

Grosvenor Lane Ghost

By Jeremy Tyrrell

Book 1 of Paranormology

Smashwords Edition

Copyright 2014 Jeremy Tyrrell

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you are reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy.

Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

This book is also available in print. Please visit www.jeztyr.com for more in the Paranormology series and other works by this author.

Dedication

For my guide, instructor, bag of laughter and brother,
Kieran.

The Professor

It may be some time before this manuscript sees the light of day, perhaps well after I am long gone from this world. As such, I have decided, given the frustrating rate of progress, to write down this story so that my experiences might not go with me.

I was only a young lad when I first met the Professor. It was probably for the best, since it meant my preconceptions were limited. Maybe that was why he hired me.

As I think back, I was barely a man, dressed as well as my few remaining coppers would allow, sitting at the bench receiving a private lecture. For the past week I had been settling into my new found occupation, learning quickly about this and that, applying whatever skills I had learnt previously.

It was late in the day when I had been called aside from my duties. The Professor had been rabbiting on about his personal theory pertaining to other-worldly phenomenon.

“Are you listening? It's the light, you see. Something about the spectrum, something about the higher end in particular. Exactly what it is, I don't know. That's something I'm hoping to find out.”

I shook my head, not quite sure what he was getting at. Truth be told, I had not really paid attention over the past hour and I had not the foggiest idea of what he was going on about.

“Well, it's not just that, but it certainly plays a part in it. I mean, from what I've read, you can banish them in the twinkling of an eye with a strong light. It's anecdotal evidence, of course, but it's compelling. I've been meaning to set up a few experiments, you see, that will allow me to figure out whether it's a threshold, or a particular colour, or even a combination of colour or if, in fact, it has nothing to do with nature of the light at all, rather the intensity.”

I held up my hand in a bid to slow him down, but he

continued unabated. He has that habit, as I would find out, of continuing on whether anyone was listening or not. It is like he has a bladder in his brain, swollen and distended, and once the valve is released his thoughts gush out to relieve the pressure within.

For a while I sat, listening to the ramble in a quiet hypnotic state, letting his words flood about me. It was only after a few minutes that my brain decided to catch up with current events.

“...and that brings under the microscope all manner of questions, such as how the light interacts with them in the first place or if there is some kind of unknown effect that plays a part in it. It's a doozy, I'm telling you, what with all the possibilities it opens up,” he cried, his engine revving, “Because then you have implications upon Momentum, that mighty stone of science, and Force and Energy! *Energy!*”

“Energy,” I nodded.

“Yes, Energy. And if there is such an interaction, then the Laws of Physics as we apply them today would then need to be applied to all events, otherwise they aren't Laws, now, are they? And if they cannot be, in certain circumstances, applied, what then?”

“What then indeed?” I asked, doing my best to keep up.

I failed. There was just so much to comprehend, so much that seemed simply unreal that my mind gave up making sense of it all and concentrated on something small and tangible. I needed something I could hold onto. He was looking at me expectantly through his circular glasses, wiggling his eyebrows, swirling a pair of marble-balls in his hand.

“So, um, Professor?”

“Yes?”

“Can I see them?”

“Who?”

“The, um, the ghosts.”

“I don't know. Can you?” he asked, wiggling his dark eyebrows harder, shaking his pointed beard and looking around, mockingly, “Is there one in here right now?”

“I don't see one.”

“How would you know if you did?”

“I, um, I guess that I should discern a face or a body or, I don't know, something.”

His eyebrows stopped wiggling and dropped back down over his eyes like a canopy. He was growing frustrated, I could tell, that I did not understand what he was driving at.

“That's your problem there, lad, hoping for the obvious to show up. That's the problem with the whole damn field. Everyone wants one they can sit and chat to, that they can relate to, that they can put a ruddy face on. And the clairvoyants and soothsayers have just made a complete mess of it. Now the only thing that people want, what they *demand*, is a half exposure of someone in a white sheet.”

