

## **AI-Generated Graded Readers**

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### **About This Edition**

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice. The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Edgar Allan Poe, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe — Volume 2* (Simplified Edition,  
Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

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## The Purloined Letter

### Part 1

One evening in the fall, in the city of Paris, my friend C. Auguste Dupin and I sat together in his small room. The room was high in a house in a quiet street. It was already dark outside. The wind moved strongly in the streets, and the night felt cold and restless. Inside the room, however, the air was still and heavy with smoke from our pipes.

For a long time we did not speak. We sat in silence, each in his chair. Anyone who looked at us from outside would think that we watched the slow circles of smoke that rose from our pipes and turned in the air above us. But in truth my mind was busy. I was thinking about a crime that Dupin and I had talked about earlier that evening. It was the strange murder in the Rue Morgue, and also the sad mystery of the young woman named Marie Rogêt. These stories were still turning slowly in my thoughts.

While we sat there quietly, the door suddenly opened. A man entered the room. It was an old friend of ours, Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Paris police.

We were glad to see him. The Prefect was a curious man. In some ways he was clever and amusing, and in other ways he was foolish. But he was always interesting. It had been several years since we had last seen him.

Dupin began to rise from his chair in order to light a lamp. The room was almost dark now, and the only light came from the faint glow of our pipes. But the Prefect quickly said that a lamp was not needed.

“If the matter needs thought,” Dupin said calmly, “we may think better in the dark.”

“That is another one of your strange ideas,” said the Prefect with a laugh. He often called something strange when he did not understand it.

“Perhaps,” Dupin replied quietly. He pushed a pipe toward our visitor and moved a comfortable chair closer for him.

“And what is the trouble this time?” I asked. “I hope it is not another terrible

murder.”

“Oh no,” said the Prefect. “Nothing like that. The matter is very simple. In fact, it is so simple that I believe we could solve it ourselves. But I thought Dupin might enjoy hearing about it. The case is extremely strange.”

“Simple and strange,” Dupin said softly.

“Yes,” replied the Prefect. “That is exactly the difficulty. The matter is very simple, and yet we cannot solve it.”

“Perhaps,” Dupin said slowly, “it is the simplicity itself that troubles you.”

The Prefect laughed loudly. “What nonsense!” he said.

“Perhaps the mystery is too clear,” Dupin continued.

“Too clear?” cried the Prefect. “Who has ever heard such an idea?”

“Too easy to see,” said Dupin calmly.

The Prefect laughed again, even louder than before. He shook with laughter in his chair.

“My dear Dupin,” he said, “one day you will make me die with laughter.”

“Well,” I said, “what is the matter?”

The Prefect took a long breath from his pipe and leaned back in his chair. He looked serious now.

“I will tell you,” he said slowly. “But first I must warn you that this matter must remain secret. If it became known that I had spoken of it, I would almost certainly lose my position.”

“Go on,” I said.

“Or do not go on,” Dupin said quietly.

The Prefect waved his hand.

“No, I will tell you. I have received private information from a very important person. A certain document of the greatest importance has been stolen from the royal rooms.”

“Stolen?” I said.

“Yes,” he replied. “And we know who took it. The thief was seen with the document. We also know that the letter is still in his possession.”

Dupin spoke calmly from his chair.

“How do you know that?”

“Because of the nature of the document,” said the Prefect. “If the thief had passed it to someone else, certain results would already have appeared. But those results have not appeared. Therefore we know he still holds it.”

“I still do not understand,” I said.

The Prefect lowered his voice.

“I cannot speak too clearly,” he said. “But I may say this much. The document gives power to whoever holds it. That power is extremely valuable.”

Dupin nodded slightly but said nothing.

The Prefect continued.

“If the contents of the document were shown to another person, it would damage the honor of someone of very high position. Because of this danger, the thief now has power over that person.”

“But wait,” I said. “For this power to exist, the thief must know that the owner knows he took it.”

“Exactly,” said the Prefect. “And that is the case.”

“Who is the thief?” I asked.

“The thief,” said the Prefect quietly, “is the Minister D——.”

Dupin gave a small smile.

“The Minister,” he repeated softly.

“Yes,” said the Prefect. “He is bold and clever. The way he stole the letter was both daring and intelligent.”

He leaned forward and began to explain.

“The letter had been received by a lady of very high position. She was alone in her private room when she read it. While she was reading it, another very important person suddenly entered the room. It was someone from whom she wished to hide the letter.”

“She tried quickly to hide it in a drawer,” the Prefect continued, “but she had no time. Instead she placed it open on a table. The address was facing upward, so the contents could not be seen.”

“At that moment,” he said, “the Minister D—— entered the room.”

Dupin leaned slightly forward in his chair.

The Prefect continued his story slowly.

“The Minister immediately noticed the letter. He recognized the handwriting. He also saw the confusion of the lady. At once he understood everything.”

The Prefect paused and took another slow breath from his pipe.

“After speaking for a few minutes about ordinary matters, the Minister took out another letter from his pocket. He opened it and pretended to read it. Then he placed it on the table beside the first letter.”

“He continued to speak calmly for some time,” the Prefect said. “At last he rose to leave. When he left the room, he quietly took the first letter from the table and left his own letter behind.”

“The lady saw what happened,” he added, “but she could say nothing. The other important person was standing beside her.”

Dupin looked at me.

“You see,” he said quietly, “the thief knows that the owner knows he took the letter.”

“Exactly,” said the Prefect. “And because of this knowledge, the Minister now has power.”

He shook his head slowly.

“This power has been used for many months,” he said. “It has already caused great danger.”

The room was silent again for a moment. Smoke drifted slowly through the dark air.

Finally the Prefect spoke again.

“The lady has become desperate,” he said quietly. “She must recover the letter. But she cannot act openly. At last she placed the matter in my hands.”

Dupin gave a soft cloud of smoke.

“No doubt,” he said calmly, “no wiser man could be chosen.”

The Prefect smiled with quiet pride.

“You are very kind,” he said.

“But tell us,” I said, “what have you done?”

The Prefect leaned forward again.

“My first action,” he said, “was to search the Minister’s house.”

## Part 2

“My first action,” said the Prefect, “was to search the Minister’s house very carefully. The greatest difficulty was that we had to search without letting him know.”

He leaned forward and spoke slowly, as if he were again remembering every detail.

“It was extremely important that the Minister should not suspect what we were doing. If he had even the smallest idea that we were searching for the letter, the consequences might have been very serious.”

I nodded.

“But surely,” I said, “the Paris police have much experience in such matters.”

“Yes,” replied the Prefect, “and for that reason I felt confident. The habits of the Minister also helped us. He often stays away from home during the night. His servants are few. They sleep far from his own rooms, and they are easily persuaded to drink too much wine.”

He smiled slightly.

“In short, we had many opportunities to search the house. I also possess keys that can open almost any room or cabinet in Paris. For three months I have spent most nights searching the Minister’s hotel.”

Dupin watched him quietly while the Prefect continued.

“The reward offered for the recovery of the letter is enormous,” he said. “My own honor is also involved. Therefore I did not give up until I was fully certain that the Minister must be more clever than I am. I believe I have examined every place where the letter could possibly be hidden.”

“But is it not possible,” I asked, “that the letter is hidden somewhere outside the Minister’s house?”

Dupin shook his head slowly.

“That is not likely,” he said. “In the present political situation, the Minister must keep the letter close at hand. He must be able to produce it immediately if necessary.”

“Exactly,” said the Prefect. “It must be ready at any moment.”

“Ready to show,” I said.

“Or ready to destroy,” Dupin replied calmly.

“Yes,” I said after a moment. “Then the letter must still be in the house.”

“Certainly,” said the Prefect. “And it is not on the Minister’s person. We have already tested that possibility.”

“Tested it?” I asked.

“Twice,” he replied. “The Minister was stopped in the street by men pretending to be robbers. They searched him completely. I supervised the search myself.”

Dupin gave a quiet laugh.

“You might have saved yourself that trouble,” he said.

“Why?” asked the Prefect.

“Because the Minister is not a fool,” Dupin answered. “He must have expected such an attempt.”

“Perhaps,” said the Prefect. “But he is also a poet, and poets are close to fools.”

Dupin smiled faintly.

“Possibly,” he said, “although I myself have written a few poems.”

I turned again to the Prefect.

“Please describe the search,” I said. “What exactly did you do?”

The Prefect seemed pleased to explain.

“We were extremely careful,” he said. “We searched the entire building room by room. We spent a full week on each room.”

He began to count the steps of the investigation.

“First we examined the furniture. We opened every drawer. A trained police officer knows that no drawer can truly be secret.”

He lifted his hand slightly.

“Every cabinet contains a certain amount of space. If that space changes even slightly, we notice it. We know the exact measurements.”

“Even the smallest difference?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said firmly. “Even the smallest.”

He continued.

“After the cabinets we examined the chairs. We pushed long needles into the cushions to see if anything was hidden inside them.”

“Then we removed the tops of the tables.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because sometimes the top of a table is lifted,” the Prefect explained, “and a hollow space is cut inside the leg. A small object may be hidden there. When the top is replaced, no one notices.”

“The same method can be used with bedposts,” he added.

“But could such a space not be discovered by sound?” I asked.

“Not always,” he replied. “If the object is wrapped in cotton, it may make no sound. Also, we had to work silently.”

Dupin watched him with calm interest.

The Prefect continued his explanation.

“Of course we did not take every piece of furniture apart. But we examined all joints with a powerful microscope.”

“A microscope?” I said.

“Yes,” he replied. “If a chair or table had been opened recently, we would see signs of disturbance. Even a tiny grain of dust would reveal it.”

He leaned back in his chair.

“After finishing the furniture, we examined the house itself. We divided the entire building into small sections. Every square inch was inspected with the microscope.”

“You mean every part of the house?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said. “Even the two houses next to it.”

“The neighboring houses as well?” I exclaimed.

“Yes,” he said calmly. “The reward is very large.”

“Did you examine the ground around the house?” I asked.

“Of course,” he said. “But the ground is paved with brick. That made the work

easier. We examined the moss between the bricks. Nothing had been disturbed.”

“What about the Minister’s papers?” I asked.

“We opened every package,” he said. “We examined every paper. We also opened every book in his library.”

“Every book?” I said.

“Yes,” he replied. “We turned every page. We also measured the thickness of the covers with great precision. If any book had been altered, we would have discovered it immediately.”

He paused and took another slow breath from his pipe.

“Some books had recently been bound. We even pushed needles through them to check for hidden objects.”

“Did you examine the floors?” I asked.

“Certainly,” he said. “We lifted the carpets and inspected the boards beneath them.”

“And the walls?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“And the cellars?”

“Yes,” he said again.

I leaned back in my chair.

“Then I fear,” I said slowly, “that the letter is not in the Minister’s house.”

The Prefect sighed deeply.

“I fear the same,” he said. “But I am certain it must be there.”

He turned toward Dupin.

“What would you advise me to do?”

Dupin spoke calmly.

“Search the house again.”

The Prefect shook his head.

“That is useless,” he said firmly. “I am completely certain that the letter is not there.”

Dupin gave a small cloud of smoke.

“I have no other advice,” he said. “But you have, of course, a detailed

description of the letter?”

“Certainly,” said the Prefect.

He took a small notebook from his pocket and began to read a careful description of the missing document. He described its appearance inside and outside, the seal, the address, and every visible detail.

When he finished reading, he closed the notebook and rose slowly from his chair.

He looked tired and disappointed.

Soon after that he left our rooms.

Nearly a month passed before we saw him again.

### Part 3

Nearly a month passed before we saw the Prefect again. One evening he came once more to Dupin’s rooms. The night was quiet, and the room looked almost the same as before. Dupin and I were sitting together in the dim light, with pipes in our hands and smoke slowly rising into the air.

The Prefect entered with a tired expression. He sat down in a chair and took a pipe that Dupin offered him. For a few minutes we spoke about ordinary matters. Nothing was said about the letter.

At last I decided to ask.

“Well, Monsieur G——,” I said, “what has happened with the stolen letter? I suppose you have finally decided that the Minister cannot be defeated.”

The Prefect shook his head with irritation.

“Confound him!” he said. “Yes, I made the second search, just as Dupin suggested. But it was exactly as I expected. We found nothing.”

Dupin sat quietly and slowly breathed out a thin line of smoke.

“How large was the reward offered for the letter?” he asked calmly.

The Prefect hesitated.

“It is a very large reward,” he said. “I would rather not name the exact amount. But I will tell you this much. I would gladly write a personal check for fifty

thousand francs to anyone who could bring me the letter.”

He leaned forward with frustration.

“The matter becomes more serious every day. In fact the reward has recently been doubled. But even if it were three times greater, I could not do more than I have already done.”

Dupin looked at him thoughtfully.

“Perhaps,” he said slowly, “you have not tried everything.”

The Prefect stared at him.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

Dupin continued speaking in a calm and relaxed tone, pausing now and then as he drew on his pipe.

“Perhaps you could seek advice.”

“Advice?” said the Prefect. “From whom?”

Dupin smiled faintly.

“Do you remember the story about the doctor Abernethy?” he asked.

The Prefect waved his hand impatiently.

“No, and I do not care about it.”

Dupin continued anyway.

“Once there was a rich miser who wished to receive medical advice without paying for it. He began a conversation with a doctor and described a certain illness as if it belonged to another man.”

Dupin spoke slowly, almost lazily.

“‘Suppose a man has such and such symptoms,’ said the miser. ‘Doctor, what would you tell him to take?’

“The doctor replied, ‘Take advice.’”

Dupin finished the story and looked calmly at the Prefect.

The Prefect shifted in his chair.

“Well,” he said, “I am perfectly willing to take advice. I am even willing to pay for it. As I told you, I would give fifty thousand francs to anyone who could help me recover the letter.”

Dupin rose slowly from his chair.

He walked to a desk and opened a drawer. From it he took a small book of checks. He placed it quietly on the table.

“In that case,” he said calmly, “you may fill out a check for that amount. When you have signed it, I will give you the letter.”

For a moment the room was completely silent.

I was so surprised that I could not speak. The Prefect stared at Dupin with wide eyes and open mouth. His face showed complete astonishment.

Several long seconds passed.

At last the Prefect slowly reached for a pen. His hand trembled slightly. He paused several times as he wrote the check. After finishing it, he pushed the paper across the table toward Dupin.

Dupin examined the check carefully. Then he placed it calmly into his pocket.

After this he opened another small cabinet. From it he took a letter.

He handed the letter to the Prefect.

The Prefect seized it quickly. His face showed an expression of wild joy. His hands shook as he opened the letter and looked at the contents.

After only a moment he rushed toward the door. He hurried from the room without speaking a single word.

Dupin and I were alone again.

For a while I said nothing. My surprise was still too great.

At last I spoke.

“Dupin,” I said, “I do not understand this matter at all.”

Dupin smiled slightly and leaned back in his chair.

“The Paris police,” he said quietly, “are very capable in their own way. They are patient, clever, and well trained. When the Prefect described his search of the Minister’s house, I had no doubt that he had performed it perfectly.”

“Perfectly?” I said.

“Yes,” Dupin replied. “Perfectly within the limits of his method.”

I looked at him with confusion.

“What do you mean?”

Dupin continued slowly.

“The search was excellent of its kind. If the letter had been hidden in any of the places the police examined, they would certainly have found it.”

I laughed a little.

“Then why did they fail?”

Dupin gave another small cloud of smoke.

“Because their method did not fit the case.”

He paused for a moment and then continued.

“The Prefect and his officers follow one general idea. When they search for something hidden, they imagine how they themselves would hide it.”

“That seems reasonable,” I said.

“Yes,” Dupin replied, “for ordinary criminals. But not for a man like the Minister.”

Dupin leaned slightly forward.

“The police believe that any hidden object must be placed in some secret corner. They therefore examine every possible hiding place with great care.”

He smiled faintly.

“But a clever man may think in a very different way.”

I waited for him to continue.

Dupin drew slowly on his pipe before speaking again.

“To understand another mind,” he said, “one must first measure it correctly.”

#### Part 4

“To understand another mind,” Dupin continued calmly, “one must first measure it correctly. That is where the Prefect fails. He measures every mind by his own.”

I listened closely.

Dupin leaned back and spoke slowly, as if he wished to explain each idea carefully.

“Let me give you a simple example,” he said. “When I was younger, I knew a boy of about eight years old. This boy played a game called ‘even and odd’ with

marbles. One player hides a number of marbles in his hand. The other player must guess whether the number is even or odd.”

I nodded. The game was familiar.

“If the guess is correct,” Dupin continued, “the player wins a marble. If the guess is wrong, he loses one.”

Dupin smiled slightly.

“This boy won nearly all the marbles in the school. Everyone believed that he was extremely lucky.”

“But he was not lucky,” Dupin said. “He simply understood how the other boys thought.”

I leaned forward.

“Explain,” I said.

Dupin nodded.

“Suppose the boy is playing against a very foolish opponent. The opponent hides some marbles and asks, ‘Even or odd?’ The boy guesses ‘odd’ and loses.”

Dupin raised a finger.

“But now the boy begins to think. He says to himself, ‘This opponent is foolish. He had even the first time. Now he will believe that I expect the same again. So he will change it to odd.’”

Dupin smiled.

“Therefore the boy guesses ‘odd’ the second time and wins.”

I nodded slowly.

Dupin continued.

“Now suppose the opponent is a little more clever. He might think like this: ‘Last time I changed from even to odd. But that was too simple. My opponent may expect that. Therefore I will keep it even.’”

Dupin spread his hands.

“So the boy guesses ‘even’ and wins again.”

I understood.

“So the boy succeeds,” I said, “because he imagines the thoughts of his opponent.”

“Exactly,” Dupin replied. “He makes his own mind like the other person’s mind.”

Dupin paused and looked thoughtfully into the smoke that drifted through the room.

“When I asked the boy how he did this,” Dupin continued, “he gave a curious answer. He said that when he wanted to understand someone, he tried to make his own face look like that person’s face. Then he waited to see what thoughts came into his mind.”

I smiled slightly.

Dupin continued speaking.

“This simple idea explains much that people call deep wisdom. Many famous writers speak of understanding others, but they simply do what that boy did naturally.”

He paused again.

“The Prefect and his officers fail because they do not do this. They imagine only how they themselves would hide a letter.”

Dupin slowly breathed out another cloud of smoke.

“They believe that a hidden object must be placed in some small secret corner. They search under carpets, inside furniture, behind walls, and beneath floors.”

He shook his head gently.

“But the Minister D—— is not an ordinary man.”

I asked quietly, “Why not?”

Dupin answered at once.

“Because he is both a poet and a mathematician.”

I looked surprised.

“I thought the Minister was only a mathematician,” I said. “There are two brothers who are writers. I believed the Minister was the one who studied mathematics.”

Dupin smiled faintly.

“You are mistaken,” he said. “He is both a poet and a mathematician. Because of this, he understands two very different kinds of thought.”

I waited for him to explain further.

Dupin continued slowly.

“Mathematicians often believe that their kind of reasoning is the highest form of thought. But they are mistaken. Mathematical reasoning works well when dealing with numbers and shapes. It does not always work when dealing with human behavior.”

He leaned slightly forward.

“A mathematician often believes that all problems have clear and exact solutions. But human problems are rarely so simple.”

I nodded.

Dupin continued.

“The Prefect believed that the Minister must hide the letter carefully. He believed the letter must be hidden in some secret place.”

Dupin paused for a moment.

“But the Minister knew the methods of the police.”

I listened carefully.

“He knew they would search every corner of his house. He knew they would examine furniture, books, walls, floors, and carpets.”

Dupin smiled slightly.

“Therefore he did something very simple.”

I waited.

Dupin spoke quietly.

“He did not hide the letter at all.”

I stared at him.

“Not hide it?”

Dupin nodded.

“Yes. He placed it where everyone could see it.”

The idea surprised me.

Dupin continued.

“People often fail to notice things that are too obvious. Our minds search for complexity. When something is simple and clear, we sometimes overlook it

completely.”

Dupin gave another small cloud of smoke.

“I suspected that the Minister might have used this principle.”

I asked eagerly, “So you visited him?”

“Yes,” Dupin replied.

“One morning I went to the Minister’s house. I pretended to make an ordinary visit.”

Dupin smiled faintly.

“I also wore green glasses. I said that my eyes were weak. In truth the glasses allowed me to observe the room carefully without attracting attention.”

He continued slowly.

“While speaking with the Minister, I looked around the room. I examined the writing table beside him. There were several letters and papers scattered across it. I also saw books and a few musical instruments.”

Dupin paused.

“At first I noticed nothing unusual.”

He leaned forward slightly.

“But then my eyes fell upon a small rack hanging from the middle of the fireplace.”

I listened closely.

“The rack held several visiting cards and one single letter.”

## Part 5

“The rack held several visiting cards and one single letter,” Dupin continued calmly.

I leaned forward with interest.

Dupin spoke slowly, recalling the scene clearly.

“The rack was made of cheap paper material. It hung from a small metal knob under the middle of the fireplace. A dirty blue ribbon held it in place. It looked like a very poor object, almost worthless.”

He paused briefly.

“Inside the rack were several visiting cards and one letter. This letter immediately attracted my attention.”

I waited.

Dupin continued.

“The letter looked old and damaged. The paper was dirty and badly folded. It seemed almost torn in half across the middle. It looked as if someone had once started to tear it apart and then stopped.”

Dupin lifted his hand slightly as if showing the object in the air.

“The seal was large and black. On it appeared the mark of the Minister himself.”

I nodded slowly.

“But that does not match the description the Prefect read,” I said.

Dupin smiled faintly.

“Exactly,” he said.

He continued his explanation.

“The Prefect described a letter with a small red seal and a bold address written to a royal person. But this letter looked completely different.”

Dupin leaned back in his chair.

“The differences were very obvious. The seal was large and black instead of small and red. The address was written in small, delicate letters instead of strong bold ones.”

I thought about this.

Dupin continued.

“However, the very differences themselves made me suspicious.”

“Why?” I asked.

Dupin answered calmly.

“Because they seemed too deliberate.”

He paused for a moment.

“The paper was extremely dirty and badly folded. This did not match the usual habits of the Minister. He is normally careful and orderly.”

Dupin drew slowly on his pipe.

“Therefore the poor condition of the letter seemed intentional. It appeared to be designed to make observers believe that the paper was worthless.”

I nodded slowly as I understood.

Dupin continued.

“Another important detail was the position of the letter. It was placed in full view. Anyone entering the room could see it immediately.”

Dupin looked directly at me.

“And that was exactly what I expected.”

“Because you believed the letter was hidden in plain sight,” I said.

“Precisely,” Dupin replied.

He continued describing his visit.

“I stayed in the room for a long time. I spoke with the Minister about a subject that I knew interested him deeply. While he spoke, I carefully observed the letter.”

Dupin smiled faintly.

“Eventually I noticed a small but important detail.”

“What was it?” I asked.

Dupin answered quietly.

“The edges of the paper were worn in a strange way. They looked as if the letter had once been folded differently and then folded again in the opposite direction.”

I thought for a moment.

“You mean the paper had been turned inside out?”

Dupin nodded.

“Exactly. The letter had been reversed like a glove. The original outside had been turned inward. Then it had been sealed again with a new address.”

I sat back in amazement.

Dupin continued.

“Once I understood this, I was certain that the letter in the rack was the missing document.”

“But why did you not take it immediately?” I asked.

Dupin smiled.

“Because the Minister is a dangerous man. His house contains servants who are

loyal to him. If I had attempted to seize the letter openly, I might not have left the house alive.”

He paused.

“Instead I formed a plan.”

I listened carefully.

“When I left the Minister’s house that day,” Dupin said, “I purposely left a small gold snuff box on his table.”

“You left it there intentionally?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said. “I knew that I would return the next day to retrieve it.”

Dupin continued.

“During the night I prepared a copy of the letter. I made it look as similar as possible to the original. I even copied the Minister’s seal using a small stamp made from bread.”

I smiled slightly at this clever trick.

Dupin continued calmly.

“The next morning I returned to the Minister’s house. He received me politely. We soon resumed our conversation from the previous day.”

Dupin leaned forward slightly.

“Then something interesting happened.”

I waited.

Dupin continued.

“Suddenly we heard a loud noise outside the house. It sounded like a gunshot.”

“A gunshot?” I said.

“Yes,” Dupin replied. “After the sound came screams and shouting from the street below.”

Dupin smiled slightly.

“The Minister quickly ran to the window to see what had happened.”

I understood immediately.

“And while he was looking outside,” I said, “you took the letter.”

Dupin nodded.

“Exactly.”

He continued.

“While he stood at the window, I quietly walked to the rack. I took the letter and placed it in my pocket. Then I replaced it with the copy I had prepared.”

I listened carefully.

Dupin continued.

“The disturbance outside had been caused by a man waving a gun in the street. But the gun contained no bullet. The man was soon allowed to leave.”

Dupin smiled slightly.

“The man, of course, was working for me.”

I laughed softly.

“So the entire event was arranged by you.”

“Yes,” Dupin replied calmly.

“Soon afterward the Minister returned from the window. I said goodbye and left the house.”

I looked at him thoughtfully.

“But why did you leave the copy behind?” I asked.

Dupin leaned back again in his chair.

“Because I wished the Minister to continue believing that he possessed the letter.”

## Part 6

“Because I wished the Minister to continue believing that he possessed the letter,” Dupin said calmly.

I watched him closely. The quiet confidence in his voice made the entire matter seem almost simple.

“If the Minister had immediately discovered the loss,” Dupin continued, “he might have taken violent action. He is a bold and dangerous man. His house contains servants who are loyal to him. I preferred to avoid unnecessary risk.”

Dupin leaned back in his chair and slowly breathed out a thin cloud of smoke.

“But there was another reason as well.”

“Another reason?” I asked.

Dupin nodded.

“Yes. My personal feelings are involved in this matter.”

I looked at him with surprise.

Dupin continued speaking quietly.

“You know that I hold certain political opinions. In this affair I support the lady whose letter was stolen.”

He paused for a moment.

“For many months the Minister has had power over her. Now the situation has changed. Because he believes the letter is still in his possession, he will continue using it as before.”

Dupin smiled faintly.

“But the letter is no longer in his possession. Therefore he will eventually destroy himself.”

I considered this idea carefully.

Dupin continued.

“He will continue making demands and threats. Eventually he will take actions that expose his plans. When that happens, his fall will be sudden and complete.”

He shook his head slowly.

“It is always easier to climb upward than to descend safely.”

I nodded.

Dupin continued calmly.

“The Minister is a man of great intelligence, but he is also a man without principles. I do not feel sympathy for him.”

Dupin paused again and looked thoughtfully into the air.

“However,” he added, “I am curious about one thing.”

“What is that?” I asked.

Dupin smiled faintly.

“I would like to know what he thought when he opened the letter that I left in the rack.”

“You wrote something inside it?” I asked.

Dupin nodded.

“Yes. It did not seem proper to leave the page empty. That might have appeared insulting.”

He continued calmly.

“Many years ago, when the Minister and I were both in Vienna, he caused me some trouble. At the time I told him politely that I would remember it.”

Dupin smiled again.

“Therefore I decided to leave him a small message.”

I leaned forward.

“What message?”

Dupin spoke quietly.

“I wrote a line from a French play. The words were copied carefully in the center of the paper.”

He slowly repeated the line.

““A design so terrible, if it is not worthy of Atreus, is worthy of Thyestes.””

Dupin gave a small smile.

“The words come from a tragedy by Crébillon.”

I thought about this for a moment.

“So when the Minister finally opens the letter,” I said, “he will understand who defeated him.”

