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THE DOUBLE-BEDDED ROOM.

"Well, after all," I exclaimed, "there are few things so comfortable as snug quarters in a good inn; and so saying, I drew up my chair a foot or so nearer the fire, and manifested the exuberance of my satisfaction and the soundness of the poker by reducing a succulent mass of the best Walls-end to atomic fragments. A ride of some eighty miles outside the mail in a biting November had thrown me into that state of delicious languor, which disposes one to regard any thing in the best light, and I had abandoned myself to the enjoyment of the pleasurable sojourn as it was to be obtained in the best parlour of the head inn in the provincial town of Abbington. A neat repast had feasted me with light and choice, and a second tumbler of brandy and water, "warm with," stood exhaling its fragrance at my elbow. The fire was a fine spirit, and went laughing and crackling merrily up the chimney; it took part in the satisfaction it afforded—we were sworn friends.

"What a glorious thing it is," I muttered to myself, as I rested my heels upon the fender, and stretched myself backwards into my chair,—what a glorious thing it is this taking one's ease in one's inn! It hath a relish most too fine for earth—'tis snacks of Elysium! You have cheated fate for once, given business the go-by, and left the anxieties that beg your footsteps daily, in the lurch. Here you are, 'yourself alone,'—none to thwart, and to frown upon you—with a few sovereigns in your pocket, you are yourself a king. How respectful is mine host?—he is your chancellor and holds you tenderly in his keeping, as royal personages are kept. The waiters, how obsequious!—like angels, ever eager-eyed, these be your ministers, watchful to do you will be all the more that the prospect of the gratuity to be secured thereby is ever vividly present to their imagination. The chambermaids, our maids of honour, and honoured as maids, fighting you to dreams of love and bliss, like poor! Heros, with warming pan and bed-room and stick of brass. Your bed—but, good! never thought of that,—and I started up and tugged the bell in considerable trepidation.

My call was answered by the appearance of one of those smiling animals, that go about us with towels over their left arms.

"Have you secured a bed for me?"

"Yezsir," I resolved the dog should have an additional half-crown for his attention. "Sorry, sir, could not let you have a room to yourself, sir."

"Eh, what?" I exclaimed, and my countenance shined with indignation. "Single bedrooms all engaged, sir."

"The devil!"

"Yezsir,—full of lawyers, sir. Anxious this week—crowded—not a corner to cram a cat in."

"And where am I to be stowed away pray?"

"Excellent apartment, sir—third story behind—two capital beds, well aired. Other gin't'm'a very quiet, sir."

"Who, or what is he?"

"Don't know sir. Came here a week ago, sir—ten minutes to eight precisely—cup of coffee, sir, and a half a roll—goes out, and comes home at eleven every night. Mute as a mouse—tried myself to draw him out—wouldn't work, sir. Strange man, sir—neither speaks nor eats—how he lives, can't tell—what he does, ditto—where he goes, a mystery as dark as dark as Omibus, sir."

"Hum! Queer fish, seemingly."

"Yezsir, singular man, sir—indeed I may say, a very singular man, sir. Seems in rather low spirits, sir. Any more brandy and water, sir?"

I ordered a fresh supply of this terrestrial nectar, and flung myself into my chair with the air of a man who feels himself a victim to untoward destiny.

That this should have happened to me, of all men in the world! to me, who never could tolerate bed-fellows in my life!—slept with locked door and window fast, and not a soul within half a dozen rooms of me—me, whose chief motive for remaining single—my Marion was certainly a very, very charming creature! I do half incline to believe, was the horror of having my habit of loneliness invaded! Possibly the wretch snored. Oh, horrible! most horrible! Well, if I do strangle him, no enlightened jury can bring in a worse verdict against me than "justifiable homicide." Looks melancholy, too? Oh your melancholy men have a trick of speaking in their sleep; and I shall be kept shuddering all night at his incoherent *ohs* and *ahs*! It is positively too bad!

