

THE COMPENSATION HOUSE

Charles Collins

'THERE'S NOT A looking-glass in all the house, sir. It's some peculiar fancy of my master's. There isn't one in any single room in the house.'

It was a dark and gloomy-looking building, and had been purchased by this Company for an enlargement of their Goods Station. The value of the house had been referred to what was popularly called 'a compensation jury,' and the house was called, in consequence, The Compensation House. It had become the Company's property; but its tenant still remained in possession, pending the commencement of active building operations. My attention was originally drawn to this house because it stood directly in front of a collection of huge pieces of timber which lay near this part of the Line, and on which I sometimes sat for half an hour at a time, when I was tired by my wanderings about Mugby Junction.

It was square, cold, grey-looking, built of rough-hewn stone, and roofed with thin slabs of the same material. Its windows were few in number, and very small for the size of the building. In the great blank, grey broadside, there were only four windows. The entrance-door was in the middle of the house; there was a window on either side of it, and there were two more in the single story above. The blinds were all closely drawn, and when the door was shut, the dreary building gave no sign of life or occupation.

But the door was not always shut. Sometimes it was opened from within, with a great jingling of bolts and door-chains, and then a man would come forward and stand upon the doorstep, snuffing the air as one might do

who was ordinarily kept on rather a small allowance of that element. He was stout, thickset, and perhaps fifty or sixty years old—a man whose hair was cut exceedingly close, who wore a large bushy beard, and whose eye had a sociable twinkle in it which was prepossessing. He was dressed, whenever I saw him, in a greenish-brown frock-coat made of some material which was not cloth, wore a waistcoat and trousers of light colour, and had a frill to his shirt—an ornament, by the way, which did not seem to go at all well with the beard, which was continually in contact with it. It was the custom of this worthy person, after standing for a short time on the threshold inhaling the air, to come forward into the road, and, after glancing at one of the upper windows in a half mechanical way, to cross over to the logs, and, leaning over the fence which guarded the railway, to look up and down the Line (it passed before the house) with the air of a man accomplishing a self-imposed task of which nothing was expected to come. This done, he would cross the road again, and turning on the threshold to take a final sniff of air, disappeared once more within the house, bolting and chaining the door again as if there were no probability of its being reopened for at least a week. Yet half an hour had not passed before he was out in the road again, sniffing the air and looking up and down the Line as before.

It was not very long before I managed to scrape acquaintance with this restless personage. I soon found out that my friend with the shirt-frill was the confidential servant, butler, valet, factotum, what you will, of a sick gentleman, a Mr Oswald Strange, who had recently come to inhabit the house opposite, and concerning whose history my new acquaintance, whose name I ascertained was Masey, seemed disposed to be somewhat communicative. His master, it appeared, had come down to this place, partly for the sake of reducing his establishment—not, Mr Masey was swift to inform me, on economical principles, but because the poor gentleman, for particular reasons, wished to have few dependents about him—partly in order that he might be near his old friend, Dr Garden, who was established in the neighbourhood,

and whose society and advice were necessary to Mr Strange's life. That life was, it appeared, held by this suffering gentleman on a precarious tenure. It was ebbing away fast with each passing hour. The servant already spoke of his master in the past tense, describing him to me as a young gentleman not more than five-and-thirty years of age, with a young face, as far as the features and build of it went, but with an expression which had nothing of youth about it. This was the great peculiarity of the man. At a distance he looked younger than he was by many years, and strangers, at the time when he had been used to get about, always took him for a man of seven or eight-and-twenty, but they changed their minds on getting nearer to him. Old Masey had a way of his own of summing up the peculiarities of his master, repeating twenty times over: 'Sir, he was Strange by name, and Strange by nature, and Strange to look at into the bargain.'

It was during my second or third interview with the old fellow that he uttered the words quoted at the beginning of this plain narrative.

'Not such a thing as a looking-glass in all the house,' the old man said, standing beside my piece of timber, and looking across reflectively at the house opposite. 'Not one.'

'In the sitting-rooms, I suppose you mean?'

'No, sir, I mean sitting-rooms and bedrooms both; there isn't so much as a shaving-glass as big as the palm of your hand anywhere.'

'But how is it?' I asked. 'Why are there no looking-glasses in any of the rooms?'