He tugged at his goatee beard in vexation.

“That's the problem. It's *expectations*, is what it is. It's you projecting what you want to see and hear and feel over what you actually see and hear and feel. It's a farce. It's a shambles,” he remonstrated, rifling through a drawer and bringing up a handful of photographs.

“And it always comes down to the visuals. Well, so be it. There!” he announced, thumping his finger on the pile, awaiting my reaction.

After a couple of seconds I timidly reached forward and took up a few, flicking through the grainy images of walls and doors and floors. On each was a series of glowing dots.

“What do you see?” he asked.

“I'm not sure if I'm supposed to see anything,” I admitted as I squinted, “It looks like a couple of doorways. I can see some paint peeling there...”

“You've got an eye for detail. That's good, that's

commendable, but look first, lad, for the obvious.”

“Oh,” I said, squinting and looking closer.

He sighed, pulling my head back from the photograph and circling the picture with his finger.

“The *obvious* first,” he growled, pointing to bright circles on the pictures, “These! In the air, floating about here.”

I shrugged, thoroughly confused, “And is this what I am looking for?”

“No! No! No! This is simply what *others* look for! These blobs of light are nothing more than dust specks in the air, nothing more! They act as tiny reflectors, catching the camera flash and shining light back onto the lens, looking for all the world like floating points of light. And they can be created at a whim, and discredited just as fast, for they are well known in the field,” he said, taking the photographs back and taking his time flicking through, “And I would not waste my time chasing dust, now, would I? No. I wouldn't, let me tell you. But what I might chase is this!”

The last photograph of the pile was placed under my nose. It looked very similar to the rest, with a glowing dot positioned a little off-centre, somewhere near the door covered in peeling paint. I expressed my indifference, expecting another lecture.

“I thought you would say that. Everyone says that. But here, here is the thing. That dot there is *not* a piece of dust.”

“It's not?”

“No. Does it look like the other floating specks?”

“Well, yes.”

“Does it have the same intensity?”

“No. No I guess it doesn't.”

“Look closely. I instructed you before to look for the obvious first. Now I want you to look for the nuance, the subtlety, the obscure, the latent little clues that will yield the answer.”

He handed me a magnifying glass so I could get a better look. I was only an assistant, back then, and I was still quite raw. What could I possibly see or say that would be of use to the Professor? Still, I looked closely and compared the tiny ball with the other photographs.

“It's certainly, um, *subdued*, isn't it? I'm not sure if that's the right word. And it does look different to the other pictures that you have here. But surely brightness is not...”

“Is not what I would base a discovery on, no. But look closer. These photographs, this one, and this one, all of them, are taken with a flash. You can see the reflections here, easily enough, on the opposite wall, on that door. The light, you see, is coming out from just above the camera and reflecting back to the lens. That's the flash,” he said, sounding a little giddy, “Whereas with *this* one, the light is coming from the orb itself! See? Look again!”

I looked once again at the photograph. It was true. The only reason I could see the paint peeling on the door was from the light coming from the point that hovered just next to it. The shadows caused by the paint flecks were also at a different angle. The Professor nodded sagely as I pointed this out.

“Plus, the point of light was not blurred and close to the lens, as with these dust specks, this is further away, right next to the door there and, if you use this,” he instructed while impressing upon me an even larger magnifying glass, “You can see that the image is quite well defined, not hazy and fuzzy like these, and that there is an apparent *structure* to the ball. Yes? It has a geometry!”

I took my time examining his evidence. Certainly this was no speck of dust, nor a clumsy reflection. The question had to be asked, however, and I was more than a little afraid to do it. He sensed my hesitation and, no doubt, knew what I was thinking.