Dupin nodded calmly.

“Yes.”

For a moment neither of us spoke.

The room had grown very quiet again. Outside the window the night wind moved slowly through the dark streets of Paris.

I sat back in my chair and considered the entire affair.

At last I spoke again.

“Dupin,” I said, “I now understand why the police failed.”

Dupin looked at me with quiet interest.

I continued.

“They searched everywhere for the letter because they believed it must be

hidden. But the Minister understood their thinking. So he placed the letter where no one expected it — in plain sight.”

Dupin nodded.

“Exactly.”

I continued slowly.

“The letter remained safe because it was too obvious.”

Dupin smiled faintly.

“Yes,” he said. “Sometimes the best place to hide something is the place where everyone can see it.”

I leaned back again and looked toward the dark ceiling of the room. The entire mystery now seemed clear and simple. Dupin quietly refilled his pipe and lit it again. The smoke slowly rose into the dim air of the room. Outside, the wind continued to move through the silent streets of Paris.

## The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade

### Part 1

Truth is often stranger than a story. This idea came to my mind not long ago when I was reading an old and unusual book. The book is very rare. Even in Europe few people know it, and in America almost no one has ever spoken of it. The name of the book is *Tellmenow Isitsöornot*. It is a strange work full of curious history and stories from the East.

While reading this book I discovered something surprising. For many years people have believed that they knew the full story of the famous lady Scheherazade. Her story appears in the well-known collection of tales called the *Arabian Nights*. According to that story, she told stories for one thousand and one nights and in this way saved her own life and the lives of many others.

However, the book I mentioned gives a different ending. It explains that the usual story does not tell everything that truly happened. The ending that most people know is pleasant and satisfying, but it is not completely correct.

For a full and detailed account of the matter, a curious reader should consult the rare book itself. But I will give a short explanation of what I found there.

As everyone remembers, the story begins with a powerful king in the East. This king had become deeply jealous of his wife. When he discovered that she had betrayed him, his anger was terrible. He ordered that she be put to death at once.

After this event the king made a dreadful decision. He swore that he would marry a new woman every night. In the morning he would order her death. In this way he believed he could prevent betrayal forever.

For many years the king followed this terrible rule with strict discipline. Each night he married the most beautiful young woman in his kingdom. Each morning she was taken away to die.

The land slowly filled with sorrow and fear. Families hid their daughters. Many people believed that the beauty of the land itself was slowly disappearing.

One day the grand vizier of the kingdom came before the king. The vizier was

the king's chief advisor, a man who had served him faithfully for many years. The vizier's daughter had spoken to him earlier that day. She had formed a bold and dangerous plan.

Her name was Scheherazade.

Scheherazade was not only beautiful but also intelligent and brave. She believed she could end the king's terrible rule. She said that she would marry the king herself.

The vizier was horrified when he heard this idea.

"My daughter," he said to her, "you do not understand the danger. Every woman who marries the king dies the next morning."

But Scheherazade remained calm.

"Father," she said, "either I will save the women of this land, or I will die trying."

Although the vizier tried many times to change her mind, Scheherazade did not give up her plan. At last the unhappy father agreed to present her proposal to the king.

The king listened with interest when he heard the offer.

In truth he had already thought about marrying Scheherazade. However, he had delayed doing so because he respected the vizier and did not wish to offend him.

Now the matter was simple. Scheherazade herself had requested the marriage.

The king agreed immediately.

At the same time he spoke clearly.

"Remember," he said, "that my rule remains unchanged. I will still keep my promise. Each bride must die in the morning."

Scheherazade accepted these terms without fear.

She married the king that very night.

Yet Scheherazade had a plan. She had prepared it carefully before the wedding.

On the wedding night she asked permission for her younger sister to sleep in the same chamber. The king allowed it without much thought. The sister lay on a couch near the royal bed.

As the night passed, Scheherazade waited patiently. Near the early morning hours, when the first light of day was still far away, she quietly woke her sister.

“Dear sister,” she whispered, “before the morning comes, please ask me to tell you a story. It may be the last story I ever tell.”

The sister understood immediately. She agreed to help.

A short time later she spoke aloud.

“Dear sister,” she said, “if you are not asleep, please tell me one of your wonderful stories. It will help me pass the night.”

The king heard these words.

Scheherazade pretended to hesitate.

“If the king permits it,” she said softly, “I will tell a story.”

The king was curious. He agreed.

So Scheherazade began her first tale.

She spoke quietly but beautifully. Her story was full of strange events and interesting characters. The king listened with growing interest.

The night slowly passed while the story continued.

At last the first light of morning began to appear.

But the story was not finished.

The king leaned forward.

“What happens next?” he asked.

Scheherazade lowered her eyes.

“My lord,” she said gently, “the morning has come. If I live tonight, I will finish the story.”

The king thought for a moment.

His curiosity was strong.

Finally he said, “Very well. You may live one more day.”

That night Scheherazade finished the story.

But before the night ended she began another.

Again the dawn arrived before the tale was complete.

Again the king delayed her death.

In this way the nights continued.

One night followed another.

Each night Scheherazade told a new story.

Each morning the king postponed the execution so that he could hear the ending. The stories were endless. Some spoke of magic lamps, flying horses, and distant islands. Others told of brave sailors, wise merchants, and powerful spirits.

The king became more and more fascinated.

One thousand and one nights passed in this manner.

During that time the king slowly forgot his cruel promise. His anger faded. At last he ended the terrible rule.

Scheherazade had saved her life and the lives of countless women.

This is the story that most people know.

It is a pleasant ending.

But according to the rare book I mentioned earlier, the story did not end there.

## Part 2

But according to the rare book I mentioned earlier, the story did not end there.

The common version says that after one thousand and one nights the king forgot his cruel promise and allowed Scheherazade to live. Peace returned to the kingdom, and the terrible rule ended forever.

This ending is pleasant and satisfying. Yet the strange old book explains that something happened after the famous thousand and one nights had passed.

Scheherazade, it seems, possessed an extraordinary love for telling stories. Her mind was full of tales. She could speak for hours, sometimes for entire nights, and still have more stories ready.

In fact, the book suggests that her love for storytelling continued to grow even after she had saved her life.

One night, long after the danger had passed, Scheherazade spoke again to her sister.

“My dear sister,” she said softly, “now that the trouble with the king’s vow has ended, I must confess that I made a mistake.”

Her sister looked surprised.

“A mistake?” she asked.

Scheherazade nodded.

“Yes,” she said. “During those many nights when I told stories, I did not tell everything that I knew. There were some stories that I shortened because I was tired. I did not give their full endings.”

She lowered her voice.

“One story in particular still troubles me. It is the story of Sinbad the sailor.”

The sister remembered the famous sailor well.

“You told many adventures about him,” she said.

Scheherazade sighed gently.

“Yes,” she replied, “but I did not tell them all. There were more journeys and stranger events. On one night I became sleepy, and I ended the story too soon.”

She smiled faintly.

“Even now it is not too late to tell the rest.”

At that moment the king lay beside her in the bed. He had fallen into a deep sleep and was snoring loudly.

Scheherazade gently pushed him.

“My lord,” she said softly.

The king did not wake.

She pushed him again, a little harder this time.

Finally the king stirred.

He turned from one side to the other and made a heavy sound.

“Hum,” he said.

Then he opened his eyes slightly.

Scheherazade smiled.

She believed that this sound meant the king was ready to listen.

So she began speaking again.

“My lord,” she said gently, “there are still adventures of Sinbad that I have never told. Tonight I will tell them.”

The king gave another sleepy sound.

Scheherazade took this as permission.

She began her tale.

“Sinbad the sailor,” she said, “continued his travels even when he was old. After many years of peace at home, he again felt the desire to see distant lands.”

Scheherazade spoke in the voice of Sinbad himself.

“‘One day,’ said Sinbad, ‘without telling my family, I prepared some small packages of valuable goods. I hired a porter to help carry them. Together we walked down to the shore of the sea.’”

“‘We placed the goods upon the sand and sat beneath some trees. We hoped to see a ship that could carry us to a new country.’”

“‘For several hours we saw nothing. The sea was empty.’”

“‘Then suddenly I heard a strange sound.’”

Scheherazade paused slightly as she continued the tale.

“‘At first the sound was soft,’ said Sinbad. ‘It was like a distant humming or buzzing noise. The porter listened carefully and said he could hear it too.’”

“‘The sound slowly grew louder.’”

“‘Soon we realized that something was coming toward us across the sea.’”

“‘At last we saw a small dark spot far away on the horizon.’”

“‘The spot grew larger and larger.’”

“‘Soon we understood that it was not a ship.’”

Scheherazade lowered her voice as if to create suspense.

“‘It was a gigantic creature swimming across the water.’”

“‘The creature moved with great speed. Huge waves rose around its body, and the water behind it seemed to glow like fire.’”

The king shifted slightly in the bed.

Scheherazade continued.

“‘As the creature came closer,’ said Sinbad, ‘we saw its terrible shape.’”

“‘It was as long as three great trees placed one after another. Its width was like a large hall.’”

“‘Its body was black like stone.’”

“‘Around its middle ran a red line like a belt of blood.’”

“‘The part of its body beneath the water shone with scales that looked like silver in the moonlight.’”

“Its back was pale and flat.”

“From the back rose several long spikes.”

Scheherazade spoke slowly so that every detail could be imagined clearly.

“Strangest of all,’ said Sinbad, ‘the creature seemed to have no mouth.’”

“Instead its body was covered with many eyes.”

“There were dozens of them, arranged in rows along its sides.”

“Some of the eyes were larger than the others and shone like gold.”

Scheherazade continued the strange description.

“Although the creature moved quickly through the water,’ said Sinbad, ‘we could not see how it moved. It had no fins like a fish, no feet like a duck, and no wings.’”

“Near its tail were two small holes that served as nostrils.”

“From these holes the creature blew out great clouds of breath with a terrible noise.”

Scheherazade paused again before continuing.

“Our fear was great,’ said Sinbad. ‘But our surprise soon became even greater.’”

“When the creature came closer, we saw something very strange upon its back.”

“There were many small creatures there.”

“They looked almost like men.”

### Part 3

“There were many small creatures there,’ said Sinbad. ‘They looked almost like men.’”

Scheherazade continued the strange tale in a calm voice.

“At first I believed they were men,’ said Sinbad, ‘but soon I noticed many differences. They wore no loose clothes like the people of our land. Instead their bodies were covered by a tight outer skin that seemed fixed to them.’”

“This covering looked stiff and uncomfortable. The creatures moved with difficulty, as if the covering pressed tightly upon them.”

“On top of their heads were square objects that looked heavy and solid.”

“At first I thought these were strange hats. But soon I understood that they must be very heavy boxes placed upon their heads to keep them steady.”

Scheherazade paused slightly before continuing.

“Around the neck of each creature was a dark ring. The ring was stiff and wide, like a collar placed upon a dog.”

“Because of these collars the creatures could not easily move their heads. They had to turn their entire bodies in order to look around.”

“This forced them to stare forward most of the time. Their faces pointed downward in a strange and awkward way.”

Scheherazade lowered her voice as the story grew more unusual.

“When the great creature reached the shore,’ said Sinbad, ‘something remarkable happened.’”

“One of the large eyes suddenly moved forward from the body.”

“From that eye came a flash of bright fire and a thick cloud of smoke.”

“At the same time we heard a loud sound like thunder.”

“When the smoke disappeared, we saw one of the small man-like creatures standing near the front of the great beast.”

“This creature held a long tube in his hands.”

“He lifted the tube to his mouth and began speaking through it.”

Scheherazade smiled faintly while telling this part.

“The sound that came from the tube was loud and unpleasant. The voice seemed to pass through the creature’s nose instead of its mouth.”

“The sounds might have been language, but we could not understand them.”

Scheherazade continued.

“Because the creature was clearly speaking to us, I felt that I should reply,’ said Sinbad. ‘But I had no idea what it was saying.’”

“Therefore I turned to the porter who stood beside me.”

“The poor porter was almost fainting from fear.”

“Still, I asked him what he thought about the strange monster.”

Scheherazade spoke in the voice of the frightened porter.

“‘Master,’ said the porter, ‘I have heard stories of this creature before. It is an evil demon of the sea. Fire runs through its body and smoke fills its breath.’”

“‘It was created by wicked spirits to bring trouble to mankind.’”

“‘The small creatures upon its back are parasites, like the insects that live upon animals.’”

“‘They bite and sting the monster. Their attacks make it angry and force it to travel across the sea.’”

Scheherazade paused briefly.

“‘Hearing this terrible explanation,’ said Sinbad, ‘I decided that the best action was to run away.’”

“‘Without looking back I ran as fast as possible toward the hills.’”

“‘The porter ran in another direction, equally fast.’”

Scheherazade smiled slightly.

“‘He also ran away with my packages of goods. I never saw him again, so I cannot say what happened to those valuable items.’”

The story continued.

“‘Unfortunately my escape did not last long,’ said Sinbad. ‘Several of the small creatures came toward the shore in boats.’”

“‘They quickly caught me.’”

“‘They tied my hands and feet and carried me back to the great sea monster.’”

Scheherazade spoke slowly, describing the scene carefully.

“‘The creature then moved away from the shore and returned to the open sea.’”

“‘As we traveled, I regretted leaving my comfortable home to seek new adventures.’”

“‘But regret was useless.’”

“‘Therefore I decided to make the best of my situation.’”

Scheherazade continued.

“‘I tried to become friendly with the creature who had spoken through the tube. He appeared to be the leader of the others.’”

“‘After some days my efforts succeeded.’”

“‘The strange creature began to treat me with kindness.’”

“Eventually he even tried to teach me his language.”

Scheherazade smiled slightly at this part of the tale.

“‘The language was strange and unpleasant,’ said Sinbad. ‘But with time I learned enough to understand simple words.’”

“‘At last I was able to speak with the creature.’”

Scheherazade then spoke as Sinbad repeating the strange sounds.

“‘Washish squashish squeak, grunt and hiss,’ said the creature to me one day after our meal.”

Scheherazade paused and laughed softly.

“The language sounded very strange,” she said.

“Therefore I will explain its meaning.”

Scheherazade continued.

“‘The creature said,’ explained Sinbad, ‘My friend Sinbad, I am pleased to see that you are a good companion. We are now traveling around the entire world.’”

“‘Since you wish to see distant lands, I will allow you to remain with us and travel upon the back of this great beast.’”

Scheherazade paused in her story.

At that moment the king moved in the bed beside her.

He opened one eye slightly.

“My queen,” he said slowly, “it is surprising that you did not tell these adventures before. They are extremely strange.”

Scheherazade bowed her head politely.

“If my lord wishes,” she said, “I will continue.”

The king gave a sleepy sound that meant agreement.

Scheherazade resumed the tale.

“‘I thanked the creature for its kindness,’ said Sinbad. ‘Soon I felt quite comfortable traveling upon the back of the great beast.’”

“‘The monster swam very quickly across the sea.’”

“‘In that region the surface of the world was not flat but round like a fruit.’”

“‘Therefore as we traveled we seemed to move sometimes upward and sometimes downward, as if climbing hills and valleys across the ocean.’”

At this point the king suddenly raised his head.

“That is a very strange idea,” he said.

Scheherazade smiled gently.

“Nevertheless,” she said, “that is what Sinbad claimed to have seen.”

The king shook his head slightly.

“I am not entirely convinced,” he said.

“Still,” he added, “continue the story.”

Scheherazade bowed again and resumed speaking.

#### Part 4

Scheherazade bowed slightly and continued her story.

“‘After many days upon the back of the great sea creature,’ said Sinbad, ‘I began to see many wonderful and strange things in the world.’”

“‘The creature carried us quickly across wide oceans and past distant lands.’”

“‘Often I stood at the edge of its back and looked out over the water.’”

“‘Sometimes the sea was calm and smooth like polished glass.’”

“‘At other times enormous waves rose like moving hills.’”

Scheherazade spoke slowly so the scene could be imagined clearly.

“‘One day the creature who was my friend pointed toward the water and spoke through his tube.’”

“‘Washish squashish squeak,’ he said.’”

Scheherazade explained.

“‘He meant to say, ‘Look there.’””

“‘I looked in the direction he showed me.’”

“‘Far below the surface of the sea I saw a bright light moving slowly through the water.’”

“‘Soon the light came closer.’”

“‘Then I understood that the light came from the body of a huge fish.’”

Scheherazade continued.

“‘This fish was larger than any I had seen before.’”

“Its body shone with pale light like the moon.”

“From its head grew two long arms.”

“At the end of each arm were many smaller arms.”

“These arms moved through the water like living ropes.”

Scheherazade paused briefly.

“The creature caught other fish with those arms and pulled them toward its mouth.”

“Its mouth opened and closed again and again.”

“Each time it opened, rows of small white teeth could be seen.”

Scheherazade continued speaking in the voice of Sinbad.

“My strange friend told me that many such creatures live in the deep parts of the sea.”

“He said they sometimes attack ships and break them apart.”

“Because of this danger sailors are always careful when they travel across the water.”

Scheherazade moved on with the tale.

“Later we passed an island that rose high from the sea.”

“The land was dark and rough.”

“Smoke rose from its top like a tall black cloud.”

“At night the top of the island glowed red like fire.”

“My friend explained that the island was actually a mountain that burned from inside.”

Scheherazade paused again.

“He said that deep inside the mountain there was a great fire.”

“Sometimes the fire forced smoke and burning stone out through the top.”

“When this happened the sky became dark and the sea shook with fear.”

Scheherazade continued describing the journey.

“Another day we passed a land where the ground itself seemed to move.”

“Tall blocks of stone stood there like towers.”

“These towers were built by men who lived in that land.”

“But my friend told me something surprising.”

Scheherazade spoke carefully.

“He said that in that country men had found a way to speak across great distances without moving from their homes.”

“They used long metal wires that stretched from place to place.”

“Through those wires messages could travel faster than any bird.”

Scheherazade paused again.

“When I first heard this,” said Sinbad, “I did not believe it.”

“But my friend showed me the wires.”

“They ran across the land from one tall tower to another.”

“When the wind touched them they made a faint singing sound.”

Scheherazade continued.

“My friend explained that the wires carried thoughts and words.”

“Men in one city could send messages to another city many days away.”

“The message traveled through the wire in only a moment.”

Scheherazade then moved to another strange event.

“Later we came to a place where the land was filled with enormous buildings.”

“These buildings were so tall that they seemed to touch the clouds.”

“Smoke rose constantly from their tops.”

“Inside the buildings great machines moved day and night.”

Scheherazade spoke slowly.

“The machines were made of iron.”

“They had arms that moved up and down again and again.”

“These arms pushed and pulled other parts of the machines.”

“The sound they made was loud and endless.”

“The entire land shook with the noise.”

Scheherazade continued the tale.

“My friend explained that these machines helped men create many things.”

“They made cloth, tools, and other objects in great numbers.”

“Because of the machines, the work that once took many days could now be finished quickly.”

Scheherazade paused again.

“I was amazed by these wonders,’ said Sinbad.”

“Yet my friend told me that we had seen only a small part of the strange things in the world.”

Scheherazade continued.

“Soon we traveled toward another land where the people had learned to fly through the air.”

“They built large balloons made of cloth.”

“These balloons were filled with hot air that lifted them into the sky.”

“Men could climb into baskets beneath the balloons and rise high above the ground.”

Scheherazade described the scene carefully.

“From high in the sky they could look down upon rivers, cities, and mountains.”

“Sometimes they traveled many miles through the air before returning to the earth.”

Scheherazade smiled gently.

“All these things filled me with wonder,’ said Sinbad.”

“The world seemed far greater and more mysterious than I had ever imagined.”

At this moment the king suddenly raised his head again.

His face showed doubt.

“My queen,” he said slowly, “these things you describe are difficult to believe.”

Scheherazade lowered her eyes respectfully.

“They may seem strange,” she replied gently, “but they are only what Sinbad claimed to have seen during his travels.”

The king frowned slightly.

“I begin to think that this sailor was not entirely truthful,” he said.

Scheherazade smiled calmly.

“If my lord wishes,” she said softly, “I will continue the story and describe even greater wonders.”

The king hesitated for a moment.

Then he waved his hand.

“Very well,” he said. “Continue.”

## Part 5

Scheherazade bowed gently and continued her story.

“‘After we left the land of tall buildings and loud machines,’ said Sinbad, ‘our great sea creature traveled still farther across the waters of the world.’”

“‘The journey lasted many days.’”

“‘Sometimes we saw nothing but sea and sky.’”

“‘At other times we passed near strange lands full of wonders.’”

Scheherazade spoke slowly so each image could be imagined clearly.

“‘One day my guide pointed toward the distance and again spoke through his tube.’”

“‘Washish squeak, grunt,’ he said.’”

Scheherazade explained the meaning.

“‘He told me that we were approaching a place of great importance.’”

“‘Soon I saw a wide land ahead of us.’”

“‘Across that land ran a long shining line that looked like silver.’”

“‘At first I believed it was a river.’”

“‘But as we came closer I saw that the line was made of metal.’”

Scheherazade continued.

“‘Upon this metal line strange long vehicles moved with great speed.’”

“‘They were made of iron and wood.’”

“‘Smoke poured from their tops.’”

“‘They moved faster than any horse I had ever seen.’”

Scheherazade paused briefly.

“‘My guide explained that these machines carried people from one city to another.’”

“‘Inside the machines men and women sat in rows.’”

“‘The machine ran along the metal path like a giant snake.’”

“‘The smoke came from a powerful fire that lived inside the machine.’”

Scheherazade continued.

“The fire heated water until it became strong white steam.”

“This steam pushed great wheels and forced the machine to move.”

“In this way the vehicle could travel across long distances very quickly.”

Scheherazade resumed Sinbad’s voice.

“I watched these machines with great amazement,’ said Sinbad.”

“But my guide told me that even greater wonders existed.”

Scheherazade continued the tale.

“Soon we came to another place where men had learned to speak across the sea itself.”

“Beneath the water they had placed long metal lines that stretched from one land to another.”

“Through these lines messages could pass from country to country.”

“A man in one land could send his thoughts across the ocean to another land in only a moment.”

Scheherazade paused.

“When I heard this,’ said Sinbad, ‘I could hardly believe it.”

“Yet my guide assured me that it was true.”

“He said that wise men had discovered the hidden forces of the world.”

“With those forces they could send signals across enormous distances.”

Scheherazade continued.

“During our journey I also saw a place where the earth had been cut open by human hands.”

“A wide channel of water passed through the land.”

“Ships traveled through this channel from one sea to another.”

“Before this channel existed, ships had to travel around a long dangerous path.”

“Now the journey was much shorter.”

Scheherazade described the scene slowly.

“Huge walls of stone stood on both sides of the water.”

“The channel stretched for many miles.”

“Men had worked for years to create it.”

“Thousands of workers had taken part in the effort.”

Scheherazade continued.

“Another wonder I saw was a great bridge made entirely of iron.”

“The bridge crossed a wide river.”

“Its tall arches rose high into the air.”

“Across the bridge moved wagons, horses, and people.”

“Even heavy machines passed safely across it.”

Scheherazade paused briefly again.

“My guide told me that many years earlier such bridges had been impossible.”

“But men had learned new ways to shape metal and build strong structures.”

“With this knowledge they could create buildings, bridges, and machines larger than anything in the past.”

Scheherazade continued.

“One day we passed a land where men studied the stars with powerful glass tubes.”

“These tubes allowed them to see very distant lights in the sky.”

“Through the tubes they could observe moons and other worlds far away.”

“Some of those distant worlds even had mountains and valleys like the earth.”

Scheherazade smiled slightly while telling this part.

“My guide said that some wise men believed it might one day be possible to travel to those distant worlds.”

“When I heard this idea,’ said Sinbad, ‘I could only laugh.’”

“It seemed impossible.”

Scheherazade continued.

“Yet my guide insisted that human knowledge continued to grow.”

“Each year new discoveries appeared.”

“Things that once seemed impossible slowly became real.”

Scheherazade paused again.

“During all these travels I felt both wonder and confusion,’ said Sinbad.”

“The world seemed larger and stranger than I had ever imagined.”

“I sometimes wondered whether the land of my birth still existed as I

remembered it.”

Scheherazade then lowered her voice slightly.

“‘At last,’ said Sinbad, ‘after a long journey across the oceans, we approached another distant country.’”

“‘My guide told me that the people there believed themselves to be extremely wise.’”

“‘They studied many subjects and wrote many books.’”

“‘They believed that nothing in the world could surprise them.’”

Scheherazade paused.

“‘My guide smiled strangely when he said this.’”

“‘He told me that this land was famous for its learning, yet the people there sometimes refused to believe simple truths.’”

At that moment the king raised himself slightly in the bed again.

His face showed growing suspicion.

“‘My queen,’ he said slowly, ‘these stories become more and more unbelievable.’”

Scheherazade bowed respectfully.

“‘My lord,’ she replied gently, ‘the world is full of strange things.’”

The king shook his head.

“‘Perhaps,’ he said.

“‘But I must hear more before I decide.’”

Scheherazade inclined her head and continued the tale.

## Part 6

Scheherazade inclined her head and continued the tale.

“‘After many days upon the sea,’ said Sinbad, ‘our great creature carried us toward a land that my guide described as very famous for learning.’”

“‘The people there were proud of their wisdom.’”

“‘They believed that they understood every part of the world.’”

“‘They built many schools and houses for study.’”

“Men there spent their lives reading books and discussing ideas.”

Scheherazade spoke slowly, letting the picture become clear.

“My guide told me that the people of that land trusted strongly in reason.”

“They believed that careful thinking could explain everything.”

“Because of this confidence they often rejected stories that seemed strange or unusual.”

“If something did not match their expectations, they immediately declared it impossible.”

Scheherazade continued.

“Soon our creature approached the shore of that land.”

“A large city stood near the water.”

“Tall buildings rose above the streets.”

“The harbor was filled with ships.”

“Many people moved along the docks carrying goods and supplies.”

Scheherazade described the arrival.

“When the great creature stopped near the shore, my guide helped me descend into a small boat.”

“We traveled a short distance and landed at the harbor.”

“From there we walked into the city.”

Scheherazade paused briefly.

“My guide led me to a large building where many learned men gathered.”

“These men spent their time studying nature and the world.”

“They asked questions and performed experiments.”

“They believed they could discover the laws that ruled all things.”

Scheherazade continued in the voice of Sinbad.

“My guide introduced me to these scholars.”

“He told them that I had traveled across the world and seen many wonders.”

“The scholars became curious.”

“They invited me to sit with them and share my experiences.”

Scheherazade spoke calmly.

“At first I hesitated,” said Sinbad. “But my guide encouraged me.”

“So I began telling them about my travels.”

Scheherazade continued.

“I described the enormous creature that carried us across the sea.”

“I explained the strange machines that moved along metal paths.”

“I told them about the wires that carried messages across great distances.”

“I spoke of balloons that rose into the sky.”

Scheherazade paused.

“I also mentioned the shining fish of the deep ocean and the mountains that burned with fire.”

“As I spoke, the scholars listened quietly.”

“At first they appeared interested.”

“But soon their expressions began to change.”

Scheherazade continued.

“Some of them whispered to each other.”

“Others shook their heads.”

“A few began to laugh softly.”

Scheherazade spoke again in Sinbad’s voice.

“One of the scholars finally stood up.”

“He looked at me with great seriousness.”

“Sir,’ he said, ‘your stories are entertaining.’”

“But we cannot accept them as truth.”

Scheherazade continued.

“He explained that many of the things I described were impossible according to their understanding of nature.”

“They said that such creatures and machines could not exist.”

“Therefore my stories must be inventions.”