'Ah, sir!' replied Masey, 'that's what none of us can ever tell. There is the mystery. It's just a fancy on the part of my master. He had some strange fancies, and this was one of them. A pleasant gentleman he was to live with, as any servant could desire. A liberal gentleman, and one who gave but little trouble; always ready with a kind word, and a kind deed, too, for the matter of that. There was not a house in all the parish of St George's (in which we lived before we came down here) where the servants had more holidays or a better table kept; but for all that, he had his

queer ways and his fancies, as I may call them, and this was one of them. And the point he made of it, sir,' the old man went on; 'the extent to which that regulation was enforced, whenever a new servant was engaged; and the changes in the establishment it occasioned! In hiring a new servant, the very first stipulation made, was that about the looking-glasses. It was one of my duties to explain the thing, as far as it could be explained, before any servant was taken into the house. "You'll find it an easy place," I used to say, "with a liberal table, good wages, and a deal of leisure; but there's one thing you must make up your mind to; you must do without looking-glasses while you're here, for there isn't one in the house, and, what's more, there never will be."'

'But how did you know there never would be one?' I asked.

'Lor' bless you, sir! If you'd seen and heard all that I'd seen and heard, you could have no doubt about it. Why, only to take one instance:—I remember a particular day when my master had occasion to go into the housekeeper's room, where the cook lived, to see about some alterations that were making, and when a pretty scene took place. The cook—she was a very ugly woman, and awful vain—had left a little bit of a looking-glass, about six inches square, upon the chimney-piece; she had got it surreptitious, and kept it always locked up; but she'd left it out, being called away suddenly, while titivating her hair. I had seen the glass, and was making for the chimney-piece as fast as I could; but master came in front of it before I could get there, and it was all over in a moment. He gave one long piercing look into it, turned deadly pale, and seizing the glass, dashed it into a hundred pieces on the floor, and then stamped upon the fragments and ground them into powder with his feet. He shut himself up for the rest of that day in his own room, first ordering me to discharge the cook, then and there, at a moment's notice.'

'What an extraordinary thing!' I said, pondering.

'Ah, sir,' continued the old man, 'it was astonishing what trouble I had with those women servants. It was

difficult to get any that would take the place at all under the circumstances. "What not so much as a mossul to do one's 'air at?" they would say, and they'd go off, in spite of extra wages. Then those who did consent to come, what lies they would tell, to be sure! They would protest that they didn't want to look in the glass, that they never had been in the habit of looking in the glass, and all the while that very wench would have her looking-glass, of some kind or another, hid away among her clothes upstairs. Sooner or later, she would bring it out too, and leave it about somewhere or other (just like the cook), where it was as likely as not that master might see it. And then—for girls like that have no consciences, sir—when I had caught one of 'em at it, she'd turn round as bold as brass, "And how am I to know whether my 'air's parted straight?" she'd say, just as if it hadn't been considered in her wages that that was the very thing which she never was to know while she lived in our house. A vain lot, sir, and the ugly ones always the vainest. There was no end to their dodges. They'd have looking-glasses in the interiors of their workbox-lids, where it was next to impossible that I could find 'em, or inside the covers of hymn-books, or cookery-books, or in their caddies. I recollect one girl, a sly one she was, and marked with the small-pox terrible, who was always reading her prayer-book at odd times. Sometimes I used to think what a religious mind she'd got, and at other times (depending on the mood I was in) I would conclude that it was the marriage service she was studying; but one day, when I got behind her to satisfy my doubts—lo and behold! It was the old story: a bit of glass, without a frame, fastened into the kiver with the outside edges of the sheets of postage-stamps. Dodges! Why they'd keep their looking-glasses in the scullery or the coal-cellar, or leave them in charge of the servants next door, or with the milk-woman round the corner; but have 'em they would. And I don't mind confessing, sir,' said the old man, bringing his long speech to an end, 'that it was an inconveniency not to have so much as a scrap to shave before. I used to go to the barber's at first, but I soon gave that up, and took to wearing my beard as my master

did; likewise to keeping my hair'—Mr Masey touched his head as he spoke—'so short, that it didn't require any parting, before or behind.'

I sat for some time lost in amazement, and staring at my companion. My curiosity was powerfully stimulated, and the desire to learn more was very strong within me.