“As for being some kind of double exposure, yes, I can

see how one may think that it would be possible. But here's the thing: With a double exposure you include a bunch of artefacts into an image with the express purpose of defining a disembodied face for the fancy of a wealthy client. Do you see a face? No. Do you see a floating white sheet? No. That's because there isn't one. If you're looking for something like that, I'm very happy to disappoint. That's showmanship. It's charlatanism. It's dishonourable and disrespectful to the field and I simply won't do it," he sniffed, "It brings everything down to the level of mere money grubbing, whereas I am a man of science. If those boobs stumbled upon the genuine article, they'd just as soon sell it to make a buck. If I make no pennies tomorrow but uncover undeniable proof of the existence of such beings that would start up this field in earnest, I will die a happy man."

"So you say," I said, a little more familiar than I would like.

As it was, the Professor did not take it the wrong way.

"I *do* say. And it is natural for you to be sceptical, for that's what happens when you let a bunch of no good, blind, frivolous, money-hungry gypsies run the show," he seethed, "I was sceptical myself. I have to be, being a man of science. But there are two things to which I can attest that will allay you of any suspicions. Firstly, that cannot be a double exposure, for the paint flecks on the door to be visible, for that embossing to show up, for the handle to reflect the light like that, overlaying a glowing dot would do no such things."

"Yes, Professor. I have worked with a photographer once," I said, immediately regretting my words.

I hoped that he would not ask me why I was no longer working with the photographer. He did not.

"Hmm? Oh. Good. That may come in handy."

He looked a little peeved that he had lost his train of speech, so I prompted him, "So, what's the second reason?"

“Ha! The second is that I consider the taker of this photograph to be credible. Very credible. Almost infallible. You see, *I* was the one who took the picture.”

“You?”

“On my word, I saw this very orb with my own two eyes! And this can be shown by the nature of the photograph once more: The angle of the door frame is not square to the edges. There is nothing of interest in the shot itself, no stairway or mantle-clock or fireplace or whatever the tricksters prefer to use in their images. The dot itself is close to the centre of the frame, but this is only because I turned the camera at the last instant to capture its image!” he said with a laugh, “A second later and you'd be looking at black plate. You see, it was all I could do to hit the shutter when I saw the spectacle, it moved so fast...”

“You *saw* it?”

“Yes! Keep up, now! I saw it, with my own two eyes, I saw it! One moment I was taking shots in the dark, testing a new plate that I've been working on. It works on the lower end of the spectrum, you know, in what is known as infra red.”

“Infer red?”

“No, no. *Infra*. If we look at the spectrum as the rainbow – you do know that colours of the rainbow, don't you?”

I immediately felt a little silly, “Of course! There's red and yellow and pink and green and purple...”

“Stop there. Stop, stop, stop! I know the rhyme. Well. It might interest you to know that there isn't really a red, a yellow, a pink and a green.”

“What?”

He rummaged underneath his desk and came up empty handed. Cursing quietly to himself, he left the room to fish about in his study, clanking and clattering away as he searched about. I took the opportunity to look at the photographs again.

My initial misgivings slowly gave way the more I

inspected and compared the shots. While I am no photographer, and cannot profess to be anything remotely close to an expert on the topic, as an observer who has used his eyes his entire life and has relied upon them for many different things, I would argue that my opinion would be as good as any other layman's in judging the artefacts before me.

The light coming from the dust reflecting back to the lens was evidently a common problem with photographers taking images of old houses or castles. Time had allowed copious, uncountable drops of dust to settle about, ready to fall and tumble through the air should a bumbling oaf come stomping through.

The one plate of interest, however, was nothing like this. The crispness of the ball, the definite glow that it emitted, the *form!* It had a geometry to it, that was striking. It was positioned quite close to the door, almost like it was resting against it, like it was making its mind up whether to enter the room or leave again.

“Here! Sorry about that. You buy these things and use them for demonstrations, then they grow legs and walk off by themselves. I've got a mind that Miss Fitzgerald is playing games with me,” muttered the Professor, assembling a prism within a holder, “I've found so many things that I thought were lost, and I'm convinced that, unless I placed them away when I was under the effects of some opiate, which, mind you, I could never be since I do not partake in it, then she has been toying with me... the blinds, lad! The blinds!”

