

CASE XVII  
**Glamis Castle**  
By Elliott O'Donnell

Of all the hauntings in Scotland, none has gained such widespread notoriety as the hauntings of Glamis Castle, the seat of the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne in Forfarshire.

Part of the castle—that part which is the more frequently haunted—is of ancient though uncertain date, and if there is any truth in the tradition that Duncan was murdered there by Macbeth, must, at any rate, have been in existence at the commencement of the eleventh century. Of course, extra buildings have, from time to time, been added, and renovations made; but the original structure remains pretty nearly the same as it always has been, and is included in a square tower that occupies a central position, and commands a complete view of the entire castle.

Within this tower—the walls of which are fifteen feet thick—there is a room, hidden in some unsuspected quarter, that contains a secret (the keynote to one, at least, of the hauntings) which is known only to the Earl, his heir (on the attainment of his twenty-first birthday), and the factor of the estate.

In all probability, the mystery attached to this room would challenge but little attention, were it not for the fact that unearthly noises, which at the time were supposed to proceed from this chamber, have been heard by various visitors sleeping in the Square Tower.

The following experience is said to have happened to a lady named Bond. I append it more or less in her own words.

It is a good many years since I stayed at Glamis. I was, in fact, but little more than a child, and had only just gone through my first season in town. But though young, I was neither nervous nor imaginative; I was inclined to be what is termed stolid, that is to say, extremely matter-of-fact and practical. Indeed, when my friends exclaimed, “You don’t mean to say you are going to stay at Glamis! Don’t you know it’s haunted?” I burst out laughing.

“Haunted!” I said, “how ridiculous! There are no such things as ghosts. One might as well believe in fairies.”

Of course I did not go to Glamis alone—my mother and sister were with me; but whereas they slept in the more modern part of the castle, I was, at my own request, apportioned a room in the Square Tower.

I cannot say that my choice had any-thing to do with the secret chamber. That, and the alleged mystery, had been dinned into my ears so often that I had grown thoroughly sick of the whole thing. No, I wanted to sleep in the Square Tower for quite a different reason, a reason of my own. I kept an aviary; the tower was old; and I naturally hoped its walls would be covered with ivy and teeming with birds’ nests, some of which I might be able to reach—and, I am ashamed to say, plunder—from my window.

Alas, for my expectations! Although the Square Tower was so ancient that in some places it was actually crumbling away—not the sign of a leaf, not the vestige of a bird’s nest could I see anywhere; the walls were abominably, brutally bare. However, it was not long before my disappointment gave way to delight; for the air that blew in through the open window was so sweet, so richly scented with heather and honeysuckle, and the view of the broad, sweeping, thickly wooded grounds so indescribably charming, that, despite my inartistic and unpoetical nature, I

was entranced—entranced as I had never been before, and never have been since. “Ghosts!” I said to myself, “ghosts how absurd! how preposterously absurd! such an adorable spot as this can only harbour sunshine and flowers.”

I well remember, too—for, as I have already said, I was not poetical—how much I enjoyed my first dinner at Glamis. The long journey and keen mountain air had made me hungry, and I thought I had never tasted such delicious food—such ideal salmon (from the Esk) and such heavenly fruit. But I must tell you that, although I ate heartily, as a healthy girl should, by the time I went to bed I had thoroughly digested my meal, and was, in fact, quite ready to partake of a few oatmeal biscuits I found in my dressing-case, and remembered having bought at Perth. It was about eleven o’clock when my maid left me, and I sat for some minutes wrapped in my dressing gown, before the open window. The night was very still, and save for an occasional rustle of the wind in the distant tree-tops, the hooting of an owl, the melancholy cry of a peewit and the hoarse barking of a dog, the silence was undisturbed.

The interior of my room was, in nearly every particular, modern. The furniture was not old; there were no grim carvings; no grotesquely-fashioned tapestries on the walls; no dark cupboards; no gloomy corners;—all was cosy and cheerful, and when I got into bed no thought of bogle or mystery entered my mind.

