them should come and go in the day), he found her withdrawn to the furthest corner, and there standing pressed against the paneling as if she would have shrunk through it: her flaxen hair all wild about her face, and her large eyes staring at him in vague terror.

“What are you afraid of? Come and sit down by me.”

“I will do anything you wish. I beg your pardon, sir. Forgive me!” Her monotonous tune as usual.

“Ellen, here is a writing that you must write out to-morrow, in your own hand. You may as well be seen by others, busily engaged upon it. When you have written it all fairly, and corrected all mistakes, call in any two people there may be about the house, and sign your name to it before them. Then, put it in your bosom to keep it safe, and when I sit here again to-morrow night, give it to me.”

“I will do it all, with the greatest care. I will do anything you wish.”

“Don’t shake and tremble, then.”

“I will try my utmost not to do it—if you will only forgive me!”

Next day, she sat down at her desk, and did as she had been told. He often passed in and out of the room, to observe her, and always saw her slowly and laboriously writing: repeating to herself the words she copied, in appearance quite mechanically, and without caring or endeavouring to comprehend them, so that she did her task. He saw her follow the directions she had received, in all particulars; and at night, when they were alone again in the same Bride’s Chamber, and he drew his chair to the hearth, she timidly approached him from her distant seat, took the paper from her bosom, and gave it into his hand.

It secured all her possessions to him, in the event of her death. He put her before him, face to face, that he might look at her steadily; and he asked her, in so many plain words, neither fewer nor more, did she know that?

There were spots of ink upon the bosom of her white dress, and they made her face look whiter and her eyes look larger as she nodded her head. There were spots of ink upon the hand with which she stood before him, nervously plaiting and folding her white skirts.

He took her by the arm, and looked her, yet more closely and steadily, in the face. “Now, die! I have done with you.”

She shrunk, and uttered a low, suppressed cry.

“I am not going to kill you. I will not endanger my life for yours. Die!”

He sat before her in the gloomy Bride’s Chamber, day after day, night after night, looking the word at her when he did not utter it. As often as her large unmeaning eyes were raised from the hands in which she rocked her head, to the stern figure, sitting with crossed arms and knitted forehead, in the chair, they read in it, “Die!” When she dropped asleep in exhaustion, she was called back to shuddering consciousness, by the whisper, “Die!” When she fell upon her old entreaty to be pardoned, she was answered “Die!” When she had out-watched and out-suffered the long night, and the rising sun flamed into the sombre room, she heard it hailed with, “Another day and not dead?—Die!”

‘Shut up in the deserted mansion, aloof from all mankind, and engaged alone in such a struggle without any respite, it came to this—that either he must die, or she. He knew it very well, and concentrated his strength against her feebleness. Hours upon hours he held her by the arm when her arm was black where he held it, and bade her Die!

‘It was done, upon a windy morning, before sunrise. He computed the time to be half-past four; but, his forgotten watch had run down, and he could not be sure. She had broken away from him in the night, with loud and sudden cries—the first of that kind to which she had given vent—and he had had to put his hands over her mouth. Since then, she had been quiet in the corner of the paneling where she had sunk down; and he had left her, and had gone back with his folded arms and his knitted forehead to his chair.

‘Paler in the pale light, more colourless than ever in the leaden dawn, he saw her coming, trailing herself along the floor towards him—a white wreck of hair, and dress, and wild eyes, pushing itself on by an irresolute and bending hand.

“‘O, forgive me! I will do anything. O, sir, pray tell me I may live!’”

“‘Die!’”

“‘Are you so resolved? Is there no hope for me?’”

“‘Die!’”

‘Her large eyes strained themselves with wonder and fear; wonder and fear changed to reproach; reproach to blank nothing. It was done. He was not at first so sure it was done, but that the morning sun was hanging jewels in her hair—he saw the diamond, emerald, and ruby, glittering among it in little points, as he stood looking down at her—when he lifted her and laid her on her bed.

‘She was soon laid in the ground. And now they were all gone, and he had compensated himself well.

‘He had a mind to travel. Not that he meant to waste his Money, for he was a pinching man and liked his Money dearly (liked nothing else, indeed), but, that he had grown tired of the desolate house and wished to turn his back upon it and have done with it. But, the house was worth Money, and Money must not be thrown away. He determined to sell it before he went. That it might look the less wretched and bring a better price, he hired some labourers to work in the overgrown garden; to cut out the dead wood, trim the ivy that drooped in heavy masses over the windows and gables, and clear the walks in which the weeds were growing mid-leg high.

‘He worked, himself, along with them. He worked later than they did, and, one evening at dusk, was left working alone, with his bill-hook in his hand. One autumn evening, when the Bride was five weeks dead.

“‘It grows too dark to work longer,’” he said to himself, “‘I must give over for the night.’”

‘He detested the house, and was loath to enter it. He looked at the dark porch waiting for him like a tomb, and felt that it was an accursed house. Near to the porch, and near to where he stood, was a tree whose branches waved before the old bay-window of the Bride’s Chamber, where it had been done. The tree swung suddenly, and made him start. It swung

again, although the night was still. Looking up into it, he saw a figure among the branches.

