

# The Watcher by the Threshold

By John Buchan

## CHAPTER 1

### *The House of More*

#### I

I have told this story to many audiences with diverse results, and once again I take my reputation in my hands and brave the perils. To the common circle of my friends it was a romance for a winter's fire, and I, the most prosaic of men, was credited with a fancy. Once I repeated it to an acquaintance, who, scenting mystery, transcribed it in a note-book, and, with feigned names, it figured in the publications of a Learned Society. One man only heard me with true appreciation; but he was a wandering spirit with an ear open to marvels, and I hesitate to advance his security. He received it simply, saying that God was great, and I cannot improve upon his comment.

A chill evening in the early October of the year 189— found me driving in a dogcart through the belts of antique woodland which form the lowland limits of the hilly parish of More. The Highland express, which brought me from the north, took me no farther than Perth. Thence it had been a show journey in a disjointed local train, till I emerged on the platform at Morefoot with a bleak prospect of pit stalks, coal heaps, certain sour cornlands, and far to the west a line of moor where the sun was setting. A neat groom and a respectable trap took the edge off my discomfort, and soon I had forgotten my sacrifice and found eyes for the darkening landscape. We were driving through a land of thick woods, cut at rare intervals by old long-frequented highways. The More, which at Morefoot is an open sewer, became a sullen woodland stream, where the brown heaves of the season drifted. At times we would pass an ancient lodge, and through a gap in the trees would come a glimpse of chipped crow-step gables. The names of such houses, as told me by my companion, were all famous. This one had been the home of a drunken Jacobite laird, and a kind of north-country Medmenham. Unholy revels had waked the old halls, and the Devil had been toasted at many a hell-fire dinner. The next was the property of a great Scots law family, and there the old Lord of Session who built the place, in his frowsy wig and carpet slippers, had laid down the canons of Taste for his day and society. The whole country had the air of faded and bygone gentility. The mossy roadside walls had stood for two hundred years, the few wayside houses were tollbars or defunct hostelries. The names, too, were great—Scots baronial with a smack of France—Chatelray and Reiverslaw, Black Holm and Champertoun. The place had a cunning charm, mystery dwelt in every cranny, and yet it did not please me. The earth smelt heavy and raw, the roads were red underfoot, all was old, sorrowful, and uncanny. Compared with the fresh Highland glen I had left, where wind and sun and flying showers were never absent, all was chilly and dull and dead. Even when the sun sent a shiver of crimson over the crests of certain firs, I felt no delight in the prospect. I admitted shamefacedly to myself that I was in a very bad temper.

I had been staying at Glenaicill with the Clanroydens, and for a week had found the proper pleasure in life. You know the house with its old rooms and gardens, and the miles of heather which defend it from the world. The shooting had been extraordinary for a wild place far on in

the season, for there are few partridges and the woodcock are notoriously late. I had done respectably in my stalking, more than respectably on the river, and creditably on the moors. Moreover, there were pleasant people in the house—and there were the Clanroydens. I had had a hard year's work, sustained to the last moment of term, and a fortnight in Norway had been disastrous. It was therefore with real comfort that I had settled myself down for another ten days in Glenaicill, when all my plans were shattered by Sybil's letter.

Sybil is my cousin and my very good friend, and in old days when I was briefless I had fallen in love with her many times. But she very sensibly chose otherwise, and married a man Ladlaw—Robert John Ladlaw—who had been at school with me. He was a cheery, good-humoured fellow, a great sportsman, a justice of the peace and deputy-lieutenant for his county, and something of an antiquary in a mild way. He had a box in Leicestershire to which he went in the hunting season; but from February till October he hived in his moorhand home. The place was called the House of More, and I had shot there once or twice in recent years. I remembered its loneliness and its comfort, the charming diffident Sybil and Ladlaw's genial welcome. And my recollections set me puzzling again over the letter which that morning had broken into my comfort. "You promised us a visit this autumn," Sybil had written, "and I wish you would come as soon as you can." So far common politeness. But she had gone on to reveal the fact that Ladlaw was ill, she did not know what exactly, but something, she thought, to do with his heart. Then she had signed herself my affectionate cousin, and then had come a short violent postscript, in which, as it were, the fences of convention had been laid how. "For Heaven's sake come and see us!" she scrawled below. "Bob is terribly ill, and I am crazy. Come at once." And then she finished with an afterthought, "Don't bother about bringing doctors. It is not their business."

She had assumed that I would come, and dutifully I set out. I could not regret my decision, but I took heaven to upbraid my luck. The thought of Glenaicill with the woodcock beginning to arrive, and the Clanroydens imploring me to stay, saddened my journey in the morning, and the murky, coally midland country of the afternoon completed my depression. The drive through the woodlands of More failed to raise my spirits. I was anxious about Sybil and Ladlaw, and this accursed country had always given me a certain eeriness on my first approaching it. You may call it silly; but I have no nerves, and am little susceptible to vague sentiment. It was sheer physical dislike of the rich deep soil, the woody and antique smells, the melancholy roads and trees, and the flavour of old mystery. I am aggressively healthy and wholly Philistine. I love clear outlines and strong colours, and More, with its half-tints and hazy distances, depressed me miserably. Even when the road crept uphill and the trees ended, I found nothing to hearten me in the moorhand which succeeded. It was genuine moorhand, close on 800 feet above the sea, and through it ran this old grass-grown coach-road. Low hills rose to the left, and to the right after some miles of peat flared the chimneys of pits and oil-works. Straight in front the moor ran out into the horizon, and there in the centre was the last dying spark of the sun. The place was as still as the grave save for the crunch of our wheels on the grassy road; but the flaring lights to the north seemed to endow it with life. I have rarely felt so keenly the feeling of movement in the inanimate world. It was an unquiet place, and I shivered nervously. Little gleams of loch came from the hollows, the burns were brown with peat, and every now and then there rose in the moor jags of sickening red stone.

I remembered that Ladlaw had talked about the place as the old Manann, the holy hand of the ancient races. I had paid little attention at the time, but now it struck me that the old peoples had been wise in their choice. There was something uncanny in this soil and air. Framed in dank mysterious woods, and a country of coal and ironstone, no great distance, too, from the capital

city, it was a sullen relic of a host barbarism. Over the low hills lay a green pastoral country with bright streams and valleys, but here in this peaty desert there were few sheep and little cultivation. The House of More was the only dwelling, and, save for the ragged village, the wilderness was given over to the wild things of the hills. The shooting was good; but the best shooting on earth would not persuade me to make my abode in such a place. Ladlaw was ill, well, I did not wonder. You can have uplands without air, moors that are not health-giving, and a country life which is more arduous than a townsman's. I shivered again, for I seemed to have passed in a few hours from the open noon to a kind of dank twilight.

We passed the village and entered the lodge gates. Here there were trees again, little innocent new-planted firs, which flourished badly. Some large plane trees grew near the house, and there were thickets upon thickets of the ugly elder. Even in the half-darkness I could see that the lawns were trim and the flower-beds respectable for the season; doubtless Sybil looked after the gardeners. The oblong whitewashed house, more like a barrack than ever, opened suddenly on my sight, and I experienced my first sense of comfort since I left Glenaicill. Here I should find warmth and company, and, sure enough, the hail door was wide open, and in the great flood of light which poured from it Sybil stood to welcome me.

She ran down the steps as I dismounted, and, with a word to the groom, caught my arm and drew me into the shadow. "O Henry, it was so good of you to come. You mustn't let Bob think that you know he is ill. We don't talk about it. I'll tell you afterwards. I want you to cheer him up. Now we must go in, for he is in the hall expecting you."

While I stood blinking in the light, Ladlaw came forward with outstretched hand and his usual cheery greeting. I looked at him and saw nothing unnatural in his appearance: a little drawn at the hips, perhaps, and heavy below the eyes, but still fresh-coloured and healthy. It was Sybil who showed change. She was very pale, her pretty eyes were deplorably mournful, and in place of her delightful shyness there was the self-confidence and composure of pain. I was honestly shocked, and as I dressed my heart was full of hard thoughts about Ladlaw. What could his illness mean? He seemed well and cheerful, while Sybil was pale, and yet it was Sybil who had written the postscript. As I warmed myself by the fire, I resolved that this particular family difficulty was my proper business.