And again I dashed the pocket into the bowels of the fire, and stirred it fiercely. The exercise only threw my brains into a livelier state of activity, and my fancies assumed a darker hue. To be shut up in an out-of-the-way room in a confounded old rambling wilderness of an inn, with a fellow whom nobody knows, any thing about!—to have your valise and breeches pocket ransacked, their *silver lining* turned out upon the night, while you are wailing the carresses of the drowsy god,—or possibly, like the Irish member, to wake in the morning and find your throat cut! A cold line seemed to be drawn across my forehead at the thought, and I groined inwardly. Seizing my brandy and water, I whipped it off at a gulp; but it had lost its flavour,—was cold, vapid, ineffectual stuff, and left no relish on the palate. I sank into a reverie, a dull and quasi-collapse state of misery, on starting from which I found that the fire had sunk down to a few cinders and a ghost of flame, which looked up for a moment, as if to reproach me for my neglect, and quietly went out. Conjuring up a smile at my fears,—a very hectic sort of an affair, indeed,—I called for a light, and, following the pilotage of the chambermaid, was heralded along a succession of passages, and up a labyrinth of staircase, until I reached the room that had been selected as my dormitory.

Its dimensions were something of the smallest. Two beds, placed directly opposite each other, engrossed three-fourths of the apartment. They were divided by an alley of some four feet in breadth, at the end of which in the window recess, stood a table with the usual appurtenances of mirror and carafes, and the window itself looked out upon Cimmerian darkness, and the devil knows what. The other furnishing consisted of certain cane chairs, whose appearance was anything but calculated to inspire confidence in their trustworthiness. "The rusty grate, unconscious of a fire," stood shivering in the yawning fire-place, above which a cloudy mizotist, conveying the faintest possible intimation of a blasted hearth, with a ghbet in perspective, decorating a wall, which time and damp had reduced from its primitive shade of green to the most miscellaneous diversity of tints. Here was an appearance of things, not certainly the most favourable for dissipating the unpleasant feelings that had for some time been fretting my lesser intestines to the tenacity of fiddlestrings; but

I put a bold face on the matter, and after a leisurely survey of the apartment, deposited myself in bed. Sleep, however, was not to be thought of till the arrival of the person who was to share the apartment with me, and I lay forming all sorts of speculations as to his probable appearance. At length, towards midnight, a heavy step sounded on the staircase, and I heard some one advancing with a stately tread to the room in which I lay. Now, then, for a solution of my uncertainty? I half raised myself on my elbow to examine the person that should enter. The door opened leisurely, and a figure advanced into the room, that increased rather than abated my perplexity. It was that of a tall, powerfully built man, dressed all in black, with a cloak of the same colour about his shoulders, and as he held the candle before him as though he held it not, its light fell upon features of a character singularly impressive, but pale and blasted, as it were, with untold woe. His long raven hair fell away in masses from his forehead, like blackening pines upon a lightning scorched mountain summit, and his eyes burned with a dull, moveless glare. He appeared to be utterly unconscious of my presence, notwithstanding my endeavours to excite his attention by sundry admonitory coughs and sneezes.— Finding these of no avail, I resolved to attack him more directly, and, in an indifferent tone as I could muster, exclaimed,

"Good night, sir?"—no answer.—"Good night, sir!" with a stronger emphasis—still not a word; and it was not until I repeated the salutation several times that he turned his eyes upon me. And oh! what an inward hell did that look reveal!—in words that dropped like minute guns from his lips, he said,

"I wish you may have a good night, sir."

This was enough: I was thoroughly relieved from my desire for further converse with a gentleman of his kidney; so he re-appeared into his abstraction, and I into my pillow and speculations.

I was fatigued, and would fain have slept, but this I soon found to be impossible. In vain I turned from left side to right, from right to left, and then in despair threw myself on my face, and dug my head into the pillow. I tried to think of securities on political economy, of sermons on temperance, of all the most sober reasons in nature I could recall. I repeated the alphabet letter by letter and then groped my way through the multiplication-table; but it was of no use. Sleep was not to be coaxed. The gentleman in black had betaken himself to bed. The room was as dark as midnight could make it, and I heard a sigh, and the curtains drawn closely round in front of where he lay. Strange precaution, I thought. What can he mean? Has he the same doubts of me that are haunting me with regard to him, and so wishes to place the slight barrier of a piece of dignity between us? Or perhaps the gentleman is conscious of sleeping in rather an ungainly style,—tosses his bed-clothes off him perhaps, or lies with his mouth agape, like a fish in the death-pang,—and may not wish the morning light to disclose his weakness? But this comfortable view of the matter soon faded away as the remembrance of his appearance pressed upon my vision. Those features so pale and rigid; that massive figure, trained in no ordinary toils; those eyes dead to all outward objects, and lighted up with fire, that seemed inwardly consuming him, stared vividly before me. I saw him as he entered the room, and went through all the operation of undressing, with a motion merely mechanical. What could have so palsied the senses and the will! Was it remorse for some unutterable guilt that preyed upon his heart, or was he even then meditating some act of execrable crime? It lay there alone, in darkness, with a felon, perhaps a murderer! And then his answer to my friendly salutation, "I wish you may have a good night, sir!" came back upon my ear. *May have a good night!* There was, then, a doubt, which even he confessed. I stirred in my bed with as much noise as possible, coughed at the same time, to see if I could elicit any corresponding sound from my opposite neighbour. But all was hushed. I could not even catch his breathing. Oh, I thought, he