It was the figure of a young man. The face looked down, as his looked up; the branches cracked and swayed; the figure rapidly descended, and slid upon its feet before him. A slender youth of about her age, with long light brown hair.

“What thief are you?” he said, seizing the youth by the collar.

The young man, in shaking himself free, swung him a blow with his arm across the face and throat. They closed, but the young man got from him and stepped back, crying, with great eagerness and horror, “Don’t touch me! I would as like be touched by the Devil!”

He stood still, with his bill-hook in his hand, looking at the young man. For, the young man’s look was the counterpart of her last look, and he had not expected ever to see that again.

“I am no thief. Even if I were, I would not have a coin of your wealth, if it would buy me the Indies. You murderer!”

“What!”

“I climbed it,” said the young man, pointing up into the tree, “for the first time, nigh four years ago. I climbed it, to look at her. I saw her. I spoke to her. I have climbed it, many a time, to watch and listen for her. I was a boy, hidden among its leaves, when from that bay-window she gave me this!”

He showed a tress of flaxen hair, tied with a mourning ribbon.

“Her life,” said the young man, “was a life of mourning. She gave me this, as a token of it, and a sign that she was dead to every one but you. If I had been older, if I had seen her sooner, I might have saved her from you. But, she was fast in the web when I first climbed the tree, and what could I do then to break it!”

In saying those words, he burst into a fit of sobbing and crying: weakly at first, then passionately.

“Murderer! I climbed the tree on the night when you brought her back. I heard her, from the tree, speak of the Death-watch at the door. I was three times in the tree while you were shut up with her, slowly killing her. I saw her, from the tree, lie dead upon her bed. I have watched you, from the tree, for proofs and traces of your guilt. The manner of it, is a mystery to me yet, but I will pursue you until you have rendered up your life to the hangman. You shall never, until then, be rid of me. I loved her! I can know no relenting towards you. Murderer, I loved her!”

The youth was bare-headed, his hat having fluttered away in his descent from the tree. He moved towards the gate. He had to pass—Him—to get to it. There was breadth for two old-fashioned carriages abreast; and the youth’s abhorrence, openly expressed in every feature of his face and limb of his body, and very hard to bear, had verge enough to keep itself at a distance in. He (by which I mean the other) had not stirred hand or foot, since he had stood still to look at the boy. He faced round, now, to follow him with his eyes. As the back of the bare light-brown head was turned to him, he saw a red curve stretch from his hand to it. He knew, before he threw the bill-hook, where it had alighted—I say, had alighted, and not, would alight; for, to his clear perception

the thing was done before he did it. It cleft the head, and it remained there, and the boy lay on his face.

‘He buried the body in the night, at the foot of the tree. As soon as it was light in the morning, he worked at turning up all the ground near the tree, and hacking and hewing at the neighbouring bushes and undergrowth. When the labourers came, there was nothing suspicious, and nothing suspected.

‘But, he had, in a moment, defeated all his precautions, and destroyed the triumph of the scheme he had so long concerted, and so successfully worked out. He had got rid of the Bride, and had acquired her fortune without endangering his life; but now, for a death by which he had gained nothing, he had evermore to live with a rope around his neck.

‘Beyond this, he was chained to the house of gloom and horror, which he could not endure. Being afraid to sell it or to quit it, lest discovery should be made, he was forced to live in it. He hired two old people, man and wife, for his servants; and dwelt in it, and dreaded it. His great difficulty, for a long time, was the garden. Whether he should keep it trim, whether he should suffer it to fall into its former state of neglect, what would be the least likely way of attracting attention to it?

‘He took the middle course of gardening, himself, in his evening leisure, and of then calling the old serving-man to help him; but, of never letting him work there alone. And he made himself an arbour over against the tree, where he could sit and see that it was safe.

‘As the seasons changed, and the tree changed, his mind perceived dangers that were always changing. In the leafy time, he perceived that the upper boughs were growing into the form of the young man—that they made the shape of him exactly, sitting in a forked branch swinging in the wind. In the time of the falling leaves, he perceived that they came down from the tree, forming tell-tale letters on the path, or that they had a tendency to heap themselves into a churchyard mound above the grave. In the winter, when the tree was bare, he perceived that the boughs swung at him the ghost of the blow the young man had given, and that they threatened him openly. In the spring, when the sap was mounting in the trunk, he asked himself, were the dried-up particles of blood mounting with it: to make out more obviously this year than last, the leaf-screened figure of the young man, swinging in the wind?

‘However, he turned his Money over and over, and still over. He was in the dark trade, the gold-dust trade, and most secret trades that yielded great returns. In ten years, he had turned his Money over, so many times, that the traders and shippers who had dealings with him, absolutely did not lie—for once—when they declared that he had increased his fortune, Twelve Hundred Per Cent.

‘He possessed his riches one hundred years ago, when people could be lost easily. He had heard who the youth was, from hearing of the search that was made after him; but, it died away, and the youth was forgotten.

‘The annual round of changes in the tree had been repeated ten times since the night of the burial at its foot, when there was a great thunder-storm over this place. It broke at midnight, and roared until morning. The first

intelligence he heard from his old serving-man that morning, was, that the tree had been struck by Lightning.