In a few minutes I was asleep, and for some time there was nothing but a blank—a blank in which all identity was annihilated. Then suddenly I found myself in an oddly-shaped room with a lofty ceiling, and a window situated at so great a distance from the black oaken floor as to be altogether inaccessible from within. Feeble gleams of phosphorescent light made their way through the narrow panes, and served to render distinct the more prominent objects around; but my eyes struggled in vain to reach the remoter angles of the wall, one of which inspired me with terror such as I had never felt before. The walls were covered with heavy draperies that were sufficient in themselves to preclude the possibility of any save the loudest of sounds penetrating without.

The furniture, if such one could call it, puzzled me. It seemed more fitted for the cell of a prison or lunatic asylum, or even for a kennel, than for an ordinary dwelling-room. I could see no chair, only a coarse deal table, a straw mattress, and a kind of trough. An air of irredeemable gloom and horror hung over and pervaded everything. As I stood there, I felt I was waiting for something—something that was concealed in the corner of the room I dreaded. I tried to reason with myself, to assure myself that there was nothing there that could hurt me, nothing that could even terrify me, but my efforts were in vain—my fears grew. Had I had some definite knowledge as to the cause of my alarm I should not have suffered so much, but it was my ignorance of what was there, of what I feared, that made my terror so poignant. Each second saw the agony of my suspense increase. I dared not move. I hardly dare breathe, and I dreaded lest the violent pulsation of my heart should attract the attention of the Unknown Presence and precipitate its coming out. Yet despite the perturbation of my mind, I caught myself analysing my feelings. It was not danger I abhorred so much, as its absolute effect—fright. I shuddered at the bare thought of what result the most trivial incident—the creaking of a board, ticking of a beetle, or hooting of an owl—might have on the intolerable agitation of my soul.

In this unnerved and pitiable condition I felt that the period was bound to come, sooner or later, when I should have to abandon life and reason together in the most desperate of struggles with—fear.

At length something moved. An icy chill ran through my frame, and the horror of my anticipations immediately reached its culminating point. The Presence was about to reveal itself.

The gentle rubbing of a soft body on the floor, the crack of a bony joint, breathing, another crack, and then—was it my own excited imagination—or the disturbing influence of the atmosphere—or the uncertain twilight of the chamber that produced before me, in the stygian darkness of the recess, the vacillating and indistinct outline of something luminous, and horrid? I would gladly have risked futurity to have looked elsewhere—I could not. My eyes were fixed—I was compelled to gaze steadily in front of me.

Slowly, very slowly, the thing, whatever it was, took shape. Legs—crooked, misshapen, human legs. A body—tawny and hunched. Arms—long and spidery, with crooked, knotted fingers. A head—large and bestial, and covered with a tangled mass of grey hair that hung around its protruding forehead and pointed ears in ghastly mockery of curls. A face—and herein was the realisation of all my direst expectations—a face—white and staring, piglike in formation, malevolent in expression; a hellish combination of all things foul and animal, and yet withal not without a touch of pathos.

As I stared at it aghast, it reared itself on its haunches after the manner of an ape, and leered piteously at me. Then, shuffling forward, it rolled over, and lay sprawled out like some ungainly turtle—and wallowed, as for warmth, in the cold grey beams of early dawn.

At this juncture the handle of the chamber door turned, some one entered, there was a loud cry—and I awoke—awoke to find the whole tower, walls and rafters, ringing with the most appalling screams I have ever heard,—screams of some thing or of some one—for there was in them a strong element of what was human as well as animal—in the greatest distress.

Wondering what it meant, and more than ever terrified, I sat up in bed and listened,—listened whilst a conviction—the result of intuition, suggestion, or what you will, but a conviction all the same—forced me to associate the sounds with the thing in my dream. And I associate them still.

It was, I think, in the same year—in the year that the foregoing account was narrated to me—that I heard another story of the hauntings at Glamis, a story in connection with a lady whom I will call Miss Macginney. I append her experience as nearly as possible as she is stated to have told it.

I seldom talk about my adventure, Miss Maginney announced, because so many people ridicule the superphysical, and laugh at the mere mention of ghosts. I own I did the same myself till I stayed at Glamis; but a week there quite cured me of scepticism, and I came away a confirmed believer.

The incident occurred nearly twenty years ago—shortly after my return from India, where my father was then stationed.

It was years since I had been to Scotland, indeed I had only once crossed the border and that when I was a babe; consequently I was delighted to receive an invitation to spend a few weeks in the land of my birth. I went to Edinburgh first—I was born in Drumsheugh Gardens—and thence to Glamis.