'Had your master any personal defect,' I inquired, 'which might have made it distressing to him to see his own image reflected?'

'By no means, sir,' said the old man. 'He was as handsome a gentleman as you would wish to see: a little delicate-looking and care-worn, perhaps, with a very pale face; but as free from any deformity as you or I, sir. No, sir, no: it was nothing of that.'

'Then what was it? What is it?' I asked desperately. 'Is there no one who is, or has been, in your master's confidence?'

'Yes, sir,' said the old fellow, with his eyes turning to that window opposite. 'There is one person who knows all my master's secrets, and this secret among the rest.'

'And who is that?'

The old man turned round and looked at me fixedly. 'The doctor here,' he said. 'Dr Garden. My master's very old friend.'

'I should like to speak with this gentleman,' I said, involuntarily.

'He is with my master now,' answered Masey. 'He will be coming out presently, and I think I may say he will answer any question you make like to put to him.' As the old man spoke, the door of the house opened, and a middle-aged gentleman, who was tall and thin, but who lost something of his height by a habit of stooping, appeared on the step. Old Masey left me in a moment. He muttered something about taking the doctor's directions, and hastened across the road. The tall gentleman spoke to him for a minute or two very seriously, probably about the patient upstairs, and then it seemed to me from their gestures that I myself was the subject of some further conversation between them. At all events, when old Masey retired into the house, the doctor came across to

agreeable smile.

'John Masey tells me that you are interested in the case of my poor friend, sir. I am now going back to my house, and if you don't mind the trouble of walking with me, I shall be happy to enlighten you as far as I am able.'

I hastened to make my apologies and express my acknowledgements, and we set off together. When we had reached the doctor's house and were seated in his study, I ventured to inquire after the health of this poor gentleman.

'I am afraid there is no amendment, nor any prospect of amendment,' said the doctor. 'Old Masey has told you something of his strange condition, has he not?'

'Yes, he has told me something,' I answered, 'and he says you know all about it.'

Dr Garden looked very grave. 'I don't know all about it. I only know what happens when he comes into the presence of a looking-glass. But as to the circumstances which have led to his being haunted in the strangest fashion that I ever heard of, I know no more of them than you do.'

'Haunted?' I repeated. 'And in the strangest fashion that you ever heard of?'

Dr Garden smiled at my eagerness, seemed to be collecting his thoughts, and presently went on:

'I made the acquaintance of Mr Oswald Strange in a curious way. It was on board of an Italian steamer, bound from Civita Vecchia to Marseilles. We had been travelling all night. In the morning I was shaving myself in the cabin, when suddenly this man came behind me, glanced for a moment into the small mirror before which I was standing, and then, without a word of warning, tore it from the nail, and dashed it to pieces at my feet. His face was at first livid with passion—it seemed to me rather the passion of fear than of anger—but it changed after a moment, and he seemed ashamed of what he had done. Well,' continued the doctor, relapsing for a moment into a smile, 'of course I was in a devil of a rage. I was operating on my under-jaw, and the start the thing gave me caused

me to cut myself. Besides, altogether it seemed an outrageous and insolent thing, and I gave it to poor Strange in a style of language which I am sorry to think of now, but which, I hope, was excusable at the time. As to the offender himself, his confusion and regret, now that his passion was at an end, disarmed me. He sent for the steward, and paid most liberally for the damage done to the steamboat property, explaining to him, and to some other passengers who were present in the cabin, that what had happened had been accidental. For me, however, he had another explanation. Perhaps he felt that I must know it to have been no accident—perhaps he really wished to confide in someone. At all events, he owned to me that what he had done was done under the influence of an uncontrollable impulse—a seizure which took him, he said, at times—something like a fit. He begged my pardon, and entreated that I would endeavour to disassociate him personally from this action, of which he was heartily ashamed. Then he attempted a sickly joke, poor fellow, about his wearing a beard, and feeling a little spiteful, in consequence, when he saw other people taking the trouble to shave; but he said nothing about any infirmity or delusion, and shortly after left me.