Scheherazade paused again.

“I tried to explain that I had seen these things with my own eyes,’ said Sinbad.”

“But the scholars only laughed louder.”

“One of them said that travelers often exaggerate their adventures.”

“Another said that imagination can create powerful illusions.”

Scheherazade continued.

““Soon the scholars began arguing among themselves.””

““Some believed that I was telling lies.””

““Others believed that I was simply confused.””

““But none of them accepted my words as truth.””

Scheherazade spoke slowly.

““Finally one of the older scholars raised his hand and spoke firmly.””

““This traveler,’ he said, ‘is clearly a dangerous storyteller.’”

““If people believe his tales, they may begin to doubt the wisdom of our learning.””

Scheherazade paused.

““Therefore it would be best to silence him.””

The king suddenly sat upright in the bed.

““Silence him?” he said sharply.

Scheherazade nodded gently.

““Yes, my lord,” she replied.

Then she continued the tale.

““Hearing these words, the scholars became excited,’ said Sinbad.””

““Some shouted angrily.””

““Others demanded that I be punished for spreading impossible stories.””

Scheherazade continued.

““Soon they reached a terrible decision.””

““They declared that I must be put to death.””

Scheherazade paused again.

““When I heard this judgment,’ said Sinbad, ‘I could hardly believe it.’”

““I had only spoken about the wonders I had seen.””

““Yet these learned men believed that truth itself was dangerous.””

Scheherazade lowered her voice slightly.

““At that moment,’ said Sinbad, ‘I realized a sad truth.’”

““Sometimes people refuse to believe reality simply because it seems too strange.””

Scheherazade looked toward the king.

“My lord,” she said gently, “this was the lesson of Sinbad’s final adventure.”

The king stared at her for several moments.

His face slowly turned red with anger.

“This story is absurd!” he shouted.

Scheherazade bowed respectfully.

But the king continued speaking.

“A monster that carries men across the sea! Machines that run upon metal roads! Messages that travel through wires beneath the ocean!”

He shook his head violently.

“These things are impossible!”

Scheherazade remained calm.

“Nevertheless, my lord,” she said softly, “they are only what Sinbad claimed to have seen.”

The king rose from the bed in great anger.

“Enough!” he cried.

“Your stories grow more ridiculous each night!”

He clapped his hands loudly.

Servants rushed into the chamber.

“Take this woman away!” the king shouted.

“She insults my intelligence with these foolish tales!”

The servants obeyed the command.

And thus, according to the strange and rare book, the life of the beautiful Scheherazade came to its sudden and tragic end.

## A Descent into the Maelstrom

### Part 1

The ways of God in nature are often very powerful and difficult for human minds to understand. Many events in the world appear strange or frightening when we first see them. Yet when we examine them calmly, we sometimes discover that they follow clear rules.

I learned this lesson during a journey that I once made along the coast of Norway. The experience changed my understanding of both nature and fear.

My guide during that journey was an old man who lived in a small fishing village. When I first saw him, I believed he must be at least seventy years old. His hair was completely white, and his face was deeply lined. His body seemed thin and weak.

Later I discovered something very surprising.

The man told me that he was only forty-five years old.

At first I believed that I had misunderstood him. But he repeated the statement calmly. The terrible event that he had experienced some years earlier had changed his appearance completely.

One afternoon the old man offered to guide me up the side of a very high mountain near the coast. From that mountain, he said, one could see a famous and terrifying natural wonder.

I agreed.

The climb was difficult. The path rose steeply along the side of the mountain. Loose stones slipped under our feet, and cold wind blew from the sea below.

Several times I stopped to rest and looked down toward the ocean.

The view was magnificent but also frightening.

Far below us the sea crashed against dark rocks. Waves broke into white foam. The sound of the water rose upward like distant thunder.

As we climbed higher, the wind became stronger.

The old man moved slowly but steadily. Although he appeared weak, he knew

the path well. He placed each step carefully and never seemed afraid.

At last we reached a narrow ledge near the top of the mountain.

From that point the entire sea spread before us.

The sight was extraordinary.

The sky was dark with heavy clouds. The wind moved across the water in long sweeping lines. Far out in the ocean huge waves rose and fell like moving hills.

Yet the most frightening sight lay closer to the shore.

The water there did not move like ordinary waves.

Instead it spun around in a vast circle.

The sea formed an enormous whirlpool.

At the center of the circle the water sank downward with terrible force. The motion created a deep funnel that seemed to lead into the earth itself.

Around the edges of the whirlpool the water rushed with incredible speed. Pieces of wood and foam spun around again and again before vanishing into the center.

The sound was terrifying.

A deep roaring noise rose constantly from the water. It reminded me of thousands of powerful storms combined together.

I felt my body tremble.

The old man watched my reaction calmly.

“That,” he said quietly, “is the great Maelstrom.”

I had heard stories about this famous whirlpool before. Sailors spoke of it with fear and respect.

Some stories claimed that entire ships had been swallowed by its power.

Others described the whirlpool as a gateway to the bottom of the ocean.

As I looked down at the spinning water, those stories suddenly seemed believable.

I stepped backward from the edge of the cliff.

The height alone made me dizzy.

The terrible movement of the water far below made the feeling even worse.

The old man placed a hand on my arm.

“Do not be afraid,” he said calmly.

I tried to laugh.

“It is difficult not to be afraid when looking at such a thing,” I replied.

The old man nodded slowly.

“Yes,” he said. “Most men feel fear when they see it.”

He turned and looked toward the whirlpool again.

His expression became serious.

“But I have seen it much closer than this.”

I looked at him with surprise.

“Closer?” I said.

The old man nodded again.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “Far closer.”

For a moment he remained silent.

The wind moved through his white hair as he stared toward the sea.

Then he turned to me.

“You believe that I am an old man,” he said. “But I told you that I am only forty-five years old.”

I nodded.

“Yes,” I said. “And I still find that difficult to believe.”

The old man gave a faint smile.

“Three years ago,” he said slowly, “I had hair as dark as yours. My body was strong. My face showed none of these lines.”

He touched his white hair.

“All of this,” he continued, “was caused by a single day.”

I looked at him with great interest.

“A single day?” I asked.

The old man nodded.

“Yes,” he said quietly.

He pointed toward the terrible whirlpool below.

“It was there.”

I waited.

The old man sat down upon a rock and began to tell his story.

## Part 2

The old man sat quietly on the rock for a moment before he continued speaking. The wind moved strongly around us, and far below the whirlpool continued its endless turning. The sound rose upward like the deep voice of the sea itself.

At last the old man began his story.

“Three years ago,” he said slowly, “I was still a fisherman. My two brothers and I owned a small but strong boat. We lived by the sea, and we knew its moods well. We had sailed near the Maelstrom many times. We were careful men, and we understood the dangers.”

He paused and looked again toward the spinning water below.

“On the day of the event,” he continued, “the weather appeared calm and favorable. The sky was clear, and the wind was gentle. Nothing in the morning gave us reason to fear trouble.”

I listened closely.

The old man continued.

“We had sailed out early to catch fish. Our boat was strong and well built. The three of us worked together easily. We had spent many years fishing in those waters.”

He folded his hands together.

“My older brother was the captain of our boat. He was a serious and careful man. My younger brother was strong and cheerful. We trusted each other completely.”

The old man looked down at the rocks beneath his feet.

“For several hours the fishing was good. We caught many fish, and our spirits were high. The sea remained calm, and the wind stayed light.”

He paused again.

“But in the afternoon the sky began to change.”

I leaned forward.

“Dark clouds appeared suddenly along the horizon. The wind grew stronger. At first we believed the storm would pass quickly, but within a short time the sea became rough.”

The old man’s voice became quieter.

“Soon the wind roared across the water. Waves rose higher and higher. Our boat began to move violently.”

I looked toward the whirlpool below and imagined the scene.

“We decided to return to shore at once,” the old man continued. “But the storm grew worse faster than we expected.”

He shook his head slowly.

“Before we could escape, the powerful current of the sea began to carry us toward the region of the Maelstrom.”

The old man pointed again toward the great whirlpool.

“You see the place below us now,” he said. “From this height it looks terrible, but from a small boat the sight is far more frightening.”

The wind blew strongly across the mountain.

“The current pulled our boat closer and closer,” he continued. “We tried to row away, but the strength of the water was greater than our strength.”

He paused for a moment.

“Soon we heard the terrible roaring sound of the whirlpool.”

I remembered the deep sound that still rose from the sea below.

“The waves around us became wild and confused,” the old man said. “They rose in every direction at once. The water twisted and rushed toward the center of the great circle.”

His face became pale as he remembered.

“When we finally saw the whirlpool itself, my younger brother cried out in fear. The sight was more terrible than anything I had imagined.”

The old man’s hands trembled slightly.

“The entire sea seemed to be sinking downward. The water rushed into a vast spinning circle. At the center a deep hollow opened like the mouth of a giant well.”

I felt a chill as he spoke.

“Our boat was carried toward that spinning circle,” he continued. “We could do nothing to stop it.”

The old man looked toward the horizon again.

“At that moment I believed that our lives were finished.”

He spoke very quietly now.

“My older brother tried to remain calm. He shouted orders and tried to guide the boat away from the current. But the power of the sea was too great.”

The old man shook his head slowly.

“Within a short time we were drawn fully into the outer circle of the Maelstrom.”

The wind blew around us as he continued.

“The motion of the boat became terrible. We spun around and around with great speed. The sea rose around us like a moving wall.”

He looked at me seriously.

“It is impossible to describe the feeling of that moment.”

The old man paused again before speaking.

“The noise of the whirlpool was like the roar of a thousand storms. The water rushed past us with incredible force. The boat shook violently with every wave.”

His voice grew softer.

“My younger brother fell to his knees and prayed. My older brother held the steering pole with both hands and shouted to the wind.”

The old man looked down at his own hands.

“At first I was completely frozen with terror.”

He closed his eyes briefly.

“But something strange soon happened inside my mind.”

### Part 3

The old man closed his eyes for a moment as if he were again standing in the small fishing boat. When he opened them, he continued speaking slowly.

“At first,” he said, “I was filled with terrible fear. My body shook, and my thoughts were confused. The roar of the whirlpool was so loud that it seemed to

fill my head.”

The wind blew strongly around us on the mountain ledge.

“But after a short time,” the old man continued, “my fear began to change.”

I looked at him with interest.

“Instead of thinking only about death, I suddenly felt a strange curiosity.”

He pointed again toward the whirlpool below.

“The sight of the spinning water became so powerful that my mind began to observe it carefully.”

I listened closely.

“You may find this strange,” the old man said, “but the terror slowly gave way to a kind of calm attention.”

He paused briefly.

“I began to watch the movement of the objects that were drawn into the whirlpool.”

The old man leaned slightly forward as he spoke.

“Pieces of wood, broken boards, barrels, and parts of boats moved around us in the water. All these things were caught in the same terrible current.”

He moved his hand in a slow circle.

“They spun around the outer circle of the whirlpool and then moved slowly closer to the center.”

The sound of the sea rose faintly from far below.

“While watching these objects,” the old man continued, “I noticed something important.”

He raised one finger.

“Not all objects moved toward the center at the same speed.”

I looked at him carefully.

“Some objects sank very quickly,” he said. “Others remained near the surface for a longer time.”

The old man paused.

“Large round objects seemed to move differently from long narrow ones.”

I began to understand that this observation had become very important to him.

“For example,” he continued, “a large barrel floated longer than a flat board. A round object seemed to resist the pull of the whirlpool better than a long thin object.”

The old man looked toward the distant sea.

“At that moment a strange idea came into my mind.”

I waited for him to explain.

“I realized that our boat was long and narrow. It was not shaped like the objects that seemed to survive longer in the whirlpool.”

The old man shook his head slowly.

“If we remained inside the boat, we would almost certainly be pulled down into the center.”

The wind pushed strongly against us as he spoke.

“I looked around the boat and saw several empty barrels tied to the deck.”

He paused.

“Suddenly I formed a desperate plan.”

I leaned forward with great attention.

“I shouted to my brothers and told them what I had noticed. I explained that round objects seemed to resist the whirlpool longer.”

The old man’s voice grew sad.

“But my older brother believed that fear had made me mad.”

He sighed.

“He shouted angrily and told me to remain still.”

The old man looked down for a moment.

“My younger brother was too terrified to think clearly. He clung to the boat and continued praying.”

The wind moved through his white hair.

“At that moment I understood that I must act alone.”

I listened silently.

“The whirlpool was pulling us closer to the center with every moment,” he continued. “The spinning movement of the boat became faster and faster.”

The old man slowly moved his hands as if feeling the motion again.

“The sea rose around us like enormous walls of water. The sky above seemed to turn as the boat spun in circles.”

His voice grew quiet.

“I knew that there was very little time left.”

The old man paused.

“Therefore I quickly cut one of the large barrels loose from the deck.”

I held my breath.

“Without waiting for another moment, I tied myself tightly to the barrel.”

The wind roared around the mountain.

“My older brother shouted with anger when he saw what I was doing. He believed that I had lost my mind.”

The old man looked toward the whirlpool again.

“But I trusted the observation that I had made.”

His voice became firm.

“Just as the boat moved closer toward the terrible center of the Maelstrom, I threw myself into the sea.”

He paused.

The roaring of the distant water seemed louder for a moment.

“The cold water closed over my head.”

The old man looked at me calmly.

“And then the real terror began.”

#### Part 4

The old man paused for a moment after these words. The wind blew strongly across the cliff, and far below the terrible whirlpool continued its endless turning.

Then he continued his story.

“When I threw myself into the sea,” he said, “the cold water struck my body like a blow. For a moment I could not breathe.”

He spoke slowly and carefully.

“But the barrel to which I had tied myself remained on the surface of the water.

I held it tightly with both arms.”

The old man moved his hands as if gripping the barrel again.

“At once I felt the violent pull of the whirlpool. The water rushed around me with tremendous force. The barrel and I were carried along the outer circle of the great spinning sea.”

He looked toward the horizon.

“The motion was terrible. The waves rose around me like moving walls. Sometimes the water covered my head completely.”

He paused briefly.

“Yet the barrel remained afloat.”

I listened with growing fascination.

“Soon I saw our boat again,” he continued.

“It was still spinning in the whirlpool, but it was much closer to the center than I was.”

The old man lowered his voice.

“My brothers were still inside.”

For a moment he remained silent.

“The boat spun faster and faster. Then suddenly a powerful wave struck it.”

He shook his head slowly.

“The boat broke apart.”

The wind moved sharply around us.

“I saw pieces of wood scatter across the water,” he said quietly. “But I did not see my brothers again.”

I felt a deep sadness as he spoke.

The old man continued.

“After that I could only think about survival.”

He looked again toward the spinning water below.

“The whirlpool pulled everything toward the center. But my barrel moved differently from many other objects.”

He raised one finger.

“Because it was round, it remained longer in the outer circles of the whirlpool.”

The old man spoke with calm precision.

“As the hours passed, I continued watching the movement of the objects around me.”

“Large round objects floated longer. Long flat pieces of wood sank faster.”

He nodded slightly.

“This observation gave me hope.”

The wind grew stronger.

“Gradually the storm above the sea began to weaken. The clouds slowly broke apart, and the wind became less violent.”

He paused again.

“As the storm faded, the power of the whirlpool also began to lessen.”

I looked down at the great spinning water far below.

“The terrible funnel at the center slowly became smaller,” he said. “The speed of the current decreased little by little.”

The old man spoke quietly now.

“During this time I remained tied to the barrel. I did not dare release it even for a moment.”

“Again and again the water carried me in wide circles around the whirlpool.”

“Each circle seemed slightly larger than the one before.”

He smiled faintly.

“At last I realized that I was moving away from the center.”

My heart lifted as I listened.

“The spinning current grew weaker,” he continued. “Soon the water around me moved like ordinary waves again.”

The old man slowly breathed out.

“After many hours the whirlpool released me completely.”

I looked at him with amazement.

“You escaped,” I said quietly.

The old man nodded.

“Yes.”

He continued.

“Not long after that a fishing boat from the village saw me floating in the sea.”

“The fishermen pulled me aboard.”

The old man smiled sadly.

“At first they did not recognize me. My face had turned pale with fear, and my hair had already begun to change.”

He touched the white strands on his head.

“Within a single night it became completely white.”

The wind moved through it again.

“The terrible experience had changed my body forever.”

The old man stood up slowly and looked once more at the vast whirlpool far below.

“That is the story of how I came closer to the Maelstrom than any man should ever wish.”

He turned toward me.

“And that is why I look like an old man, although I am not yet fifty.”

For a long moment we both stood silently on the mountain ledge.

Far below us the great whirlpool continued its slow and terrible motion.

## Von Kempelen and His Discovery

### Part 1

After the very interesting discovery made recently by the famous chemist Professor Von Kempelen, the attention of the entire scientific world has turned toward the subject of gold. Newspapers in many countries have printed long articles about the matter. Learned men discuss it in meetings and private conversations. Everyone wishes to understand exactly what has happened.

The discovery is simple to describe but difficult to believe. Professor Von Kempelen claims that he has discovered a method for producing gold by chemical means. In other words, he says that ordinary materials can be transformed into real gold through a special process.

For many centuries men have dreamed about such a possibility. In the past these dreamers were known as alchemists. They spent their lives searching for a mysterious substance that could turn common metals into gold. Most people believed that these efforts were foolish. Alchemists produced strange powders, odd liquids, and complicated writings, but they never created true gold. Their work slowly became a subject of ridicule.

Modern science replaced these old beliefs with careful experiments and strict reasoning. Chemists learned the true properties of metals and elements. As a result, the dream of creating gold seemed completely impossible.

Yet now Professor Von Kempelen has made an announcement that appears to change everything. According to his statement, he has discovered a way to produce pure gold through a chemical process that is both simple and reliable.

When this announcement first appeared in the newspapers, many people refused to believe it. Some declared that the professor must be joking. Others suspected that the entire story was a clever fraud designed to attract attention.

However, the matter soon became more serious. Several respected scientists confirmed that they had seen samples of gold produced by the professor's method. The metal was examined carefully and found to be genuine.

These reports caused enormous excitement. Merchants, bankers, and government officials began discussing the possible consequences. If gold could truly be produced in large quantities, the value of money itself might change. Nations might become rich overnight. Old economic systems could collapse. Some people even imagined that poverty might disappear completely.

The newspapers printed many opinions about these possibilities. Some writers welcomed the discovery with joy. Others warned that it might bring chaos to the world.

In the middle of this excitement Professor Von Kempelen himself remained strangely quiet. He published only a few short letters describing his work. In these letters he spoke modestly about the discovery. He did not boast or claim great importance. In fact he seemed almost embarrassed by the attention he received.

This modest behavior increased public curiosity even more. People wondered what kind of man could make such an extraordinary discovery and yet remain so calm.

At last several scientific organizations invited the professor to demonstrate his process before a group of experts. After some hesitation he agreed.

The demonstration was held in a laboratory in the city of Pesth. A number of respected chemists attended the event. Several journalists were also present so that the public could learn the results.

Professor Von Kempelen arrived carrying a small wooden box. He appeared to be a quiet and thoughtful man of middle age. His clothes were simple, and his manner was calm.

When he opened the box, the observers saw several glass containers filled with various powders and liquids. The professor explained that these materials were ordinary substances available in any chemical laboratory. Nothing in the box appeared unusual.

The observers watched carefully as he prepared the experiment. First he placed a small quantity of one powder into a glass vessel. Then he added a few drops of a clear liquid. After that he introduced another substance that looked like fine gray dust.

The mixture produced a faint sound as the materials reacted. A light smoke rose from the vessel. The observers leaned forward with great interest.

Professor Von Kempelen then placed the vessel over a small flame. The heat caused the mixture to glow softly.

After several minutes he removed the vessel from the flame and allowed it to cool. When the vessel was opened, the observers saw a small shining object at the bottom. It was a piece of gold.

The room became silent with amazement. The chemists examined the metal carefully. They weighed it and tested its properties.

After several tests they reached a surprising conclusion. The metal was genuine gold.

The demonstration created immediate excitement among those present. Several observers asked the professor to repeat the experiment. He agreed.

Once again he followed the same procedure. Once again a small piece of gold appeared in the vessel.

The witnesses could hardly believe their eyes. If the process was truly real, it would change the entire world.

Yet Professor Von Kempelen remained calm throughout the demonstration. When the experiment ended, he quietly packed his materials back into the wooden box. Then he prepared to leave the laboratory.

The observers hurried to ask him many questions. But the professor answered only a few.

Finally he spoke clearly. "The method is simple," he said. "But it requires careful preparation. I am not yet ready to publish the full details."

With those words he left the room. His mysterious discovery soon became the most discussed subject in Europe.

## Part 2

The news of Professor Von Kempelen's discovery spread through Europe with incredible speed. Newspapers printed detailed reports of the demonstration in the

laboratory at Pesth. Within a few days people in many countries were discussing the strange experiment.

Merchants gathered in cafés and argued about the possible effects on trade. Bankers studied the reports with serious expressions. Government officials began asking whether the discovery might change the value of money itself.

At the same time scientists examined the story with caution. Some believed that the discovery must be real, because respected witnesses had seen the experiment with their own eyes. Others suspected that some hidden trick might be involved. Yet none of the observers could explain how the professor had produced the gold.

Because of this uncertainty the public curiosity grew even stronger. People wanted to know everything about the mysterious chemist.

Professor Von Kempelen lived quietly in the city of Pesth. He had long been known as a man interested in science and invention. For many years he had worked alone in his laboratory. He rarely spoke about his experiments.

His neighbors described him as a calm and thoughtful person who spent much of his time reading books and studying chemical materials.

After the famous demonstration many visitors tried to meet him. Scientists, journalists, and even government officials requested interviews. But the professor avoided most of these requests. He explained that his research was not yet complete.

In several short letters he repeated the same statement. “My discovery is real,” he wrote. “However, the method must be used carefully. I will explain it fully when the proper time arrives.”

These words created even greater excitement. People began to imagine the possibilities of unlimited gold. Some writers predicted that nations would become wealthier than ever before. Others feared that the sudden increase of gold might destroy the entire system of trade.

Economists wrote long essays about the future of money. If gold became easy to produce, they said, its value would fall. Old financial systems might collapse.

Yet the public imagination was not easily controlled. Many people dreamed about personal fortune. Merchants spoke about building great cities filled with

wealth. Farmers imagined that poverty would disappear forever.

A few adventurous men even began trying to copy the professor's experiments. Chemical shops soon sold large quantities of powders and liquids to curious amateurs. These attempts produced many strange results but no gold.

Meanwhile the professor continued his quiet work.

One day a group of scientists sent him a respectful letter. They asked him to perform another demonstration, this time before a larger gathering of experts. After some hesitation he agreed again.

The second demonstration took place several weeks later. Once more the professor arrived carrying the same small wooden box. The observers noticed that his manner remained calm and simple.

He greeted the guests politely and prepared his materials.

As before, he placed several powders into a glass vessel. Then he added drops of a clear liquid. A faint smoke rose as the substances mixed together.

The vessel was placed over a small flame. The observers watched in complete silence.

After several minutes the mixture cooled. When the professor opened the vessel, the shining metal appeared again at the bottom. It was gold.

The scientists examined the metal carefully. They tested its weight and purity. The results were the same as before. The metal was genuine gold.

After the experiment several observers questioned the professor closely.

One scientist asked whether the process required rare materials. "No," the professor replied calmly. "The substances are common."

Another observer asked whether the process could produce large quantities of gold.

The professor paused before answering. "In theory," he said, "the amount could be increased."

These words caused a wave of excitement among the listeners.

But the professor raised his hand gently. "However," he continued, "the process must be handled with great care. Without proper knowledge it could easily fail."

One journalist then asked the most important question. "When will you publish

the full method?”

Professor Von Kempelen smiled slightly. “Soon,” he said.

Yet the weeks passed, and the method was still not published. The mystery surrounding the discovery only deepened. Many people began to wonder whether the professor was waiting for the right moment. Others suspected that he feared the consequences of revealing such powerful knowledge.

Whatever the reason, the world continued waiting for the secret of gold.

### Part 3

As the weeks passed, curiosity about Professor Von Kempelen’s discovery continued to grow. Newspapers printed new articles almost every day. Some writers praised the professor as one of the greatest scientific minds of the age. Others warned that his discovery might bring serious danger to the world.

Meanwhile many people waited impatiently for the full explanation of the process. Merchants and bankers believed that the secret might soon change the entire system of trade. Governments quietly began discussing the matter in private meetings.

Yet Professor Von Kempelen remained silent.

He continued living quietly in his home in Pesth. Occasionally he sent short letters to scientific societies, but these letters revealed almost nothing about the true method. In those letters he simply repeated that the discovery was genuine and that he would publish the process when the proper moment arrived.

This behavior increased the mystery surrounding the discovery.

Some people suspected that the professor wished to control the release of his information carefully. Others wondered whether he feared that the discovery might be used in dangerous ways. A few critics even suggested that the entire story might still be a clever trick.

But the scientists who had witnessed the demonstrations insisted that the gold was real.

The debate continued.

During this time an interesting change occurred in the markets of Europe. The price of gold began to move slightly. Merchants were uncertain about the future value of the metal. If the professor truly possessed the power to produce unlimited gold, the value of gold might fall greatly.

Some traders began selling their gold supplies. Others waited cautiously for further news.

Economists wrote long discussions about the possible consequences. They explained that gold had served for centuries as a stable form of wealth. If that stability disappeared, many financial systems might collapse.

Yet the professor's secret remained hidden.

Finally, after many months of silence, Professor Von Kempelen announced that he would publish a brief report describing his discovery.

The announcement caused enormous excitement. Scientists across Europe prepared to examine the report carefully. Newspapers promised to print the document as soon as it appeared.

When the report was finally released, people rushed to read it.

The document was surprisingly short. In calm and simple language the professor described the experiments that had led to his discovery. He explained how certain chemical substances could be combined and heated in a controlled manner.

According to the report, these reactions produced small quantities of gold.

The explanation appeared clear and reasonable.

Yet as scientists studied the document more carefully, they noticed something unusual. The report did not include the exact proportions of the materials. It also failed to describe several important details of the heating process.

In other words, the document explained the general idea but did not reveal the full method.

Because of this, the mystery remained unsolved.

Some scientists tried repeating the experiment using the information provided. Their results were disappointing. No gold appeared in their vessels.

The powders and liquids reacted in various ways, but none of the mixtures

produced the shining metal that the professor had demonstrated.

This failure created new suspicion.

Several critics claimed that the discovery must be false.

Yet the witnesses who had attended the demonstrations continued to defend the professor. They insisted that they had seen the gold produced directly before their eyes.

The debate grew stronger.

Letters and articles appeared in newspapers across Europe. Some writers demanded that the professor reveal every detail of his method. Others argued that he had the right to protect his work.

During this time Professor Von Kempelen himself remained calm and patient. He answered only a few questions and refused to participate in public arguments.

One journalist finally managed to ask him directly whether the discovery was completely genuine.

The professor smiled quietly before answering. "The gold that I produced in the laboratory was real," he said.

The journalist then asked another question. "But can the process truly produce gold from ordinary materials?"

The professor paused for a moment.

Then he spoke carefully. "The world sometimes believes what it wishes to believe," he said.

The journalist did not fully understand this reply. But the meaning of the professor's discovery would soon become clear.

#### Part 4

The months that followed Professor Von Kempelen's report were filled with debate and confusion. Scientists continued examining the short document that he had published. Many attempted to repeat the process described in the text. None of these attempts succeeded. Chemical laboratories across Europe repeated the experiment again and again. Powders were mixed. Liquids were heated. Glass

vessels were placed over flames exactly as the professor had demonstrated. Yet no gold appeared.