It was late in the autumn, the weather was intensely cold, and I arrived at the castle in a blizzard. Indeed, I do not recollect ever having been out in such a frightful storm. It was as much as the horses could do to make headway, and when we reached the castle we found a crowd of anxious faces eagerly awaiting us in the hall.

Chilled! I was chilled to the bone, and thought I never should thaw. But the huge fires and bright and cosy atmosphere of the rooms—for the interior of Glamis was modernised throughout—soon set me right, and by tea time I felt nicely warm and comfortable.

My bedroom was in the oldest part of the castle—the Square Tower—but although I had been warned by some of the guests that it might be haunted, I can assure you that when I went to bed no subject was farther from my thoughts than the subject of ghosts. I returned to my room at about half-past eleven. The storm was then at its height—all was babel and confusion—impenetrable darkness mingled with the wildest roaring and shrieking; and when I peeped through my casement window I could see nothing—the panes were shrouded in snow—snow which was incessantly dashed against them with cyclonic fury. I fixed a comb in the window-frame so as not to be kept awake by the constant jarring; and with the caution characteristic of my sex looked into the wardrobe and under the bed for burglars—though Heaven knows what I should have done had I found one there—placed a candlestick and matchbox on the table by my bedside, lest the roof or window should be blown in during the night or any other catastrophe happen, and after all these preparations got into bed. At this period of my life I was a sound sleeper, and, being somewhat unusually tired after my journey, I was soon in a dreamless slumber. What awoke me I cannot say, but I came to myself with a violent start, such as might have been occasioned by a loud noise. Indeed, that was, at first, my impression, and I strained my ears to try and ascertain the cause of it. All was, however, silent. The storm had abated, and the castle and grounds were wrapped in an almost preternatural hush. The sky had cleared, and the room was partially illuminated by a broad stream of silvery light that filtered softly in through the white and tightly drawn blinds. A feeling that there was something unnatural in the air, that the stillness was but the prelude to some strange and startling event, gradually came over me. I strove to reason with myself, to argue that the feeling was wholly due to the novelty of my surroundings, but my efforts were fruitless. And soon there stole upon me a sensation to which I had been hitherto an utter stranger—I became afraid. An irrepressible tremor pervaded my frame, my teeth chattered, my blood froze. Obeying an impulse—an impulse I could not resist, I lifted myself up from the pillows, and, peering fearfully into the shadowy glow that lay directly in front of me—listened. Why I listened I do not know, saving that an instinctive spirit prompted me. At first I could hear nothing, and then, from a direction I could not define, there came a noise, low, distinct, uninterpretative. It was repeated in rapid succession, and speedily construed itself into the sound of mailed footsteps racing up the long flight of stairs at the end of the corridor leading to my room. Dreading to think what it might be, and seized with a wild sentiment of self-preservation, I made frantic endeavours to get out of bed and barricade my door. My limbs, however, refused to move. I was paralysed. Nearer and nearer drew the sounds; and I could at length distinguish, with a clearness that petrified my very soul, the banging and clanging of sword scabbards, and the panting and gasping of men, sore pressed in a wild and desperate race. And then the meaning of it all came to me with hideous abruptness—it was a case of pursued and pursuing—the race was for—LIFE. Outside my door the fugitive halted, and from the noise he made in trying to draw his breath, I knew he was dead beat. His antagonist, however, gave him but scant time for recovery. Bounding at him with prodigious leaps, he struck him a blow that sent him reeling with such tremendous force against the door, that the panels, although composed of the stoutest oak, quivered and strained like flimsy matchboard.

The blow was repeated; the cry that rose in the victim's throat was converted into an abortive gurgling groan; and I heard the ponderous battle-axe carve its way through helmet, bone, and brain. A moment later came the sound of slithering armour; and the corpse, slipping sideways, toppled to the ground with a sonorous clang.