I, lost in his rambling words, looked up, startled, “I'm sorry?”

“Don't be, and pull the blinds down! We need darkness for this demonstration! Wait! Let me light this lantern first.”

After a few minutes to find the lantern, a few minutes more to refuel it, and yet another few minutes to find some matches, “I don't smoke any more,” he had added, and a few

minutes more to attach an iris, he was ready to begin.

Finally, with the curtains drawn tightly, we sat in the hot glow of the lantern.

“Now watch closely, for this is the meat of the matter. Ha! Now to make it a little clearer, I shall put up this white piece of paper here. No, maybe a little further back. Yes, there. Now if I adjust his lantern to limit the light to only project this much, maybe less, you don't mind the dark, do you? Good.”

He adjusted the aperture of the lantern, slowly closing the iris until it let through only a thin stream of light. The blinds were quite effective, and I found myself captivated by the tiny emission, claiming my attention since it was the brightest thing in the room.

“Note the line produced by the beam of light is fairly invisible until it should strike another surface, like the paper. When it strikes it rebounds haphazardly, casting itself about the room. If I should sprinkle a little dust, there, you can see clearly the rod of light, yes?”

“Yes I can,” I observed.

“Good. And you'll notice, too, that the dust that might be present within the beam also acts to scatter the light about. From this we can surmise that one of the natures of light is that it prefers to continue as it is until something should present itself as an obstacle.”

I nodded, “So, similar to the momentum of a body?”

“How so?” he asked at my suggestion, eyebrows raised.

“Um. Well, I am not entirely familiar with the topic as you would be, but from what I understand, it was one of Sir Isaac Newton's famous statements, was it not, that spoke about a body in motion, and that the body prefers to maintain its motion unless acted upon by an unopposed force.”

My face went red. Here I was, a young, half-educated upstart talking to a seasoned Professor about a topic near to any Physician's heart.

He strummed his beard, “That’s a good analogy, I should suppose, but there is more to that story. For it applies to a body at rest, you know, and from what we can tell, light is never really at rest. But I suppose if it aids your understanding, then you should stick with it.”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be! I use analogies all the time! So long as you do not carry them too far, or give them more credit than they are due, they are very useful indeed,” he said, “Now let us continue. Bring that prism holder closer, will you? Keep it in the holder, it’s expensive you know, don’t drop it, a bit to the left...”

We adjusted the position of the prism until it interfered with the beam of the light, causing the homogeneous ray to separate itself into a rainbow, projected neatly onto the paper.

“And here is your spectrum.”

“I see.”

“Yes, you do. But note what I was saying before. What colour is this?”

I shrugged, “Red.”

“Very good. Very good. Now what colour is this?”

“Green, Professor.”

“And you are right again, full marks. Now here is a trickier question: Is red the same as green?”

I laughed spontaneously at his question, for I was expecting it to be something more scientific in nature.

He looked deadpan, “What is so funny?”

“Well, red is not green, Professor.”

“Then why not just say so? Why laugh?”

My face turned red, a hotness I sensed was plainly visible even in the darkness, “Well, I, er, I’m not sure. It’s an obvious answer, isn’t it?”

I could see his teeth from the lamplight leaking around the edges of the aperture, “My good lad, nothing is *obvious*. I’d

be out of a job, otherwise. Even the simplest of questions can be broken down to find some very, very strange conclusions and some cannot even be answered definitively at all.”

I said what I said whenever I had nothing left to say (which was often), which was, “Yes, Professor.”

He lowered his voice to a growl that shook my nerves some, “So I’ll ask again, is red the same as green?”

My mind felt a little dizzy. I did not wish to disappoint him or face another lecture.

“Um. No?”

“No? You sound unsure.”

“Yes?”

The Professor dragged his hands across his face, “Is it yes or no? Be observant! Make an observation!”