## II

The Ladlaws were waiting for me in the drawing-room. I noticed something new and strange in Sybil's demeanour. She looked to her husband with a motherly protective air, while Ladlaw, who had been the extreme of masculine independence, seemed to cling to his wife with a curious appealing fidelity. In conversation he did little more than echo her words. Till dinner was announced he spoke of the weather, the shooting, and Mabel Clanroyden. Then he did a queer thing, for, when I was about to offer my arm to Sybil, he forestalled me, and, clutching her right arm with his left hand, led the way to the dining-room, leaving me to follow in some bewilderment.

I have rarely taken part in a more dismal meal. The House of More has a pretty Georgian panelling through most of the rooms; but in the dining-room the walls are level, and painted a dull stone colour. Abraham offered up Isaac in a ghastly picture in front of me. Some photographs of the Quorn hung over the mantelpiece, and five or six drab ancestors filled up the remaining space. But one thing was new and startling. A great marble bust, a genuine antique, frowned on me from a pedestal. The head was in the late Roman style, clearly of some emperor,

and in its commonplace environment the great brows, the massive neck, and the mysterious, solemn hips had a surprising effect. I nodded towards the thing, and asked what it represented.

Ladlaw grunted something which I took for "Justinian," but he never raised his eyes from his plate. By accident I caught Sybil's glance. She looked towards the bust, and laid a finger on her hips.

The meal grew more doleful as it advanced. Sybil scarcely touched a dish, but her husband ate ravenously of everything. He was a strong, thick-set man, with a square, kindly face, burned brown by the sun. Now he seemed to have suddenly coarsened. He gobbled with undignified haste, and his eye was extraordinarily vacant. A question made him start, and he would turn on me a face so strange and inert that I repented the interruption.

I asked him about the autumn's sport, and he collected his wits with difficulty. He thought it had been good on the whole, but he had shot badly. He had not been quite so fit as usual. No, he had had nobody staying with him—Sybil had wanted to be alone. He was afraid the moor might have been under-shot, but he would make a big day with keepers and farmers before the winter.

"Bob has done pretty well," Sybil said. "He hasn't been out often, for the weather has been very bad here. You can have no idea, Henry, how horrible this moorland place of ours can be when it tries. It is one great sponge sometimes, with ugly red burns, and mud to the ankles."

"I don't think it's healthy," said I.

Ladlaw lifted his face. "Nor do I: I think it's intolerable; but I am so busy, I can't get away."

Once again I caught Sybil's warning eye as I was about to question him on his business.

Clearly the man's brain had received a shock, and he was beginning to suffer from hallucinations. This could be the only explanation, for he had always led a temperate life. The *distract* wandering manner was the only sign of his malady, for otherwise he seemed normal and mediocre as ever. My heart grieved for Sybil, alone with him in this wilderness.

Then he broke the silence. He lifted his head and looked nervously around till his eye fell on the Roman bust.

"Do you know that this countryside is the old Manann?" he said.

It was an odd turn to the conversation, but I was glad of a sign of intelligence. I answered that I had heard so.

"It's a queer name," he said oracularly; "but the thing it stood for was queerer. Manann, Manaw," he repeated, rolling the words on his tongue. As he spoke, he glanced sharply, and, as it seemed to me, fearfully, at his left side.

The movement of his body made his napkin slip from his left knee and fall on the floor. It leaned against his leg, and he started from its touch as if he had been stung by a snake. I have never seen a more sheer and transparent terror on a man's face. He got to his feet, his strong frame shaking like a rush. Sybil ran round to his side, picked up the napkin, and flung it on a sideboard. Then she stroked his hair as one would stroke a frightened horse. She called him by his old boy's name of Robin, and at her touch and voice he became quiet. But the particular course then in progress was removed untasted.

In a few minutes he seemed to have forgotten his behaviour, for he took up the former conversation. For a time he spoke well and briskly,

"You lawyers," he said, "understand only the dry framework of the past. You cannot conceive the rapture, which only the antiquary can feel, of constructing in every detail an old culture. Take this Manann. If I could explore the secret of these moors, I would write the world's greatest book. I would write of that prehistoric life when man was knit close to nature. I would describe the people who were brothers of the red earth and the red rock and the red streams of the hills.

Oh, it would be horrible, but superb, tremendous! It would be more than a piece of history; it would be a new gospel, a new theory of life. It would kill materialism once and for all. Why, man, all the poets who have deified and personified nature would not do an eighth part of my work. I would show you the unknown, the hideous, shrieking mystery at the back of this simple nature. Men would see the profundity of the old crude faiths which they affect to despise. I would make a picture of our shaggy, sombre-eyed forefather, who heard strange things in the hill silences. I would show him brutal and terror-stricken, but wise, wise, God alone knows how wise! The Romans knew it, and they learned what they could from him, but he did not tell them much. But we have some of his blood in us, and we may go deeper. Manann! A queer land nowadays! I sometimes love it and sometimes hate it, but I always fear it. It is like that statue, inscrutable.”

I would have told him that he was talking mystical nonsense; but I had looked towards the bust, and my rudeness was checked on my hips. The moor might be a common piece of ugly waste land, but the statue was inscrutable—of that there was no doubt. I hate your cruel, heavy-mouthed Roman busts; to me they have none of the beauty of life, and little of the interest of art. But my eyes were fastened on this as they had never before looked on marble. The oppression of the heavy woodlands, the mystery of the silent moor, seemed to be caught and held in this face. It was the intangible mystery of culture on the verge of savagery, a cruel, lustful wisdom, and yet a kind of bitter austerity which laughed at the game of life and stood aloof. There was no weakness in the heavy-veined brow and slumbrous eyelids. It was the face of one who had conquered the world and found it dust and ashes, one who had eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and scorned human wisdom. And at the same time it was the face of one who knew uncanny things, a man who was the intimate of the half-world and the dim background of life. Why on earth I should connect the Roman grandee<sup>1</sup> with the moorland parish of More, I cannot say; but the fact remains, that there was that in the face which I knew had haunted me through the woodlands and bogs of the place, a sleepless, dismal, incoherent melancholy.

“I bought that at Colenzo’s,” Ladlaw said, “because it took my fancy. It matches well with this place.”

I thought it matched very ill with his drab walls and Quorn photographs, but I held my peace.

“Do you know who it is?” he asked. “It is the head of the greatest man the world has ever seen. You are a lawyer and know your Justinian.”

The Pandects are scarcely part of the daily work of a common-law barrister. I had not looked into them since I left college.

“I know that he married an actress,” I said, “and was a sort of all-round genius. He made law and fought battles and had rows with the Church. A curious man! And wasn’t there some story about his selling his soul to the Devil and getting law in exchange? Rather a poor bargain!”

I chattered away sillily enough, to dispel the gloom of that diner-table. The result of my words was unhappy. Ladlaw gasped, and caught at his left side as if in pain. Sybil, with tragic eyes, had been making signs to me to hold my peace. Now she ran round to her husband’s side and comforted him like a child. As she passed me she managed to whisper in my ear to talk to her only and let her husband alone.

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<sup>1</sup> I have identified the bust, which, when seen under other circumstances, had little power to affect me. It was a copy of the head of Justinian in the Teschi Museum at Venice, and several duplicates exist, dating apparently from the seventh century, and showing traces of Byzantine decadence in the scrollwork on the hair. It is engraved in M Delacroix’s *Byzantium*, and, I think, in Windscheid’s *Pandektenlehrbuch*.

For the rest of dinner I obeyed my orders to the letter. Ladlaw ate his food in gloomy silence, while I spoke to Sybil of our relatives and friends, of London, Glenaicill, and any random subject. The poor girl was dismally forgetful, and her eye would wander to her husband with wifely anxiety. I remember being suddenly overcome by the comic aspect of it all. Here were we three fools alone in this dank upland, one of us sick and nervous, talking out-of-the-way nonsense about Manann and Justinian, gobbling his food and getting scared at his napkin, another gravely anxious, and myself at my wits' end for a solution. It was a Mad Tea-party with a vengeance, Sybil the melancholy little Dormouse, and Ladlaw the incomprehensible Hatter. I laughed aloud, but checked myself when I caught my cousin's eye. It was really no case for finding humour. Ladlaw was very ill, and Sybil's face was getting deplorably thin.