A silence too awful for words now ensued. Having finished his hideous handiwork, the murderer was quietly deliberating what to do next; whilst my dread of attracting his attention

was so great that I scarcely dare breathe. This intolerable state of things had already lasted for what seemed to me a lifetime, when, glancing involuntarily at the floor, I saw a stream of dark-looking fluid lazily lapping its way to me from the direction of the door. Another moment and it would reach my shoes. In my dismay I shrieked aloud. There was a sudden stir without, a significant clatter of steel, and the next moment—despite the fact that it was locked—the door slowly opened. The limits of my endurance had now happily been reached, the over-taxed valves of my heart could stand no more—I fainted. On my awakening to consciousness it was morning, and the welcome sun rays revealed no evidences of the distressing drama. I own I had a hard tussle before I could make up my mind to spend another night in that room; and my feelings as I shut the door on my retreating maid, and prepared to get into bed, were not the most enviable. But nothing happened, nor did I again experience anything of the sort till the evening before I left. I had lain down all the afternoon—for I was tired after a long morning's tramp on the moors, a thing I dearly love—and I was thinking it was about time to get up, when a dark shadow suddenly fell across my face.

I looked up hastily, and there, standing by my bedside and bending over me, was a gigantic figure in bright armour.

Its visor was up, and what I saw within the casque is stamped for ever on my memory. It was the face of the dead—the long since dead—with the expression—the subtly hellish expression—of the living. As I gazed helplessly at it, it bent lower. I threw up my hands to ward it off. There was a loud rap at the door. And as my maid softly entered to tell me tea was ready—it vanished.

The third account of the Glamis hauntings was told me as long ago as the summer of 1893. I was travelling by rail from Perth to Glasgow, and the only other occupant of my compartment was an elderly gentleman, who, from his general air and appearance, might have been a dominie, or member of some other learned profession. I can see him in my mind's eye now—a tall, thin man with a premature stoop. He had white hair, which was brushed forward on either side of his head in such a manner as suggested a wig; bushy eyebrows; dark, piercing eyes; and a stern, though somewhat sad, mouth. His features were fine and scholarly; he was clean-shaven. There was something about him—something that marked him from the general horde—something that attracted me, and I began chatting with him soon after we left Perth.

In the course of a conversation, that was at all events interesting to me, I adroitly managed to introduce the subject of ghosts—then, as ever, uppermost in my thoughts.

Well, he said, I can tell you of something rather extraordinary that my mother used to say happened to a friend of hers at Glamis. I have no doubt you are well acquainted with the hackneyed stories in connection with the hauntings at the castle; for example, Earl Beardie playing cards with the Devil, and The Weeping Woman without Hands or Tongue. You can read about them in scores of books and magazines. But what befel my mother's friend, whom I will call Mrs. Gibbons—for I have forgotten her proper name—was apparently of a novel nature. The affair happened shortly before Mrs. Gibbons died, and I always thought that what took place might have been, in some way, connected with her death.

She had driven over to the castle one day—during the absence of the owner—to see her cousin, who was in the employ of the Earl and Countess. Never having been at Glamis before, but having heard so much about it, Mrs. Gibbons was not a little curious to see that part of the building, called the Square Tower, that bore the reputation of being haunted.

Tactfully biding an opportunity, she sounded her relative on the subject, and was laughingly informed that she might go anywhere about the place she pleased, saving to one spot, namely, "Bluebeard's Chamber"; and there she could certainly never succeed in poking her nose, as its locality was known only to three people, all of whom were pledged never to reveal it. At the commencement of her tour of inspection, Mrs. Gibbons was disappointed—she was disappointed in the Tower. She had expected to see a gaunt, grim place, crumbling to pieces with age, full of blood-curdling, spiral staircases, and deep, dark dungeons; whereas everything was the reverse. The walls were in an excellent state of preservation—absolutely intact; the rooms bright and cheerful and equipped in the most modern style; there were no dungeons, at least none on view, and the passages and staircases were suggestive of nothing more alarming than—bats! She was accompanied for some time by her relative, but, on the latter being called away, Mrs. Gibbons continued her rambles alone. She had explored the lower premises, and was leisurely examining a handsomely furnished apartment on the top floor, when, in crossing from one side of the room to the other, she ran into something. She looked down—nothing was to be seen. Amazed beyond description, she thrust out her hands, and they alighted on an object, which she had little difficulty in identifying. It was an enormous cask or barrel lying in a horizontal position.