It had been riven down the stem, in a very surprising manner, and the stem lay in two blighted shafts: one resting against the house, and one against a portion of the old red garden-wall in which its fall had made a gap. The fissure went down the tree to a little above the earth, and there stopped. There was great curiosity to see the tree, and, with most of his former fears revived, he sat in his arbour—grown quite an old man—watching the people who came to see it.

They quickly began to come, in such dangerous numbers, that he closed his garden-gate and refused to admit any more. But, there were certain men of science who travelled from a distance to examine the tree, and, in an evil hour, he let them in!—Blight and Murrain on them, let them in!

They wanted to dig up the ruin by the roots, and closely examine it, and the earth about it. Never, while he lived! They offered money for it. They! Men of science, whom he could have bought by the gross, with a scratch of his pen! He showed them the garden-gate again, and locked and barred it.

But they were bent on doing what they wanted to do, and they bribed the old serving-man—a thankless wretch who regularly complained when he received his wages, of being underpaid—and they stole into the garden by night with their lanterns, picks, and shovels, and fell to at the tree. He was lying in a turret-room on the other side of the house (the Bride's Chamber had been unoccupied ever since), but he soon dreamed of picks and shovels, and got up.

He came to an upper window on that side, whence he could see their lanterns, and them, and the loose earth in a heap which he had himself disturbed and put back, when it was last turned to the air. It was found! They had that minute lighted on it. They were all bending over it. One of them said, "The skull is fractured;" and another, "See here the bones;" and another, "See here the clothes;" and then the first struck in again, and said, "A rusty bill-hook!"

He became sensible, next day, that he was already put under a strict watch, and that he could go nowhere without being followed. Before a week was out, he was taken and laid in hold. The circumstances were gradually pieced together against him, with a desperate malignity, and an appalling ingenuity. But, see the justice of men, and how it was extended to him! He was further accused of having poisoned that girl in the Bride's Chamber. He, who had carefully and expressly avoided imperilling a hair of his head for her, and who had seen her die of her own incapacity!

There was doubt for which of the two murders he should be first tried; but, the real one was chosen, and he was found Guilty, and cast for death. Bloodthirsty wretches! They would have made him Guilty of anything, so set they were upon having his life.

His money could do nothing to save him, and he was hanged. I am He, and I was hanged at Lancaster Castle with my face to the wall, a hundred years ago!

At this terrific announcement, Mr. Goodchild tried to rise and cry out. But, the two fiery lines extending from the old man's eyes to his own, kept him down, and he could not utter a sound. His sense of hearing, however, was acute, and he could hear the clock strike Two. No sooner had he heard the clock strike Two, than he saw before him Two old men!

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*"THERE was a ship!" This is how the eponymous Ancient Mariner of Coleridge's Gothic poem begins his ritualistic narration. Condemned to wander the earth and relate the tale of his crimes, the old man with gleaming eyes arrests the attention of his listeners before disappearing. "She was a bride!" exclaims Dickens' ancient murderer. This grotesque phantom is likewise damned to transmit the story of his deeds on a regular basis (one o'clock each night) as a part of his penance. The story would have an obvious influence on E. F. Benson, Algernon Blackwood, Wilkie Collins, M.R. James – particularly "Martin's Close," "The Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance," "Lost Hearts," "The Ash Tree," and "The Stalls of Barchester" – and on Britain's master ghost story writer, J. Sheridan Le Fanu. Indeed, the tale reads very much like a Le Fanu tale, closely resembling elements of "Schalken the Painter" (which, in this case, being written in the 1830s, was possibly an influence on this episode), "Mr Justice Harbottle," "The Haunted Baronet," "Madam Crowl's Ghost," and "Squire Toby's Will." Like Le Fanu's grisly oeuvre, Dickens uses this story to examine the blurred lines between good and evil, health and illness, innocence and guilt (the killer is innocent of the first death... or is he? It is nebulous), the natural and the supernatural, past and present, falsehood and truth. It is a dark, chiaroscuro landscape of human sin, shame, and corruption, spotted with gleams of virtue, but overwhelmingly cloaked in featureless shadow.*

*MOST famous of Dickens' ghost stories (somewhat undeservingly when compared to the original, weird, and mystifying mainstays "Signal-Man," "Dusk," and "Bride") "The Trial for Murder" was once considered the exemplar of a respectable ghost story (largely because of its author) and was included with "The Turn of the Screw," "The Body-Snatchers," and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" in early-to-mid twentieth century anthologies of ghost stories. In our current century, "Trial" loses a great deal of momentum due to its perspective, narration, and delivery, all of which diminish the intrusion of the supernatural, making it odd but never really frightening or weird. Until the end. While early anthologists were correct in choosing this tale as a relatively tame and reputable example of the decent ghost story (good lord, what would they have done with Onions or Hodgson or Machen, Blackwood, Wakefield, or God forbid, Lovecraft, Aickman, or De la Mare?), they missed the utterly thrilling implications of its conclusion – that we are all ghosts of something, that our society is crippled and inept, and that justice is not to be expected without the goodly puppeteering of a supernatural overlord, one which – as the secondary title suggests – Dickens sadly writes off.*