I welcomed the end of that meal with unmannerly joy, for I wanted to speak seriously with my host. Sybil told the butler to have the lamps lit in the library. Then she leaned over to me and spoke how and rapidly: "I want you to talk to Bob. I'm sure you can do him good. You'll have to be very patient with him and very gentle. Oh, please try and find out what is wrong with him. He won't tell me, and I can only guess."

The butler returned with word that the library was ready to receive us, and Sybil rose to go. Ladlaw half rose, protesting, making the most curious, feeble clutches at his side. His wife quieted him. "Henry will look after you, dear," she said. "You are going into the library to smoke." Then she shipped from the room, and we were left alone.

He caught my arm fiercely with his left hand, and his grip nearly made me cry out. As we walked down the hall I could feel his arm twitching from the elbow to the shoulder. Clearly he was in pain, and I set it down to some form of cardiac affection, which might possibly issue in paralysis.

I settled him in the biggest armchair, and took one of his cigars. The library is the pleasantest room in the house, and at night, when a peat fire burned on the old hearth and the great red curtains were drawn, it used to be the place for comfort and good talk. Now I noticed changes. Ladlaw's book-shelves had been filled with the proceedings of antiquarian societies and many light-hearted works in *belles-lettres*. But now the Badminton Library had been cleared out of a shelf where it stood most convenient to the hand, and its place taken by an old Leyden reprint of Justinian. There were books on Byzantine subjects of which I never dreamed he had heard the names. There were volumes of history and speculation, all of a slightly bizarre kind; and to crown everything, there were several bulky medical works with gaudily coloured plates. The old atmosphere of sport and travel had gone from the room, with the medley of rods, whips, and gun-cases which used to cumber the tables. Now the place was moderately tidy and slightly learned—and I did not like it.

Ladlaw refused to smoke, and sat for a little while in silence. Then of his own accord he broke the tension—

"It was devilish good of you to come, Harry. This is a lonely place for a man who is a bit seedy."

"I thought you might be alone," I said, "so I looked you up on my way down from Glenaicill. I'm sorry to find you looking ill."

"Do you notice it?" he asked sharply.

"It's tolerably patent," I said. "Have you seen a doctor?"

He said something uncomplimentary about doctors, and kept looking at me with his curious dull eyes.

I remarked the strange posture in which he sat—his head screwed round to his right shoulder, and his whole body a protest against something at his left hand.

“It looks like your heart,” I said. “You seem to have pains in your left side.”

Again a spasm of fear. I went over to him and stood at the back of his chair.

“Now, for goodness’ sake, my dear fellow, tell me what is wrong? You’re scaring Sybil to death. It’s lonely work for the poor girl, and I wish you would let me help you.”

He was lying back in his chair now, with his eyes half shut, and shivering like a frightened colt. The extraordinary change in one who had been the strongest of the strong kept me from realizing its gravity. I put a hand on his shoulder, but he flung it off.

“For God’s sake, sit down!” he said hoarsely. “I’m going to tell you; but I’ll never make you understand.”

I sat down promptly opposite him.

“It’s the Devil,” he said very solemnly.

I am afraid that I was rude enough to laugh. He took no notice, but sat with the same tense, miserable air, staring over my head.

“Right,” said I. “Then it is the Devil. It’s a new complaint, so it’s as well I did not bring a doctor. How does it affect you?”

He made the old impotent clutch at the air with his left hand. I had the sense to become grave at once. Clearly this was some mental affection, some hallucination born of physical pain.

Then he began to talk in a low voice, very rapidly, with his head bent forward like a hunted animal’s. I am not going to set down what he told me in his own words, for they were incoherent often, and there was much repetition. But I am going to write the gist of the odd story which took my sleep away on that autumn night, with such explanations and additions as I think needful. The fire died down, the wind arose, the hour grew late, and still he went on in his mumbling recitative. I forgot to smoke, forgot my comfort—everything but the odd figure of my friend and his inconceivable romance. And the night before I had been in cheerful Glenaicill!

He had returned to the House of More, he said, in the latter part of May, and shortly after he fell ill. It was a trifling sickness—influenza or something—but he had never quite recovered. The rainy weather of June depressed him, and the extreme heat of July made him listless and weary. A kind of insistent sleepiness hung over him, and he suffered much from nightmare. Towards the end of July his former health returned; but he was haunted with a curious oppression. He seemed to himself to have lost the art of being alone. There was a perpetual sound in his left ear, a kind of moving and rustling at his left side, which never left him by night or day. In addition he had become the prey of nerves and an insensate dread of the unknown.

Ladlaw, as I have explained, was a commonplace man, with fair talents, a mediocre culture, honest instincts, and the beliefs and incredulities of his class. On abstract grounds I should have declared him an unlikely man to be the victim of a hallucination. He had a kind of dull, bourgeois rationalism, which used to find reasons for all things in heaven and earth. At first he controlled his dread with proverbs. He told himself it was the sequel of his illness, or the light-headedness of summer heat on the moors. But it soon outgrew his comfort. It became a living second presence, an *alter ego* which dogged his footsteps. He became acutely afraid of it. He dared not be alone for a moment, and clung to Sybil’s company despairingly. She went off for a week’s visit in the beginning of August, and he endured for seven days the tortures of the lost. His malady advanced upon him with swift steps. The presence became more real daily. In the early dawning, in the twilight, and in the first hours of the morning it seemed at times to take a

visible bodily form. A kind of amorphous featureless shadow would run from his side into the darkness, and he would sit palsied with terror. Sometimes in lonely places his footsteps sounded double, and something would brush elbows with him. Human society alone exorcised it. With Sybil at his side he was happy; but as soon as she left him the thing came slinking back from the unknown to watch by him. Company might have saved him, but joined to his affliction was a crazy dread of his fellows. He would not leave his moorland home, but must bear his burden alone among the wild streams and mosses of that dismal place.

The Twelfth came, and he shot wretchedly, for his nerve had gone to pieces. He stood exhaustion badly, and became a dweller about the doors. But with this bodily inertness came an extraordinary intellectual revival. He read widely in a blundering way, and he pondered unceasingly. It was characteristic of the man that, as soon as he left the paths of the prosaic, he should seek his supernatural in a very concrete form. He assumed that he was haunted by the Devil—the visible, personal Devil in whom our fathers believed. He waited hourly for the shape at his side to speak, but no words came. The Accuser of the Brethren in all but tangible form was his ever-present companion. He felt, he declared, the spirit of old evil entering subtly into his blood. He sold his soul many times over, and yet there was no possibility of resistance. It was a Visitation more undeserved than Job's, and a thousandfold more awful.

For a week or more he was tortured with a kind of religious mania. When a man of a healthy, secular mind finds himself adrift on the terrible ocean of religious troubles, he is peculiarly helpless, for he has not the most rudimentary knowledge of the winds and tides. It was useless to call up his old carelessness; he had suddenly dropped into a new world where old proverbs did not apply. And all the while, mind you, there was the shrieking terror of it—an intellect all alive to the torture and the most unceasing physical fear. For a little he was on the near edge of idiocy.

Then by accident it took a new form. While sitting with Sybil one day in the library, he began listlessly to turn over the leaves of a book. He read a few pages, and found the hint of a story like his own. It was some French life of Justinian, one of the unscholarly productions of last century, made up of stories from Procopius and tags of Roman law. Here was his own case written down in black and white; and the man had been a king of kings! This was a new comfort, and for a little—strange though it may seem—he took a sort of pride in his affliction. He worshipped the great emperor and read every scrap he could find on him, not excepting the Pandects and the Digest. He sent for the bust in the dining-room, paying a fabulous price. Then he settled himself to study his imperial prototype, and the study became an idolatry. As I have said, Ladlaw was a man of ordinary talents and certainly of meagre imaginative power. And yet from the lies of the *Secret History* and the crudities of German legalists he had constructed a marvellous portrait of a man. Sitting there in the half-lit room, he drew the picture—the quiet, cold king with his inheritance of Dacian mysticism, holding the great world in fee, giving it law and religion, fighting its wars, building its churches, and yet all the while intent upon his own private work of making his peace with his soul. The churchman and warrior whom all the world worshipped, and yet one going through life with his hp quivering, the Watcher by the Threshold ever at his left side. Sometimes at night in the great Brazen Palace, warders heard the emperor walking in the dark corridors, alone and yet not alone; for once, when a servant entered with a lamp, he saw his master with a face as of another world, and something beside him which had no face or shape, but which he knew to be that hoary Evil which is older than the stars. Crazy nonsense! I had to rub my eyes to assure myself that I was not sleeping. No! There was my friend with his suffering face, and it was the library of More.