She bent down close to where she felt it, but she could see nothing—nothing but the well-polished boards of the floor. To make sure again that the barrel was there, she gave a little kick—and drew back her foot with a cry of pain. She was not afraid—the sunshine in the room forbade fear—only exasperated. She was certain a barrel was there—that it was objective—and she was angry with herself for not seeing it. She wondered if she were going blind; but the fact that other objects in the room were plainly visible to her, discountenanced such an idea. For some minutes she poked and jabbed at the Thing, and then, seized with a sudden and uncontrollable panic, she turned round and fled. And as she tore out of the room, along the passage and down the seemingly interminable flight of stairs, she heard the barrel behind her in close pursuit—bump—bump—bump!

At the foot of the staircase Mrs. Gibbons met her cousin, and, as she clutched the latter for support, the barrel shot past her, still continuing its descent—bump—bump—bump! (though the steps as far as she could see had ended)—till the sounds gradually dwindled away in the far distance.

Whilst the manifestations lasted, neither Mrs. Gibbons nor her cousin spoke; but the latter, as soon as the sounds had ceased, dragged Mrs. Gibbons away, and, in a voice shaking with terror, cried: "Quick, quick—don't, for Heaven's sake, look round—worse has yet to come." And, pulling Mrs. Gibbons along in breathless haste, she unceremoniously hustled her out of the Tower.

"That was no barrel!" Mrs. Gibbons's cousin subsequently remarked by way of explanation. "I saw it—I have seen it before. Don't ask me to describe it. I dare not—I dare not even think of it. Whenever it appears, a certain thing happens shortly afterwards. Don't, don't on any account say a word about it to any one here." And Mrs. Gibbons, my mother told me, came away from Glamis a thousand times more curious than she was when she went.

The last story I have to relate is one I heard many years ago, when I was staying near Balmoral. A gentleman named Vance, with strong antiquarian tastes, was staying at an inn near the Strathmore estate, and, roaming abroad one afternoon, in a fit of absent-mindedness entered the castle grounds. It so happened—fortunately for him—that the family were away, and he encountered no one more formidable than a man he took to be a gardener, an uncouth-looking

fellow, with a huge head covered with a mass of red hair, hawk-like features, and high cheekbones, high even for a Scot. Struck with the appearance of the individual, Mr. Vance spoke, and, finding him wonderfully civil, asked whether, by any chance, he ever came across any fossils, when digging in the gardens.

“I dinna ken the meaning of fossils,” the man replied. “What are they?”

Mr. Vance explained, and a look of cunning gradually pervaded the fellow’s features. “No!” he said, “I’ve never found any of those things, but if you’ll give me your word to say nothing about it, I’ll show you something I once dug up over yonder by the Square Tower.”

“Do you mean the Haunted Tower?—the Tower that is supposed to contain the secret room?” Mr. Vance exclaimed.

An extraordinary expression—an expression such as Mr. Vance found it impossible to analyse—came into the man’s eyes. “Yes! that’s it!” he nodded. “What people call—and rightly call—the Haunted Tower. I got it from there. But don’t you say naught about it!”

Mr. Vance, whose curiosity was roused, promised, and the man, politely requesting him to follow, led the way to a cottage that stood near by, in the heart of a gloomy wood. To Mr. Vance’s astonishment the treasure proved to be the skeleton of a hand—a hand with abnormally large knuckles, and the first joint—of both fingers and thumb—much shorter than the others. It was the most extraordinarily shaped hand Mr. Vance had ever seen, and he did not know in the least how to classify it. It repelled, yet interested him, and he eventually offered the man a good sum to allow him to keep it. To his astonishment the money was refused. “You may have the thing, and welcome,” the fellow said. “Only, I advise you not to look at it late at night; or just before getting into bed. If you do, you may have bad dreams.”

“I will take my chance of that!”

Mr. Vance laughed. “You see, being a hard-headed cockney, I am not superstitious. It is only you Highlanders, and your first cousins the Irish, who believe nowadays in bogles, omens, and such-like”; and, packing the hand carefully in his knapsack, Mr. Vance bid the strange-looking creature good morning, and went on his way.

For the rest of the day the hand was uppermost in his thoughts—nothing had ever fascinated him so much. He sat pondering over it the whole evening, and bedtime found him still examining it—examining it upstairs in his room by candlelight. He had a hazy recollection that some clock had struck twelve, and he was beginning to feel that it was about time to retire, when, in the mirror opposite him, he caught sight of the door—it was open.