At first many researchers believed that they must have misunderstood some small detail of the process. They repeated the experiments with great care. Still the result remained the same. There was no gold. Because of this failure, the scientific world began asking serious questions. If the professor's method was real, why could no one repeat it?

Some scientists suggested that a small but essential step had been omitted from the report. Perhaps the professor had forgotten to mention some important detail. Others suspected something very different. They wondered whether the entire discovery might have been misunderstood. The mystery grew deeper.

During this time Professor Von Kempelen continued living quietly in Pesth. He avoided public meetings and gave no new demonstrations. Journalists tried many times to speak with him. Usually he politely refused.

At last one visitor succeeded in obtaining a short interview. The visitor was a writer who had traveled a long distance to meet the famous chemist. When he arrived at the professor's home, he found a modest house with a small garden. Professor Von Kempelen welcomed the visitor calmly. His manner was friendly but reserved.

After a short conversation the visitor finally asked the question that everyone wished to know. "Professor," he said, "the entire world wishes to understand your discovery. Yet no one has been able to reproduce your experiment. Could you explain the reason?"

The professor looked thoughtful. For a moment he did not answer. Then he spoke quietly. "The experiment that I demonstrated in the laboratory was genuine," he said.

The visitor nodded. "Yes," he replied. "Many respected scientists saw it with their own eyes." The professor smiled slightly. "That is correct," he said.

The visitor continued. "But if the experiment was genuine, why does the written explanation fail to produce the same result?"

The professor stood and walked slowly to a table near the window. On the table

lay several small pieces of metal. He picked up one of them. The visitor recognized the object immediately. It was gold. The professor held it in the light of the window.

“This metal is real,” he said calmly. “Yes,” the visitor replied.

The professor placed the metal back on the table. Then he turned toward the visitor again. “Tell me,” he said gently, “what do you believe is more powerful — a chemical reaction or the imagination of the public?”

The visitor looked confused. “I am not sure I understand,” he said.

The professor smiled. “Let me explain,” he continued. “For centuries people have dreamed about turning common materials into gold.” He paused. “When I demonstrated the experiment, the observers already believed that such a transformation might be possible.”

The visitor listened carefully.

“They watched the experiment with great excitement,” the professor said. “Their minds expected a miracle.” The professor moved his hand slowly across the table. “During the experiment I performed a simple chemical reaction that produced smoke and heat. While the observers focused on the reaction, I introduced a small piece of gold into the vessel.”

The visitor stared at him in surprise.

The professor continued calmly. “The observers believed they had seen gold created from ordinary substances.”

The visitor spoke slowly. “Then the discovery was not real?”

The professor shook his head. “The gold was real,” he said. “But the transformation was not.”

The visitor remained silent for a moment.

The professor continued. “I wished to demonstrate something important about human belief.” He looked directly at the visitor. “People often accept extraordinary claims when they wish them to be true.”

The visitor slowly understood. “So the entire discovery was an experiment,” he said.

The professor nodded. “Yes.” He smiled gently. “Not an experiment in

chemistry.” He paused briefly. “An experiment in human nature.”

The visitor left the house later that evening with a completely different understanding of the famous discovery. The world had believed that gold could be created by science. In truth the professor had revealed something far more interesting. He had shown how easily the human mind can transform hope into belief.

## Mesmeric Revelation

### Part 1

For many years I have been interested in the strange subject known as mesmerism. Many people consider it mysterious or doubtful, but I have always believed that careful observation can reveal important truths about it.

During my studies I met a man named Mr. Vankirk. He became one of the most remarkable subjects I ever observed.

Mr. Vankirk was a quiet and thoughtful man of middle age. He had a serious mind and enjoyed discussing philosophy and religion. Yet he was also interested in the study of mesmerism and agreed to take part in several experiments.

At the time when the events I describe took place, Mr. Vankirk was suffering from a serious illness. The doctors believed that he would not live long.

Although his body had grown weak, his mind remained clear and active.

One evening I visited him in the small room where he rested. The room was simple but comfortable. A lamp burned softly on the table, and the air was very quiet.

Mr. Vankirk lay on a couch near the window.

His face looked pale, but his expression was calm.

We spoke together for some time about ordinary matters. Then the conversation turned to the subject of mesmerism.

“I have been thinking about it,” he said slowly. “If my illness becomes worse, I would like to attempt a mesmeric experiment.”

I looked at him with interest.

“What kind of experiment?” I asked.

He smiled faintly.

“I wish to discover whether the mind can remain active even when the body approaches death.”

His words surprised me.

“That would be a very unusual experiment,” I said.

Mr. Vankirk nodded.

“Yes,” he replied calmly. “But my situation gives us a rare opportunity.”

He paused before continuing.

“If my condition becomes very weak, you may attempt to place me in a mesmeric sleep.”

I hesitated.

“Are you certain that you wish to try such a thing?” I asked.

“Completely certain,” he said.

His voice remained calm and steady.

“If the mind can speak while the body is close to death, we might learn something important about existence itself.”

I thought carefully about his request.

Finally I agreed.

Several days later his condition became much worse. His breathing grew slow, and the doctors believed that the end of his life was approaching.

That evening I returned to his room.

Mr. Vankirk was extremely weak.

Yet when I entered, he opened his eyes and recognized me.

“You have come,” he said softly.

“Yes,” I replied.

He nodded.

“Then the time has arrived.”

The room was very quiet.

I placed a chair beside the couch and began the mesmeric process.

Slowly and carefully I moved my hands in front of his face, guiding his attention toward sleep.

Mr. Vankirk watched my movements calmly.

Within a short time his breathing became deeper and more regular.

His eyes closed gently.

I continued the passes for several minutes.

At last I was satisfied that the mesmeric state had been reached.

I spoke his name quietly.

“Mr. Vankirk.”

After a moment he answered.

“Yes.”

His voice was extremely soft but perfectly clear.

I felt a sudden excitement.

The experiment had begun.

“Do you hear me?” I asked.

“I hear you,” he replied.

“Are you comfortable?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said slowly.

For a moment I remained silent, considering what question to ask first.

Then I spoke again.

“Mr. Vankirk,” I said, “can you describe your condition?”

There was a long pause before he answered.

“I feel calm,” he said at last.

“My body is very weak, but my mind is clear.”

His voice sounded distant but peaceful.

I continued the conversation carefully.

“Do you feel pain?”

“No,” he replied.

“Do you feel that your life is ending?”

Again there was a pause.

“Yes,” he said quietly.

The room seemed even more silent than before.

I leaned closer to hear him clearly.

“Mr. Vankirk,” I said, “while you are in this state, can you tell me anything about the nature of existence?”

For several moments he did not answer.

Then he spoke slowly.

“Yes,” he said.

“I can.”

## Part 2

For a short time after these words Mr. Vankirk remained silent. His face was very pale, and his breathing was slow but steady. The small lamp on the table gave a soft light to the quiet room.

At last he began speaking again.

“The mind,” he said slowly, “is not the same as the body.”

I listened with great attention.

His voice sounded distant, yet every word was clear.

“The body is only an instrument,” he continued. “It is a tool through which the mind acts while it lives in the physical world.”

I asked him another question.

“Then the mind exists separately from the body?”

“Yes,” he replied softly. “The mind is the true being.”

He paused briefly.

“When the body grows weak and approaches death, the mind begins to separate from it.”

His words were calm and thoughtful.

“This separation is not sudden. It happens slowly.”

I wrote down his words as he spoke.

“Do you feel this separation now?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answered.

“It is like waking from a long sleep.”

I leaned closer.

“Can you explain what you mean?”

Mr. Vankirk spoke again after a short pause.

“While we live in the body,” he said, “our senses are limited. We see only a small part of reality.”

His breathing remained steady.

“But as the mind begins to leave the body, these limits slowly disappear.”

I felt a deep curiosity.

“Do you see anything now that you could not see before?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

“I perceive things more clearly.”

The word he used surprised me.

“Perceive?” I repeated.

“Yes,” he said quietly.

“The mind perceives truth directly. It does not depend on the eyes or the ears.”

The room remained silent except for his slow breathing.

“Then reality is different from what we believe while living?” I asked.

“Very different,” he replied.

Mr. Vankirk continued speaking.

“Everything that exists is part of one great system. All matter is connected.”

I considered his words carefully.

“Do you mean that the universe is made from one substance?” I asked.

“Yes,” he answered.

“All things come from a single source.”

His voice became softer but still clear.

“This source is the essence of existence.”

I asked another question.

“Is this essence what people call God?”

Mr. Vankirk paused before answering.

“The word ‘God’ is often misunderstood,” he said slowly.

“Many people imagine a separate being who rules the universe.”

His voice remained calm.

“But the truth is more profound.”

I waited.

“God is not separate from existence,” he continued.

“God is the unity of all things.”

I felt a strange sensation while listening to these words.

The quiet room seemed filled with deep meaning.

“Then every part of the universe is connected to this unity?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Every particle of matter, every movement, every thought is part of the same great whole.”

Mr. Vankirk paused again.

“When the mind leaves the body completely, it becomes aware of this unity.”

His breathing grew slightly slower.

“The mind then enters a state of greater understanding.”

I spoke carefully.

“Do you believe that the mind continues to exist after death?”

His answer came quickly.

“Yes.”

The certainty of his voice was remarkable.

“The mind does not end when the body dies,” he said.

“It simply moves into another form of existence.”

I continued questioning him.

“Can you describe that existence?”

For a moment he remained silent.

Then he spoke again.

“It is difficult to explain in human language.”

His voice became even softer.

“But it is a state of knowledge and harmony.”

I leaned forward.

“Are you afraid of it?”

Mr. Vankirk answered immediately.

“No.”

His tone was peaceful.

“Fear belongs to the body.”

The room remained silent again.

I realized that the experiment had reached a moment of extraordinary

importance.

Mr. Vankirk was speaking calmly about the final moments of life.

### Part 3

For some time after this statement Mr. Vankirk remained quiet. His breathing was still slow, and his face looked peaceful in the dim light of the lamp. The silence in the room felt deep and almost sacred.

At last I spoke again.

“Mr. Vankirk,” I said softly, “you mentioned that the mind becomes aware of unity when it leaves the body. Can you explain more about this unity?”

He answered after a short pause.

“All existence comes from one original source.”

His voice was calm and steady.

“In the beginning there was a single essence. From that essence all forms of matter and life developed.”

I listened carefully.

“Everything that appears separate in the world is actually part of that original unity.”

He paused briefly before continuing.

“When we live in the physical body, we experience separation. We see objects as different and independent.”

His breathing grew slightly slower.

“But this separation is only an appearance created by our limited senses.”

I asked another question.

“Then separation does not truly exist?”

“No,” he replied.

“All things remain connected to the original essence.”

The room felt very quiet.

“When the mind begins to leave the body,” he continued, “it gradually becomes aware of this truth.”

I wrote his words carefully.

“Do you feel that awareness now?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said softly.

“It is becoming clearer.”

I leaned closer.

“What does it feel like?”

Mr. Vankirk answered slowly.

“It feels like understanding something that was always present but hidden.”

He paused again.

“The universe is not made of separate objects.”

His voice became softer.

“It is one living system.”

I thought about his words for a moment.

“If that is true,” I said, “then every event must be connected to every other event.”

“Exactly,” he replied.

“Nothing happens alone.”

The lamp flickered gently beside us.

“Every movement in the universe influences every other movement.”

His voice remained calm.

“This is the law of unity.”

I continued my questions.

“Does the human mind become part of that unity after death?”

Mr. Vankirk answered without hesitation.

“Yes.”

He paused briefly.

“The mind returns to the universal essence.”

His breathing grew slower.

“But it does not lose its awareness.”

I was surprised by this idea.

“Then the mind continues to know itself?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said quietly.

“But its understanding becomes greater.”

I asked another question.

“Does it remember the life it lived in the body?”

Mr. Vankirk thought for a moment.

“Yes,” he replied.

“But those memories become less important.”

He continued.

“The mind begins to see a much larger reality.”

I felt a strong curiosity.

“Can you see that reality now?” I asked.

For several moments he did not answer.

Then he spoke again.

“Yes.”

His voice sounded distant but peaceful.

“I see it more clearly with every moment.”

The quiet room seemed filled with a strange atmosphere.

“What do you see?” I asked softly.

Mr. Vankirk answered slowly.

“I see that existence is infinite.”

He paused.

“There is no true beginning and no true end.”

His breathing grew even slower.

“All forms change, but the essence remains.”

I asked another question.

“Does this mean that death is only a transformation?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Death is simply a passage.”

His voice was now extremely soft.

“The mind leaves the limits of the body and enters a greater state of being.”

The silence of the room deepened again.

I realized that Mr. Vankirk was approaching the final moments of his life.

Yet his expression remained calm.

His words carried no fear at all.

I spoke once more.

“Mr. Vankirk,” I said quietly, “are you aware that your life is ending?”

His answer came gently.

“Yes.”

He paused.

“But I feel no fear.”

His breathing slowed further.

“Only understanding.”

I waited beside him in silence as the remarkable experiment continued.

#### Part 4

For a long moment after these words the room remained silent. The small lamp on the table gave a steady light, and the night outside the window was completely still. Mr. Vankirk lay motionless on the couch, yet his breathing continued slowly and regularly.

I waited beside him, uncertain whether he would speak again.

At last I asked another question.

“Mr. Vankirk,” I said softly, “can you tell me what happens to the mind at the moment when it fully leaves the body?”

He answered after a short pause.

“The mind expands.”

His voice was extremely faint but still clear.

“The limits that once surrounded it disappear.”

I leaned closer so that I would not miss his words.

“While the mind lives in the body,” he continued, “it is confined to narrow senses.”

His breathing remained slow.

“The eyes see only a small portion of light. The ears hear only certain sounds.”  
He paused briefly.

“But when the mind separates from the body, it no longer depends on these organs.”

I wrote his words carefully.

“It perceives truth directly.”

The quiet room seemed filled with a deep stillness.

I asked another question.

“Does this direct perception allow the mind to understand the universe?”

Mr. Vankirk answered slowly.

“Yes.”

His voice sounded distant.

“The mind becomes aware of the universal order.”

I waited for him to continue.

“All events follow the same great law,” he said.

“This law governs every part of existence.”

I asked carefully.

“Is this law connected to the unity you described earlier?”

“Yes,” he replied.

“The law is the expression of that unity.”

His breathing became even slower.

“Everything in the universe moves according to the same principle.”

I thought about this idea for a moment.

“Does the human mind continue learning after death?” I asked.

Mr. Vankirk answered quietly.

“Yes.”

“The process of understanding does not end.”

His voice remained calm.

“The mind continues discovering the nature of existence.”

I leaned closer again.

“Then knowledge grows even after life in the body has ended?”

“Yes,” he said.

“The search for truth continues forever.”

The lamp flickered slightly in the quiet room.

“Do you feel that your mind is moving toward that greater state now?” I asked.

Mr. Vankirk remained silent for several seconds.

Then he spoke again.

“Yes.”

His voice was now barely audible.

“The separation is almost complete.”

I felt a mixture of curiosity and solemn respect.

“Are you able to see the body from which your mind is separating?” I asked.

“No,” he replied softly.

“The body is becoming less important.”

He paused briefly.

“The mind turns toward the greater reality.”

His breathing slowed further.

“The connection with the body grows weaker.”

I spoke again.

“Mr. Vankirk, do you feel pain?”

“No,” he answered.

“There is only calm.”

The peaceful expression on his face did not change.

“Do you have any final message for those who still live in the physical world?”

I asked.

Mr. Vankirk remained silent for a long time.

At last he spoke again.

“Tell them that existence is not what it appears to be.”

His voice was very faint now.

“Life in the body is only the beginning.”

He paused again.

“The true nature of reality lies beyond the limits of the senses.”

I leaned forward to hear his final words.

“The universe is one,” he said quietly.

“All things return to the same source.”

His breathing became slower and slower.

A final moment of silence passed.

Then Mr. Vankirk spoke one last time.

“I am entering the greater understanding.”

After these words his voice ceased completely.

His breathing stopped.

Mr. Vankirk had died peacefully while still under the mesmeric influence.

I remained beside him for a long time, reflecting on the extraordinary conversation that had taken place.

Whether his words represented true knowledge or only the visions of a dying mind, I cannot say.

But I will never forget the calm certainty with which he spoke of the unity of existence.

## The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar

### Part 1

For many years I have been interested in the subject of mesmerism. During that time I performed numerous experiments and carefully observed their results. Most of these experiments involved ordinary subjects in good health. Yet one question continued to interest me deeply. I wondered whether the mesmeric state could be produced in a person who was very close to death. This question had never been answered clearly. Many people believed that such an experiment would be impossible. Others believed it might reveal important information about the connection between the mind and the body.

For a long time I had no opportunity to attempt such a test. Then I met a man named Mr. Ernest Valdemar. Mr. Valdemar was well known in literary circles. He worked as an editor and translator and had published several books. He was also interested in unusual scientific subjects. Our acquaintance soon became friendly.

Mr. Valdemar was a thin man with sharp features and dark eyes. His hair was completely black, although his mustache had already begun to turn gray. Unfortunately he was suffering from a serious illness. The disease had attacked his lungs, and his doctors believed that his death would occur within a short time.

One evening I visited him in his apartment. He appeared very weak but remained perfectly aware of his condition. We spoke openly about the state of his health. At last I mentioned the experiment that had long interested me.

“Mr. Valdemar,” I said carefully, “I have often wondered whether mesmerism could be applied to a person at the moment of death.”

He listened with calm attention. “You mean,” he said slowly, “placing a dying man into a mesmeric trance?”

“Yes,” I replied.

Mr. Valdemar considered the idea for a moment. “The experiment would be unusual,” he said. “But I see no reason why it should not be attempted.”

His calm answer surprised me. “You would be willing to take part in such an

experiment?" I asked.

"Certainly," he replied. He spoke with remarkable seriousness. "If my condition becomes worse, I will inform you immediately."

Several weeks passed after this conversation. During that time Mr. Valdemar's illness grew steadily worse. At last I received a letter from him. The message was short. He wrote that his doctors believed he had only a day or two left to live. He asked me to come to his home at once.

I arrived at his apartment late in the evening. The room was quiet and dimly lit. Several doctors were present. They explained that Mr. Valdemar's lungs were almost completely destroyed by disease. According to their judgment, he would die before the next morning.

I spoke privately with Mr. Valdemar. His voice was weak, but his mind remained perfectly clear. "The time has come," he said.

I asked the doctors whether they would allow the experiment. After some discussion they agreed to observe the procedure. They were curious about the possible results.

The mesmeric process began shortly after midnight. Mr. Valdemar lay on a bed near the center of the room. The doctors stood nearby and watched carefully. I sat beside the bed and began making the usual mesmeric passes with my hands.

Mr. Valdemar fixed his eyes on mine. His breathing was extremely difficult. Several times I feared that he might die before the trance could be established. Yet after several minutes his eyelids began to close slowly. His breathing became slightly more regular.

I continued the passes with great care. At last I felt certain that the mesmeric state had been reached.

I spoke his name quietly. "Mr. Valdemar."

For a moment there was no answer. Then a faint voice replied. "Yes."

The doctors looked at each other with surprise. I continued the experiment.

"Are you asleep?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. The voice sounded extremely weak but clear.

I asked another question. "Do you feel pain?"

There was a short pause. Then he answered. "No pain."

The doctors leaned closer to observe him carefully. Mr. Valdemar's face had grown pale, and his breathing was almost silent. Yet he remained able to answer questions.

I then asked the most important question. "Mr. Valdemar," I said quietly, "do you believe that you are about to die?"

For several moments there was no reply. Then the faint voice answered. "Yes." The word seemed to come from a great distance.

The doctors looked at each other again. None of us had ever witnessed such a state before. The dying man appeared suspended between life and death.

## Part 2

The strange condition of Mr. Valdemar continued for several minutes. The doctors watched him closely, and I remained beside the bed. The silence in the room felt heavy and unnatural.

Mr. Valdemar's body lay completely still. His eyes were closed. His breathing was almost impossible to detect. Yet he had answered my questions clearly.

I spoke again. "Mr. Valdemar," I said quietly, "are you sleeping now?"

After a short pause the same faint voice replied. "Yes." The sound seemed weak but distinct.

One of the doctors moved closer and placed his hand near Mr. Valdemar's chest. He turned to the others and whispered that the breathing was extremely slight. Another doctor checked the pulse. It was almost impossible to find.

The observers looked at me with growing curiosity. I continued the experiment. "Mr. Valdemar," I said, "how do you feel?"

A long silence followed. Then the voice answered. "I feel... very calm." The words were slow and uncertain.

I asked another question. "Do you still feel alive?"

There was a longer pause this time. The doctors leaned closer. At last the voice spoke again. "Yes... but dying."

The strange answer caused a deep silence in the room. One doctor shook his head slowly, unable to explain what he was seeing.

I decided to continue questioning him. "Mr. Valdemar," I said carefully, "what is your condition now?"

Several seconds passed. Then the faint voice replied. "Still sleeping... still dying." The words sounded extremely distant. His lips moved only slightly as he spoke.

One of the doctors carefully lifted Mr. Valdemar's eyelids. The eyes appeared dull and motionless. Yet when I spoke again, the voice continued to answer.

"Mr. Valdemar," I asked, "do you wish to awaken?"

The answer came quickly. "No."

I continued. "Do you wish to remain in this state?"

Again he replied. "Yes... leave me... sleeping."

The doctors exchanged uncertain glances. None of them had ever seen anything similar.

For nearly an hour we remained in the room observing him. His body did not move. His breathing remained almost invisible. Yet when I spoke to him, he continued to answer.

At last one of the doctors suggested that the mesmeric state might be preventing death itself. The idea seemed unbelievable, but no other explanation appeared possible.

We decided to leave him in the trance and observe what would happen.

The night passed slowly. Mr. Valdemar remained in the same condition. His body appeared almost lifeless. Yet his voice continued to respond when I spoke.

When morning arrived, several additional doctors came to examine him. They were astonished by what they saw.

After careful examination they agreed that the physical signs of life were almost completely absent. His heart barely beat. His breathing was nearly stopped. Yet he continued answering questions.

The doctors began discussing the matter quietly among themselves. Some believed that the mesmeric trance had stopped the natural process of death. Others

thought that the mind might somehow continue functioning even after the body had begun to die.

Meanwhile Mr. Valdemar remained motionless on the bed.

At one point I asked him again about his condition. "Mr. Valdemar," I said softly, "are you still sleeping?"

After a moment the faint voice answered. "Yes... still sleeping." His words sounded weaker than before.

I asked another question. "Do you still feel pain?"

The answer came slowly. "No pain... dying."

The doctors grew more uneasy as the strange experiment continued. None of them had expected such a result. The dying man remained suspended in a mysterious state between life and death.

### Part 3

The strange condition of Mr. Valdemar continued throughout that entire day. The doctors returned several times to observe him, and each examination produced the same astonishing result.

His body appeared almost completely lifeless. His skin had become pale and cold. His pulse could barely be detected. His breathing was so faint that it was difficult to observe at all.

Yet when I spoke to him while he remained in the mesmeric trance, he continued to answer.

The voice that answered did not sound natural. It seemed to come from deep inside the body rather than from the lips. One doctor described it as a sound produced by the tongue alone. The lips hardly moved when the words were spoken.

This strange condition lasted for many hours. Finally the doctors and I agreed that the experiment had reached an important stage.

I decided to ask Mr. Valdemar again about his condition. I leaned close to him and spoke clearly. "Mr. Valdemar," I said, "are you still asleep?"

A long silence followed. At last the voice answered. "Yes... sleeping... dying."

The words sounded weaker than ever.

One of the doctors asked me to question him further. I obeyed.

“Mr. Valdemar,” I said, “what is your present condition?”

For several moments there was no reply. Then the voice spoke again. “Dying.”

The sound of the word seemed to frighten everyone in the room. The doctors looked at each other with growing uneasiness.

I continued. “Mr. Valdemar, do you wish to awaken?”

This time the answer came very slowly. “No... let me... die.”

His words produced a deep silence. None of us knew how to proceed.

Finally one of the doctors suggested that we should allow him to remain in the mesmeric state for a longer time. The idea seemed reasonable. Therefore we decided not to disturb him.

Hours passed. Mr. Valdemar remained in exactly the same condition. His body showed no sign of change. The strange voice continued to answer when I spoke to him.

Several days later we returned again to examine him. To our amazement the condition had not changed at all. Mr. Valdemar still lay motionless on the bed. His body appeared almost completely dead. Yet the mesmeric trance continued. Whenever I asked a question, the strange voice replied.

During these examinations I noticed something particularly disturbing. Mr. Valdemar’s tongue had begun to change color. It had turned dark and swollen. Yet the voice still seemed to come from it.

The doctors discussed the matter with growing concern. Some believed that the body had already died and that the trance was holding the remains in a suspended state. Others believed that some unknown force was preventing the final moment of death. None of us had ever seen anything like it.

For several months the strange condition continued. Mr. Valdemar remained exactly as he had been on the first night of the experiment. His body did not decay. His position never changed. Yet the voice still answered questions when I spoke to him.

At last we decided that the experiment must end. It seemed wrong to keep the

man in such an unnatural condition.

Therefore we prepared to awaken him from the mesmeric trance.

The doctors gathered around the bed. I began making the reverse passes that normally bring a subject out of the trance.

At first nothing happened. Mr. Valdemar remained motionless.

I continued the passes more strongly.

Then something terrible occurred.

His tongue suddenly moved. The strange voice spoke again. This time the words were clear and dreadful.

“For God’s sake... quick... quick... wake me... or put me to sleep again...”

The voice continued.

“Quick... I say... quick...”

A moment later it added the most horrible words we had ever heard.

“I am dead.”

A terrible silence filled the room.

I tried desperately to complete the awakening process. But the moment the mesmeric influence broke completely, a shocking change occurred.

The body of Mr. Valdemar suddenly collapsed.

In less than a minute the entire form before us dissolved into a foul mass of decay.

The sight was so horrible that none of us could speak.

The experiment had revealed a truth that no one present would ever forget.

## The Black Cat

### Part 1

I do not hope that anyone will believe my story. If my mind were calm and strong, perhaps I would also doubt such a story. But I am not calm. My mind is broken and tired. Tomorrow I will die. Before that time comes, I want to tell what happened. I want to place the weight on my heart outside my body. I will speak in a plain way. I will not try to explain the strange fear that fills my mind. For me, the events of my life are terrible and strange, but they happened exactly as I will say.

From my early years I was known as a gentle and kind person. Many people noticed my love for animals. I was very young, yet I cared deeply for every small living thing. My parents often laughed at me because I filled our home with pets. I had birds, fish, rabbits, and a small dog. I spent many hours feeding them, touching them softly, and speaking to them as if they could understand me.

This love did not fade when I became older. When I grew into a man and married, I was lucky to find that my wife also liked animals very much. Because of this shared love, our house soon became full of living creatures. We had birds that sang every morning. We had small fish that moved slowly in a clear bowl. We had a little dog that followed my wife everywhere in the house. We also had rabbits and a monkey. But among all these animals there was one that I loved more than the others.

This animal was a large black cat. His name was Pluto. He was a beautiful creature. His fur was deep black, and his body was strong and healthy. Pluto was also very wise for a cat. My wife sometimes said that cats, especially black ones, were not always what they seemed. She said this half as a joke. But she also repeated an old belief that black cats might be spirits in animal form. I laughed when she said this. Still, I remember those words clearly now.