I breathed deeply, “No. Red is not the same as green.”

“It isn’t?”

“No.”

“Are you certain this time?”

“Yes.”

“Good. That was my conclusion as well. I see red, I see green, and I see that they are not the same. So let us play a little game.”

He took out a ruler from his pocket and handed it to me along with a pencil.

“Please mark, on the paper there, where red ends and where green begins.”

“But, um, there are other colours in between.”

“Then mark them out, also.”

Clumsily I drew on the page a line, just after the sheen of red turned to an orange. I measured a little across and drew another line between orange and yellow, then between yellow and green.

“You’ve marked this area as being distinct from this area, and this from this and so on,” he said, taking the pencil from

me and pointing to the portions, “And this appears to be a valid separation, for this red here is clearly different from this orange, and this yellow likewise. Now, move the paper to the next bench please.”

“Further away?”

“Yes, just onto the next bench there. Note that the further the prism is from the paper, the greater the spread of the colours. This is to be expected.”

“I should suppose,” I replied, coming back to the professor, but he stopped me.

“No, stay there. I want you to do the same as before.”

“But it's too wide, now. The green has fairly moved off the paper.”

“That's quite alright. Just mark out the individual areas as best you can.”

I scratched my head and began again, this time getting up to yellow before going back on my work. The larger distance and greater separation of colours showed that there was something else afoot.

“It might be wise, to play this properly, to indicate that there are actually differences in colour between the orange and the red, and the orange and the yellow,” I muttered.

The Professor merely grinned, showing his teeth over his goatee beard, “And this is where our game becomes difficult. Where, pray, does the red *stop* being red?”

“Around about here, I should think. It's more of an orangey kind of..”

“Around about? Use the ruler, man! Draw a line! Surely red is red only up to a point?”

“Well, um, then there,” I said, making my mark, “But it's a little hazy. It's hard to make it distinct.”

“So it is. If it was easy, it wouldn't be much of a game. But that shows you yet another strange facet of light. Red is not red. Red is merely the name we give to the colour of light that

is, as you said, around about there. Ish. Kind of. Sort of. Give or take,” he chuckled, “And that part you pointed out could easily, should I occlude this portion of the spectrum like so, it could easily pass as an orange.”

He held a card in front of the ray of light, blocking sections of the spectrum.

“I guess it could.”

“So, rather than a distinct separation of colours, one may conclude that the colours of the rainbow encompass a very gradual and subtle transition.”

“That is a revelation,” I said, looking closely at the rainbow, “I never thought of it like that.”

“Probably because you've not been taught to think of it like that. I could go on for some time about this topic, you know...”

“No doubt you could,” I mumbled, thinking about the long-winded lecture that morning.

“...for there are many, many interesting attractions to this field of optics. One, for example, is that when passing white light through particular media, we find that voids within the spectrum are produced.”

“I'm sorry?”

“Voids. Missing colours. Colours that otherwise would be there, but are strangely diminished in their intensity. It's a conundrum, one that I hope to examine when I've time, and one that is currently being scrutinised by some of my contemporaries.”

I pondered, “Why not join them?”

“I would, I would. But currently they are looking at merely reproducing what can be reproduced, and measuring what can be measured. It's a rather tedious part of study. I think that I shall be more content to examine what evidences they've gathered,” he said.

“But that might preclude you from discovering

something important along the way.”

His eyebrows dropped and his chin jutted forward, thrusting his beard at me, “I don't do this for accolades, lad! It's for the betterment of understanding! It's for knowledge! My pride has no place in the history books, and it won't help any formulas to be derived.”

“My apologies. It's just that...”

“Every other scientist you've come across is hell-bent on being the next, great Pascal, the next Bernoulli?”

I reluctantly nodded, “Yes, in fact. I would not have put it so bluntly, but.”