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THE TRIAL FOR MURDER  
Or, TO BE TAKEN WITH A GRAIN OF SALT  
{1865}

I have always noticed a prevalent want of courage, even among persons of superior intelligence and culture, as to imparting their own psychological experiences when those have been of a strange sort. Almost all men are afraid that what they could relate in such wise would find no parallel or response in a listener's internal life, and might be suspected or laughed at. A truthful traveller, who should have seen some extraordinary creature in the likeness of a sea-serpent, would have no fear of mentioning it; but the same traveller, having had some singular presentiment, impulse, vagary of thought, vision (so-called), dream, or other remarkable mental impression, would hesitate considerably before he would own to it. To this reticence I attribute much of the obscurity in which such subjects are involved. We do not habitually communicate our experiences of these subjective things as we do our experiences of objective creation. The consequence is, that the general stock of experience in this regard appears exceptional, and really is so, in respect of being miserably imperfect.

In what I am going to relate, I have no intention of setting up, opposing, or supporting, any theory whatever. I know the history of the Bookseller of Berlin, I have studied the case of the wife of a late Astronomer Royal as related by Sir David Brewster, and I have followed the minutest details of a much



more remarkable case of Spectral Illusion occurring within my private circle of friends. It may be necessary to state as to this last, that the sufferer (a lady) was in no degree, however distant, related to me. A mistaken assumption on that head might suggest an explanation of a part of my own case, -- but only a part, -- which would be wholly without foundation. It cannot be referred to my inheritance of any developed peculiarity, nor had I ever before any at all similar experience, nor have I ever had any at all similar experience since.

It does not signify how many years ago, or how few, a certain murder was committed in England, which attracted great attention. We hear more than enough of murderers as they rise in succession to their atrocious eminence, and I would bury the memory of this particular brute, if I could, as his body was buried, in Newgate Jail. I purposely abstain from giving any direct clue to the criminal's individuality.

When the murder was first discovered, no suspicion fell -- or I ought rather to say, for I cannot be too precise in my facts, it was nowhere publicly hinted that any suspicion fell -- on the man who was afterwards brought to trial. As no reference was at that time made to him in the newspapers, it is obviously impossible that any description of him can at that time have been given in the newspapers. It is essential that this fact be remembered.

Unfolding at breakfast my morning paper, containing the account of that first discovery, I found it to be deeply interesting, and I read it with close attention. I read it twice, if not three times. The discovery had been made in a bedroom, and, when I laid down the paper, I was aware of a flash -- rush -- flow -- I do not know what to call it, -- no word I can find is satisfactorily descriptive, -- in which I seemed to see that bedroom passing through my room, like a picture impossibly painted on a running river. Though almost instantaneous in its passing, it was perfectly clear; so clear that I distinctly, and with a sense of relief, observed the absence of the dead body from the bed.

It was in no romantic place that I had this curious sensation, but in chambers in Piccadilly, very near to the corner of St. James's Street. It was entirely new to me. I was in my easy-chair at the moment, and the sensation was accompanied with a peculiar shiver which started the chair from its position. (But it is to be noted that the chair ran easily on castors.) I went to one of the windows (there are two in the room, and the room is on the second floor) to refresh my eyes with the moving objects down in Piccadilly. It was a bright autumn morning, and the street was sparkling and cheerful. The wind was high. As I looked out, it brought down from the Park a quantity of fallen leaves, which a gust took, and whirled into a spiral pillar. As the pillar fell and the leaves dispersed, I saw two men on the opposite side of the way, going from West to East. They were one behind the other. The foremost man often looked back over his shoulder. The second man followed him, at a distance of some thirty paces, with his right hand menacingly raised. First, the singularity and steadiness of this threatening gesture in so public a thoroughfare attracted my attention; and next, the more remarkable circumstance that nobody heeded it. Both men threaded their way among the other passengers with a smoothness hardly consistent even with the action of walking on a pavement; and no single creature, that I could see, gave them place, touched them, or

looked after them. In passing before my windows, they both stared up at me. I saw their two faces very distinctly, and I knew that I could recognise them anywhere. Not that I had consciously noticed anything very remarkable in either face, except that the man who went first had an unusually lowering appearance, and that the face of the man who followed him was of the colour of impure wax.

I am a bachelor, and my valet and his wife constitute my whole establishment. My occupation is in a certain Branch Bank, and I wish that my duties as head of a Department were as light as they are popularly supposed to be. They kept me in town that autumn, when I stood in need of change. I was not ill, but I was not well. My reader is to make the most that can be reasonably made of my feeling jaded, having a depressing sense upon me of a monotonous life, and being "slightly dyspeptic." I am assured by my renowned doctor that my real state of health at that time justifies no stronger description, and I quote his own from his written answer to my request for it.

As the circumstances of the murder, gradually unravelling, took stronger and stronger possession of the public mind, I kept them away from mine by knowing as little about them as was possible in the midst of the universal excitement. But I knew that a verdict of Wilful Murder had been found against the suspected murderer, and that he had been committed to Newgate for trial. I also knew that his trial had been postponed over one Sessions of the Central Criminal Court, on the ground of general prejudice and want of time for the preparation of the defence. I may further have known, but I believe I did not, when, or about when, the Sessions to which his trial stood postponed would come on.