‘In my professional capacity I could not help taking some interest in Mr Strange. I did not altogether lose sight of him after our sea journey to Marseilles was over. I found him a pleasant companion up to a certain point; but I always felt that there was a reserve about him. He was uncommunicative about his past life, and especially would never allude to anything connected with his travels or his residence in Italy, which, however, I could make out had been a long one. He spoke Italian well, and seemed familiar with the country, but disliked to talk about it.

‘During the time we spent together there were seasons when he was so little himself, that I, with a pretty large experience, was almost afraid to be with him. His attacks were violent and sudden in the last degree; and there was one most extraordinary feature connected with them all:—some horrible association of ideas took possession of him whenever he found himself before a looking-glass. And

after we had travelled together for a time, I dreaded the sight of a mirror hanging harmlessly against a wall, or a toilet-glass standing on a dressing-table, almost as much as he did.

'Poor Strange was not always affected in the same manner by a looking-glass. Sometimes it seemed to madden him with fury; at other times, it appeared to turn him to stone: remaining motionless and speechless as if attacked by catalepsy. One night—the worst things always happen at night, and oftener than one would think on stormy nights—we arrived at a small town in the central district of Auvergne: a place but little known, out of the line of railways, and to which we had been drawn, partly by the antiquarian attractions which the place possessed, and partly by the beauty of the scenery. The weather had been rather against us. The day had been dull and murky, the heat stifling, and the sky had threatened mischief since the morning. At sundown, these threats were fulfilled. The thunderstorm, which had been all day coming up—as it seemed to us, against the wind—burst over the place where we were lodged, with very great violence.

'There are some practical-minded persons with strong constitutions, who deny roundly that their fellow-creatures are, or can be, affected, in mind or body, by atmospheric influences. I am not a disciple of that school, simply because I cannot believe that those changes of weather, which have so much effect upon animals, and even on inanimate objects, can fail to have some influence on a piece of machinery so sensitive and intricate as the human frame. I think, then, that it was in part owing to the disturbed state of the atmosphere that, on this particular evening I felt nervous and depressed. When my new friend Strange and I parted for the night, I felt as little disposed to go to rest as I ever did in my life. The thunder was still lingering among the mountains in the midst of which our inn was placed. Sometimes it seemed nearer, and at other times further off; but it never left off altogether, except for a few minutes at a time. I was quite unable to shake off a succession of painful ideas which

persistently besieged my mind.

'It is hardly necessary to add that I thought from time to time of my travelling-companion in the next room. His image was almost continually before me. He had been dull and depressed all the evening, and when we parted for the night there was a look in his eyes which I could not get out of my memory.

'There was a door between our rooms, and the partition dividing them was not very solid; and yet I had heard no sound since I parted from him which could indicate that he was there at all, much less that he was wide awake and stirring. I was in a mood, sir, which made this silence terrible to me, and so many foolish fancies—as that he was lying there dead, or in a fit, or what not—took possession of me, that at last I could bear it no longer. I went to the door, and, after listening, very attentively but quite in vain, for any sound, I at last knocked pretty sharply. There was no answer. Feeling that longer suspense would be unendurable, I, without more ceremony, turned the handle and went in.

'It was a great bare room, and so imperfectly lighted by a single candle that it was almost impossible—except when the lightning flashed—to see into its great dark corners. A small rickety bedstead stood against one of the walls, shrouded by yellow cotton curtains, passed through a great iron ring in the ceiling. There was, for all other furniture, an old chest-of-drawers which served also as a washing-stand, having a small basin and ewer and a single towel arranged on the top of it. There were, moreover, two-ancient chairs and a dressing-table. On this last, stood a large old-fashioned looking-glass with a carved frame.

'I must have seen all these things, because I remember them so well now, but I do not know how I could have seen them, for it seems to me that, from the moment of my entering that room, the action of my senses and of the faculties of my mind was held fast by the ghastly figure which stood motionless before the looking-glass in the middle of the empty room.

'How terrible it was! The weak light of one candle

standing on the table shone upon Strange's face, lighting it from below, and throwing (as I now remember) his shadow, vast and black, upon the wall behind him and upon the ceiling overhead. He was leaning rather forward, with his hands upon the table supporting him, and gazing into the glass which stood before him with a horrible fixity. The sweat on his white face; his rigid features and his pale lips showed in that feeble light were horrible, more than words can tell, to look at. He was so completely stupefied and lost, that the noise I had made in knocking and in entering the room was unobserved by him. Not even when I called him loudly by name did he move or did his face change.