“I know it. They have glorious visions of having their minds celebrated, thrust into the sky for all to admire. They revel in the gasps of wonder at their achievements, listen intently for their name being tied to a phenomenon, or a formula, or a method. And, while I'm not about to deny that such an honour would be most appreciated on my part, it would be only as a bonus to what reward I should receive upon discovering that vital piece of evidence, that delicious nugget upon which I can deliberate with my peers and bring the field away from the occult and into the light of science,” he intoned, his eyes sparkling softly in the lamplight, “And that is why I would like you to understand first what it is that you are looking for.”

“I see.”

“Or, rather, you don't!”

“But...”

“No, no. There is one last little portion of this game that I wish for you to play. The next step is only natural in the sequence that we've, so far, played out. Mark, with your graphite upon the paper, the point where you can no longer see any red light,” he instructed.

Carefully I took my ruler and drew a line where I determined that the redness was no longer visible. Again, it was

a little unclear, but I was determined to mark it where there was not an speck of light showing.

“Good. That will do just fine. You've seen, then, that the light is dispersed across the paper, from red, through green, through cyans and blues, up through to violet. And, although it may appear obvious to you, we can see nothing further past that violet there, and nothing further past red in the other direction,” he summarised, quickly opening the blinds.

The sudden brightness caused me to squint. I could not tell if the Professor was doing the same, for he had donned a pair of shining, obsidian glasses.

“And so having established this clear set of rules, we need to ask ourselves if there is anything outside of the visible spectrum? Anything past the end lines that you have made?”

“I, um, I should think so.”

“But you cannot see it.”

“No,” I admitted plainly, “I can't...”

“Can you smell it? Go on, have a sniff. Can you feel it? If the answer is no, how can you form an opinion?”

I held my hands up, “Because you have already said that there is this infernal red!”

“*Infra* red, lad! That's right, though. I've already given you the answer. But, as a true scientist, you will want evidences for yourself, and I would think it only proper to demonstrate these to you. However, I fear we do not have as much time as all that, for I mean to get you into training...”

I started, “Training?”

“... immediately. And for this I will require you to accept, at my word, that the spectrum continues unabated to the left and to the right, before the red and after the violet.”

“I have no objection to take this at face value.”

“You should!”

“What? But I don't! I'll be happy to question it, if you like.”

“No! Not if *I* like, it should – look, the necessity to question is a fundamental quality of a scientist! I was hoping for a bit more resistance...”

I shot, perhaps a bit too cheekily, “You were hoping to give another lecture!”

He harrumphed, “Quite! Quite! Another lecture indeed!”

“I mean no offence, Professor.”

“Yes, well, ahem, *had* you doubted me, I could have cited many experiments that point to the contrary and, I shall yield, I would be proud to demonstrate them for you. Well, take it as you like, but I expect that, as a friend and fellow you will question me more on this topic later!”

I nodded, happy to have one over the Professor, “I will. Thoroughly. But about this training.”

“Ah, yes. The training. You see, in order to test my theories of the effect of light upon the subjects, I need first to ensure that I can readily and repeatedly gain access to a subject.”

“A subject? You mean a ghost?”

“Call it what you will.”

“But how...”

“Can I conjure up a ghost? I cannot. But what I can do is use the power of statistical analysis to show me when a ghost is more likely to be manifest.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Imagine, if you will, that I might perform such a similar experiment as that with the prism, at the drop of a hat, on demand, just like that,” he said, clicking his fingers, “Whenever I should please. That's repeatability. That's why I need successive encounters: so there can be no doubt. No speculation. No jeering from the audience.”

“Do you wish to capture a ghost?”

“Good Lord, no! Well, perhaps. That's a thought I hadn't entertained. But, no, my plan was, and still is, to use a

scientific approach. And this must be the next stage of my plan, for without the likelihood of successive encounters, there is no way I could draw any definitive conclusions.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“In this line of work, *conclusions* are everything. Even if a subject were to float up to me, sit on my lap and recite a rib-tickling limerick, I could no more count it as anything more credible than the photograph of the orb.”