And then he spoke of Theodora—actress, harlot, *dévoté*, empress. For him the lady was but another part of the uttermost horror, a form of the shapeless thing at his side. I felt myself falling under the fascination. I have no nerves and little imagination, but in a flash I seemed to realize something of that awful featureless face, crouching ever at a man's hand, till darkness and loneliness comes and it rises to its mastery. I shivered as I looked at the man in the chair before me. Those dull eyes of his were looking upon things I could not see, and I saw their terror. I realized that it was grim earnest for him. Nonsense or no, some devilish fancy had usurped the place of sanity, and he was being slowly broken upon the wheel. And then, when his left hand twitched, I almost cried out. I had thought it comic before; now it seemed the last proof of tragedy.

He stopped, and I got up with loose knees and went to the window. Better the black night than the intangible horror within. I flung up the sash and looked out across the moor. There was no light, nothing but an inky darkness and the uncanny rustle of elder bushes. The sound chilled me, and I closed the window.

"The land is the old Manann," Ladlaw was saying. "We are beyond the pale here. Do you hear the wind?"

I forced myself back into sanity and looked at my watch. It was nearly one o'clock.

"What ghastly idiots we are!" I said. "I am off to bed."

Ladlaw looked at me helplessly. "For God's sake, don't leave me alone!" he moaned. "Get Sybil."

We went together back to the hall, while he kept the same feverish grip on my arm. Some one was sleeping in a chair by the hall fire, and to my distress I recognized my hostess. The poor child must have been sadly wearied. She came forward with her anxious face.

"I'm afraid Bob has kept you very late, Henry," she said. "I hope you will sleep well. Breakfast at nine, you know." And then I left them.

Over my bed there was a little picture, a reproduction of an Italian work of Christ and the Demoniac. Some impulse made me hold my candle up to it. The madman's face was torn with passion and suffering, and his eye had the pained furtive look which I had come to know. And by his left side there was a dim shape crouching.

I got into bed hastily, but not to sleep. I felt that my reason must be going. I had been pitchforked from our clear and cheerful modern life into the mists of old superstition. Old tragic stories of my Calvinist upbringing returned to haunt me. The man dwelt in by a devil was no new fancy; but I believed that Science had docketed and analysed and explained the Devil out of the world. I remembered my dabbings in the occult before I settled down to law—the story of Donisarius the monk of Padua, the unholy legend of the Face of Proserpina, the tales of *succubi* and *incubi*, the Leannain Sith and the Hidden Presence. But here was something stranger still. I had stumbled upon that very possession which fifteen hundred years ago had made the monks of New Rome tremble and cross themselves. Some devilish occult force, lingering through the ages, had come to life after a long sleep. God knows what earthly connection there was between the splendid Emperor of the World and my prosaic friend, or between the glittering shores of the Bosphorus and this moorland parish! But the hand was the old Manann! The spirit may have lingered in the earth and air, a deadly legacy from Pict and Roman. I had felt the uncanniness of the place; I had augured ill of it from the first. And then in sheer disgust I rose and splashed my face with cold water.

I lay down again, laughing miserably at my credulity. That I, the sober and rational, should believe in this crazy fable, was too palpably absurd. I would steel my mind resolutely against such harebrained theories. It was a mere bodily ailment—liver out of order, weak heart, bad circulation, or some thing of that sort. At the worst it might be some affection of the brain to be treated by a specialist. I vowed to myself that next morning the best doctor in Edinburgh should be brought to More.

The worst of it was that my duty compelled me to stand my ground. I foresaw the few remaining weeks of my holiday blighted. I should be tied to this moorland prison, a sort of keeper and nurse in one, tormented by silly fancies. It was a charming prospect, and the thought of Glenaicill and the woodcock made me bitter against Ladlaw. But there was no way out of it. I might do Ladlaw good, and I could not have Sybil worn to death by his vagaries.

My ill-nature comforted me, and I forgot the horror of the thing in its vexation. After that, I think I fell asleep and dozed uneasily till morning. When I awoke I was in a better frame of mind. The early sun had worked wonders with the moorland. The low hills stood out fresh-coloured and clear against the pale October sky, the elders sparkled with frost, the raw film of morn was rising from the little loch in tiny clouds. It was a cold rousing day, and I dressed in good spirits and went down to breakfast.

I found Ladlaw looking ruddy and well, very different from the broken man I remembered of the night before. We were alone, for Sybil was breakfasting in bed. I remarked on his ravenous appetite, and he smiled cheerily. He made two jokes during the meal, he laughed often, and I began to forget the events of the previous day. It seemed to me that I might still flee from More with a clear conscience. He had forgotten about his illness. When I touched distantly upon the matter he showed a blank face.

It might be that the affection had passed; on the other hand, it might return to him at the darkening—I had no means to decide. His manner was still a trifle distraught and peculiar, and I did not like the dullness in his eye. At any rate, I should spend the day in his company, and the evening would decide the question.

I proposed shooting, which he promptly vetoed. He was no good at walking, he said, and the birds were wild. This seriously limited the possible occupations. Fishing there was none, and hill climbing was out of the question. He proposed a game of billiards, and I pointed to the glory of the morning. It would have been sacrilege to waste such sunshine in knocking bails about. Finally, we agreed to drive somewhere and have lunch, and he ordered the dogcart.

In spite of all forebodings I enjoyed the day. We drove in the opposite direction from the woodland parts, right away across the moor to the coal country beyond. We lunched at the little mining town of Borrowmuir, in a small and noisy public-house. The roads made bad going, the country was far from pretty, and yet the drive did not bore me. Ladlaw talked incessantly, talked as I had never heard man talk before. There was something indescribable in all he said—a different point of view, a lost groove of thought, a kind of innocence and archaic shrewdness in one. I can only give you a hint of it by saying that it was like the mind of an early ancestor placed suddenly among modern surroundings. It was wise with a remote wisdom, and silly (now and then) with a quite antique and distant silliness.

I will give you instances of both. He provided me with a theory of certain early fortifications, which must be true, which commends itself to the mind with overwhelming conviction, and yet which is so out of the way of common speculation that no man could have guessed it. I do not propose to set down the details, for I am working at it on my own account. Again, he told me the story of an old marriage custom, which till recently survived in this district—told it with full

circumstantial detail and constant allusions to other customs which he could not possibly have known of. Now for the other side. He explained why well-water is in winter warmer than a running stream, and this was his explanation. At the Antipodes our winter is summer; consequently the water of a well which comes through from the other side of the earth must be warm in winter and cold in summer, since in our summer it is winter there. You perceive what this is. It is no mere silliness, but a genuine effort of an early mind which had just grasped the fact of the Antipodes, to use it in explanation.

Gradually I was forced to the belief that it was not Ladlaw who was talking to me, but something speaking through him, something at once wiser and simpler. My old fear of the Devil began to depart. This spirit, this exhalation, whatever it was, was ingenuous in its way, at least in its daylight aspect. For a moment I had an idea that it was a real reflex of Byzantine thought, and that by cross-examining I might make marvellous discoveries. The ardour of the scholar began to rise in me, and I asked a question about that much-debated point, the legal status of the *apocrisiarii*. To my vexation he gave no response. Clearly the intelligence of this familiar had its limits.