My sitting-room, bedroom, and dressing-room, are all on one floor. With the last there is no communication but through the bedroom. True, there is a door in it, once communicating with the staircase; but a part of the fitting of my bath has been -- and had then been for some years -- fixed across it. At the same period, and as a part of the same arrangement, -- the door had been nailed up and canvased over.

I was standing in my bedroom late one night, giving some directions to my servant before he went to bed. My face was towards the only available door of communication with the dressing-room, and it was closed. My servant's back was towards that door. While I was speaking to him, I saw it open, and a man look in, who very earnestly and mysteriously beckoned to me. That man was the man who had gone second of the two along Piccadilly, and whose face was of the colour of impure wax.

The figure, having beckoned, drew back, and closed the door. With no longer pause than was made by my crossing the bedroom, I opened the dressing-room door, and looked in. I had a lighted candle already in my hand. I felt no inward expectation of seeing the figure in the dressing-room, and I did not see it there.

Conscious that my servant stood amazed, I turned round to him, and said: "Derrick, could you believe that in my cool senses I fancied I saw a --" As I there laid my hand upon his breast, with a sudden start he trembled violently, and said, "O Lord, yes, sir! A dead man beckoning!"

Now I do not believe that this John Derrick, my trusty and attached servant for more than twenty years, had any impression whatever of having seen any such figure, until I touched him. The change in him was so startling, when I touched him, that I fully believe he derived his impression in some occult manner from me at that instant.

I bade John Derrick bring some brandy, and I gave him a dram, and was glad to take one myself. Of what had preceded that night's phenomenon, I told him not a single word. Reflecting on it, I was absolutely certain that I had never seen that face before, except on the one occasion in Piccadilly. Comparing its expression when beckoning at the door with its expression when it had stared up at me as I stood at my window, I came to the conclusion that on the first occasion it had sought to fasten itself upon my memory, and that on the second occasion it had made sure of being immediately remembered.

I was not very comfortable that night, though I felt a certainty, difficult to explain, that the figure would not return. At daylight I fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was awakened by John Derrick's coming to my bedside with a paper in his hand.

This paper, it appeared, had been the subject of an altercation at the door between its bearer and my servant. It was a summons to me to serve upon a Jury at the forthcoming Sessions of the Central Criminal Court at the Old Bailey. I had never before been summoned on such a Jury, as John Derrick well knew. He believed -- I am not certain at this hour whether with reason or otherwise -- that that class of Jurors were customarily chosen on a lower qualification than mine, and he had at first refused to accept the summons. The man who served it had taken the matter very coolly. He had said that my attendance or non-attendance was nothing to him; there the summons was; and I should deal with it at my own peril, and not at his.

For a day or two I was undecided whether to respond to this call, or take no notice of it. I was not conscious of the slightest mysterious bias, influence, or attraction, one way or other. Of that I am as strictly sure as of every other statement that I make here. Ultimately I decided, as a break in the monotony of my life, that I would go.

The appointed morning was a raw morning in the month of November. There was a dense brown fog in Piccadilly, and it became positively black and in the last degree oppressive East of Temple Bar. I found the passages and staircases of the Court-House flaringly lighted with gas, and the Court itself similarly illuminated. I THINK that, until I was conducted by officers into the Old Court and saw its crowded state, I did not know that the Murderer was to be tried that day. I THINK that, until I was so helped into the Old Court with considerable difficulty, I did not know into which of the two Courts sitting my summons would take me. But this must not be received as a positive assertion, for I am not completely satisfied in my mind on either point.

I took my seat in the place appropriated to Jurors in waiting, and I looked about the Court as well as I could through the cloud of fog and breath that was heavy in it. I noticed the black vapour hanging like a murky curtain outside the great windows, and I noticed the stifled sound of wheels on the straw or

tan that was littered in the street; also, the hum of the people gathered there, which a shrill whistle, or a louder song or hail than the rest, occasionally pierced. Soon afterwards the Judges, two in number, entered, and took their seats. The buzz in the Court was awfully hushed. The direction was given to put the Murderer to the bar. He appeared there. And in that same instant I recognised in him the first of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly.

If my name had been called then, I doubt if I could have answered to it audibly. But it was called about sixth or eighth in the panel, and I was by that time able to say, "Here!" Now, observe. As I stepped into the box, the prisoner, who had been looking on attentively, but with no sign of concern, became violently agitated, and beckoned to his attorney. The prisoner's wish to challenge me was so manifest, that it occasioned a pause, during which the attorney, with his hand upon the dock, whispered with his client, and shook his head. I afterwards had it from that gentleman, that the prisoner's first affrighted words to him were, "AT ALL HAZARDS, CHALLENGE THAT MAN!" But that, as he would give no reason for it, and admitted that he had not even known my name until he heard it called and I appeared, it was not done.

Both on the ground already explained, that I wish to avoid reviving the unwholesome memory of that Murderer, and also because a detailed account of his long trial is by no means indispensable to my narrative, I shall confine myself closely to such incidents in the ten days and nights during which we, the Jury, were kept together, as directly bear on my own curious personal experience. It is in that, and not in the Murderer, that I seek to interest my reader. It is to that, and not to a page of the Newgate Calendar, that I beg attention.