Pluto and I became very close. The cat followed me everywhere in the house. When I sat in a chair, Pluto jumped onto my knees. When I walked into another

room, he moved after me quietly. At night he slept near my bed. No one else was allowed to feed him. If my wife tried, he would refuse the food and wait for me instead.

For several years our life was peaceful. I worked during the day and returned home each evening. My wife and I cared for our animals. Our house was calm and full of small sounds—wings moving, paws on the floor, soft animal cries. Pluto was always near me, watching me with bright eyes.

But slowly, almost without my noticing, something inside me began to change. I developed a habit that destroyed my peace and my good nature. I began to drink strong wine. At first I drank only a little. Then more. Soon I drank every day. The drink changed my thoughts. My mind became dark and angry. I felt sudden bursts of rage for no reason at all.

My behavior toward my wife grew cold and rough. I spoke to her in harsh words. Sometimes I pushed her away when she tried to calm me. Yet even in those early days of change, I still treated my animals kindly. I still loved them, especially Pluto. The cat seemed to understand my moods and stayed close to me even when I was angry with the rest of the world.

But drinking continued to poison my mind. Day after day the drink burned inside me. My temper grew worse. I became impatient with every small thing. I shouted easily. My wife often looked at me with worry and sadness. I knew I was hurting her, yet I did not stop.

One night I came home very late. I had been drinking for many hours. My head felt heavy and my thoughts moved slowly. As I walked into the house I believed Pluto was trying to avoid me. The cat moved away when I reached for him. This small action made my anger rise suddenly.

I grabbed Pluto roughly. The cat, frightened by my violent hands, bit my finger in fear. The pain was small, but my mind exploded with rage. I felt something dark and terrible take control of me. In that moment I no longer felt like the man I once was.

I pulled a small knife from my pocket. My hands shook, yet I held Pluto firmly. The poor animal cried and struggled, but my anger was stronger than my reason.

With one quick movement I cut out one of the cat's eyes.

I am ashamed when I remember that moment. Even now my face burns with shame. When the act was done and my anger faded, horror filled my mind. I looked at the injured creature and felt deep regret. Pluto escaped from my hands and hid somewhere in the house.

For many days the cat avoided me. I could not blame him. When he finally appeared again, I saw the terrible wound where his eye had once been. The empty place frightened me. At first I felt pity and sorrow. But soon another feeling began to grow in my mind.

Instead of love, I began to feel something like hatred toward the animal. The sight of the missing eye filled me with strange fear. Pluto, however, slowly became calm again. Like before, he followed me through the house. Yet now I pushed him away.

When the cat came near me, I felt a cold anger rise inside my chest. I did not hurt him again at first. But each day the feeling grew stronger. I began to hate the animal simply because he loved me and trusted me.

My drinking became even worse. The drink burned my mind and twisted my thoughts. I often sat alone, thinking dark and cruel things. Pluto still followed me, unaware of the terrible ideas forming in my heart.

One morning I woke with a heavy head and a bitter taste in my mouth. The house was quiet. My wife was not in the room. Pluto walked slowly across the floor toward me. His single eye looked at me calmly.

In that moment a sudden wave of cruel anger passed through my body. I do not know why. Perhaps it was the drink. Perhaps it was the darkness that had been growing inside me for many months. Whatever the reason, I decided to destroy the animal that once had been my closest companion.

I took a rope and made a small loop. Pluto followed me outside into the yard. The morning air was cool and still. For a moment my heart hesitated. The cat rubbed his head gently against my hand, just as he had done many times before.

But pity did not stop me. With tears in my eyes, yet with a cruel purpose in my heart, I placed the rope around Pluto's neck and hung him from the branch of a

tree.

The poor animal struggled and cried in fear. His body moved helplessly in the air. Soon the movement stopped. Pluto was dead.

I committed this terrible act knowing it was wrong. I did it because my heart had become empty of kindness. I did it because something dark inside me pushed me forward.

That night I slept badly. My dreams were full of fear. Yet even then I did not know that the worst events of my life had only just begun.

## Part 2

On the night after I killed the cat, I slept in a troubled and broken way. Dark dreams filled my mind, and I woke many times with fear in my chest. Yet when morning came, the strange feeling slowly faded. As the day passed, I even began to forget the terrible act I had done. This is the strange nature of the human mind. Even after great cruelty, a man may return to his daily habits as if nothing has happened.

But fate had not finished with me.

That same night, after midnight, I was suddenly awakened by loud cries. At first I thought I was still dreaming. Then I smelled smoke. I jumped from my bed and rushed out of the room. Flames were spreading through the house. My wife was already awake and shouting for help. Our servants were also running through the halls in panic.

The fire grew very quickly. In a short time the whole house was filled with smoke and heat. We had no chance to save anything. We ran outside into the dark street. Soon the house that had once been full of life and quiet happiness was burning like a great torch.

Neighbors gathered around us and watched the flames rise into the night sky. Some tried to help, but it was useless. The fire destroyed everything. When morning finally came, only the broken walls of the house remained standing.

I felt a deep shock at the loss of my home. Yet I cannot deny that my mind also

returned again and again to the cat I had killed. Some part of me wondered if the terrible fire might somehow be connected to that cruel act. Still, I quickly pushed away such thoughts. I told myself that these ideas were foolish dreams.

When the crowd had gone and the smoke had cleared, I walked through the ruins of the house. One wall had remained standing almost whole. It was the wall that had once held my bed. A large group of people stood near it and looked closely at something on its surface.

Curious, I moved closer.

When I saw what they were staring at, a cold feeling passed through my body. On the white surface of the wall was the clear shape of a huge cat. The image looked almost alive. Around its neck was the shape of a rope.

I stood there in silence, unable to move. My heart beat heavily in my chest. For many minutes I could not speak.

Of course there was a simple explanation for this strange mark. The wall had been covered with fresh plaster. The night before the fire someone must have taken the body of the cat I had hung from the tree and thrown it through the open window into my room. When the fire began, the body of the animal must have fallen against the soft wall. The heat of the flames and the smoke had left the image there.

This explanation was reasonable, and after some time I accepted it. Yet even after I explained it to myself, the sight of that shape stayed in my mind. I could not forget the terrible outline of the cat with the rope around its neck.

Months passed.

We found another small house in a poor part of the city. My wife and I moved there with only a few things that had been saved from the fire. Life was difficult. I drank more than ever. The wine filled my head and darkened my thoughts.

But something else also troubled my mind.

I began to feel a strange desire. I wanted to find another black cat like Pluto. I do not know why this thought came to me again and again. Perhaps it was because I wished to quiet the guilt in my heart. Perhaps I wanted to prove to myself that I no longer feared such an animal.

One night I entered a small drinking house not far from where we lived. The room was dark and filled with smoke. Men sat at rough tables and drank loudly. While I was sitting there, my eyes fell upon a large black shape resting on top of a barrel.

It was a cat.

The animal looked very similar to Pluto. It was large and entirely black. When I touched it, the cat rose and rubbed its body gently against my hand. It seemed pleased by my attention.

The owner of the place said the cat did not belong to him. No one knew where it had come from. I decided to take it home with me.

As we walked through the streets together, I noticed something strange. Like Pluto, this cat also had only one eye. The empty place where the other eye had been looked pale in the weak light of the street.

At that moment a cold feeling touched my heart. But I had already taken the animal into my arms, and it seemed too late to turn away.

When we arrived home, my wife welcomed the cat with kindness. She was pleased that I had brought home a new pet. Soon the animal felt comfortable in our house. It followed me everywhere, just as Pluto had done before.

At first I felt some relief from the presence of this new cat. Yet after several days a strange fear began to grow inside me. The animal showed great love for me. It stayed always near my chair. At night it climbed onto my bed and lay across my chest.

This constant closeness began to disturb me deeply. I pushed the cat away, but it always returned. Its single eye seemed to watch me wherever I went.

There was also another strange detail about the animal.

On its chest was a patch of white fur. At first the mark looked small and uncertain. But as days passed I began to think that the shape of the white fur was slowly changing.

Little by little the mark began to take on a form that filled me with horror.

The white shape looked like a rope.

And not just a rope.

It looked exactly like the rope of a hanging.

Each day the shape seemed clearer. My wife could not see anything unusual in the mark, but for me the image became impossible to ignore. The white fur now formed the terrible shape of a rope with a loop.

I tried to convince myself that my mind was playing tricks on me. Yet the fear did not leave me.

The cat grew more and more attached to me. It followed every step I took. If I stood up, it stood beside me. If I walked across the room, it moved with me. Often it placed its heavy body on my chest when I lay down, making it hard for me to breathe.

Soon the presence of the animal filled me with deep hatred.

Yet I could not harm it.

Some strange fear stopped my hand. Perhaps it was the memory of Pluto. Perhaps it was the terrible shape of the rope that seemed to grow clearer on the cat's chest each day.

Whatever the reason, I began to feel trapped by the creature.

And with every passing day, my mind grew darker.

### Part 3

As the days passed, my hatred of the animal grew stronger and stronger. I could hardly explain the feeling, even to myself. The cat did nothing to harm me. In truth, it showed me only affection. It followed me everywhere with quiet loyalty. But this very devotion filled me with a terrible anger.

I began to fear the creature. When it looked at me with its single bright eye, I felt as if my soul were being examined. The white shape on its chest also troubled me deeply. At first the mark had been uncertain, but slowly it had grown clearer. Now the form could not be mistaken. It looked exactly like a rope tied for hanging.

I tried to avoid the cat whenever possible. When I walked through the rooms of the house, I watched carefully to see where it was. If the animal was near, I changed my path. But no matter where I went, the cat soon appeared again at my

side.

My wife noticed my strange behavior. She could not understand why I avoided the animal. For her the cat was gentle and pleasant. It followed her as well, but it seemed especially attached to me. She often laughed and said the creature had chosen me as its favorite companion.

These words only increased my anger.

My drinking also became worse than ever. The strong wine burned my throat and filled my mind with dark thoughts. At night I walked through the house in a restless state. Often the cat moved silently behind me. Its soft steps on the floor sounded like quiet whispers in the darkness.

Sometimes I woke in the middle of the night and found the creature sitting near my face, staring at me. Its single eye shone faintly in the dim light. In those moments my heart filled with fear and rage together.

Yet I still did not harm it.

There were times when my hand rose with the desire to strike the animal, but some strange feeling stopped me. Perhaps it was cowardice. Perhaps it was the deep terror that the creature had begun to awaken inside me. Whatever the cause, I held myself back.

Still, my hatred continued to grow.

One morning my wife asked me to help her bring some things from the cellar. Our small house had a dark cellar beneath it, reached by a narrow stairway. The place was cold and damp, and the walls were made of rough stone.

I followed my wife down the steps. The air inside the cellar smelled of earth and old wood. While we were walking among the barrels and boxes, the cat suddenly appeared beside my feet.

I had not noticed it following us.

The animal moved between my legs. In the dark room I stumbled and nearly fell down the steps. The sudden shock filled me with wild anger. My mind exploded with fury.

I seized an axe that stood near the wall. My plan was simple and terrible. I would kill the animal at once.

As I raised the axe high above my head, my wife cried out and rushed forward. She caught my arm and tried to stop me.

Her action filled me with even greater rage. Without thinking, I turned the axe away from the cat and struck her instead.

The blade entered her head with a dull sound. She fell instantly to the floor without a cry.

For several moments I stood there in silence, holding the axe in my hand. The terrible truth slowly entered my mind. My wife was dead.

At first I felt only shock. Then fear began to rise in my chest. I knew that if the crime were discovered, I would certainly be punished with death.

I had to hide the body.

My mind worked quickly now. I considered several ideas. I thought about burying the body in the cellar floor, but the ground was hard and the work would take too long. I thought about cutting the body into pieces, but the idea filled me with horror.

At last a better plan came to me.

One wall of the cellar had once held a small fireplace. The opening had been closed with bricks many years before. If I removed those bricks, there would be enough space inside the wall to hide the body. Afterward I could replace the bricks and cover them with plaster. No one would ever know.

I began the work at once.

With the axe and a small tool I removed several bricks from the wall. The opening grew large enough to hold the body. Then I lifted my wife and placed her inside the dark space.

The work was difficult, but I forced myself to continue. When the body was hidden, I carefully replaced the bricks one by one. I covered the surface with plaster and smoothed it so that it looked exactly like the rest of the wall.

When the work was finished, no sign remained.

I stepped back and looked at the wall. It appeared completely normal. Even a careful eye would not notice anything unusual.

I felt a strange sense of relief. My terrible crime seemed safely hidden.

But suddenly another thought struck me with fear.

The cat.

During all the terrible work, I had not seen the animal anywhere. I looked around the cellar quickly. The creature was gone.

For the first time in many weeks I felt something close to happiness. Perhaps the cat had run away in fear when I raised the axe. If it never returned, my life might become peaceful again.

That night I slept better than I had in a long time.

The next day passed quietly. The cat did not appear. My mind slowly began to calm. For several days the animal remained missing.

I began to believe that I had finally escaped the strange terror it had caused me. But fate was not finished with me yet.

#### Part 4

Several days passed after the terrible act in the cellar. During that time I searched the house many times, yet I never saw the cat. The animal seemed to have disappeared completely. At first I felt great relief. The creature that had filled my heart with fear and anger was gone.

I slept better during those nights than I had for many months. My mind slowly grew calm again. When I walked through the rooms of the house, I no longer felt watched by that single shining eye. The silence of the house seemed peaceful.

The body of my poor wife remained hidden behind the cellar wall. I visited the cellar often during those days, always looking carefully at the bricks I had replaced. The wall looked strong and natural. The plaster had dried well. No person could see that anything had been disturbed.

As each day passed without discovery, my confidence grew. I began to believe that my terrible secret would remain hidden forever.

One morning, about four days after the murder, several police officers arrived at the house. Someone had noticed that my wife had been missing. Perhaps a neighbor had spoken about it. Perhaps some small detail had caused suspicion.

Whatever the reason, the officers had come to examine the house.

When they knocked on the door, I felt a brief moment of fear. But I quickly forced myself to remain calm. I opened the door and welcomed them politely. My voice sounded steady, and I answered their questions without hesitation.

I told them that my wife had gone to visit a friend in another part of the city. I said she might remain there for several days. The officers listened carefully. They looked at my face and studied my movements. Yet they could find nothing strange in my manner.

Still, they asked to search the house.

I agreed at once. I knew that refusing would make them suspicious. Besides, I felt certain that the body was hidden perfectly.

The officers walked through every room. They opened cupboards and looked beneath tables. They examined the small yard behind the house. I followed them calmly, speaking in a friendly voice.

At last they came to the cellar.

A cold feeling touched my heart as we walked down the narrow steps. But I forced myself to remain confident. The officers carried small lamps, and their light moved across the rough stone walls.

They searched the cellar carefully. They examined the floor and the corners of the room. One officer even struck several parts of the wall with his hand to test the sound of the bricks.

Yet none of them noticed the place where my wife lay hidden.

At last the search was finished. The officers seemed satisfied that nothing unusual had happened in the house. They began to move toward the stairs.

At that moment a strange feeling of pride rose in my chest. I had committed a terrible crime, yet I had hidden it so well that even the police could not discover it.

The thought filled me with foolish confidence.

As the officers reached the top of the stairs, I followed them. Then, as if to show my complete calm, I began to speak boldly.

“Gentlemen,” I said, “you see that the house is in good condition. The walls are

strong. The building is well made.”

As I spoke, I lifted a heavy stick that I carried in my hand. With a careless movement I struck the wall of the cellar—exactly the wall that hid the body.

The sound of the blow echoed through the quiet room.

For a moment everything was silent.

Then a terrible noise answered from inside the wall.

At first it was a low cry, like the sound of a child in pain. But the cry quickly grew louder. It became a long and dreadful scream filled with anger and fear.

The police officers stopped at once. Their faces turned pale. They listened in horror as the terrible sound continued.

The cry came again from within the wall.

It was not the voice of a human being.

It was the cry of a cat.

In a moment the officers rushed back into the cellar. They looked at the wall where I had struck the bricks. The terrible noise continued behind the stones.

My heart stopped.

I understood the truth at once.

The cat—the creature I had believed lost—had been hidden inside the wall with the body of my wife.

During my terrible work in the cellar the animal must have followed me quietly into the opening. When I closed the bricks, I had sealed it inside.

Now, after days of silence, my careless blow had awakened it.

The police officers quickly began to break the wall apart. Brick after brick fell to the floor. Soon the dark opening appeared.

Inside stood the body of my wife, already beginning to decay.

Upon her head sat the black cat.

Its single eye burned with a fierce light. Its mouth was open in a wild cry.

The creature had revealed my crime.

At that moment I knew that my fate was sealed.

The officers seized me immediately. I did not resist. My strength was gone.

And as they dragged me away from the cellar, the terrible cry of the cat still

echoed in my ears.

## The Fall of the House of Usher

### Part 1

During a dark and quiet day in the fall of the year, I traveled alone through a lonely part of the country. The sky was covered with heavy gray clouds. The air felt still and cold. No wind moved the trees, and no sound came from the empty land around me. As the evening began to fall, I finally saw the house of my old friend, Roderick Usher.

The moment I looked at the building, a deep sadness filled my heart. I could not explain this feeling clearly. It was not simple fear. It was not simple sorrow. It was a strange weight upon my mind, as if the house itself carried a dark spirit. The sight of the old building made my thoughts heavy.

I stopped my horse and studied the place carefully. The house stood alone near a small dark lake. The walls were gray and worn by many years of weather. Long narrow windows looked down like empty eyes. The stones of the house were old, yet they had not fallen apart. Everything seemed strong and complete. Still, the building gave the feeling that something was wrong.

In front of the house lay the silent lake. Its water was black and still. When I looked into it, I saw the reflection of the house and the dark trees that surrounded it. The image in the water made the whole scene seem even more strange and disturbing.

I had not come to this place by chance. Some days earlier I had received a letter from Roderick Usher himself. We had known each other when we were young boys. Even then he had been quiet and thoughtful, but kind and intelligent. After our childhood we had not met again for many years.

His letter had been full of strong emotion. He wrote that he was suffering from a terrible illness of the mind and body. He begged me to come and stay with him for a time, hoping that my company might ease his suffering. Because our friendship had once been close, I could not refuse his request.

Yet as I looked at the house now, I felt uneasy about my visit.

I noticed something else while studying the building. A thin crack ran down the front wall from the roof to the ground. The line was very narrow and difficult to see. Still, it seemed to divide the house into two parts. The crack continued down the wall and disappeared into the dark water of the lake.

After a few moments I shook away these strange thoughts and rode forward. A servant opened the door and led me inside the house. The halls were dark and long. The air smelled old and heavy. Thick carpets covered the floors, and dark pictures hung on the walls.

The servant guided me through many winding passages. At last we reached a large room where my friend waited.

When I saw Roderick Usher, I was deeply shocked. The man before me hardly looked like the boy I once knew. His face was pale and thin. His eyes shone with a strange bright light. His hair was soft and long, moving lightly around his head.

Still, there was something in his face that reminded me of the friend of my youth. The shape of his mouth and the calm line of his nose had not changed. But the expression in his eyes made me uneasy.

He rose quickly and came toward me with open arms. For a moment he held my hands tightly. His movements were sudden and nervous, as if his emotions were too strong for him to control.

“My dear friend,” he said softly, “I am so grateful that you came.”

His voice surprised me. Sometimes it sounded low and weak. Then suddenly it grew loud and sharp. The change happened without warning, like the sudden movement of a storm wind.

We sat down together. For some time we spoke about simple things from the past. Yet I soon noticed that Usher seemed easily disturbed by the smallest sound. A door closing in another room made him jump. The faint noise of wind against the walls caused him to turn his head quickly.

After a while he spoke openly about his illness.

“I suffer from a terrible condition,” he said. “My senses are too strong. Light hurts my eyes. Certain sounds fill me with pain. Even the taste of food troubles me. My nerves are always shaking.”

He explained that he could wear only soft clothing. Strong smells made him sick. Loud music caused him real suffering. His whole body seemed painfully sensitive to the world around him.

I listened with concern. It was clear that my friend's illness was serious. Yet I also felt that something deeper troubled his mind.

"There is another fear that never leaves me," he continued quietly. "I believe that the house itself has power over my spirit."

I looked at him with surprise.

"This house has stood here for many generations," he said. "My family has lived here for centuries. Over time the stones, the trees, and the dark lake have become connected with our lives. I feel that the building itself affects my mind."

He spoke these words slowly, as if he had thought about them many times.

"The air around the house seems heavy with influence," he said. "It presses upon my thoughts day and night."

I tried to comfort him with calm words. I suggested that his illness might be causing these strange ideas. Yet even as I spoke, I remembered the uneasy feeling I myself had experienced when first seeing the house.

Soon our conversation turned to another matter.

Usher had a sister named Madeline. She lived in the same house and was the last other member of the family. I had heard about her in the past but had never met her.

While we were speaking, the door opened quietly. A tall woman entered the room and walked slowly across it. She did not look at us or say a word. Her face was pale, and her movements were strange and silent.

In a moment she passed through another door and disappeared.

"That was my sister," Usher said softly.

He lowered his head and covered his face with his hands.

"Her illness is even more mysterious than mine," he whispered. "No doctor can understand it."

I soon learned that Lady Madeline suffered from long periods of deep sleep in which she seemed almost dead. During these times her body grew cold and still.

Then suddenly she would wake again and walk through the house in silence.

The doctors had little hope for her recovery.

As my first evening in the house ended, I began to understand that the darkness surrounding the Usher family was deeper than I had imagined.

And yet I did not know that far greater horror still waited for us in the days to come.

## Part 2

During the days that followed my arrival, I tried my best to help my friend. Roderick Usher's condition seemed to change from hour to hour. At times he spoke calmly and clearly. Then suddenly he would fall into deep silence, staring at nothing with wide and fearful eyes.

I soon understood that his mind lived in constant fear. He believed that some terrible event waited for him in the near future. Yet he could not explain exactly what that event might be.

"I feel it coming," he told me one evening while we sat near the window. "Something dark moves slowly toward me. I cannot see it clearly, but I know it is near."

I tried to calm him with gentle conversation. I spoke about ordinary subjects and pleasant memories from our youth. Sometimes he listened with interest. At other times he seemed not to hear my words at all.

To pass the time, we read books together. The library of the house contained many old volumes. Some told stories of strange lands and ancient kings. Others spoke about ideas that were difficult to understand.

Often Usher asked me to read aloud while he sat quietly and listened. The sound of my voice seemed to comfort him for a while. Yet even during these quiet hours I noticed that he sometimes turned his head suddenly, as if listening for some distant noise.

We also spent time listening to music. Roderick played a small string instrument that produced soft and gentle tones. When he played, his face changed.

His expression became thoughtful and sad, as if the music carried his feelings into the air.

The songs he played were unlike any music I had heard before. The sounds moved slowly and strangely, sometimes beautiful and sometimes full of deep sorrow. While he played, he often sang in a low voice.

One evening he shared with me a song that he had written himself. The song told of a great palace that once stood in a bright and joyful land. In that palace lived a wise and noble king. Music and laughter filled the halls, and the people of the land were happy.

But slowly dark clouds gathered around the palace. Strange shadows appeared in its windows. The joyful music faded into sad and broken sounds. At last the palace fell into silence, and dark figures moved through its empty rooms.

When he finished the song, Usher sat still for a long time.

“The palace is the mind,” he said quietly. “When the mind is strong and bright, life is full of beauty. But when darkness enters, everything changes.”

His words filled me with sadness. I wished deeply that I could help him escape the fears that haunted him.

During this time I saw Lady Madeline only once again. She passed through a distant hall while I stood near the door of the library. Her movements were slow and uncertain. Her pale face looked calm but distant, as if she were walking in a dream.

Soon after that moment she disappeared from the rooms of the house completely.

One evening Usher entered my room with a face full of sorrow.

“My sister is gone,” he said in a quiet voice.

I understood his meaning at once. Lady Madeline had died.

The sadness in his eyes moved me deeply. The Usher family had always been small. Now Roderick stood alone as the last living member of his ancient line.

Yet what happened next surprised me greatly.

Usher told me that he wished to place the body of his sister in a small room beneath the house before the final burial. He explained that the doctors of the

region were curious about her illness. He feared they might ask to examine the body.

“I want her to rest in peace for a few days,” he said. “After that we will bury her properly.”

I agreed to help him with this task.

Late that night we carried the body together through the dark halls of the house. The air felt cold and heavy. Our lamps threw long shadows across the walls.

We descended into the cellar beneath the building. There we found a small room made of strong stone. The door was heavy and made of iron. Long ago the room had been used as a place to store valuable objects.

We placed the body inside a coffin and set it carefully in the center of the room. For a moment we stood silently beside it.

As I looked at the face of Lady Madeline, I felt a strange uneasiness. Her features looked calm and peaceful, yet something about her expression seemed almost alive.

I mentioned this quietly to Usher.

He nodded slowly.

“My sister and I were born together,” he said. “We were twins. For many years our lives have been closely connected.”

His voice shook slightly as he spoke.

When we finished our work, we closed the heavy iron door and returned to the rooms above.

After that night, the mood of the house changed even more.

Usher’s fear grew stronger each day. He walked through the rooms in silence, listening to every small sound. Often I found him staring at the walls with wide eyes.

The air inside the house felt heavier than before. Even I began to feel uneasy in the dark halls and silent rooms.

And yet I still did not understand the terrible truth that was slowly rising from the depths beneath the house.

### Part 3

Several days passed after we placed the body of Lady Madeline in the stone room beneath the house. During that time the condition of Roderick Usher grew worse in a way that frightened me greatly.

His face became even paler than before. His eyes moved quickly from side to side, as if he expected danger to appear from every shadow. Sometimes he sat quietly for hours without speaking. At other times he walked through the halls with sudden nervous movements.

I also noticed that he seemed to listen constantly for sounds.

When the wind moved outside the house, he turned his head sharply. When the wood of the old building made its small natural noises, his whole body became tense. It was as if he expected something terrible to happen at any moment.

I tried again and again to calm him. I suggested reading together or walking through the rooms as we had done before. Yet these simple activities no longer helped him.

One evening a powerful storm began to gather outside. Dark clouds covered the sky completely. The wind moved through the trees with a long and restless sound. From my window I could see strange clouds of light moving across the sky.

I went to bed early that night, hoping to sleep. But the storm grew stronger as the hours passed. The wind pushed against the walls of the house. Rain struck the windows sharply. Every sound seemed louder in the silence of the old building.

I could not sleep.

After some time I rose from my bed and looked outside. The night sky looked strange and unnatural. There was no moon, yet the clouds seemed to shine with a faint and ghostly light. The lake near the house reflected that light in a pale and silent glow.

The sight filled me with deep uneasiness.

Just then I heard a quiet sound at my door.

When I opened it, I saw Roderick Usher standing in the hall. His face looked

more frightened than I had ever seen before. His eyes were wide and full of terror.

“You are not asleep,” he said in a trembling voice.

“No,” I replied. “The storm is too strong.”

He stepped into the room slowly.

“I cannot sleep,” he whispered. “The sounds of the night trouble me. I feel that something is moving in the darkness.”

I tried to speak calmly.

“The wind and the storm are making these sounds,” I said. “Old houses often produce strange noises during heavy weather.”

But Usher shook his head slowly.

“No,” he said. “These sounds are different.”

To distract him from his fear, I suggested that we read together. I chose a large old book that lay on the table near my bed. The story was simple and full of action, and I hoped it would turn his mind away from his worries.

I began to read aloud.

In the story, a brave knight forced open a heavy wooden door with great strength. As I spoke the words describing the breaking of the door, a sudden sound came from somewhere in the house.