'What a vision of horror that was, in the great dark empty room, in a silence that was something more than negative, that ghastly figure frozen into stone by some unexplained terror! And the silence and the stillness! The very thunder had ceased now. My heart stood still with fear. Then, moved by some instinctive feeling, under whose influence I acted mechanically, I crept with slow steps nearer and nearer to the table, and at last, half expecting to see some spectre even more horrible than this which I saw already, I looked over his shoulder into the looking-glass. I happened to touch his arm, though only in the lightest manner. In that one moment the spell which had held him—who knows how long?—enchained, seemed broken, and he lived in this world again. He turned round upon me, as suddenly as a tiger makes its spring, and seized me by the arm.

'I have told you that even before I entered my friend's room I had felt, all that night, depressed and nervous. The necessity for action at this time was, however, so obvious, and this man's agony made all that I had felt appear so trifling, that much of my own discomfort seemed to leave me. I felt that I must be strong.

'The face before me almost unmanned me. The eyes which looked into mine were so scared with terror, the lips—if I may say so—looked so speechless. The wretched man gazed long into my face and then, still holding me by the arm, slowly, very slowly, turned his head. I had gently

tried to move him away from the looking-glass, but he would not stir, and now he was looking into it as fixedly as ever. I could bear this no longer, and, using such force as was necessary, I drew him gradually away, and got him to one of the chairs at the foot of the bed. "Come!" I said—after the long silence my voice, even to myself, sounded strange and hollow—"come! You are over-tired, and you feel the weather. Don't you think you ought to be in bed? Suppose you lie down. Let me try my medical skill in mixing you a composing draught."

'He held my hand, and looked eagerly into my eyes. "I am better now," he said, speaking at last very faintly. Still he looked at me in that wistful way. It seemed as if there were something that he wanted to do or say, but had not sufficient resolution. At length he got up from the chair to which I had led him, and beckoning me to follow him, went across the room to the dressing-table, and stood again before the glass. A violent shudder passed through his frame as he looked into it; but apparently forcing himself to go through with what he had now begun, he remained where he was, and, without looking away, moved to me with his hand to come and stand beside him. I complied.

"Look in there!" he said, in an almost inaudible tone. He was supported as before, by his hands resting on the table, and could only bow with his head towards the glass to intimate what he meant. "Look in there!" he repeated.

'I did as he asked me.

"What do you see?" he asked next.

"See?" I repeated, trying to speak as cheerfully as I could, and describing the reflection of his own face as nearly as I could. "I see a very, very pale face with sunken cheeks—"

"What?" he cried, with an alarm in his voice which I could not understand.

"With sunken cheeks," I went on, "and two hollow eyes with large pupils."

'I saw the reflection of my friend's face change, and felt his hand clutch my arm even more tightly than he had done before. I stopped abruptly and looked round at him.

He did not turn his head towards me, but gazing still into the looking-glass, seemed to labour for utterance.

““What,” he stammered at last. “Do - you - see it - too?”

““See what?” I asked, quickly.

““That face!” he cried, in accents of horror. “That face—which is not mine—and which—I see instead of mine—always!”

‘I was struck speechless by the words. In a moment this mystery was explained—but what an explanation! Worse, a hundred times worse, than anything I had imagined. What! Had this man lost the power of seeing his own image as it was reflected there before him? and, in its place, was there the image of another? He had changed reflections with some other man? The frightfulness of the thought struck me speechless for a time—then I saw how false an impression my silence was conveying.

““No, no, no!” I cried, as soon as I could speak—“a hundred times, no! I see you, of course, and only you. It was your face I attempted to describe, and no other.”

‘He seemed not to hear me. “Why, look there!” he said, in a low, indistinct voice, pointing to his own image in the glass. “Whose face do you see there?”

““Why yours of course.” And then, after a moment, I added, “Whose do you see?”

‘He answered, like one in a trance, ‘*His—only his—always his!*’ He stood still a moment, and then, with a loud and terrific scream, repeated those words, “ALWAYS HIS, ALWAYS HIS,” and fell down in a fit before me.’