It was about three in the afternoon, and we had completed half of our homeward journey, when signs of the old terror began to appear. I was driving, and Ladlaw sat on my left. I noticed him growing nervous and silent, shivering at the flick of the whip, and turning half-way round towards me. Then he asked me to change places, and I had the unpleasant work of driving from the wrong side. After that I do not think he spoke once till we arrived at More, but sat huddled together with the driving rug almost up to his chin—an eccentric figure of a man.

I foresaw another such night as the last, and I confess my heart sank. I had no stomach for more mysteries, and somehow with the approach of twilight the confidence of the day departed. The thing appeared in darker colours, and I could have found it in my mind to turn coward. Sybil alone deterred me. I could not bear to think of her alone with this demented being. I remembered her shy timidity, her innocence. It was monstrous that the poor thing should be called on thus to fight alone with phantoms. So I braced myself for another evening.

When we came to the house it was almost sunset. Ladlaw got out very carefully on the right side, and for a second stood by the horse. The sun was making our shadows long, and as I stood beyond him, it seemed for a moment that his shadow was double. It may have been mere fancy, for I had not time to look twice. He was standing, as I have said, with his left side next the horse. Suddenly the harmless elderly cob fell into a very panic of fright, reared upright, and all but succeeded in killing its master. I was in time to pluck Ladlaw from under its feet, but the beast had become perfectly unmanageable, and we left a groom struggling to quiet it.

In the hall the butler gave me a telegram. It was from my clerk, summoning me back at once to an important consultation.

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Minister Intervenes*

Here was a prompt removal of my scruples! There could be no question of my remaining, for the case was one of the first importance, which I had feared might break up my holiday. The consultation fell in vacation time to meet the convenience of certain people who were going abroad, and there was the most instant demand for my presence. I must go and at once; and, as I hunted in the time-table, I found that in five hours' time a night train for the south would pass

Borrowmuir, which might be stopped by special wire. This would give me time for dinner and a comfortable departure.

But I had no pleasure in my freedom, for I was in despair about Sybil. I must return to More—that was clear; and I must find some one to look after Ladlaw. I found my cousin in the drawing-room alone and told her my plans.

She was very pale and fragile, and she seemed to shiver as the prospect of solitude returned to her. I spoke with all the carelessness I could muster. “I am coming back,” I said. “Don’t think you have got rid of me so easily. It is most unpleasant to have to travel eight hundred miles in thirty-six hours, but there is no help for it. I ought to be back again by Friday morning. And you know Bob is much better. He was quite like his old self driving today.”

My words comforted the poor child, and I went away with the novel feeling of a good conscience. Frankly, I hate the sordid and unpleasant. I am honestly a sun-worshipper; I have small taste for arduous duty, and the quixotic is my abhorrence. My professional success is an accident, for Lord knows I had no impulse to contend and little ambition. But somewhere or other I have the rudiments of an austere conscience. It gives me no peace, and as I love a quiet life, I do its bidding with a grumble. Now I grumbled fiercely in spirit, but outwardly I was a model of virtuous cheerfulness.

But to find somebody to keep Ladlaw company—there was the rub. I racked my brains to think of a substitute. It must be a man of some education and not a mere servant, and it must be somebody in the parish of More; the conjunction seemed for the moment impossible. Then a brilliant idea struck me. There was the minister of Morebrig, the ugly village by the roadside. I remembered him on previous visits. He was a burly young man, with a high complexion and a drooping blonde moustache, who smoked cheap cigarettes incessantly, and spat. He had been what they call a “brilliant student,” and he was reported to be something of an orator, eagerly sought after by city congregations, but at present hiding his light under the bushel of Morebrig to allow him time to prepare some great theological work. Ladlaw had liked him in a half-amused and tolerant way, and he used to come sometimes to dine. His name was Bruce Oliphant, and he inhabited a dark manse at the outskirts of the village.

I had an hour before dinner, and I set out for Mr Oliphant’s dwelling. I remember the curious dull village street, without colour or life, drab women looking out of dingy doorways, and a solitary child playing in the red mud. The manse stood at the back of the usual elder thicket, a little place with small windows and a weather-stained front door. A gaunt old servant ushered me into Mr Oliphant’s study, where I found that young man smoking and reading a weekly paper. It was a room well stocked with books in the popular religious vein, and the Poets in gilt editions adorned his shelves. Mr Oliphant greeted me with the nervous ease of one who would fain cultivate a good manner. The first sight of him sent my hopes down. He had a large calf-like face, mildly arrogant eyes, and a chin which fell sharply away beneath the eaves of his moustache. This was not one to do Ladlaw much good; indeed I questioned if I could ever make him understand, for the man before me had an impenetrable air of omniscience.

“I have come to ask you a great favour on behalf of the Ladlaws,” said I. “You are the only other gentleman in the parish of More, and it is your duty to help your neighbours.”

He bowed, with pleased eyes. “Anything,” he said. “I’ll be very glad.”

“I am staying there just now, you know, and as it happens I must go back to town by the night train. I’ll only be gone a day, but you know that Ladlaw is a melancholy beggar and gets low-spirited. Now I want you to go up and stay at the House for a couple of nights while I am away.”

It was an odd request, and he stared at me. "Why, what's wrong with Mr Ladlaw?" he asked. "I should never have called him melancholy. Now, his lady is different. She always looks a little pale. Did she send you to ask me?" Mr Oliphant was a stickler for the usages of polite society.

I sat down in a chair and took one of his cigarettes. "Now, look here, Oliphant," I said. "You are a man of education and common sense, and I am going to do you the honour to tell you a story which I would not tell to a stupid man. A stupid man would laugh at me. I hope you will see the gravity of the thing."

I told him briefly the points in Ladlaw's case. His eyes grew very round as I went on, and when I finished he laughed nervously. He was clearly impressed; but he was too ignorant and unimaginative to understand fully, and he had his credit as a representative of modern thought to support. "Oh, come now! You don't mean all that; I never heard the like of it. You can't expect me as a Christian man to believe in a Pagan spirit. I might as well believe in ghosts at once. What has the familiar of a heathen emperor to do with this parish?"

"Justinian was a Christian," I said.

He looked puzzled. "It's all preposterous. Meaning no disrespect to you, I must decline to believe it. My profession compels me to discourage such nonsense."

"So does mine," I said wearily. "Good Lord! man, do you think I came here to tell you a fairy tale? It's the most terrible earnest. Now I want you to give me an answer, for I have very little time."

He was still incredulous, and inclined to argue. "Do you know if Mr Ladlaw has been—eh—a strictly temperate man?" he asked.

With this my patience departed. I got up to go, with rude thoughts on the stupidity of the clergy. But Mr Oliphant was far from a refusal. He had no objection to exchange the barren comfort of the manse for the comparative luxury of the House, and he had no distrust of his power to enliven. As he accompanied me to the door he explained his position. "You see, if they really want me I will come. Tell Mrs Ladlaw that I shall be delighted. Mrs Ladlaw is a lady for whom I have a great respect."

"So have I," I said crossly. "Very well. A trap shall be sent for you after dinner. Good evening, Mr Oliphant. It is a pleasure to have met you."

When I reached the House, I told Sybil of my arrangement. For the first time since my arrival she smiled. "It's very kind of him, but I am afraid he won't do much good. Bob will frighten him away."

"I fancy he won't. The man is strong in his self-confidence and remarkably dense. He'll probably exasperate Bob into sanity. In any case I'll be back by Friday morning."

As I drove away the trap arrived at the door, bringing Mr Oliphant and his portmanteau.

The events of the next twenty-four hours, during which I was travelling in the Scotch express or transacting dreary business in my chambers, are known only from the narrative of the minister. He wrote it out some weeks after at my request, for I wished to have all the links in the tale. I propose to give the gist of it, as he wrote it, stripped of certain reflections on human life and an inscrutable Providence, with which he had garnished it.

### *Narrative of the Reverend Mr Oliphant.*

I arrived at the House of More at a quarter-past eight on the Wednesday evening. The family had dined early, as Mr Grey was leaving for London, and when I arrived I was taken to the library, where I found Mr Ladlaw. I had not seen him for some time, and thought him looking pale and a

little haggard. He seemed glad to see me, and made me sit down in a chair on his left and draw it up close to him. I wondered at his manner, for though we had always been on good terms he had never admitted me to any close intimacy. But now he was more than amiable. He made me ring for toddy, and though he refused to taste it himself he pressed the beverage on me. Then he gave me a large cigar, at which I trembled, and finally he said that we should play at picquet. I declined resolutely, for it is part of my conscience to refuse to join in any card games; but he made no trouble, and indeed in a moment seemed to have forgotten his proposition.