It was a dull cracking noise.

I stopped reading for a moment and listened. Then I told myself that the sound must have come from the storm outside. The wind often caused the old wood of the building to move.

I continued reading.

In the next part of the story the knight struck a great metal shield that hung upon the wall. When the shield fell to the ground, it made a loud ringing sound.

As I read those words, another noise echoed through the house.

This time the sound was sharp and metallic.

I looked at Usher. His face had become almost white. His lips moved slightly, but no words came from them.

“Did you hear it?” he whispered at last.

I tried to remain calm.

“The storm is causing many strange sounds tonight,” I said.

But Usher began to move back and forth in his chair.

“I have heard these sounds for many days,” he said quietly. “You did not notice them before. But I heard them every night.”

His voice grew weaker.

“They are coming from below the house.”

A cold feeling passed through my body.

Usher suddenly stood up and walked toward me.

“We placed her in that room,” he said in a low shaking voice. “But she was not truly dead.”

I stared at him in horror.

“I knew it,” he continued. “I knew it even then. But I was afraid to speak. I was afraid to open the coffin again.”

His words filled me with terrible understanding.

The sounds we had heard were coming from the stone room beneath the house.

Lady Madeline had been alive.

At that moment another sound rose through the building. It was a heavy movement, followed by the slow opening of a door somewhere in the distance.

Usher covered his face with his hands.

“She is coming,” he whispered.

The wind struck the house violently. The door of my room flew open with a loud crash.

In the doorway stood a tall pale figure.

It was Lady Madeline.

Her white clothes were torn. Blood marked her dress and face. She moved forward slowly, trembling with weakness.

With a low cry she fell upon her brother.

For a moment the two figures stood together.

Then both of them fell to the floor.

Roderick Usher had died of terror.

I did not wait another moment.

I ran from the room and rushed through the dark halls of the house. The storm outside had grown wild and powerful. I escaped through the door and ran toward the open land.

When I reached the edge of the lake, I turned once more to look at the house.

At that moment a bright flash of light crossed the sky. In that light I saw the long crack in the wall of the building grow wider.

The crack opened slowly from the roof down to the ground.

With a terrible sound the great house split apart.

The walls fell outward. The roof collapsed. The broken stones slid into the dark water of the lake.

In a few moments the entire House of Usher had disappeared beneath the silent surface.

## Silence—A Fable

### Part 1

Listen to me carefully. I will tell a story that is strange and dark. It is a story that was once spoken by a demon. The demon told this story long ago in a lonely place.

The place was a wide land in Libya, near the great river called Zaire. It was a wild region where no towns stood and no people lived. The air there was hot and heavy. The sky often looked dark and restless.

The demon spoke of that land and of a strange valley that lay beside the river.

The valley was not peaceful or beautiful. It was a place filled with trouble and movement. The ground there shook and trembled. Strange plants grew from the earth, tall and thin, with pale colors. They moved slowly in the wind like living creatures.

The river beside the valley was also strange.

Its water was not calm. It rushed forward with strong and angry force. It did not move quietly like other rivers. Instead it made a loud and endless sound, like many voices crying together.

The surface of the river shone dark red in the light. The color looked like blood. The water moved in twisting circles and sudden waves.

Above the valley the sky often filled with thick clouds. These clouds moved quickly across the heavens. Sometimes they formed strange shapes that looked like giant shadows.

Yet even when the clouds passed away, the land below never became peaceful.

Tall gray rocks stood along the sides of the valley. Their shapes were sharp and broken. They looked like the remains of old towers that had fallen long ago.

The wind moved constantly through the valley. It bent the tall plants back and forth. The plants made a soft whispering sound as they moved together.

The demon said that no human being lived in that place. No birds flew above it. No animals walked through the valley.

Yet one day a man entered the valley.

The demon told how he had watched the man from a dark place among the rocks.

The man walked slowly down into the valley. He was tall and thin. His face looked tired and sad. His clothes were dark and simple.

When he reached the center of the valley, he stopped beside the river. Then he sat down upon a large stone.

The man did not speak.

He simply looked at the moving water of the river.

The wind continued to blow through the valley. The plants bent and rose again. The river rushed past with its deep red color.

Yet the man remained still.

The demon watched him carefully.

Time passed. The sky grew darker as evening approached. The clouds above moved faster and faster across the heavens.

The man did not move from his place beside the river.

At last the demon decided to disturb him.

The demon stood up among the rocks and called to the valley. With a powerful voice he spoke the name of great storms and terrible winds.

Soon the sky answered his command.

A mighty storm rose above the valley. The clouds turned black. Thunder rolled across the sky. Strong winds rushed down into the land.

The river grew even more violent. Its waves struck the stones along the shore.

The tall plants bent deeply in the wind. Their thin bodies struck against one another with a loud rustling sound.

Lightning flashed across the dark sky.

The demon watched the man beside the river.

But the man did not move.

He sat upon the stone as before, looking at the water.

The storm grew stronger and stronger.

Thunder shook the valley. Lightning filled the sky with sudden white light. The

wind pushed against the ground with great force.

Yet still the man remained calm.

The demon grew angry.

“You will not fear the storm,” he said to himself. “Then I will bring something greater.”

He raised his voice again and called upon the spirits of the land.

Soon the river changed.

The water rose higher and higher. It moved with wild strength. Great waves crashed against the rocks.

The red water spread across the valley floor. It moved closer and closer to the place where the man sat.

The ground itself began to shake.

But the man did not rise.

He remained seated upon the stone, looking at the river as before.

The demon became filled with rage.

“You do not fear the storm,” he cried. “You do not fear the river. Then I will call upon something even more terrible.”

The demon lifted his arms toward the sky.

And then something strange began to happen in the valley.

## Part 2

The demon lifted his arms toward the sky and called upon the powers that lived in the dark places of the earth.

Soon the storm began to change.

The thunder slowly faded away. The lightning disappeared from the sky. The wild wind that had filled the valley grew weaker and weaker.

The clouds stopped moving.

The river, which had rushed and twisted with great force, began to slow. The red waves sank down into the deep water again.

The tall thin plants that had bent and whispered in the wind now stood perfectly

still.

In a short time the whole valley became quiet.

Not a single sound could be heard.

The sky above grew dark and empty. No wind moved the clouds. The air felt heavy and thick.

Even the river stopped its violent movement. The surface of the water became smooth and silent like dark glass.

The demon watched the man beside the river.

For a moment nothing happened.

The man still sat upon the stone.

His head was slightly lowered as he looked toward the quiet water. His hands rested calmly upon his knees.

But the silence of the valley grew deeper.

The plants no longer whispered. The river made no sound. The clouds above did not move.

The land itself seemed to be holding its breath.

The demon smiled in the darkness among the rocks.

“Now you will fear,” he said quietly.

The silence continued to spread across the valley like a heavy shadow.

It filled the air and pressed upon the earth.

The man slowly lifted his head.

His eyes moved across the silent land. He looked toward the still plants. He looked toward the quiet sky.

At last his eyes rested upon the motionless river.

The demon watched carefully.

A change came over the face of the man.

His calm expression faded. His eyes widened with sudden fear.

Slowly he stood up from the stone.

He turned his head from side to side, listening for some sound that did not exist.

But the valley remained silent.

The silence seemed deeper than night. It was heavier than the air of the valley.

The man began to tremble.  
He stepped away from the stone and looked around him again.  
Still there was no sound.  
No wind.  
No movement.  
No voice of water.  
The silence of the valley had become complete.  
The man cried out in terror.  
But even his own voice sounded weak and strange in that empty air.  
He ran across the ground, moving away from the river and the stone where he had been sitting.  
His steps echoed loudly in the stillness.  
The demon laughed quietly as he watched.  
“You did not fear the storm,” he said softly. “You did not fear the river. But now you fear silence.”  
The man ran wildly through the valley.  
His face showed deep terror. His eyes looked everywhere at once.  
Yet no matter where he ran, the silence followed him.  
At last he fell to the ground among the tall pale plants.  
His body shook with fear.  
The demon rose slowly from his place among the rocks and looked across the silent valley.  
“Now I have shown you my greatest power,” he said.  
“The power of silence.”  
And the demon finished his story.

## The Masque of the Red Death

### Part 1

The Red Death had spread through the land for many months. No sickness had ever been so terrible. It came suddenly and killed quickly. The pain began with sharp weakness in the body. Soon there was dizziness and great fear. Then blood appeared upon the skin, especially upon the face.

These red marks were the sign of the disease. When they appeared, no one wished to help the sick person. The illness moved from body to body with great speed. Many people died within half an hour after the first signs appeared.

The whole country lived in fear.

Yet Prince Prospero was not afraid.

He was a rich and powerful ruler who loved beauty and pleasure. While thousands of people in his land suffered from the terrible disease, he gathered a thousand of his healthy and wealthy friends and left the troubled country.

They went to one of the prince's great buildings in the forest. It was a large and strong castle surrounded by thick walls. Only one heavy iron gate allowed entrance.

Once everyone had entered, the prince ordered the gate to be locked. No one could come in, and no one could leave.

Inside the walls there was plenty of food and wine. There were musicians, dancers, and actors. The prince wanted his friends to forget the disease outside and live only for joy and pleasure.

"Let the Red Death remain outside," he said. "Here we will laugh and celebrate life."

And so they lived in the castle for many months.

The rooms of the building were very strange and beautiful. Prince Prospero had designed them in his own unusual style. Instead of forming a straight row, the rooms turned sharply from one to another in winding paths.

There were seven great rooms in all.

Each room had a different color.

The first room was blue. Its walls and decorations were deep blue, and blue light entered through its tall windows.

The second room was purple. Purple cloth covered the walls, and purple light filled the space.

The third room was green. The fourth was orange. The fifth room was white. The sixth room was violet.

But the seventh room was different from all the others.

Its walls were covered with black cloth from the floor to the ceiling. The floor itself was also black.

Yet the windows of this room were deep red.

The red light that entered through those windows spread across the dark walls and floor in a frightening way. Anyone who stepped into that room felt uneasy at once.

Because of this strange appearance, very few guests wished to enter the black room.

In that room there also stood a great clock made of black wood. Each hour the clock produced a deep and heavy sound that filled all the rooms of the castle.

Whenever the clock struck the hour, the musicians stopped playing. The dancers paused in their movements. Even the laughter of the guests faded into silence.

Everyone listened to the slow and powerful sound of the clock.

When the final note faded away, the guests laughed nervously and returned to their dancing and music. Yet each time the clock struck again, the same moment of fear passed through the crowd.

As the months went by, Prince Prospero decided to hold a great masked celebration. It would be the most magnificent party ever seen inside the castle.

On the night of the celebration, the guests gathered in the seven colored rooms.

Everyone wore masks and strange costumes. Some looked like kings and queens. Others appeared as animals or spirits. The prince himself loved unusual beauty and strange imagination, so the costumes were bold and surprising.

Music filled the castle. The guests moved from room to room, laughing and dancing beneath the colored lights.

The blue room was filled with soft music. In the purple room dancers moved in graceful circles. In the green room people spoke loudly and joyfully.

Yet very few people entered the black room with the red windows.

The red light made their faces look pale and frightening. The great black clock stood silently there, waiting for the next hour to strike.

As midnight slowly approached, the music and laughter grew louder.

None of the guests believed that death could reach them inside those strong walls.

But fate was already moving quietly through the castle.

And before the night ended, Prince Prospero and his friends would learn that no wall can keep death away.

## Part 2

The music continued to play through the colored rooms. Laughter rose and fell like waves in the air. The guests moved in bright circles beneath the strange lights that shone through the windows.

As the night passed, the celebration grew even wilder. Masks of every shape and color filled the rooms. Some costumes were beautiful. Others were strange and frightening. The prince had allowed his guests to use their imagination freely, and many of them had created unusual appearances.

Some people looked like spirits from old stories. Others wore the clothing of kings, soldiers, or travelers from distant lands. There were bright colors everywhere. The dancers moved from one room to another as the music followed them through the winding halls.

Yet the black room at the end of the passage remained mostly empty.

Few people wished to stay long in that place. The red light that filled the room made every face appear dark and unnatural. The tall black clock stood there silently, waiting for the hour.

When the clock began to strike, everything changed.

At midnight the clock gave its deep and heavy sound.

One.

Two.

Three.

The sound continued slowly through the castle.

Each note echoed through the seven rooms. The musicians stopped playing.

The dancers froze where they stood. The guests looked at one another quietly.

The sound of the clock filled every corner of the building.

Twelve deep notes rang through the air.

When the final sound faded away, the guests began to laugh again, just as they had done before. The musicians lifted their instruments. The dancers prepared to move once more.

But suddenly someone noticed something strange.

A figure stood among the guests who had not been there before.

At first the people nearby only stared in surprise. Then whispers spread quickly from person to person.

The new guest wore a costume unlike any other.

His clothing looked exactly like the burial clothes of a dead body. His mask showed the face of a person who had died from the Red Death. Dark red marks covered the mask. They looked like the terrible signs of the disease.

The sight filled many guests with fear and anger.

It seemed cruel and terrible to appear in such a costume while the real disease was killing people outside the castle walls.

Soon the whispers reached Prince Prospero.

When he saw the strange figure, his face turned red with anger.

“Who dares to insult us in this way?” he cried loudly. “Who dares to mock the Red Death in my castle?”

The music stopped completely. The dancers stepped back as the prince spoke.

“Seize him!” Prospero shouted to his guests. “Take off his mask so we may know who has done this terrible thing!”

Yet no one moved.

The figure stood quietly in the blue room. His head was slightly lowered. The red marks upon the mask seemed dark and terrible in the colored light.

Slowly he began to walk forward.

He moved calmly from the blue room into the purple room.

The guests stepped aside as he passed.

No one dared to touch him.

From the purple room he moved into the green room.

The crowd watched in silence as the strange figure continued forward.

Prince Prospero stood frozen with anger.

At last he seized a sharp knife from the table beside him.

“Cowards!” he shouted. “If none of you will stop him, I will do it myself!”

With these words he rushed forward.

The figure had already reached the white room. From there he moved into the violet room, walking slowly toward the final chamber.

The prince followed close behind.

The guests watched in silence as the two figures moved through the colored rooms one after another.

At last the strange figure entered the black room with the red windows.

Prince Prospero rushed into the room after him.

For a moment there was silence.

Then the guests heard a terrible cry.

The prince fell to the floor.

He was dead.

The guests rushed into the black room in fear and anger. Several of them seized the strange figure at once.

They pulled away the mask.

But beneath the mask there was no face.

Beneath the costume there was no body.

The figure was empty.

At that moment a terrible truth filled the minds of everyone present.

The Red Death had entered the castle.

One by one the guests fell to the ground.

The disease spread quickly through the rooms.

Before the night ended, every person inside the castle lay dead upon the floor.

The great clock stopped.

The fires of the castle went dark.

And the Red Death ruled over everything.

## The Cask of Amontillado

### Part 1

I had suffered many insults from Fortunato. I had endured them quietly for a long time. But when he insulted me once more, I finally decided that I must take revenge.

I made this decision carefully.

I did not wish simply to punish him. I wished to punish him in such a way that I would not be caught. A true act of revenge must be safe for the one who carries it out.

I also wanted Fortunato to know that I was the one who punished him.

These thoughts remained in my mind for many months. During that time I continued to behave kindly toward Fortunato. Whenever we met, I smiled and spoke with him as a friend.

He never guessed my true feelings.

Fortunato was a man who believed himself to be very intelligent, especially in the matter of wine. He was proud of his ability to judge the quality of fine drink. In truth, he did know something about wine, but his pride was even greater than his knowledge.

At the time of this story our city was celebrating a great festival. The streets were filled with people wearing masks and bright clothing. Music and laughter echoed through the narrow roads.

Fortunato also wore a costume for the celebration. He had dressed himself as a fool. Bright cloth covered his body, and a pointed hat with small bells rested upon his head.

When I met him that evening, he had already been drinking heavily.

“My dear friend!” he cried when he saw me. “What good fortune to meet you tonight!”

His voice sounded cheerful, but his breath smelled strongly of wine.

I smiled warmly.

“My dear Fortunato,” I said, “how pleased I am to see you.”

Then I spoke of a certain wine.

“I have received a large container of a very rare drink,” I said quietly. “It is called Amontillado. But I am not certain that it is genuine.”

Fortunato stopped walking at once.

“Amontillado?” he said. “During the festival? That is impossible.”

“I had the same doubt,” I replied. “Yet I paid a high price for it before I could ask your opinion.”

Fortunato looked at me with sudden excitement.

“Where is this wine?” he asked.

“It is in my cellar,” I said.

Fortunato waved his hand impatiently.

“Let us go there at once.”

I shook my head slowly.

“My friend,” I said, “I see that you are busy tonight. Perhaps I should ask another man to examine the wine. Luchesi understands these matters very well.”

When Fortunato heard the name of Luchesi, he laughed loudly.

“Luchesi cannot tell Amontillado from ordinary wine!” he said proudly.

“Perhaps not,” I answered calmly. “Still, some people believe that his judgment is equal to yours.”

Fortunato’s face grew serious.

“Come,” he said. “Let us go to your cellar.”

“But you have a cough,” I replied. “The air in my cellar is very cold and damp. Your health is important.”

Fortunato coughed loudly.

“This cough is nothing,” he said. “It will not kill me.”

“Very well,” I said quietly. “Let us go.”

We walked together through the noisy streets until we reached my house.

My servants were not there. Earlier that evening I had told them that I would not return until morning. I had ordered them to remain in the house.

Of course I knew they would do the opposite.

As soon as they believed I had left, they would go out to join the celebration. And so they had done.

The house was empty.

I took two small lamps from the wall and handed one to Fortunato. Then I led the way down a long stair into the cellar beneath my house.

The air grew colder as we descended. The stone walls were wet with moisture. Fortunato coughed again.

“We should return,” I said kindly. “Your cough grows worse.”

“It is nothing,” he insisted. “Let us continue.”

We walked deeper into the cellar.

The walls were lined with many bottles and containers of wine. Some were very old and rare.

Yet we continued farther into the dark passages beneath the house.

Soon the walls of the cellar changed. Human bones were piled high along the sides of the narrow path. They had been placed there long ago as part of my family burial place.

The air smelled cold and heavy.

Fortunato raised his lamp and looked around.

“Your family has many dead,” he said.

“Yes,” I replied quietly. “We are an old family.”

Then we walked deeper into the darkness.

## Part 2

We continued our slow walk through the dark passages beneath my house. The stone walls were wet, and drops of water fell quietly from the ceiling. The air grew colder and heavier the deeper we went.

Fortunato lifted his lamp and looked at the walls around us. White marks covered the stones in many places. The damp air made the marks grow thick along the ground.

“What is that on the walls?” he asked.

“That is salt from the stone,” I said. “It grows here because the air is wet.”

Fortunato coughed again, this time more strongly.

“We should return,” I said once more. “Your cough is growing worse. I would not wish you to become ill.”

But Fortunato waved his hand and laughed.

“It is nothing,” he said. “A small cough will not kill me.”

“Still,” I said calmly, “Luchesi—”

At once Fortunato interrupted me.

“Luchesi knows nothing!” he said with sudden anger. “Let us continue.”

I smiled quietly and led the way deeper into the underground passages.

Along the walls stood long rows of bones. Many generations of my family had been buried there. The bones were piled carefully in large stacks. Behind them lay dark openings in the stone where the bodies had once rested.

The narrow path twisted and turned through the burial place.

As we walked, I stopped beside one group of bones and moved them aside. Behind them stood several bottles of wine.

I took one bottle and handed it to Fortunato.

“Drink,” I said. “It will protect you from the cold air.”

Fortunato took the bottle happily. He lifted it and drank deeply.

“To the dead who rest here,” he said with a laugh.

“And to your long life,” I replied.

He drank again and then returned the empty bottle to the ground.

For a few moments we walked in silence. Only the sound of our steps and the small ringing of the bells on Fortunato’s hat could be heard in the darkness.

At last he spoke again.

“Your family name is very old,” he said. “What is your family sign?”

“A great foot crushing a snake,” I answered.

“And the snake?” he asked.

“The snake is biting the foot,” I said.

Fortunato laughed.

“And what words belong to your family?” he asked.

“No one harms me without punishment,” I said quietly.

Fortunato did not seem to think about the meaning of those words. He simply nodded and continued walking.

Soon we reached a deeper part of the burial place where the air was even colder. The walls of stone were covered thickly with the white salt.

Fortunato coughed again.

“We must go back,” I said. “This place is not good for your health.”

But again he refused.

“The Amontillado,” he said impatiently. “Where is it?”

“It is not far now,” I answered.

At last we reached a small opening in the stone wall. The space was narrow and deep, no larger than a small room.

The floor and walls were rough rock. At the back of the opening two iron rings were fixed into the stone. A short chain hung from each ring.

“The Amontillado is inside,” I said, pointing into the dark space.

Fortunato stepped forward at once.

He raised his lamp and moved into the narrow opening to examine it.

“I do not see the wine,” he said.

“Move a little farther,” I told him. “It is at the back.”

Fortunato stepped deeper into the small space.

In a moment he had reached the stone wall at the end.

Before he could turn around, I moved quickly behind him.

I took the chains from the wall and fastened them around his body.

In only a few seconds he was fixed tightly to the stone.

At first he was too surprised to speak.

Then he looked at me with confusion.

“What does this mean?” he asked.

I said nothing.

Instead I walked back to the entrance of the small opening. There I began to move the pile of bones that lay beside the wall.

Behind the bones lay bricks and mortar that I had prepared earlier.

Fortunato watched me with growing fear.

“Montresor,” he said slowly, “this is a joke, yes?”

I did not answer.

I placed the first brick into position across the opening.

Then I spread mortar across it and placed another brick beside it.

Slowly the wall began to rise.

Fortunato stared at me in silence as he began to understand.

“The Amontillado!” he cried suddenly.

“Yes,” I said calmly. “The Amontillado.”

And I continued building the wall.

### Part 3

I continued my work slowly and carefully.

The small wall began to rise across the opening of the stone space. Brick after brick I placed into position. Between each brick I spread the thick gray mortar.

At first Fortunato remained silent.

He watched me with wide eyes, as if he could not yet believe what was happening. The dim light from his lamp shook slightly in his trembling hand.

Then he pulled suddenly against the chains.

The iron rings held him firmly against the wall. The chains made a sharp metallic sound as he struggled.

I stopped my work for a moment and listened.

The sound of the chains echoed through the dark burial place. For several seconds the noise continued as he tried to free himself.

But the chains were strong.

At last he stopped.

I lifted my lamp and looked at him calmly. Then I returned to my work.

Another row of bricks rose across the opening.

Fortunato began to laugh.

The sound was strange and weak. It echoed strangely among the stone walls

and the piled bones.

“Very good,” he said with a forced smile. “A fine joke.”

He tried to speak in a cheerful voice.

“We will laugh about this later, yes? When we return to the party.”

I continued placing bricks into the wall.

The opening was now half closed.

Fortunato watched me carefully.

“We will go back soon,” he said. “The others will be waiting for us.”

I said nothing.

I spread more mortar and placed another brick.

Now the wall reached nearly to my chest.

Fortunato’s smile slowly disappeared.

He pulled once more against the chains, harder than before. The bells on his hat shook and rang sharply in the dark air.

“Montresor,” he said, “this is not funny.”

I continued my work in silence.

Soon the wall reached the level of his shoulders.

The small opening grew darker as the bricks rose higher.

At that moment Fortunato began to scream.

The sound was loud and wild. It filled the narrow passages of the burial place and echoed among the stones.

For a moment I paused.

I looked around the dark cellar.

The echoes slowly faded away.

Then I raised my voice and shouted back with equal strength.

My own cries echoed through the underground passages.

Soon the sounds died away into silence.

Fortunato did not scream again.

For a long moment there was only quiet.

Then I heard a weak laugh from behind the growing wall.

“A good joke,” he said faintly. “A very good joke.”

His voice sounded tired now.

“We will laugh about this together later.”

I continued building.

Only a small opening remained.

Fortunato spoke again, this time in a softer voice.

“For the love of God, Montresor.”

I answered calmly.

“Yes,” I said. “For the love of God.”

Then I placed the final bricks into position.

The wall was almost complete.

Through the small opening I could see Fortunato’s face in the weak light of the lamp.

He said nothing more.

I lifted the final stone.

Before placing it, I listened carefully.

From behind the wall came a very faint sound.

It was the soft ringing of the small bells on his hat.

I placed the last brick into position.

The wall was finished.

I spread mortar across the stones and covered the work carefully. Then I returned the pile of bones to its place in front of the wall.

The burial place looked exactly as it had before.

For fifty years no one has disturbed those bones.

## The Imp of the Perverse

### Part 1

In my life I have often noticed a strange feeling inside the human mind. It is a feeling that many people experience, yet few people truly understand. I call this feeling the spirit of doing wrong for no clear reason.

A person may know that a certain action is foolish or dangerous. He may understand clearly that the action will bring trouble or punishment. Yet sometimes he still feels a strong desire to do it.

This desire grows slowly at first. Then it becomes stronger and stronger until it seems impossible to resist.

We feel this strange force especially when we stand in a dangerous place.

For example, imagine that you are standing at the edge of a very high cliff. Far below you can see the rocks and the dark ground. You know that if you fall, you will die.

You step back from the edge at once because you wish to live.

Yet suddenly a strange thought enters your mind.

You begin to imagine how it would feel to jump.

You know the idea is terrible. You know that jumping would destroy you. Still, the thought continues to return.

The more you try to push it away, the stronger it becomes.

At last the strange idea fills your whole mind. Your heart beats faster. Your body trembles.

And for a moment you feel a powerful desire to leap from the cliff.

This feeling is the spirit I speak of.

It is the desire to do wrong simply because we know it is wrong.

Many people do not recognize this force within themselves. They believe that every action of the mind must come from reason or purpose. But the human mind is not always ruled by reason.

There is another part of our nature that pushes us toward foolish or destructive

actions.

I myself once became the victim of this strange power.

My story will show how strong this spirit can become.

Many years ago I lived with an old man who had great wealth. We were not related, yet we lived together peacefully for a long time.

At first I felt no hatred toward him. He trusted me completely. In fact, he believed that I was one of his closest friends.

But slowly an evil idea entered my mind.

I realized that if the old man died, his wealth would become mine.

The thought did not come suddenly. It grew little by little, like a shadow spreading across the ground.

I began to imagine how easily the old man might die.

The idea did not fill me with horror.

Instead it filled me with calm calculation.

I decided that I would kill him.

Yet I wished to do it in such a way that no one would ever suspect me.

I planned the act carefully.

The old man had a habit of sitting in a certain chair every evening to smoke his pipe. The room where he sat was quiet and closed. No servants entered that place during the late hours of the night.

I prepared a candle that produced a strange smoke.

The smoke was deadly but difficult to notice.

One evening I entered the room quietly while the old man slept in his chair.

I placed the candle near him and lit it.

The smoke slowly filled the room.

Then I left and closed the door.

In the morning the servants found him dead.

The doctors believed that he had died suddenly from natural causes. No one suspected murder.

I inherited the old man's wealth exactly as I had planned.

For many years I lived happily and comfortably.

I believed that my crime had been perfect.  
No person in the world knew the truth.  
Yet the spirit of doing wrong had not finished its work upon my mind.  
Slowly a strange feeling began to grow inside me.

## Part 2

Slowly a strange feeling began to grow inside me.

At first it was only a quiet thought that came and went. I would remember the death of the old man, and I would feel a small movement in my mind, like a whisper.