‘I knew what to do now. Here was a thing at any rate, I could understand. I had with me my usual small stock of medicines and surgical instruments, and I did what was necessary: first to restore my unhappy patient, and next to procure for him the rest he needed so much. He was very ill—at death’s door for some days—and I could not leave him, though there was urgent need that I should be back in London. When he began to mend, I sent over to England for my servant—John Masey—whom I knew I could trust. Acquainting him with the outlines of the case,

I left him in charge of my patient, with orders that he should be brought over to this country as soon as he was fit to travel.

'That awful scene was always before me. I saw this devoted man day after day, with the eyes of my imagination, sometimes destroying in his rage the harmless looking-glass, which was the immediate cause of his suffering, sometimes transfixed before the horrid image that turned him to stone. I recollect coming upon him once when we were stopping at a roadside inn, and seeing him stand so by broad daylight. His back turned towards me, and I waited and watched him for nearly half an hour as he stood there motionless and speechless, and appearing not to breathe. This apparition seen so by daylight was more ghastly than the apparition seen in the middle of the night, with the thunder rumbling among the hills.

'Back in London in his own house, where he could command in some sort the objects which should surround him, poor Strange was better than he would have been elsewhere. He seldom went out except at night, but once or twice I have walked with him by daylight, and have seen him terribly agitated when we have had to pass a shop in which looking-glasses were exposed for sale.

'It is nearly a year now since my poor friend followed me down to this place, to which I have retired. For some months he has been daily getting weaker and weaker, and a disease of the lungs has become developed in him, which has brought him to his death-bed. I should add, by-the-way, that John Masey has been his constant companion ever since I brought them together, and I have had, consequently, to look after a new servant.

'And now tell me,' the doctor added, bringing his tale to an end, 'did you ever hear a more miserable history, or was ever man haunted in a more ghastly manner than this man?'

I was about to reply, when we heard a sound of footsteps outside, and before I could speak old Masey entered the room, in haste and disorder.

'I was just telling this gentleman,' the doctor said; not at the moment observing old Masey's changed manner;

'how you deserted me to go over to your present master.'

'Ah! sir,' the man answered, in a troubled voice, 'I'm afraid he won't be my master long.'

The doctor was on his legs in a moment. 'What! Is he worse?'

'I think, sir, he is dying,' said the old man.

'Come with me, sir; you may be of use if you can keep quiet.' The doctor caught up his hat as he addressed me in those words, and in a few minutes we had reached The Compensation House. A few seconds more and we were standing in a darkened room on the first floor, and I saw lying on a bed before me—pale, emaciated and, as it seemed, dying—the man whose story I had just heard.

He was lying with closed eyes when we came into the room, and I had leisure to examine his features. What a tale of misery they told! They were regular and symmetrical in their arrangement, and not without beauty—the beauty of exceeding refinement and delicacy. Force there was none, and perhaps it was to the want of this that the faults—perhaps the crime—which had made the man's life so miserable were to be attributed. Perhaps the crime? Yes, it was not likely that an affliction, lifelong and terrible, such as this he had endured, would come upon him unless some misdeed had provoked the punishment. What misdeed we were soon to know.

It sometimes—I think generally—happens that the presence of anyone who stands and watches beside a sleeping man will wake him, unless his slumbers are unusually heavy. It was so now. While we looked at him, the sleeper awoke very suddenly, and fixed his eyes upon us. He put out his hand and took the doctor's in its feeble grasp. 'Who is that?' he asked next, pointing towards me.

'Do you wish him to go? The gentleman knows something of your sufferings, and is powerfully interested in your case; but he will leave us, if you wish it,' the doctor said.

'No. Let him stay.'

Seating myself out of sight, but where I could both see and hear what passed, I waited for what should follow. Dr Garden and John Masey stood beside the bed. There was a

moment's pause.

'I want a looking-glass,' said Strange, without a word of preface.

We all started to hear him say those words.

'I am dying,' said Strange; 'will you not grant me my request?'

Dr Garden whispered to old Masey; and the latter left the room. He was not absent long, having gone no further than the next house. He held an oval-framed mirror in his hand when he returned. A shudder passed through the body of the sick man as he saw it.

'Put it down' he said, faintly—'anywhere—for the present.' Not one of us spoke. I do not think, in that moment of suspense, that we could, any of us, have spoken if we had tried.