I was chosen Foreman of the Jury. On the second morning of the trial, after evidence had been taken for two hours (I heard the church clocks strike), happening to cast my eyes over my brother jurymen, I found an inexplicable difficulty in counting them. I counted them several times, yet always with the same difficulty. In short, I made them one too many.

I touched the brother jurymen whose place was next me, and I whispered to him, "Oblige me by counting us." He looked surprised by the request, but turned his head and counted. "Why," says he, suddenly, "we are Thirt-; but no, it's not possible. No. We are twelve."

According to my counting that day, we were always right in detail, but in the gross we were always one too many. There was no appearance -- no figure -- to account for it; but I had now an inward foreshadowing of the figure that was surely coming.

The Jury were housed at the London Tavern. We all slept in one large room on separate tables, and we were constantly in the charge and under the eye of the officer sworn to hold us in safe-keeping. I see no reason for suppressing the real name of that officer. He was intelligent, highly polite, and obliging, and (I was glad to hear) much respected in the City. He had an agreeable presence, good eyes, enviable black whiskers, and a fine sonorous voice. His name was Mr. Harker.

When we turned into our twelve beds at night, Mr. Harker's bed was drawn across the door. On the night of the second day, not being disposed to lie

down, and seeing Mr. Harker sitting on his bed, I went and sat beside him, and offered him a pinch of snuff. As Mr. Harker's hand touched mine in taking it from my box, a peculiar shiver crossed him, and he said, "Who is this?"

Following Mr. Harker's eyes, and looking along the room, I saw again the figure I expected, -- the second of the two men who had gone down Piccadilly. I rose, and advanced a few steps; then stopped, and looked round at Mr. Harker. He was quite unconcerned, laughed, and said in a pleasant way, "I thought for a moment we had a thirteenth jurymen, without a bed. But I see it is the moonlight."

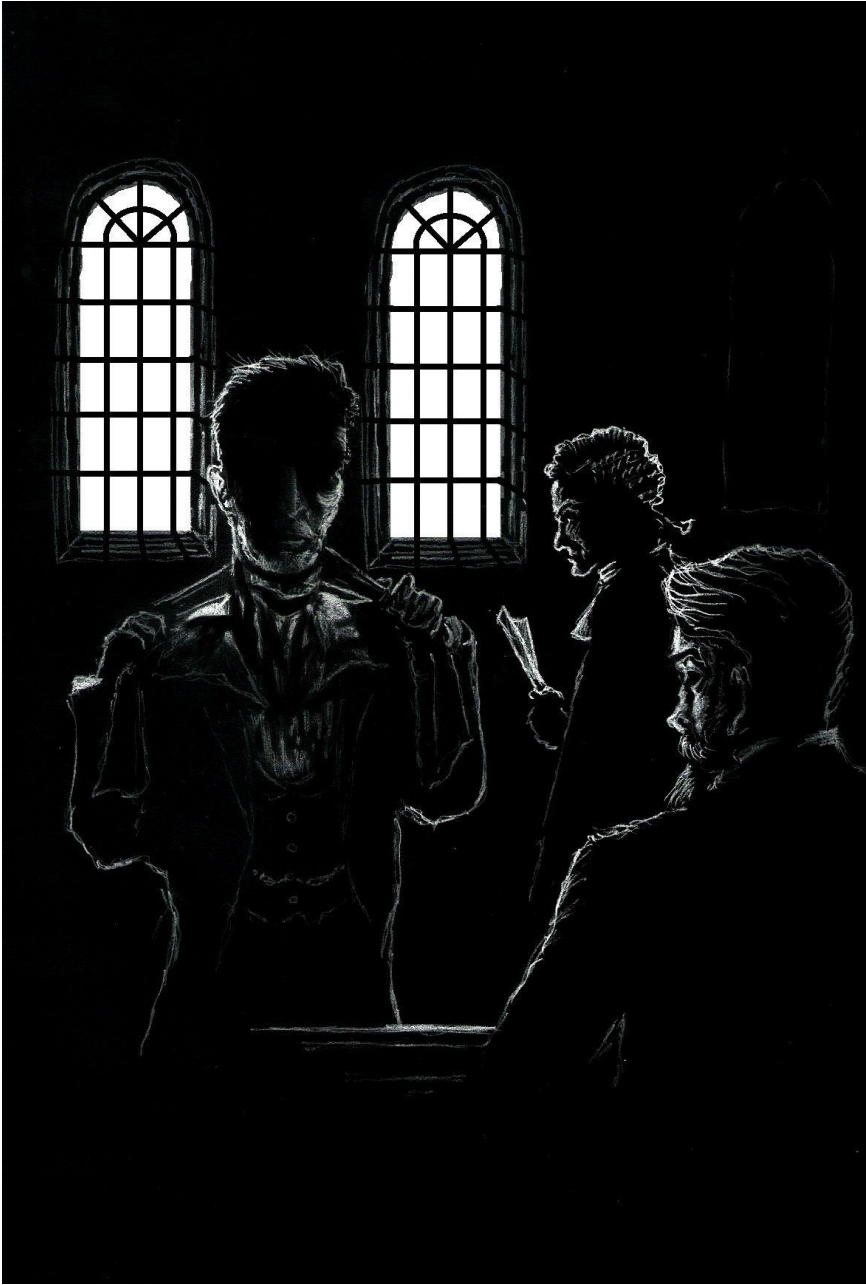
Making no revelation to Mr. Harker, but inviting him to take a walk with me to the end of the room, I watched what the figure did. It stood for a few moments by the bedside of each of my eleven brother jurymen, close to the pillow. It always went to the right-hand side of the bed, and always passed out crossing the foot of the next bed. It seemed, from the action of the head, merely to look down pensively at each recumbent figure. It took no notice of me, or of my bed, which was that nearest to Mr. Harker's. It seemed to go out where the moonlight came in, through a high window, as by an aerial flight of stairs.