“By Jove! that’s odd!” he said to himself. “I could have sworn I shut and bolted it.” To make sure, he turned round—the door was closed. “An optical delusion,” he murmured; “I will try again.”

He looked into the mirror—the door reflected in it was—open. Utterly at a loss to know how to explain the phenomenon, he leaned forward in his seat to examine the glass more carefully, and as he did so he gave a start. On the threshold of the doorway was a shadow—black and bulbous. A cold shiver ran down Mr. Vance’s spine, and just for a moment he felt afraid, terribly afraid; but he quickly composed himself—it was nothing but an illusion—there was no shadow there in reality—he had only to turn round, and the thing would be gone. It was amusing—entertaining. He would wait and see what happened.

The shadow moved. It moved slowly through the air like some huge spider, or odd-shaped bird. He would not acknowledge that there was anything sinister about it—only something droll—excruciatingly droll. Yet it did not make him laugh. When it had drawn a little nearer, he tried to diagnose it, to discover its material counterpart in one of the objects around him; but he

was obliged to acknowledge his attempts were failures—there was nothing in the room in the least degree like it. A vague feeling of uneasiness gradually crept over him—was the thing the shadow of something with which he was familiar, but could not just then recall to mind—something he feared—something that was sinister? He struggled against the idea, he dismissed it as absurd; but it returned—returned, and took deeper root as the shadow drew nearer. He wished the house was not quite so silent—that he could hear some indication of life—anything—anything for companionship, and to rid him of the oppressive, the very oppressive, sense of loneliness and isolation.

Again a thrill of terror ran through him.

“Look here!” he exclaimed aloud, glad to hear the sound of his own voice. “Look here! if this goes on much longer I shall begin to think I’m going mad. I have had enough, and more than enough, of magic mirrors for one night—it’s high time I got into bed.” He strove to rise from his chair—to move; he was unable to do either; some strange, tyrannical force held him a prisoner.

A change now took place in the shadow; the blurr dissipated, and the clearly defined outlines of an object—an object that made Mr. Vance perfectly sick with apprehension—slowly disclosed themselves. His suspicions were verified—it was the HAND!—the hand—no longer skeleton, but covered with green, mouldering flesh—feeling its way slyly and stealthily towards him—towards the back of his chair! He noted the murderous twitching of its short, flat finger-tips, the monstrous muscles of its hideous thumb, and the great, clumsy hollows of its clammy palm. It closed in upon him; its cold, slimy, detestable skin touched his coat—his shoulder—his neck—his head! It pressed him down, squashed, suffocated him! He saw it all in the glass—and then an extraordinary thing happened. Mr. Vance suddenly became animated. He got up and peeped furtively round. Chairs, bed, wardrobe, had all disappeared—so had the bedroom—and he found himself in a small, bare, comfortless, queerly constructed apartment without a door, and with only a narrow slit of a window somewhere near the ceiling.

He had in one of his hands a knife with a long, keen blade, and his whole mind was bent on murder. Creeping stealthily forward, he approached a corner of the room, where he now saw, for the first time—a mattress—a mattress on which lay a huddled-up form. What the Thing was whether human or animal—Mr. Vance did not know—did not care—all he felt was that it was there for him to kill—that he loathed and hated it—hated it with a hatred such as nothing else could have produced. Tiptoeing gently up to it, he bent down, and, lifting his knife high above his head, plunged it into the Thing’s body with all the force he could command.

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He recrossed the room, and found himself once more in his apartment at the inn. He looked for the skeleton hand—it was not where he had left it—it had vanished. Then he glanced at the mirror, and on its brilliantly polished surface saw—not his own face—but the face of the gardener, the man who had given him the hand! Features, colour, hair—all—all were identical—wonderfully, hideously identical—and as the eyes met his, they smiled—devilishly.

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Early the next day, Mr. Vance set out for the spinney and cottage; they were not to be found—nobody had ever heard of them. He continued his travels, and some months later, at a loan collection of pictures in a gallery in Edinburgh, he came to an abrupt—a very abrupt—halt,

before the portrait of a gentleman in ancient costume. The face seemed strangely familiar—the huge head with thick, red hair—the hawk-like features—the thin and tightly compressed lips. Then, in a trice, it all came back to him: the face he looked at was that of the uncouth gardener—the man who had given him the hand. And to clinch the matter, the eyes—leered.