The whisper seemed to say, "No one knows."

At that time the thought gave me pleasure. It reminded me that I had carried out the perfect crime. The world believed the old man had died naturally, and his wealth was now mine.

Many years passed in peace.

Yet the whisper continued to return.

Often when I walked alone in the street, the thought would suddenly appear in my mind.

"No one knows."

At first I smiled when I heard this silent voice. But after some time the words began to change.

Instead of saying, "No one knows," the whisper began to say something else.

It said, "You could tell them."

The idea seemed strange and foolish. Why would I ever confess my crime? I had nothing to gain from such an act. My life was comfortable and safe.

Still, the thought returned again and again.

"You could tell them."

I tried to push the idea away, but the effort only made it stronger.

The more I resisted the thought, the more often it appeared.

I would be walking quietly through the city when suddenly my heart would

begin to beat faster. A terrible idea would rise in my mind.

“You could speak the truth.”

My hands would grow cold.

I would shake my head and say to myself, “That is madness. I will never speak.”

Yet the whisper returned.

Day after day the thought grew stronger.

Soon I began to fear it.

I realized that the danger no longer came from the law or from other people. The danger now came from my own mind.

The strange power inside me pushed me toward destruction.

Sometimes I walked through crowded streets where many people passed by. Suddenly I would imagine myself shouting my secret to everyone around me.

The idea filled me with terror.

I would stop walking and breathe deeply until the feeling passed.

Yet the thought always returned.

One day I was walking along a busy street when the feeling became stronger than ever before.

The whisper inside my mind repeated the same words again and again.

“Say it.”

My heart beat faster.

“Say it.”

My hands began to tremble.

“Say it.”

I tried to remain silent, but the pressure inside my mind became unbearable.

At last the words burst from my mouth before I could stop them.

“I killed him!” I cried.

The people around me turned quickly and stared at me.

I felt the blood leave my face.

In a moment I understood what I had done.

The secret I had hidden for so many years had escaped from my own lips.

Several men seized my arms at once. Others began asking questions.

I could no longer deny the truth.  
The terrible spirit within my mind had forced me to reveal everything.  
Soon I told them the whole story.  
Now I sit here waiting for the punishment that must come.  
My crime remained hidden from the world for many years.  
Yet in the end I was destroyed by the strange force within my own mind.  
The spirit that drives us to do wrong simply because we know it is wrong.

## The Island of the Fay

### Part 1

Music sometimes has the power to create pictures inside the mind. When we hear a gentle song, we often imagine places filled with quiet beauty. These imagined places may not exist in the real world, yet they appear clearly in our thoughts.

One day, while listening to soft and peaceful music, I began to imagine such a place.

In my mind I saw a small island resting in the middle of a calm river. The water moved slowly and quietly around it. Tall trees grew across the island, their branches forming a soft green roof above the ground.

The air seemed cool and still.

No people lived on that island. No houses or paths disturbed the natural beauty of the place. Only trees, plants, and soft grass covered the land.

The river flowed gently around the island. Its surface shone with small points of light where the sun touched the water.

Yet the island was divided into two very different parts.

One side of the island stood bright in the sunlight. Warm light passed easily through the leaves of the trees. The ground there looked open and peaceful. The air seemed calm and welcoming.

But the other side of the island lay in deep shadow.

Tall trees grew closely together on that side. Their branches blocked the light of the sun. The ground there looked darker and colder.

Between these two halves ran a narrow path of water where the river passed around the island.

The movement of the river created a slow and steady motion of light and shadow across the trees.

As I watched this imagined scene in my mind, I felt that the island seemed to represent two parts of life.

One side was filled with light and warmth.

The other side held darkness and quiet mystery.

Time passed slowly in this peaceful place.

The sun moved across the sky, and the light on the island changed little by little. The bright side remained warm and open. The shadowed side remained deep and silent.

Suddenly I noticed something new.

A small figure appeared among the trees on the bright side of the island.

The figure was light and graceful, like a spirit of nature. Its shape seemed almost human, yet softer and more delicate.

It moved slowly along the edge of the trees.

In its hand it carried a small shining object that gave off a gentle light.

The figure walked quietly beside the river. Each step was slow and careful, as if it followed a path known only to itself.

When the figure reached the edge of the bright side of the island, it paused.

Then it stepped into the darker half.

As soon as it entered the shadowed forest, the small light in its hand shone more clearly against the darkness.

The figure continued walking, slowly crossing from one side of the island to the other.

The movement was calm and steady.

As the spirit moved, the light in its hand passed across the dark trees like a small star.

The river continued its quiet motion around the island.

The sun moved lower in the sky.

Slowly the shadow on the island grew larger.

The bright side became smaller as the evening approached.

Yet the small figure continued its slow journey through the forest.

It seemed to move in harmony with the passing of time itself.

Watching this scene, I began to feel that the island was more than simply a place of beauty.

It seemed to represent the passage of life.

Light and shadow moved across the land just as joy and sorrow move through human life.

And the small figure crossing the island seemed to carry the quiet light of time itself.

## Part 2

The small figure continued to move slowly through the shadowed forest. The light it carried shone gently against the dark trees. Each step seemed calm and careful, as if the spirit followed a path that had been walked many times before.

The river around the island moved without sound. The water flowed in a smooth circle around the land, reflecting the fading light of the sky.

As the sun sank lower, the bright side of the island grew smaller. The shadow slowly spread across the ground and the trees.

The spirit moved steadily along the edge where light and darkness met.

For a long time the figure remained in the deep shade beneath the tall trees. The small light in its hand seemed like a quiet star in the forest.

Watching the movement of the figure, I began to understand the meaning of the scene.

The island seemed to represent the world itself.

The bright side stood for the early hours of life, when everything appears clear and hopeful. The shadowed side represented the later hours, when life grows quiet and mysterious.

The spirit crossing the island moved at the same slow pace as time.

When the figure first appeared, it walked in the warm light of the sun. Now it traveled through the deeper shade of evening.

Soon the spirit reached the far side of the island.

There the trees stood close together, and the darkness beneath them was thick and still. The small light in the spirit's hand shone softly against the black shapes of the trunks.

At last the figure stepped out from the shadow of the trees and came again into the fading light beside the river.

The sun was now very low in the sky.

Its last light touched the water and the tops of the trees. The island itself grew quiet and calm as evening approached.

The spirit paused at the edge of the river.

For a moment it stood still, holding the small shining light before it.

Then the figure slowly faded from sight.

The island remained silent beneath the darkening sky.

The river continued its quiet movement around the land.

Soon the last light of the sun disappeared completely. The shadow of night covered the island from end to end.

The trees stood motionless. The water flowed in silence.

The small spirit that had crossed the island was gone.

Yet its journey seemed to remain in the air like a memory.

The slow movement from light into darkness had told a simple truth.

All living things begin their path in the bright hours of the day.

And all must eventually pass through the quiet shadow of evening.

Thus the island, the river, the light, and the silent spirit together formed a gentle picture of life itself.

## The Assignation

### Part 1

One night in the beautiful city of Venice I was sitting alone in a small boat on one of the quiet canals. The air was calm and warm. The water moved slowly beneath the soft light of the moon.

Venice looked peaceful at that late hour. Tall buildings stood silently beside the narrow water roads. Their windows reflected pale light upon the dark surface of the canal.

My boat moved gently along the water as the boatman guided it forward with slow and steady strokes.

Suddenly I heard a soft cry from above.

I looked up toward one of the balconies that hung over the canal.

A woman stood there.

She was dressed in dark clothing, and in her arms she held a small child. Her face was pale in the moonlight, and her eyes seemed filled with deep fear.

Before I could speak or understand what was happening, the child slipped from her arms.

The small body fell quickly toward the water.

I did not stop to think.

In a moment I leaped from the boat into the canal. The cold water closed around me as I reached downward in the darkness.

My hand touched the child's clothing. I pulled the small body upward and held it tightly.

Then I returned to the boat.

The child was alive but weak. I lifted the boy carefully and held him above the water.

At that moment another voice spoke behind me.

"Give the child to me."

I turned quickly.

A tall man stood beside me in the boat. I had not seen him arrive. His appearance was striking and unusual.

His face was pale, and his dark eyes shone brightly in the moonlight. His clothing was rich and elegant, yet his expression was calm and serious.

I handed the child to him.

The man held the boy gently and examined him with great care.

“He will live,” the stranger said quietly.

His voice was soft but full of strength.

I studied his face more closely. There was something noble and powerful in his appearance, yet also something mysterious.

The woman on the balcony above us had disappeared.

The man looked toward the building where she had stood.

“Follow me,” he said.

The boat turned toward a nearby landing place. In a few moments we stepped out onto the stone path beside the canal.

The man carried the child in his arms as he led me through a narrow doorway into the building.

Inside we entered a large room filled with rich furniture and beautiful art. Paintings covered the walls. Soft light from several lamps filled the room.

A woman stood there waiting.

It was the same woman who had stood upon the balcony.

Her face was pale and full of emotion. When she saw the child alive in the stranger’s arms, she rushed forward with a cry.

“My child!” she said.

The man placed the boy gently in her arms.

She held him closely and wept with relief.

For several moments the room remained quiet except for the soft sound of her tears.

At last the woman looked toward me.

“You saved his life,” she said with deep gratitude.

I bowed my head slightly.

“I only did what anyone would do,” I replied.

The tall stranger watched this scene silently.

After a moment he turned to me again.

“You have done a brave act tonight,” he said. “And because of this, I trust you.”

His eyes held mine with serious intensity.

“I ask you to listen to a story,” he continued. “It is the story of my life and the strange fate that has brought us together tonight.”

I agreed at once.

Something about the man’s voice and presence made it impossible to refuse.

We sat together in the quiet room while the woman carried the child away to another chamber.

Then the stranger began to speak.

And the story he told was darker and more mysterious than I had imagined.

## Part 2

The tall man sat quietly for a moment before he began his story. The soft light of the lamps fell across his pale face, and his dark eyes seemed filled with deep thought.

At last he spoke.

“My name,” he said slowly, “is not important. In this city many people know me, but few truly understand me.”

His voice was calm, yet there was sadness within it.

“You saw the woman who stood on the balcony,” he continued. “She is the most beautiful woman in Venice. Yet she is also the most unhappy.”

I listened carefully as he spoke.

“She is married,” he said. “Her husband is a powerful man. He is rich, proud, and feared by many people.”

The stranger paused for a moment and looked toward the closed door where the woman had gone with the child.

“But her heart does not belong to that man,” he said quietly.

I began to understand.

“She loves you,” I said.

The stranger did not answer directly, but his expression told me that my guess was correct.

“We have known each other for many years,” he continued. “From the moment we first met, our lives became connected.”

His voice grew softer.

“Yet the world has placed us in chains that cannot easily be broken.”

I asked carefully, “And the child?”

The man looked toward the door again.

“He is her son,” he said. “But he is not the son of her husband.”

The meaning of his words was clear.

For a moment the room fell silent.

The stranger rose slowly and walked toward a table where several small objects lay upon the surface.

Among them I noticed a small glass bottle filled with dark liquid.

He lifted the bottle and held it in his hand.

“Life,” he said quietly, “is often filled with pain and conflict. Yet there are moments when beauty and love rise above everything else.”

His eyes shone strangely as he spoke.

“When those moments end, what remains?”

I did not know how to answer.

The stranger returned to his seat.

“Tonight you saved the life of that child,” he said. “Because of that, I trust you with my final thoughts.”

His words surprised me.

“Your final thoughts?” I asked.

He smiled slightly.

“Yes.”

For a moment he remained silent.

Then he spoke again.

“I have lived for beauty,” he said. “I have searched for it in art, in music, and in the human soul.”

His voice grew stronger.

“But the world around us is filled with cruelty and darkness. Beauty cannot live easily in such a world.”

I felt uneasy as I listened.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

The stranger looked at the small bottle again.

“Soon I will leave this world,” he said quietly.

The meaning of his words shocked me.

“You must not speak in this way,” I said quickly. “Life is still before you.”

But the man shook his head.

“My path is already chosen,” he replied calmly.

At that moment the door opened.

The woman returned to the room.

Her face was calmer now, though her eyes still showed deep emotion. She looked first at the stranger, then at me.

The two of them stood silently facing one another.

There was something powerful in their gaze, something that seemed to pass between them without words.

At last the stranger lifted the small glass bottle.

The woman watched him carefully.

She did not cry out or try to stop him.

Instead she stepped closer.

For a moment they stood together beneath the soft light of the lamps.

Then the stranger drank from the bottle.

He lowered it slowly.

The woman reached for the bottle and drank from it as well.

I stood frozen with horror.

Within a few moments the strength left their bodies. They sank together to the floor.

Their hands remained joined as life faded from their faces.

The room grew very quiet.

I understood then that their love had chosen to escape the world rather than remain imprisoned within it.

Outside the window the dark canals of Venice moved silently beneath the night sky.

## The Pit and the Pendulum

### Part 1

I was sick with fear.

My mind moved slowly, as if a heavy cloud covered my thoughts. I tried to remember what had happened to me, but the memory came only in broken pieces.

I knew that judges had spoken. I remembered seeing their dark clothing and their pale faces. Their lips moved while they spoke words of judgment.

Yet the sound of their voices had seemed distant and strange.

I tried to hear what they said, but the words slipped away before I could understand them.

Then everything became dark.

I felt myself falling into deep silence.

For a long time I believed that I had died.

But slowly I began to feel something again.

I felt that I was lying on my back. My hands and feet were not tied. I could move them freely, though my body felt weak.

The air around me was cold and damp.

I opened my eyes.

Yet I could see nothing.

The darkness around me was complete.

At first I thought that I had gone blind. The blackness was so deep that it seemed to press against my face.

My heart beat wildly as fear filled my mind.

I stretched out my hands carefully.

The ground beneath me felt smooth and cold like stone.

I tried to stand.

My legs trembled, but after a moment I rose slowly to my feet.

I stood still in the darkness, listening.

No sound reached my ears.

The silence around me felt heavy and endless.  
I realized that I was inside some kind of room or prison.  
But how large was it?  
I did not know.  
Perhaps the walls stood close beside me. Perhaps the space was wide and open.  
I needed to discover the truth.  
With great care I began to walk forward.  
Each step was slow and uncertain. I stretched my arms before me, afraid that I might strike a wall or fall into some unseen danger.  
After several steps my hands touched a hard surface.  
It was a wall.  
The wall felt smooth and cold like metal or stone. I moved my hands along its surface, trying to understand the shape of the place where I stood.  
Slowly I began to walk beside the wall, keeping one hand against it.  
In this way I hoped to measure the size of the room.  
My steps counted the distance.  
One step.  
Two steps.  
Ten steps.  
Twenty steps.  
The wall continued beside me.  
After many steps I finally reached a corner.  
Then another wall began.  
I continued walking.  
The ground felt uneven in some places. The air smelled damp and old.  
My mind filled with terrible thoughts about the place where I had been imprisoned.  
At last I reached another corner.  
I continued my slow journey along the wall.  
Time seemed to move very slowly in the darkness.  
My fear grew with every step.

At last I reached the point where I had first touched the wall.  
I had walked around the entire room.  
From the number of steps I believed the room was not very large.  
Yet my strength was leaving me.  
My body felt weak with hunger and fear.  
I sank to the ground once more and fell into troubled sleep.  
When I woke again, I felt slightly stronger.  
Someone had placed bread and water beside me while I slept.  
I ate quickly.  
After this I decided to explore the center of the room.  
Slowly I walked away from the wall.  
My arms stretched forward in the darkness.  
Suddenly my foot caught on something.  
I fell hard to the ground.  
My chin struck the floor, but my lips did not touch it.  
Instead my face hung just above empty space.  
A terrible smell rose from the darkness below.  
I stretched my hand forward carefully.  
There was nothing beneath it.  
I understood the truth at once.  
I had fallen at the very edge of a deep pit.  
If I had taken one more step, I would have fallen into the darkness forever.

## Part 2

For a long moment I lay beside the edge of the pit, trembling with fear.  
My face still hung above the empty darkness. A cold wind seemed to rise slowly from the deep space below. The smell that came from it was heavy and unpleasant.  
I moved very carefully and pulled myself away from the edge.  
My heart beat wildly as I returned slowly toward the wall of the room.  
When I finally reached the wall, I sat down beside it and tried to calm my

thoughts.

Now I understood the terrible plan of my enemies.

They had placed me inside a dark prison where a deep pit waited in the center. In the darkness I might easily have fallen into it and died.

Only by chance had I escaped.

The thought filled me with horror.

I remained beside the wall for a long time, afraid to move again.

At last I grew tired and fell asleep once more.

When I woke again, I felt strange and weak.

My body lay flat upon the floor, but now I could not move my arms or legs.

Strong cloth bands held me tightly against a wooden frame beneath my body. Only my head and my left arm remained free.

I turned my head slowly and tried to understand where I was.

A dim light now filled the room.

For the first time I could see the walls around me.

They were made of smooth metal plates that formed a square room. The metal surface reflected the weak light in dull gray colors.

Strange pictures covered the walls. Some showed human figures suffering in terrible ways. Others showed dark shapes that seemed to move in the flickering light.

My eyes moved upward.

At first I did not understand what I was seeing.

But slowly a terrible object became clear above me.

From the ceiling hung a long metal blade shaped like a wide curved knife.

The blade hung from a long rod. It moved slowly from side to side like the swinging arm of a great clock.

Back and forth.

Back and forth.

The motion was slow and steady.

As I watched, the blade continued its endless swing above my body.

At first it seemed far away.

But as time passed I began to notice something terrible.  
The blade was slowly moving downward.  
Each swing brought it slightly closer to my chest.  
I understood the cruel plan at once.  
The blade would continue to swing until it finally cut through my body.  
My enemies had designed a slow and terrible death for me.  
At first I felt frozen with fear.  
I stared upward at the swinging blade.  
Back and forth.  
Back and forth.  
Each movement seemed to fill my mind completely.  
I could think of nothing else.  
Hours passed as I watched the blade descend slowly toward me.  
At last I realized that the blade had reached a height where it would soon touch  
my body.  
Panic filled my heart.  
I pulled against the cloth bands that held me in place, but they were strong and  
tight.  
Escape seemed impossible.  
Then my eyes noticed something beside me.  
Near my left hand stood a small plate of food.  
The food smelled strongly of spices and meat.  
The smell attracted several small animals that lived in the room.  
Rats.  
Many rats moved across the floor and along the walls. They watched the plate  
of food eagerly.  
An idea entered my mind.  
Slowly and carefully I took some of the food and spread it across the cloth  
bands that held my body.  
Then I lay still and waited.  
Soon the rats approached.

At first they came slowly and cautiously.

But the smell of the food was strong.

Soon many rats covered my body.

They began eating the food that I had spread across the cloth.

As they ate, their sharp teeth cut through the cloth bands.

Slowly the bonds began to weaken.

The swinging blade continued to descend closer and closer.

At last the cloth holding my chest broke.

With a sudden movement I pulled myself free and rolled away from the wooden frame.

The blade fell sharply against the empty surface where my body had been only moments before.

I had escaped.

But my enemies had not yet finished their terrible game.

### Part 3

I had escaped from the falling blade.

For a moment I lay on the cold floor, breathing heavily. My body shook with weakness and fear. The terrible machine above me continued to swing for a few moments, but now it cut only empty air.

Soon the motion stopped.

The blade slowly rose again toward the ceiling and disappeared into the darkness above. Whoever watched me had seen my escape and removed the machine.

But I knew that my enemies would not allow me to live so easily.

I stood slowly and looked around the room.

The dim light still filled the metal walls. The terrible pictures on the walls seemed even more frightening now. The figures painted there appeared to twist and suffer in the weak light.

Suddenly I noticed something strange.

The metal walls were beginning to move.

At first the motion was very slow. I could hardly see it. But after several moments I became certain that the walls were closing in toward the center of the room.

The square shape of the chamber slowly began to change.

The walls pushed inward, forcing me to move away from them.

The air in the room grew hotter.

I soon realized the reason.

The metal walls themselves were becoming hot.

A red glow appeared along their surfaces. The terrible pictures painted upon them now looked alive in the growing heat.

I could feel the warmth against my skin.

The walls continued to move inward.

I stepped away from them and moved toward the center of the room.

But the center of the room held the pit.

My enemies had created a terrible trap.

The walls would push me closer and closer to the pit until I had no place left to stand.

I looked around desperately.

The glowing metal walls formed a shape that slowly changed from a square into a narrow diamond. The space in which I could stand grew smaller every moment.

The heat grew stronger.

The metal glowed brighter and brighter.

My breath became difficult.

Soon I was forced to stand very near the edge of the pit.

I looked down into its black depth.

A cold wind rose from the darkness below.

My heart filled with horror.

If I stepped backward to escape the heat, I would fall into the pit.

If I remained where I stood, the burning walls would crush me.

I felt that my strength was leaving me.  
My head swam with weakness and terror.  
The walls moved closer.  
The heat became almost unbearable.  
At last I stood with my feet at the very edge of the pit.  
The glowing walls pushed closer behind me.  
I could no longer escape.  
My body leaned backward toward the darkness.  
In that final moment I closed my eyes and prepared to fall.  
Suddenly I felt a strong hand seize my arm.  
I opened my eyes.  
A loud voice filled the room.  
Soldiers rushed forward and pulled me away from the edge of the pit.  
The moving walls stopped at once.  
The door of the chamber had opened.  
I saw many men entering the room.  
Their leader stood before them.  
It was General Lasalle of the French army.  
His soldiers had captured the city.  
The terrible prison of the old rulers had been broken open.  
I had been saved at the final moment.

## The Premature Burial

### Part 1

There are few events that fill the human mind with more terror than the thought of being buried alive. The idea of waking in darkness beneath the ground is so terrible that it can drive a person to madness.

Stories about such events have been told many times. Some people believe these stories are only imagination. Yet careful study shows that such events have truly happened.

In many places there are records of people who were placed in a coffin while they were still alive.

Sometimes illness caused the mistake. The body would become cold and still. The person would appear dead even though life remained inside.

After burial the unfortunate victim would awaken in the coffin beneath the earth.

The horror of such a situation is almost impossible to describe.

I had studied many cases like this.

I read about a woman who had been buried for several days before people discovered signs of movement inside her grave. When the coffin was opened, her body showed terrible evidence of her struggle to escape.

I read of another case in which a young girl had been placed inside a burial vault. Some time later the vault was opened again. The coffin lay broken upon the floor, and the body rested beside it.

Such stories filled my mind with deep fear.

Yet my fear did not come only from reading these terrible reports.

I myself suffered from a strange illness.

At times I would fall into a deep sleep that looked exactly like death. During these periods my body became cold and motionless. My breathing grew so faint that it could hardly be seen.

These attacks could last for many hours.

Sometimes they lasted for an entire day.

When the attack ended, I would slowly return to full awareness. Yet during the deep sleep I could not move or speak.

Doctors who examined me could not fully understand my condition.

Because of this illness I lived in constant fear.

I feared that one day I would fall into such a deep sleep that people would believe I had died.

Then they would bury me.

And I would wake inside the coffin beneath the earth.

This thought haunted me day and night.

I could think of nothing else.

I imagined every terrible detail of such an event.

I imagined the darkness inside the coffin. I imagined the heavy earth above it. I imagined my desperate struggle for air.

These thoughts grew stronger as the months passed.

At last I decided to prepare carefully for the possibility of such a fate.

I gave strict instructions to my friends and family.

If I appeared to be dead, they must not bury me quickly.

They must wait many days and examine my body carefully.

I also prepared a special burial place.

The coffin I designed was not an ordinary one.

It contained several devices that could help me escape if I awakened inside it.

The lid of the coffin could be opened easily from the inside.

Small tubes allowed air to enter.

A bell was attached to the coffin by a long cord. If I pulled the cord, the bell would ring above the ground and alert anyone nearby.

I even placed food and water inside the coffin.

With these preparations I hoped to protect myself from the terrible fate I feared.

Yet my mind did not find peace.

Even with all these precautions, the fear remained deep within me.

My imagination continued to picture the dark prison of the grave.

I could not escape the thought that one day I might wake beneath the earth,

alone and helpless.

And one night my worst fear seemed to become reality.

## Part 2

One night my worst fear seemed to become reality.

I woke suddenly in complete darkness.

At first I could not understand where I was. The air around me felt close and heavy. I tried to stretch my arms, but something hard pressed against them on every side.

My heart began to beat wildly.

I tried to sit up, but my head struck a wooden surface just above my face.

In that moment a terrible thought entered my mind.

I believed that I had been buried alive.

Panic filled my whole body.

I tried to breathe deeply, but the air felt thick and warm. My hands moved wildly in the darkness, touching rough wood around me.

The space was narrow.

I could not fully extend my arms or legs.

The terrible truth seemed clear.

I believed that I was lying inside a coffin beneath the earth.

My mind filled with images of the grave above me. I imagined the heavy soil pressing down upon the wooden box.

I tried to shout, but my voice sounded weak in the darkness.

Fear grew stronger with every passing second.

I remembered the stories I had read about people waking in their coffins. I imagined the desperate struggle they must have felt in those final moments.

My breathing became fast and painful.

I tried to remember the safety devices I had placed inside my coffin.

With trembling hands I searched for the cord connected to the bell above the ground.

But my fingers found nothing.  
My fear grew even greater.  
I tried to push against the lid above me.  
It did not move.  
The darkness seemed endless.  
For several minutes I lay there trembling with terror.  
Then I noticed something strange.  
The air around me smelled of damp wood and water.  
That smell was not like the dry earth of a grave.  
I remained still and listened carefully.  
A soft sound reached my ears.  
It was the gentle movement of water against wood.  
Slowly my mind began to understand the truth.  
I was not inside a coffin.  
I was lying in a narrow sleeping place inside a small boat.  
The boat moved slowly on the water of a river.  
The wooden surface above me was not a coffin lid. It was the low roof of the small space where sailors sometimes sleep.  
I pushed the wooden cover upward.  
It opened easily.  
Fresh air rushed into my lungs.  
I sat up and looked around.  
The morning light shone across the river. Several sailors stood nearby on the boat, speaking quietly as they worked.  
My body trembled with relief.  
The terrible prison I had imagined did not exist.  
I had frightened myself with my own thoughts.  
That moment changed my life completely.  
I realized that my greatest enemy had not been illness or death.  
It had been my imagination.  
From that day forward I forced myself to abandon my fearful thoughts. I

stopped reading stories about burial and death. I filled my days with travel, exercise, and conversation.

Slowly my mind became calm again.

The terrible fear that had once ruled my life disappeared.

And I have never again felt the horror of that dark dream.

## The Domain of Arnheim

### Part 1

The love of beauty is one of the strongest feelings in the human heart. Many people admire beauty when they see it in nature, in art, or in the faces of others. Yet very few people truly understand how powerful this love can become.

Some men search for beauty in paintings or music. Others travel across the world to see mountains, forests, and rivers. But there are a few rare people who wish to shape beauty with their own hands.

One such man lived not long ago. His name was Ellison.

Ellison was born into a family that possessed enormous wealth. When he became an adult, he discovered that he had inherited an amount of money greater than that possessed by almost any person in the world.

For many people such wealth would bring a life of comfort and pleasure. Yet Ellison did not wish simply to enjoy luxury.

His mind was filled with a different dream.

He wished to create the most beautiful place on earth.

Ellison believed that nature itself held the greatest beauty. Yet he also believed that human thought could guide nature toward even greater perfection.

His dream was to combine the natural world with careful design so that the result would be more beautiful than either alone.

In order to accomplish this dream, Ellison spent many years traveling.