Next morning at breakfast, it appeared that everybody present had dreamed of the murdered man last night, except myself and Mr. Harker.

I now felt as convinced that the second man who had gone down Piccadilly was the murdered man (so to speak), as if it had been borne into my comprehension by his immediate testimony. But even this took place, and in a manner for which I was not at all prepared.

On the fifth day of the trial, when the case for the prosecution was drawing to a close, a miniature of the murdered man, missing from his bedroom upon the discovery of the deed, and afterwards found in a hiding-place where the Murderer had been seen digging, was put in evidence. Having been identified by the witness under examination, it was handed up to the Bench, and thence handed down to be inspected by the Jury. As an officer in a black gown was making his way with it across to me, the figure of the second man who had gone down Piccadilly impetuously started from the crowd, caught the miniature from the officer, and gave it to me with his own hands, at the same time saying, in a low and hollow tone, -- before I saw the miniature, which was in a locket, -- "I WAS YOUNGER THEN, AND MY FACE WAS NOT THEN DRAINED OF BLOOD." It also came between me and the brother jurymen to whom I would have given the miniature, and between him and the brother jurymen to whom he would have given it, and so passed it on through the whole of our number, and back into my possession. Not one of them, however, detected this.

At table, and generally when we were shut up together in Mr. Harker's custody, we had from the first naturally discussed the day's proceedings a good deal. On that fifth day, the case for the prosecution being closed, and we having that side of the question in a completed shape before us, our discussion was more animated and serious. Among our number was a vestryman, -- the densest idiot I have ever seen at large, -- who met the plainest evidence with the most preposterous objections, and who was sided with by two flabby parochial parasites; all the three impanelled from a district so delivered over to



Fever that they ought to have been upon their own trial for five hundred Murders. When these mischievous blockheads were at their loudest, which was towards midnight, while some of us were already preparing for bed, I again saw the murdered man. He stood grimly behind them, beckoning to me. On my going towards them, and striking into the conversation, he immediately retired. This was the beginning of a separate series of appearances, confined to that long room in which we were confined. Whenever a knot of my brother jurymen laid their heads together, I saw the head of the murdered man among theirs. Whenever their comparison of notes was going against him, he would solemnly and irresistibly beckon to me.

It will be borne in mind that down to the production of the miniature, on the fifth day of the trial, I had never seen the Appearance in Court. Three changes occurred now that we entered on the case for the defence. Two of them I will mention together, first. The figure was now in Court continually, and it never there addressed itself to me, but always to the person who was speaking at the time. For instance: the throat of the murdered man had been cut straight across. In the opening speech for the defence, it was suggested that the deceased might have cut his own throat. At that very moment, the figure, with its throat in the dreadful condition referred to (this it had concealed before), stood at the speaker's elbow, motioning across and across its windpipe, now with the right hand, now with the left, vigorously suggesting to the speaker himself the impossibility of such a wound having been self-inflicted by either hand. For another instance: a witness to character, a woman, deposed to the prisoner's being the most amiable of mankind. The figure at that instant stood on the floor before her, looking her full in the face, and pointing out the prisoner's evil countenance with an extended arm and an outstretched finger.

The third change now to be added impressed me strongly as the most marked and striking of all. I do not theorise upon it; I accurately state it, and there leave it. Although the Appearance was not itself perceived by those whom it addressed, its coming close to such persons was invariably attended by some trepidation or disturbance on their part. It seemed to me as if it were prevented, by laws to which I was not amenable, from fully revealing itself to others, and yet as if it could invisibly, dumbly, and darkly overshadow their minds. When the leading counsel for the defence suggested that hypothesis of suicide, and the figure stood at the learned gentleman's elbow, frightfully sawing at its severed throat, it is undeniable that the counsel faltered in his speech, lost for a few seconds the thread of his ingenious discourse, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and turned extremely pale. When the witness to character was confronted by the Appearance, her eyes most certainly did follow the direction of its pointed finger, and rest in great hesitation and trouble upon the prisoner's face. Two additional illustrations will suffice. On the eighth day of the trial, after the pause which was every day made early in the afternoon for a few minutes' rest and refreshment, I came back into Court with the rest of the Jury some little time before the return of the Judges. Standing up in the box and looking about me, I thought the figure was not there, until, chancing to raise my eyes to the gallery, I saw it bending forward, and leaning over a very decent woman, as if to assure itself whether the Judges

had resumed their seats or not. Immediately afterwards that woman screamed, fainted, and was carried out. So with the venerable, sagacious, and patient Judge who conducted the trial. When the case was over, and he settled himself and his papers to sum up, the murdered man, entering by the Judges' door, advanced to his Lordship's desk, and looked eagerly over his shoulder at the pages of his notes which he was turning. A change came over his Lordship's face; his hand stopped; the peculiar shiver, that I knew so well, passed over him; he faltered, "Excuse me, gentlemen, for a few moments. I am somewhat oppressed by the vitiated air;" and did not recover until he had drunk a glass of water.