The sick man tried to raise himself a little. 'Prop me up,' he said. 'I speak with difficulty—I have something to say.'

They put pillows behind him, so as to raise his head and body.

'I have presently a use for it,' he said, indicating the mirror. 'I want to see —' He stopped, and seemed to change his mind. He was sparing of his words. 'I want to tell you—all about it.' Again he was silent. Then he seemed to make a great effort, and spoke once more, beginning very abruptly.

'I loved my wife fondly. I loved her—her name was Lucy. She was English; but, after we were married, we lived long abroad—in Italy. She liked the country, and I liked what she liked. She liked to draw, too, and I got her a master. He was an Italian. I will not give his name. We always called him "the Master". A treacherous insidious man this was, and, under cover of his profession, took advantage of his opportunities, and taught my wife to love him—to love him.

'I am short of breath. I need not enter into details as to how I found them out; but I did find them out. We were away on a sketching expedition when I made my discovery. My rage maddened me, and there was one at hand who fomented my madness. My wife had a maid, who, it seemed, had also loved this man—the Master—and had

been ill-treated and deserted by him. She told me all. She had played the part of go-between—had carried letters. When she told me these things, it was night, in a solitary Italian town, among the mountains. "He is in his room now," she said, "writing to her."

'A frenzy took possession of me as I listened to those words. I am naturally vindictive—remember that—and now my longing for revenge was like a thirst. Travelling in those lonely regions, I was armed, and when the woman said, "He is writing to your wife," I laid hold of my pistols, as by an instinct. It has been some comfort to me since, that I took them both. Perhaps, at that moment, I may have meant fairly by him—meant that we should fight. I don't know what I meant, quite. The woman's words, "He is in his own room now, writing to her," rung in my ears.'

The sick man stopped to take a breath. It seemed an hour, though it was probably not more than two minutes, before he spoke again.

'I managed to get into his room unobserved. Indeed, he was altogether absorbed in what he was doing. He was sitting at the only table in the room, writing at a travelling-desk, by the light of a single candle. It was a rude dressing-table, and—and before him—exactly before him—there was—there was a looking-glass.

'I stole up behind him as he sat and wrote by the light of the candle. I looked over his shoulder at the letter, and I read, "Dearest Lucy, my love, my darling." As I read the words, I pulled the trigger of the pistol I held in my right hand, and killed him—killed him—but, before he died, he looked up once—not at me, but at my image before him in the glass, and his face—such a face—has been there—ever since, and mine—my face—is gone!'

He fell back exhausted, and we all pressed forward thinking that he must be dead, he lay so still.

But he had not yet passed away. He revived under the influence of stimulants. He tried to speak, and muttered indistinctly from time to time words of which we could sometimes make no sense. We understood, however, that he had been tried by an Italian tribunal, and had been

found guilty; but with such extenuating circumstances that his sentence was commuted to imprisonment, during, we thought we made out, two years. But we could not understand what he said about his wife, though we gathered that she was still alive, from something he whispered to the doctor of there being provision made for her in his will.

He lay in a doze for something more than an hour after he had told his tale, and then he woke up quite suddenly, as he had done when we had first entered the room. He looked round uneasily in all directions, until his eye fell on the looking-glass.

'I want it,' he said, hastily; but I noticed that he did not shudder now as it was brought near. When old Masey approached, holding it in his hand, and crying like a child, Dr Garden came forward and stood between him and his master, taking the hand of poor Strange in his.

'Is this wise?' he asked. 'Is it good, do you think, to revive this misery of your life now, when it is so near its close? The chastisement of your crime,' he added, solemnly, 'has been a terrible one. Let us hope in God's mercy that your punishment is over.'

The dying man raised himself with a last great effort, and looked up at the doctor with such an expression on his face as none of us had seen on any face, before.

'I do hope so,' he said, faintly, 'but you must let me have my way in this—for if, now, when I look, I see aright—once more—I shall then hope yet more strongly—for I shall take it as a sign.'

The doctor stood aside without another word, when he heard the dying man speak thus, and the old servant drew near, and, stooping over softly, held the looking-glass before his master. Presently afterwards, we, who stood around looking breathlessly at him, saw such a rapture upon his face, as left no doubt upon our minds that the face which had haunted him so long, had, in his last hour, disappeared.