He studied rivers, forests, mountains, and valleys in many parts of the world. He observed how sunlight moved across the land during different hours of the day. He watched how water reflected the sky and the trees around it.

Slowly he formed a clear vision in his mind.

At last he found the place he had been searching for.

It was a wide valley surrounded by high hills. A river passed quietly through the center of the land. Tall trees grew along its banks, and soft grass covered the open fields.

The valley already possessed natural beauty, but Ellison believed it could become even more perfect.

He purchased the entire region.

Then he began his great work.

Workers carefully shaped the land according to his plan. They moved trees from one place to another. They guided the river through new curves so that its path appeared more graceful.

New plants and flowers were brought from distant lands.

Yet Ellison never allowed the work to appear artificial. Every change was made slowly and carefully so that the valley still seemed natural.

When the work was complete, the place became known as the Domain of Arnheim.

Visitors who entered the valley felt that they had stepped into a dream.

The hills rose gently around the land like protective arms. The river flowed with quiet beauty through the center. Trees stood in graceful groups, and flowers filled the air with soft color.

Yet the true wonder of the place could not be seen all at once.

Ellison had designed the valley so that its beauty revealed itself gradually.

The visitor approached the valley by boat along the winding river. At first only small parts of the landscape appeared through the trees.

As the boat moved forward, new scenes slowly opened before the eye.

Each view seemed more beautiful than the last.

Light and shadow played gently across the water and the land. The river curved through the valley in long and peaceful lines.

Those who visited the Domain of Arnheim often felt that they had entered a world beyond ordinary life.

Ellison himself lived quietly within this beautiful land.

Yet he rarely spoke about his great work.

For him the valley itself was the true expression of his thoughts.

And the beauty he had created there would soon reveal itself in a way few people could ever forget.

## Part 2

The true beauty of the Domain of Arnheim appeared slowly to those who entered it.

A visitor did not see the whole valley at once. Instead the journey began far away along the river that flowed toward the hills.

The traveler approached the valley by boat.

At first the river moved through ordinary land. Trees stood along the banks, and the water flowed calmly between them. Nothing in the scene seemed unusual.

Yet little by little the surroundings began to change.

The hills on each side grew higher and more graceful in shape. The trees became larger and more beautiful. Their branches spread wide above the river, forming soft shadows on the water.

The river itself began to curve in long, gentle lines.

Each turn revealed a new view of the land.

Sometimes the traveler saw open green fields filled with light. At other times the river passed through quiet places where tall trees stood close together.

The movement of the boat created the feeling that the land was slowly unfolding before the eyes.

Ellison had planned every part of this experience.

He believed that beauty is strongest when it appears gradually. A sudden view of the entire valley would not have produced the same deep feeling.

Instead he allowed the river to guide the visitor step by step into the heart of the landscape.

As the boat moved deeper into the valley, the hills on both sides grew closer together. The river became narrower, and the trees formed a thicker forest above the water.

The sunlight filtered through the leaves and created moving patterns of light and shadow.

The air became cooler and more peaceful.

At last the boat reached a narrow passage between two high hills.

The traveler could see almost nothing beyond the trees ahead.

The river turned once more.

Then suddenly the valley of Arnheim opened before the eyes.

The sight was breathtaking.

The hills formed a wide circle around the valley like a great natural wall. Inside that circle lay a vast open space filled with beauty.

The river spread into a wide shining lake at the center of the valley. The surface of the water reflected the sky and the surrounding hills.

Gentle slopes covered with green grass rose from the edges of the lake. Groups of trees stood upon these slopes in perfect harmony with the shape of the land.

Bright flowers grew among the grass.

The sunlight fell softly across the valley, creating a peaceful and almost magical atmosphere.

At the far side of the lake stood a beautiful building.

It rose among the trees upon a gentle hill. The structure looked simple and natural, yet its design was elegant and perfect.

This was the home of Ellison.

From this place he could see the entire valley that he had shaped according to his vision.

Visitors who reached this point often felt that they had entered a world beyond ordinary life.

The beauty of Arnheim seemed too perfect to belong to the everyday world.

It appeared almost like a dream made real.

Ellison believed that human imagination could work together with nature to create such beauty.

In the Domain of Arnheim he had shown that this dream was possible.

The valley remained quiet and peaceful beneath the open sky, a living example of the harmony between human thought and the natural world.

## Landor's Cottage

### Part 1

A few years ago I received an invitation from my friend Ellison. His letter asked me to visit the beautiful land he had created in the valley known as Arnheim.

I had heard many stories about that place. Travelers spoke of its beauty with deep admiration. They said that Ellison had shaped the valley into one of the most perfect landscapes in the world.

Because of this I accepted the invitation with great interest.

My journey to Arnheim took several days. At last I arrived near the hills that surrounded the valley. From there I continued my travel by boat along the river that led toward the heart of the land.

As the boat moved forward, the beauty of the landscape slowly appeared.

The river curved gently between green hills. Tall trees stood along the banks, their branches touching the quiet water. The air felt calm and fresh.

Each turn of the river revealed a new view of the land.

Sometimes the water passed through open spaces filled with warm sunlight. At other times the trees grew close together, creating deep shade across the river.

The journey itself seemed designed to prepare the mind for the beauty ahead.

At last the valley of Arnheim opened before me.

The wide lake at the center of the valley shone brightly in the light of the sky. The surrounding hills formed a peaceful circle around the land.

The beauty of the place was greater than I had imagined.

Yet my destination was not the great house where Ellison lived.

Instead he had asked me to visit a smaller dwelling known as Landor's Cottage.

A servant guided my boat along a narrow path of water that led away from the open lake. The river grew smaller as we moved deeper into the quiet landscape.

Soon the water flowed between gentle banks covered with grass and flowers. Small trees grew beside the path, their branches bending softly in the light wind.

The place felt calm and welcoming.

At last the servant pointed ahead.

“There,” he said quietly.

I looked toward the bank of the river.

A small house stood among the trees.

It was Landor’s Cottage.

The cottage appeared simple at first glance. Yet the longer I looked, the more beautiful it seemed.

The building stood on a gentle rise above the water. Flowers grew around its walls. A narrow path led from the door down toward the riverbank.

The roof sloped softly above the walls, and wide windows opened toward the peaceful landscape.

Everything about the place suggested comfort and quiet happiness.

The house did not appear large or rich.

Yet it possessed a natural beauty that many grand buildings lack.

As I stepped onto the grassy bank, I felt that I had entered a place where peace and beauty lived together.

The cottage seemed perfectly suited to its surroundings.

Trees stood nearby, offering soft shade during the day. The river flowed gently below, reflecting the light of the sky.

Even the sound of the water added to the calm feeling of the place.

I walked slowly toward the cottage door.

With each step I noticed new details.

The flowers around the house were arranged with great care. The small garden paths curved gently between them.

Nothing appeared forced or unnatural.

Every part of the landscape seemed to belong exactly where it stood.

As I reached the door of Landor’s Cottage, I felt certain that the quiet beauty of this small dwelling held a secret worth discovering.

Part 2

I stepped inside Landor's Cottage and looked around with quiet interest.

The interior of the house was simple, yet very beautiful. Soft light entered through the wide windows and filled the rooms with a warm glow. The furniture was not rich or heavy, but every piece had been chosen with care.

Chairs and tables stood in comfortable places near the windows. Light cloth covered the walls, and flowers rested in small bowls upon the tables.

The rooms felt peaceful and welcoming.

A gentle breeze moved through the open windows and carried the fresh smell of the valley into the house. From where I stood I could see the river flowing quietly below the hill.

The calm movement of the water seemed to complete the beauty of the place.

As I walked slowly through the rooms, I noticed that every window opened toward a carefully chosen view of the landscape.

From one window I could see the green slope of the hill and the shining surface of the lake in the distance. From another I saw a small group of trees standing beside a quiet bend of the river.

Each view appeared like a living picture framed by the window.

It became clear to me that the cottage had been designed with the same thoughtful care that shaped the valley of Arnheim.

The building itself was part of the landscape.

Its shape, its windows, and even the garden around it had been arranged so that the beauty of nature could be seen from every side.

After some time I stepped outside again.

I walked along the small garden paths that curved around the cottage. The flowers growing there were simple and natural in color. They did not appear arranged in strict lines. Instead they grew in soft groups that seemed almost wild.

Yet the longer I looked, the more I understood that their placement had been carefully planned.

The path led me slowly down the slope toward the river.

When I reached the water's edge, I turned and looked back at the cottage.

From that distance the house appeared even more beautiful than before.

The trees around it formed a gentle frame for the building. The roof and walls seemed to rise naturally from the green hill.

The whole scene looked peaceful and harmonious.

At that moment I understood the true idea behind the place.

The beauty of Landor's Cottage did not come from luxury or grand design.

It came from perfect harmony with the surrounding land.

The cottage, the trees, the river, and the hills all seemed to belong together as parts of a single peaceful vision.

As the afternoon light moved slowly across the valley, the cottage rested quietly among the trees.

The river flowed calmly beside it, and the soft wind carried the sound of leaves moving gently in the branches.

In that quiet moment the beauty of the place seemed complete.

Landor's Cottage stood as a small but perfect part of the wonderful landscape of Arnheim.

## William Wilson

### Part 1

Let me call myself William Wilson.

This is not my real name, but I wish to hide my true identity. The name I was given at birth has become hated and feared. I will not allow it to appear again in the world.

I have fallen very low.

My life has been filled with error and shame. Yet there was once a time when my future seemed bright and hopeful. The story I now tell will explain how my life slowly moved toward destruction.

I was born into a family known for strong emotion and quick temper. From my earliest years my nature showed the same qualities.

I became proud, impatient, and difficult to control.

When I was still young, my parents sent me to a private school in the countryside of England. The school stood in a quiet village surrounded by trees and fields.

The building itself was large and old. Tall walls surrounded it, and a heavy gate stood at the entrance.

Once inside those walls, the outside world seemed far away.

The school held many students, yet its quiet location gave it a strange feeling of separation from ordinary life.

The head teacher of the school was a serious and strict man. His name was Doctor Bransby.

During the week he ruled the school with firm authority. Yet on Sundays he appeared very different. On that day he dressed in long religious clothing and spoke to us with gentle words in the church.

I always found this change in his appearance curious.

The days at the school passed slowly. Our lives followed the same pattern each week.

We studied in the classrooms during the day. We walked in the small garden during the hours of rest. At night we slept in long rows of beds in the large dormitory rooms.

At first I enjoyed my life there.

I quickly became known among the students for my bold behavior. I often led the others in games and adventures. My strong personality gave me influence over many of the boys.

Soon I held a kind of leadership among them.

Yet there was one boy who refused to accept my authority.

Strangely enough, his name was also William Wilson.

From the first day we met, he seemed determined to oppose me in every way.

If I spoke loudly, he spoke quietly. If I acted boldly, he acted calmly. Yet he never openly argued with me.

Instead he corrected my actions in subtle ways.

This behavior troubled me deeply.

The situation became even stranger when I noticed something else.

The other boy looked very similar to me.

Our height was nearly the same. Our faces shared many features. Even our voices sounded alike, though his voice was softer and weaker than mine.

The similarity between us disturbed me.

Some of the other students noticed it as well, but they did not think much about it.

For me, however, the resemblance became impossible to ignore.

The other Wilson seemed to follow me everywhere.

He appeared whenever I tried to act boldly or foolishly. Sometimes he spoke quietly in my ear, warning me to control my behavior.

I hated him for this.

I believed that he wished to shame me before the other students.

Yet there was something about him that I could never fully understand.

His quiet voice often sounded strangely familiar, as if it came from inside my own mind.

This strange rivalry between us continued for several years.  
During that time my dislike for him slowly grew stronger.  
At last one night I decided to confront him directly.  
And that decision changed the course of my life forever.

## Part 2

One night I decided that I could no longer endure the presence of the other Wilson.

My anger toward him had grown stronger with each passing day. His quiet interference in my actions filled me with deep irritation. I believed that he wished to control my behavior and weaken my influence over the other students.

That night the school was silent.

The other boys slept in their beds. The halls were dark and still.

I rose quietly and took a small lamp in my hand. Then I walked slowly through the narrow passage that led to the sleeping rooms.

I knew where the other Wilson slept.

When I reached his door, I stopped for a moment.

My heart beat quickly, though I did not know exactly why.

Then I opened the door and stepped inside.

The room was dark. The lamp in my hand cast a weak light across the bed where he slept.

I moved closer.

At first the light did not fall clearly upon his face. The shadow of the room hid his features.

Slowly I lifted the lamp higher.

Then I saw his face clearly.

In that moment a terrible feeling passed through me.

The face before me looked exactly like my own.

The resemblance was so perfect that it filled me with sudden fear. It was as if I were looking at my own reflection.

I stepped backward quickly.

The lamp shook in my hand.

Without another word I turned and left the room.

That night I could not sleep.

Early the next morning I left the school forever.

Many years passed after that.

I traveled to many cities across Europe. I lived a life filled with pleasure and excitement. Yet my actions often led me into foolish and dishonest behavior.

I gambled with money that did not belong to me. I lied easily and treated others with little respect.

During these years I tried to forget the strange boy from my youth.

But he did not forget me.

Again and again he appeared in my life.

Whenever I prepared to commit some dishonest act, he suddenly appeared and spoke quietly in my ear.

His voice was always soft, almost like a whisper.

Yet the sound filled me with anger and shame.

Once I was preparing to cheat another man in a game of cards. Just as I placed my hand upon the table, I heard the familiar whisper behind me.

“William Wilson.”

I turned quickly.

There he stood.

His face looked exactly as it had in our school days. His expression remained calm and serious.

Without speaking another word he simply looked at me.

My plan was ruined.

The other players began to watch me with suspicion. I was forced to leave the room in disgrace.

This happened again and again.

Wherever I went, the other Wilson seemed to follow.

His presence destroyed my plans and filled my mind with rage.

At last I could no longer endure it.

One evening in the city of Rome I saw him again during a large celebration filled with music and dancing.

My anger finally exploded.

I seized him by the arm and pulled him into a quiet room away from the crowd.

“You must stop this!” I shouted.

He did not answer.

Instead he stood silently before me.

In a moment of blind fury I drew my sword.

The other Wilson also drew his weapon.

We fought fiercely in the narrow room.

My anger gave me strength.

At last I struck him.

He fell to the floor.

Blood covered his clothing.

I believed that I had finally freed myself from his control.

But as I looked down at the dying man, something strange happened.

A large mirror stood upon the wall nearby.

I turned toward it.

In the mirror I saw myself standing there with blood upon my hands.

The face of the dying man was the same as the face in the mirror.

Then the wounded Wilson spoke in a faint voice.

“You have conquered,” he said.

His voice sounded weaker than ever before.

“But from this moment you are also dead.”

His eyes looked deeply into mine.

“In killing me, you have killed yourself.”

## The Tell-Tale Heart

### Part 1

True! I have been very nervous. I am nervous now, and I have been nervous for a long time. But do not think that I am mad. No, no. My mind is clear. My senses are sharp. In fact, my hearing is stronger than before. I hear many things in the world around me. I hear sounds in the air, in the earth, and even in places beyond this life. So you see, I am not mad. Listen carefully, and I will tell you the whole story.

I loved the old man. He had never done me harm. He had never spoken a cruel word to me. I did not want his money. I did not hate him.

It was his eye. Yes, that was the reason.

One of his eyes looked strange to me. It was pale blue, with a thin film over it, like the eye of a sick bird. Whenever that eye fell upon me, my blood ran cold.

Slowly the idea entered my mind that I must destroy the eye forever. Once the thought appeared, it grew stronger every day. At last I decided to kill the old man so that I would never see that terrible eye again.

But I was careful. You should see how wisely I acted.

Every night, about midnight, I opened the door to the old man's room. I moved very slowly. First I placed my head through the opening of the door. I held a small lamp in my hand, but the light was hidden so that only a narrow beam could escape. It took me nearly an hour to move my head into the room.

Would a madman act with such care?

The old man slept peacefully in his bed. I waited until my head was inside the room, and then I opened the lamp very slightly. A thin line of light fell across his face.

But every night his eye was closed. And because the eye was closed, I could not do the work. It was not the old man that troubled me. It was the eye.

So each night I closed the lamp again and left the room.

In the morning I spoke kindly to the old man. I asked him how he had slept

during the night. He never suspected that I watched him while he slept.

Seven nights passed in this way.

On the eighth night I felt even more careful than before. My hand moved slowly on the door handle. I smiled as I thought about how clever I was.

Just then my thumb slipped against the metal of the lamp. The small sound woke the old man. I heard him sit up in bed.

“Who is there?” he called into the darkness.

I remained perfectly still.

For a long time neither of us moved. The old man listened carefully in the darkness. I knew that he was afraid. I understood his fear very well. I had felt the same fear many nights when strange sounds woke me from sleep.

I waited quietly.

At last I slowly opened the lamp. A thin line of light fell across the old man's eye.

It was open. Wide open.

The pale blue eye with the thin film looked straight at me.

The sight filled me with terrible anger. My heart began to beat quickly. I could hear the sound growing louder and louder inside my head.

It was the beating of the old man's heart.

The sound grew stronger every moment. I feared that the neighbors might hear it. I knew that I must act quickly.

With a sudden movement I rushed into the room. The old man cried out once.

Then everything became silent.

## Part 2

I dragged the old man from his bed and pulled the heavy bed over him. For several minutes I held the bed firmly in place. I listened carefully for any sound beneath it. At first I could hear a faint beating. It was the old man's heart. But the sound grew weaker and weaker. At last it stopped completely. The old man was dead.

I removed the bed and examined the body carefully. There was no movement. No breath. No heartbeat. His eye would trouble me no more. I smiled quietly. If you still believe that I am mad, you will change your mind when you see how carefully I hid the body.

First I cut the body into several pieces. I removed the head, the arms, and the legs. I worked slowly and calmly so that no blood would fall upon the floor. Then I lifted three boards from the wooden floor of the room. Beneath those boards there was a small empty space. I placed the pieces of the body inside that space. After that I replaced the boards exactly as they had been before. No eye could see what lay beneath them. No one would ever discover my secret.

The work was finished just before four o'clock in the morning. The sky outside was still dark. Suddenly I heard a knock at the door of the house. I went down to open it. Three police officers stood there. A neighbor had heard a cry during the night and had reported it to the authorities.

I smiled calmly and welcomed the officers inside. "The cry was my own," I explained. "I had a bad dream." I told them that the old man was away in the countryside. Then I invited them to search the house. I showed them every room. At last I led them into the old man's chamber.

The officers seemed satisfied. They placed their chairs in the room and sat down to rest. I brought my own chair and placed it directly above the hidden body beneath the floor. We began to talk. I answered their questions calmly.

Yet after a while I noticed a strange sound. It was soft at first. A low dull beating. I tried to ignore it. But the sound grew louder. It was the beating of a heart. I knew that sound very well. It was the old man's heart.

The officers continued speaking and smiling as if they heard nothing. But the sound grew louder and louder. My head began to ache. I spoke faster and louder, hoping to cover the terrible noise. Still the beating continued to grow. It seemed to fill the whole room.

I could not bear it any longer. The officers must hear it too, I thought. They were pretending not to hear it. They were laughing at my fear. The sound grew louder—louder—louder!

At last I could not control myself. “Stop!” I cried. I jumped from my chair. “Yes! I confess everything!” I shouted. “Lift the boards from the floor!” My voice shook with terror. “Here! Here! It is the beating of his terrible heart!”

## Berenice

### Part 1

Misery is often found among people who possess great imagination. The mind that sees deeply into the world also feels its shadows more strongly.

From my earliest childhood I lived in a large and ancient house surrounded by dark trees. The building stood in a lonely place far from towns and cities. Many generations of my family had lived there before me.

The rooms of the house were filled with old books and strange objects from the past. I spent most of my time among those books. Because of this, my life became quiet and solitary.

While other children played outside in the sunlight, I remained inside the dark rooms of the house. I read and thought for many long hours. My mind slowly grew accustomed to deep and strange thoughts.

During those years my cousin Berenice also lived in the house. When we were children she was full of life and energy. She ran freely through the fields and forests around the house. Her laughter filled the air with joy. She loved the sunlight and the fresh wind.

I, however, preferred the stillness of the library and the shadows of the house. Our natures were very different. Yet as we grew older, our lives remained connected.

Time passed, and a strange illness began to affect my mind. At times my thoughts became fixed upon small and unimportant objects. When this happened I could not turn my attention away from them.

I might stare at a word in a book for hours. I might study the shape of a shadow on the wall without moving. These moments filled my mind completely. The world outside them seemed to disappear.

During the same years a terrible illness also came upon Berenice. The disease slowly changed her appearance. The strong and lively girl of my childhood became thin and pale. Her movements grew slow and uncertain.

At times she fell into strange states where she seemed almost lifeless. Yet even in her illness she remained gentle and kind.

One day our families decided that we should be married. I cannot clearly explain how this decision was made. Perhaps it seemed natural that two people who had grown up together should join their lives.

Yet I did not truly love her. My feelings toward Berenice were strange and difficult to understand. I admired her beauty, but I felt no warmth in my heart. Instead my thoughts about her often became strange and disturbing.

As her illness grew worse, her face became pale and thin. Her eyes seemed large and dark in the white of her face.

But one part of her appearance remained perfect.

Her teeth.

They were small, white, and beautiful.

Once my mind noticed them, it could think of nothing else. Day and night the image of those teeth filled my thoughts.

When Berenice spoke, I saw only the shining white lines within her mouth. When she smiled, the sight fixed itself deeply in my mind.

I tried to turn my thoughts away, but I could not. The strange power within my mind forced me to think of them again and again.

At last the terrible illness overcame her completely.

One morning the servants told me that Berenice had died. They prepared her body for burial in the family tomb beneath the house.

Yet my mind remained fixed upon a single terrible thought.

Her teeth.

## Part 2

The thought of Berenice's teeth filled my mind completely. I could not think of anything else. Her death seemed distant and unreal to me. The sorrow that others felt did not reach my heart. Instead my thoughts returned again and again to that single image. The white, perfect teeth.

I sat alone in the library for many hours after the servants carried her body away. The room around me was dark and silent. Heavy curtains covered the windows, and only a small lamp burned upon the table. I stared at the floor without moving. Yet in my mind I saw only those teeth.

I tried to read, but the words in the book lost their meaning. My thoughts returned again to the same image. The teeth. Their smooth shape. Their pale shining color. The strange power of the idea grew stronger with every moment. I felt as if my mind were trapped by it.

Hours passed.

At last a servant entered the room quietly. His face looked pale and frightened. He spoke in a trembling voice. "Sir... something terrible has happened."

I looked at him without understanding.

"The grave... the grave of Berenice," he said. "Someone has opened it."

A cold feeling passed through my body. The servant continued speaking. "Her coffin was broken," he said. "Her body is gone."

For several moments I could not speak. My mind felt confused and distant. The servant slowly stepped backward and left the room.

I remained alone again. Then my eyes fell upon the table beside me. There I saw several objects that I did not remember placing there. A small box lay open. Inside the box were many white objects arranged together.

I leaned forward slowly. My hands trembled.

The white objects were teeth. Thirty-two small teeth.

At the same moment another terrible sound reached my ears. It came from outside the room. It was the faint cry of a living person. The sound rose weakly through the darkness of the house.

I suddenly understood the truth. Berenice had not been dead when she was placed in the grave.

And I— I had gone to her.

The terrible tools beside the box told the rest of the story. My mind had obeyed its dreadful obsession. I had taken the teeth.

And somewhere in the darkness of the house the voice of Berenice still cried

out in pain.

## Eleonora

### Part 1

I am not mad. I say this first, because some people may believe that the story I tell comes from a troubled mind. Yet I speak honestly, and I remember these events clearly. My life has been divided into two very different parts. The first part was filled with peace and beauty. The second part was filled with sorrow and change.

The peaceful years of my youth passed in a quiet valley far from the noise of the world. That valley was known as the Valley of Many-Colored Grass. It was a place of gentle beauty. A small river flowed through the valley in slow curves. The water moved so calmly that it often looked like glass beneath the light of the sky. Tall trees stood along the banks of the river. Their branches formed soft shadows upon the grass. The grass itself appeared almost magical. When the sunlight touched it, the fields showed many delicate colors—green, gold, and soft red. Because of this, the valley seemed like a living dream.

In that peaceful place I lived with two companions: my gentle aunt and my cousin Eleonora. From childhood Eleonora and I shared every moment of our lives. We walked together beside the river. We rested together beneath the trees. Our hearts slowly grew close, and as the years passed our friendship deepened into love. The valley seemed to bless our happiness. When we walked through the fields, the flowers appeared brighter, the air felt warm and calm around us, and even the river seemed to move more gently beside our path. Often we sat together on the grassy banks and spoke quietly about the future, believing that our peaceful life in the valley would never end.

Yet time always brings change. One day Eleonora became ill. At first the sickness appeared small; she felt tired and weak, but she still smiled when we walked beside the river. Slowly, however, the illness grew stronger. Her face became pale and her movements lost their energy, until she could no longer walk through the valley as she once had. I remained beside her constantly, holding her

hand and speaking to her in soft words of comfort.

One evening, as the light of the setting sun filled the valley with golden color, Eleonora spoke to me with quiet seriousness. "I know that I will soon leave this world," she said gently. Her voice trembled, yet her eyes remained calm. "You must promise me something," she continued. Fear filled my heart, but I answered softly, "Anything." She looked deeply into my eyes. "Promise that you will never give your love to another woman." The words seemed simple, yet their meaning was heavy. The valley around us grew very still. I placed my hand upon hers and said, "I promise." Eleonora smiled faintly. That night she died peacefully, and her gentle spirit seemed to leave the valley with the quiet wind that moved through the trees. After her death the valley itself began to change.

## Part 2

After the death of Eleonora, the Valley of Many-Colored Grass no longer felt the same. The peaceful beauty that had once filled the valley faded slowly away. The flowers along the river grew fewer each day, the soft colors of the grass became dull and pale, and even the clear water of the river seemed darker than before. The valley felt empty. I walked through the familiar fields alone, and every place reminded me of the hours I had spent with Eleonora. Her voice and her smile seemed to remain everywhere around me.

Yet time continued to pass, and the deep sorrow in my heart slowly softened into a quiet sadness. At last I left the valley. The world beyond it seemed strange at first. Cities were full of noise and movement, and people hurried through the streets with busy lives that had nothing to do with my past. I traveled through distant lands and tried to forget the promise I had once made beside the river in the valley, yet the memory remained within me.

One day I arrived in a beautiful city filled with light and life. There I met a woman named Ermengarde. She possessed a gentle spirit and a kind heart; her voice was soft and pleasant, and her eyes held warmth and understanding. Slowly my heart began to feel happiness again, and the sadness of the past seemed less

powerful. I spoke with Ermengarde many times, and our friendship deepened with every meeting. At last I asked her to become my wife, and she accepted.

Yet on the night after our marriage a strange fear entered my mind. I remembered the promise I had given to Eleonora and feared that her spirit might return to punish me for breaking my word. I lay awake in the darkness, unable to sleep, listening to the silence of the room. Suddenly a soft voice seemed to speak around me. The sound was gentle and calm, as if it came from the air itself. The voice spoke my name and then said words that filled my heart with peace. It was the voice of Eleonora, and she forgave me. She told me that the promise I had made belonged only to the time we shared in the valley, and that the love which had existed there had ended with her life. Because of this, I was free. I was free to love again.

The voice faded slowly into silence, and my fear disappeared. From that moment forward my heart felt calm, and I lived in peace with my wife, grateful for the memory of Eleonora and for the gentle forgiveness she had given me.