Through all the monotony of six of those interminable ten days, -- the same Judges and others on the bench, the same Murderer in the dock, the same lawyers at the table, the same tones of question and answer rising to the roof of the court, the same scratching of the Judge's pen, the same ushers going in and out, the same lights kindled at the same hour when there had been any natural light of day, the same foggy curtain outside the great windows when it was foggy, the same rain pattering and dripping when it was rainy, the same footmarks of turnkeys and prisoner day after day on the same sawdust, the same keys locking and unlocking the same heavy doors, -- through all the wearisome monotony which made me feel as if I had been Foreman of the Jury for a vast cried of time, and Piccadilly had flourished coevally with Babylon, the murdered man never lost one trace of his distinctness in my eyes, nor was he at any moment less distinct than anybody else. I must not omit, as a matter of fact, that I never once saw the Appearance which I call by the name of the murdered man look at the Murderer. Again and again I wondered, "Why does he not?" But he never did.

Nor did he look at me, after the production of the miniature, until the last closing minutes of the trial arrived. We retired to consider, at seven minutes before ten at night. The idiotic vestryman and his two parochial parasites gave us so much trouble that we twice returned into Court to beg to have certain extracts from the Judge's notes re-read. Nine of us had not the smallest doubt about those passages, neither, I believe, had any one in the Court; the dunder-headed triumvirate, having no idea but obstruction, disputed them for that very reason. At length we prevailed, and finally the Jury returned into Court at ten minutes past twelve.

The murdered man at that time stood directly opposite the Jury-box, on the other side of the Court. As I took my place, his eyes rested on me with great attention; he seemed satisfied, and slowly shook a great gray veil, which he carried on his arm for the first time, over his head and whole form. As I gave in our verdict, "Guilty," the veil collapsed, all was gone, and his place was empty.

The Murderer, being asked by the Judge, according to usage, whether he had anything to say before sentence of Death should be passed upon him, indistinctly muttered something which was described in the leading newspapers of the following day as "a few rambling, incoherent, and half-audible words, in which he was understood to complain that he had not had a fair trial, because the Foreman of the Jury was prepossessed against him." The



remarkable declaration that he really made was this: "MY LORD, I KNEW I WAS A DOOMED MAN, WHEN THE FOREMAN OF MY JURY CAME INTO THE BOX. MY LORD, I KNEW HE WOULD NEVER LET ME OFF, BECAUSE, BEFORE I WAS TAKEN, HE SOMEHOW GOT TO MY BEDSIDE IN THE NIGHT, WOKE ME, AND PUT A ROPE ROUND MY NECK."

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*To be taken with a grain of salt. The phrase suggests that the morsel about to be swallowed would not be palatable without some cynicism, humor, or other allowance. It also suggests a farce, a fantasy, or a flight of fancy. And this, I believe, is what Dickens' original title implied. Like "To be Read at Dusk," Dickens refers his readership to the optimal condition for understanding the text. In this case, it is to suspend belief, judgment, or critique for a moment, and to enjoy a fantasy. The dream he projects is one in which the universe steps in to correct the mistakes of bumbling clerks, electees, officials, judges, rogues, criminals, idiots, and whole seas of unchecked corruption. It is a cosmos that permits the laws of nature to be suspended – the very definition of supernaturalism – in order that justice and right might be served. The tale is a relative of "The Lawyer and the Ghost" in that it uses a preternatural experience to highlight a foible of natural life. Like the ghost who is more socially mobile after death and the poor wretch who envies him, the specter in the courtroom corrects for the stupidity of the jury, the idiocy of the jurists, and the corruption of the witnesses. And eventually our narrator joins the spirit, appearing himself at the criminal's bedside. What Dickens suggests here is that we have the ability to do what the ghost does – to rise above our bumbling, mortal situation and interfere with the status quo. After all, not only did his specter divert the course of events, but the living narrator acted in them, too, presaging the criminal's doom and making intellectual decisions which lead to that turn of events. Otherwise, the only suspect – and the favorite of the papers – would have escaped without paying so much as a fine. But Dickens warns us – take it with a dash of realism, because far too often a situation like this is without guiding spirits, without moral inference, without mindful justice, and without hope. As a brief aside, this tale was a tremendous influence to M. R. James, who adored Dickens ("Count Magnus," "A Warning to the Curious," "Story of a Disappearance and an Appearance," and "Casting the Runes," include wry nods to the tale, but it is "Martin's Close" that is its unmistakable descendent) and to Le Fanu, whose "Mr Justice Harbottle" contains more than one clear reference to Dickens' story.*