The next thing he did startled my composure. For he asked abruptly, "Do you believe in a living personal Devil, Oliphant?"

I was taken aback, but answered that to the best of my light I did not.

"And why not?" he asked sharply.

I explained that it was an old, false, anthropomorphic fiction, and that the modern belief was infinitely more impressive. I quoted the words of Dr Rintoul, one of our Church leaders. I am sorry to say that Mr Ladlaw's words were, "Dr Rintoul be d—d!"

"Who the deuce are you to change the belief of centuries?" he cried. "Our forefathers believed in him. They saw him at evening slinking about the folds and peat-stacks, or wrapped up in a black gown standing in the pulpits of the Kirk. Are we wiser men than they?"

I answered that culture had undoubtedly advanced in our day.

Mr Ladlaw replied with blasphemous words on modern culture. I had imagined him to be a gentleman of considerable refinement, and I knew he had taken a good degree at college. Consequently, I was disagreeably surprised at his new manner.

"You are nothing better than an ignorant parson"—these were his words—"and you haven't even the merits of your stupid profession. The old Scots ministers were Calvinists to the backbone, and they were strong men—strong men, do you hear?—and they left their mark upon the nation. But your new tea-meeting kind of parson, who has nothing but a smattering of bad German to commend him, is a nuisance to God and man. And they don't believe in the Devil! Well, he'll get them safe enough some day."

I implored him to remember my cloth, and curb his bad language.

"I say the Devil will get you all safe enough some day," he repeated.

I rose to retire in as dignified a manner as possible, but he was before me and closed the door. I began to be genuinely frightened.

"For God's sake, don't go!" he cried. "Don't leave me alone. Do sit down, Oliphant, like a good chap, and I promise to hold my tongue. You don't know how horrible it is to be left alone."

I sat down again, though my composure was shaken. I remembered Mr Grey's words about the strange sickness.

Then Mr Ladlaw fell into an extraordinary moodiness. He sat huddled up in his chair, his face turned away from me, and for some time neither of us spoke a word. I thought that I had seriously offended him, and prepared to apologize, so I touched his left shoulder to attract his attention. Instantly he jumped to his feet, screaming, and turned on me a face of utter terror. I could do nothing but stare at him, and in a second he quieted down and returned to his seat.

Then he became partially sane, and murmured a sort of excuse. I thought that I would discover what truth lay in Mr Grey's singular hypothesis. I did not ask him bluntly, as an ordinary man would have done, what was his malady, but tactfully, as I thought then, I led the conversation to demoniacal possession in the olden time, and quoted Pellingier's theory on the Scriptural cases. He answered with extraordinary vehemence, showing a childish credulity I little expected from an educated man.

"I see that you hold to the old interpretation," I said pleasantly. "Nowadays, we tend to find the solution in natural causes."

"Heavens, man!" he cried. "What do you mean by natural? You haven't the most rudimentary knowledge of nature. Listen to mine, and I will tell you something."

And with this he began a long rambling account of something which I could not understand. He talked much about a name which sounded like Canaan, and then he wandered to another subject and talked about Proserpina, whom I remembered from Mr Matthew Arnold's poem. I would have thought him trying to ridicule me, if I had not seen his face, which was white and drawn with pain; and, again, I would have thought him drunk, but for his well-known temperate habits. By-and-by even my nerves, which are very strong, began to suffer. I understood fragments of his talk, and the understanding did not reassure me. It was poisonous nonsense, but it had a terrible air of realism. He had a queer habit of catching at his heart like a man with the heart disease, and his eyes were like a mad dog's I once saw, the pupils drawn to a pin-point with fear. I could not bear it, so I tried to break the spell. I offered, against my conscience, to play a card game, but his face showed that he did not understand me. I began to feel a sort of languor of terror. I could hardly rise from my chair, and when at last I got up the whole room seemed haunted. I rushed to the bell and rang it violently, and then tried to open the door. But he was before me again, and gripped my arm so fiercely that I cried out between the pain and my dread of him.

"Come back!" he cried hoarsely. "Don't leave me alone. For God's sake, Oliphant!"

Just then the man-servant opened the door, and found the two of us standing like lunatics. I had the sense to save the situation, and I asked him to bring more coals for the fire. Then as soon as he turned to go, I stepped out of the open door before Mr Ladlaw could prevent me.

The hall seemed empty, but to my surprise I found Mrs Ladlaw sleeping in a chair by the fire. I did not like to waken her, but I was at my wits' end with fright. If I had known the way to the kitchen, I would have sought the servants' company. I ran down a passage, but it seemed to end in a blind wall, and in a great fear I turned and ran upstairs. But the upper lobbies seemed to be unlit, and I was turning back when I heard Ladlaw's voice behind me. It was muffled and queer, and the sound drove me into the darkness. When I turned a corner, to my relief I saw a lamp burning on a table and recognized my bedroom door. Here was sanctuary at last, and I ran in and shut it behind me.

My nerves were so shaken by the evening's performances that I found it impossible to get to sleep. I sat up the better part of the night by the fire, and smoked several cigarettes, which in ordinary circumstances I should never have dared to do in a strange bedroom. About four o'clock, I think, I dozed off in my chair, and awoke about nine, very stiff and cold, to find Ladlaw laughing at me in the doorway.

I was at first so confused that I did not remember what had scared me the night before. Then, as it came back to me, I was amazed at my host's appearance. He looked fresh and well, and in excellent spirits. He laughed immoderately when he found I had not gone to bed.

"You do look cheap," he said. "Breakfast's in half an hour. You will feel better when you have had a tub."

I bathed reluctantly, feeling ill and bitterly cold; but I was comforted by a good breakfast. Then I had an opportunity of talking to Mrs Ladlaw. As I remembered her, she had been full of gaiety, and even, I thought, a little frivolous; but now she was so pale and silent that I pitied her sincerely. I began to feel an intense dislike of her husband, partly for the fright he had given me the night before, and partly for the effect his silliness seemed to be having on his wife. The day

was a fine one, but after breakfast he showed no intention of going out. I expected to be asked to shoot, a sport which I sometimes try; but he never spoke of it, and insisted on my coming to the billiard-room. As we were heaving the table Mrs Ladlaw touched my arm, and asked me in a how tone if I would promise to stay all day with her husband. "I want to go down to Morefoot," she said, "and you know he cannot be left alone." I promised willingly, for in the daylight Mr Ladlaw had no terrors for me. I thought that Mrs Ladlaw looked relieved. Poor thing! she badly needed a respite.

We hung aimlessly about the place till lunch, playing a few games of billiards, and in the intervals looking at stables and harness-rooms and the now barren gardens. At lunch Mrs Ladlaw appeared, but immediately after I heard wheels on the gravel and knew that she had gone to Morefoot. Then I began to feel nervous again. I was the only responsible person left in the place, and Mr Ladlaw might at any moment relapse into craziness. I watched his moods anxiously, and talked all the nonsense I knew to keep him in good humour. I told him stories, I talked wildly of sport, I made ridiculous jokes at which I felt myself blushing. At first he seemed amused, but soon I felt that my words were falling on deaf ears. He himself began to talk, violently, incessantly, and, I may say, brilliantly. If my memory had been better and my balance less upset, I might have made my reputation, though it would have been a reputation perhaps that a minister of the Gospel might well look askance at. I could have written a terrible romance from that man's babbling. Nay, I could have done more: I could have composed a new philosophy which would have cast Nietzsche in the shade for ever. I do not wish to exaggerate, but I have never been so impressed with a sense of a crazy intellectual acumen. This Mr Ladlaw, whom I had known as a good landlord and a respectable country gentleman, now appeared as a kind of horrible genius, a brilliant and malignant satyr. I was shocked and confounded, and at the same time filled with admiration. I remember that we passed through the dining-room, where there was a great marble bust of a Roman emperor, an old discoloured thing, but wonderful in its way. Mr Ladlaw stopped before it and pointed out its merits. The thing seemed simple enough, and yet after the description I fled from it as if it had been a devil. He followed me, still talking, and we found ourselves in the library.