must be gone to sleep. He, at least, takes the matter easy. But still his words—"I wish you may have a good night, sir!"—haunted me. What was there to prevent my having a good night, but something of which he himself was alone conscious? The night was a quiet one, and our room too much out of the way to be visited by any of the usual sleep-dispersing noises of an inn. Would to Heaven it had been less so! Again I thought of the curtains drawn so carefully in front of his bed. Might he not behind them be preparing the knife, with which he was to spring upon my secure slumbers? I coughed louder than before, to assure him that I was still wakeful. This horrible fancy now took entire possession of my mind. His sepulchral "I wish you may have a good night!" pealed perpetual alarm in my ears. It was an intimation to settle accounts with the world.

He would not kill my unprepared spirit. Not he! He was a sentimental murderer, an amateur assassin, and Fate had kindly poised me into his grasp. I lay riveted to my couch, expecting every moment to hear the curtains torn apart, and to feel his fingers at my throat. Every nerve and faculty were strained to the utmost pitch, till even the suspense grew more fearful than the reality itself could have born. A deathlike stillness filled the chamber. Its "very hush and creeping" grew oppressive. The stirring of a mouse would have been worth worlds to me.

Worn out with excitement, I fell into a perturbed and gasping slumber, and, on starting from it, my ear seemed to catch the expiring echo of a groan. It might, however, have only been the wind striking a favorite note in the crannies of the chimney. Day had by this time begun to break, and the gladsome light gave me courage to look out between my curtains. Those of the opposite bed were still down, & its inmate seemed locked in profound repose. I turned my eyes towards the window to strengthen myself by the sight of some cheering object against the anxieties that still hung about my mind, and found that it looked out upon a desolate coast, commanding a prospect at the same time of which the leading features were some crazy old chimney-stacks. The sky was wet and weltering, and no sound of life was audible, except the occasional rattle of a cart belted with the driver's whoop, rousing the echoes of the slumbering streets. The whole feeling of the time and place was as cheerless as possible; and, to complete my discomfort, a superannuated raven, a creature worn with the throes of luckless prophecy, settled upon a chimney right before my eyes, and began croaking its monotonous chant of woe. Oh, how that eternal "caw caw!" did chafe me, "mingling strangely with my fears," and presaging the coming of some unknown horror! It threw my thoughts back into their old channel. Alarm, however, had now given place to curiosity, and I determined at all hazards to know more of the mysterious man who had occasioned me such a night of torture. I lay intent to catch the minutest sound, but in vain. Fair-ear himself, that hears the grass grow in the fairy-tale, could not have detected the shadow of a breath. This, I thought, is the most unaccountable man I ever met with. He comes nobody whence, goes nobody knows where, eats nothing, drinks nothing, and says nothing,—and sleep like no other mortal beneath the sun. I must, and will sound the heart of this mystery.

Here was I, with fevered pulse and throbbing brow, after a night of agony, while the cause of my uneasiness was taking deep draughts of that "tired Nature's sweet restorer," of which his singular appearance and ominous words had effectually robbed me. It was not more strange than provoking. I could bear this state of things no longer, and discharged a volley of tearing coughs, as if all the pulmonary complaints of the town had taken refuge in my individual chest. Still there was not a movement to indicate the slightest disturbance on the part of my tormentor. I sprang out of bed, and paced up and down the room, making as much noise as possible by pushing the chairs about, and hitching the dressing table along the floor. Still my