I remember that I suggested tea, but he scarcely heeded me. The darkness was falling, Mrs Ladlaw had not returned, and I felt horribly uncomfortable. I tried to draw him away from the room which I feared, but he made no sign of understanding. I perceived that the malady of the last night was returning. I hated that library, with its low fire, its ghastly white books, and its dreary outlook. I picked up one volume, and it was lettered on the back *Sancti Adelberti Certamina*. I dropped it, only to feel Mr Ladlaw clutching my right arm and dragging me to one of those horrible armchairs.

"The night is coming on, the old Nox Atra that the monks dreaded. Promise me that you won't go away."

I promised feebly, and prayed for Mrs Ladlaw's return. I suggested that the lamps should be lit. He rose and tried to light the hanging central one, and I noticed how his hands trembled. His awkwardness upset the thing, and it fell with a crash on the floor. He jumped back with a curious scream like an animal.

I was so miserably scared that I had not the heart to do the work for him, so we sat on in the darkness. Any sound from the out-of-doors would have comforted me, but the whole world was as silent as death. I felt that a little more would drive me mad, and the thought roused me to make a final effort after safety. In spite of all my promises I must get away. A man's first duty is to himself, and the hour had come for me. I thought with longing of my little bare manse and my

solemn housekeeper. And yet how was I to escape, for this man was the stronger, and he would never let me go.

I begged him to come into the hall, but he refused. Then I became very cunning. I suggested that we should go to the door and receive Mrs Ladlaw. He did not know that she had gone, and the news made him so nervous that he accepted my proposal. He caught my arm as before, and, leaning heavily upon me, went into the hall. There was no one about, and the fire had died down; but at the far end there was a pale glimmer from the glass door. We opened it and stood on the top step, looking over the dark lawns. Now was the time for an effort for freedom. If I could only get rid of his hand I might escape across the fields. I believed him to be too weak on his legs to follow me, and in any case I was a respectable runner. Out of doors he seemed less formidable: it was only in that haunted room that I shuddered.

I took the only way of escape which presented itself. There was a flowering shrub in a pot on the top of the parapet. I caught this within my elbow and knocked it over, so that it broke with a clatter on the stone. As I expected, he screamed and jumped aside, letting go my arm for one instant. The next I was down the steps and running hard across the lawns to the park beyond.

For a little I heard him stumbling after me, breathing heavily and with short broken cries. I ran with the speed of fear, for till I was within my own doors I could feel no security. Once I turned, and there he was, a field behind me, running with his head down like a blind dog. I skirted the village, broke through the little fir plantation, and came out on the highway. I saw the light from Jean's little window, and it was like a beacon of hope. In a few minutes I was at the door, and my servant stared as I rushed in, without hat or overcoat, and wet with perspiration. I insisted on barring the doors, and bolting and shuttering every window. Then I had the unusual luxury of a fire in my bedroom, and there I supped, and sat till I fell asleep.

*End of Mr Oliphant's Statement.*

## CHAPTER 3

### *Events on the Uplands*

I returned from town by the night express, which landed me at Borrowmuir about seven on the Friday morning. To my surprise there was no dogcart to meet me, as had been arranged, and I was compelled to hire from the inn. The omission filled me with forebodings. Things must have gone badly at More in my absence, or the careful Sybil would never have forgotten. I grudged the time occupied in that weary drive. The horse seemed intolerably slow, the roads unaccountably steep. It was a sharp morning, with haze on the fields and promise of bright sunshine at midday; but, tired as I was with my two days' journey, I was in the humour to see little good in my case. I was thankful when we drew up at the house door, and, cold and stiff, I hobbled up the steps.

The door was open, and I entered. The hall was empty, there was no sigh of any servant, and all the doors were wide to the wall. I tried one room after another without success. Then I made my voice heard in that place. I shouted for Ladlaw, and then I shouted for Sybil. There came no answer, and in despair I rushed to the kitchen wiling. There I found a cluster of frightened maids, and by dint of much questioning learned the truth.

Ladlaw, it seemed, had disappeared from the house about a quarter-past six on the previous night. The minister had decamped and found sanctuary in the manse; but there was no trace of the other. Sybil had gone to Morefoot in the afternoon, and, returning about half-past six, found her husband gone. She had been distracted with anxiety, had gone to the manse, where she found Mr Oliphant in a state of nervous collapse and quite unable to make any coherent statement, and had then roused some of the neighbouring shepherds and organized a search party. They had searched all night, but so far no word had come of the result. Meanwhile, Sybil, utterly wearied and a little hysterical, was in bed, sleeping, for her anxiety of the past week had culminated in a sort of deep languor, which in the circumstances was the best thing that could have happened. There was no question of wakening her; but, as I snatched a hurried breakfast, it seemed to me that I must at once follow the search. They were to meet in the morning at a farm called Mossrigging, beneath a hill of the same name, and if I went there I might get word of them. In the meantime I must interview Mr Oliphant.

I found him in bed, unshaven, and very hollow about the eyes. He told me a lame story, and indeed his fright was so palpable that I had not the heart to blame him. But I insisted that he should get up and come with me, for every man would be needed to search those mossy uplands. I was dog-tired, sleepy, and irritable, and yet I must go: why should not this man, who had had his night's rest?

He made some feeble objection; but he had a conscience of his own and rose obediently. We set out to the nearest part of the moor, he in his clergyman's garb, and I in a dark suit and a bowler; and I remember thinking how oddly unsuited was our dress for this stalking game. I was wretchedly anxious, for I liked Ladlaw, and God alone knew where he might have got to in the night. There were deep bogs and ugly old pit-shafts on the moor, and there were ravines with sheer red sides. At any moment we might find tragedy, and I dreaded the report of the searchers at Mossrigging.

When we left the road, we followed an old cart track up a shallow glen, where stood some curious old stone chimneys, which had been built by a speculator who hoped to make a fortune from peat. The sun was beginning to break through the haze, and miles of low moorland were

disclosed to left and right. But the hills in front were still cloudy, and we were chose on the cottage before we knew its whereabouts. It stood high in a crinkle of hill, with a wide prospect north and east to the sea, and as I turned I saw Morebrig smoking clear in the autumn light, and the chimneys of the House above the fir trees. Out on the waters three ships were sailing like toy boats, a reminder of the bustling modern life beyond this antique place of horrors.

The house was full of men, devouring their morning porridge. They were shepherds of the neighbourhood, and two boys from the village, as well as John Ker, the head keeper from More. One man, Robert Tod by name, answered my unspoken question. "We havena gotten him, but we've gotten his whereabouts. We got a ghisk o' him about six this mornin' on the back side o' the Lowe Moss. I kent him fine by the way he ran. Lord, but he was souple! Nane o' us could come within a hunner yairds o' him. We'll hae to wyse him genty, sir, and some o' us'll hae to tak a lang cast round the hill."

I had no ambition to "tak a hang cast round the hill"; but these men had been abroad all night, and I and the minister must undertake the duty. Tod agreed to come with us, and the shaggy silent men of the party expounded the plan of campaign. The Lowe Moss was impassable on one side, on another bounded by a steep hill-shoulder, and on the others by two narrow glens. They would watch the glens; we three should make a circuit and come back over the hill, driving the fugitive before us. Once enclosed between the moss and our three parties, he should be an easy capture. I implored them to go to work gently, for I feared that he might be driven into the bog. They shook their heads and laughed: it was all a kind of crazy sport to them, and their one idea was to carry out their orders.

I confess I was desperately tired before we had forded the upper waters of the More, crossed the Redscaurhead, and looked over the green pasturelands to the south. It was a most curious sight; for whereas one side of the range was rough and mossy and hideous with red scaurs, the other was a gentle slope with sweet hill grass and bright shallow waters. It was a new country where the old curse could not reign, and an idea took possession of me that if once Ladlaw came into the place he would be healed of his malady. The air seemed clearer, the sky softer, the whole world simple and clean. We fetched a circuit down one of the little streams till we came to the back of the hill which on its face is called Mossrigging. I was abominably tired, but in better spirits. As for the minister, he groaned occasionally, but never spoke a word.

At the foot we separated to the distance of half a mile, and began the ascent. So far there was no sign of our man. Tod was on the far east, I was in the centre, and Mr Oliphant took the west. I cannot profess to remember exactly all the incidents of that climb. I was too stupid with sleep and exertion, and the little distant figures of my companions danced in a kind of haze. The ascent was simple—short grass, varied by short heather, with at wide intervals a patch of shingle. The shepherd walked with an easy swing, the minister stumbled and groaned, while I, in sheer bravado and irritation at my weakness, kept up a kind of despairing trot. The Devil and Ladlaw combined might confront me, but I was too tired to care. Indeed, in a little I had forgotten all about the purpose of our quest.

Then, quite suddenly, almost at the summit, in a little hollow of the ridge, I saw our man. He was sitting on the ground, directly in the minister's line, and his head was sunk on his breast. I remember being taken with a horrid thought that he was dead, and quickened my trot to a run. Meanwhile the minister was approaching very near, but apparently quite unconscious of his presence. His eyes were in the ends of the earth, and he ambled along with no purpose in the world.

What happened rests mainly on my authority; but Robert Tod, shepherd in Nether Mossrigging, is ready to swear to the essentials. Mr Oliphant stumbled on into the hollow till he was within ten yards of the sitting figure. Ladlaw never moved; but the subtle influence which tells of human presence came suddenly upon the minister's senses, for he lifted his eyes and started. The man was still scared to death, and he naturally turned to run away, when something happened which I cannot well explain. Ladlaw was still sitting with his head on his breast, and yet it was clear to my mind that Ladlaw had somehow risen and was struggling with the minister. I could see the man's wrists strained and twisted as if in a death-grapple, and his white face reddening with exertion. He seemed to be held round the middle, for his feet tottered several times, and once he lurched to the left side, so that I thought he was thrown. And yet he was only battling with the air, for there was Ladlaw sitting quietly some yards from him.

And then suddenly the contest seemed to cease. Mr Oliphant ran straight past the sitting man and over the brow of the hill. Surprise had held Tod and myself motionless. Now the spell was broken, and from our several places we ran towards Ladlaw. I heard the shepherd's loud voice crying, "Look at Oliphant! Oliphant's no wise!" and I thought I heard a note of sardonic mirth. In any case, it was the minister he was after, for a moment later he disappeared down the farther slope.

Mr Oliphant might go where he pleased, but my business was within my friend. I caught Ladlaw by the shoulder and shook him fiercely. Then I pulled him to his feet, let him go, and he rolled over. The sight was so comic that I went into a fit of nervous laughter; but the shock seemed to have restored his wits, for he opened sleepy eyes and regarded mime solemnly. I do not propose to analyse my reasons, but I was conscious that it was the old Ladlaw who was looking at mime. I knew he was healed of his malady, but how I knew it I do not know. He stuck both fists into his eyes like a sleepy child. Then he yawned, and looked down ruefully at soaked, soiled, and ragged clothing. Then he looked reproachfully at me.

"What's up?" he asked. "Stop that hideous row and tell me what has happened. Have I had an accident?"

Then I spoke cunningly. "Nothing much. A little bit of a fall, but you'll be all right soon. Why, you look better already." And again I went into a fit of laughter.

He grew wholesomely cross. "Oh, don't be a confounded jackass!" he cried. "I feel as if I hadn't slept for a week, and I'm hungry and thirsty."

He swallowed the contents of my flask, and wolfed my sandwiches in a disgusting way. Then he proposed that we should go home. "I'm tired, and I'm sick of shooting for the day. By-the-by, where's my gun?"

"Broken," I said, "broken in the fall. The keeper is going to look after it." And with the aid of my arm he began with feeble steps his homeward journey.

The minister—this is the tale of Robert Tod and his colleagues—descended the precipitous part of Mossrigging like a thing inspired. Tod, labouring heavily in his wake, declared that he went down the hillside like a loose stone, slipping, stumbling, yet never altogether losing his feet, and clearing dangers solely by the grace of God. As he went, said the men, he made clutches at the air, and his face was the face of one distraught. They ran together from their different places to intercept him on the edge of the bog, for at first they thought he was Ladlaw. When they saw their mistake they did not stop, for Tod was making frantic signals for pursuit. John Ker, the More keeper, was nearest, and he declared afterwards that he never approached a business so unwillingly. "I wad hae grippet a wild stot or a daft staig suner nor yon man," he said. But the

business was too public for sheer cowardice. John assaulted him on the left flank while the other attacked in front, and John was bowled over like a ninepin. It was not the minister, he said, but something else, something with an arm two yards long, which flew out like a steam hammer. But the others were more fortunate. One caught Mr Oliphant's right arm, another hung on to the flaps of his coat, while a third tripped him up gallantly, till the whole body of them roiled on the ground. Then ensued an indescribable fray. Tod got a black eye from some unknown source, and one of the boys lost several front teeth. Howls of rage filled the moorland air, and all the while, they declared, the minister was praying with an unction which was never heard in the kirk. "Lord, give me peace!" he cried. "Lord, take the thing away!" and then again, "Get thee behind mime, Satan!"

The end came very suddenly, for the company rolled into the bog. The minister, being lowest, saved the others, but he floundered in the green slime up to his middle. The accident seemed to inspire sobriety, He ceased his prayers, his face lost its horror, and took on a common human fear. Then Tod and his friends laboured heroically to rescue him, and all the while, they declared, something was pommelling them and bruising them, and they showed for long black marks on their bodies. Slowly they raised Mr Oliphant from the slough, and on a bridge of coats he crept back to solid land.

And then that happened which was the crowning marvel of the business. It was a still sharp day; but suddenly there came a wind, hot and harsh, and like nothing they had ever known. It stung them like nettles, played for a moment in their midst, and then in a kind of visible cloud passed away from them over the bog in the direction of the Red Loch. And with the wind went the Thing which had so long played havoc in the place; and the men were left with an unkempt figure, coated with slime and shivering within fright, but once more the sane and prosaic Mr Oliphant, the minister of the parish of More.

We got Ladlaw and the minister back to the house with much trouble, for both were weak on their legs, and one was still in a pitiable fright. The two kept eyeing each other, one with a sort of disgusted amusement, the other with a wondering fear. The shepherds were mystified; but they were matter-of-fact beings, who, having fulfilled their orders, gave no more thought to the business. The wounded nursed their bruises and swore cheerfully, and the boy with the broken teeth whistled his complaints. A good dinner restored them to humour, and the last I saw was Ker and Tod going over the Odyssey of their adventures to a circle of critical spectators.

When Ladlaw and the minister had washed and fed, and sat smoking in the library, I went to talk to Sybil. I have often wondered how much she understood. At any rate she took my word that the trouble had passed, and in a fit of tears thanked me for my labours. Then she said she would go to her husband, and I led her to the library, where the two heroes were smoking the pipe of peace.

Ladlaw greeted her cheerily as if nothing had happened. "I feel a bit shaken," he said, "but I'll be all right after a night's rest. You needn't be nervous, Sib. By-the-by, Harry, where's that gun?"

Then he wandered round the room, casting an unfriendly eye on his new acquisitions. "Look here! Somebody has been playing the fool in this place. I can't see a single Badminton, and where did this stuff come from?" And he tapped a row of books in old vellum. "I never remember the things before. St Adelbert! Who on earth was he? Why, any one who came in suddenly and did not know me might think I was a minor poet. I wish you'd tell Harrison to clear all this truck away."

The minister sat by the fire and said nothing. The marvellous had intruded upon his easy life and spoiled the balance. I was sorry for the man, as I thanked him in a low tone and asked how he felt.

The words came from between chattering teeth.

“I am getting b-better,” he said, “but I have had a terrible sh-shock.—I am a Christian man and I have been tempted. I thought we lived in a progressive age, but now I know that we d-d-don’t. And I am going to write to Dr Rintoul.”