“Still, it would be exciting, wouldn't it?”

His eyes were lost a little behind his perfectly round spectacles, “Yes. Yes I dare say it would be.”

He muttered to himself, as he would so many times in the coming years, and hypnotised himself with his words, “Such an amazing prospect! Such an exciting idea!”

With a yank of his beard he brought himself out of his stupor, “That's lost to the future. I must follow my plan of experimentation. Statistics and observation. Yes. Can you grow a beard?”

I was taken aback by his sudden question, and I frowned, “Um, no Professor.”

“No? That won't do.”

“Well, I've not tried, but I think that the most I can muster at my age is a dusty coating.”

“Well work on that in your spare time. If you cannot get a beard, then try for mutton-chops, or a moustache. You need something to stroke when you're thinking,” he ordered, sizing me up as if for the first time even though I had been working with him for over a week, “I won't have a fellow scientist walking around clean shaven.”

For the record, the Professor is one hundred percent right in this respect. I do believe that God gave men moustaches, beard and side-burns for the express purpose of thinking.

I have since grown a full beard, trimmed down on my cheeks, that I can rub and strum while in thought. I have,

however, kept the top of my lip clean, at the insistence of my wife. Science and romance, it can be shown, are not wholly compatible.

I should have enjoyed to have compared the aspects of facial hair and cognitive ability, but that would be in another lifetime.

But I digress.

I said, "But, Professor, I'm not a scientist."

"What? What are you doing here then?" he roared, "Is this just another job to you?"

"No, Professor," I squeaked.

"Jolly good! Because with this game, either you're in or you're out."

"Yes, Professor."

"I haven't time to waste on bumbling upstarts. I need an observant, trainable student."

"Yes, Professor."

"And in order to capture the evidence I so desperately need, I need an assistant and an observer and a fellow scientist. That's you!"

So struck was I with his words, that my mouth only made the soundless impression, "Yes, Professor."

He began tidying up, organising this and that. I thought about all he had said. While being his assistant was not formal training, not a university or a guild school, it would certainly be an interesting career choice. I made my mind up then and there to give this job everything I had.

"You need to collect evidence. What more evidence can you gather," I said, and I motioned to the photograph, "Isn't this enough?"

"Far from it! Far from it! Oh, you haven't been in this game long enough to understand how intense the scrutiny is, how ruthless the criticisms! Peer review, they call it, and it's a circus!" cried the Professor, gesticulating wildly, "They'll

snatch and catch and chew on anything you've got! They'll turn your words about and around and twist and turn them into unintelligible gibberish, and throw it back at you to sort through. It's all part of the process, to a degree, and I confess to having criticised unfairly myself in the past, but that doesn't make it any easier. They're ravenous beasts, all of them!"

"Must it go through peer review? Can't you simply take what you have to the press?"

"And rely on popular opinion? Posh! Haven't you heard a word I've said to you? If I am to bring this field, the field of paranormal science, any credulity or meaning, then it must not be a mere side-show to be paraded before the public's eye. It must be done methodically, with care, attention to details. It's a burden I must face!"

I implored, "But if the review is so fierce, and the evidence is so scarce, then how can you hope to prove anything?"

This made him stop his wild motions and settle some. I was not sure if he was building up to a raging tirade, which I had witnessed a couple of times before in previous employers, or if he was sitting in defeat. Either way, I stayed where I was and waited to see, be it an explosion or an implosion.

It was neither.

"I don't need to *prove* anything, lad," he said, "Not yet. I only need to gather as much data as possible, reaped with scientific methods, compiled and processed transparently. I need quantifiable, reviewable measurements that can stand up to being picked at by the sharpest, most critical minds in the business. Then, lad, once they have accepted that there may be merit to further investigations, then the field will grow in acceptance and be seen as a mature endeavour by my peers."

"Surely you won't convert them all?"

"Not all, not all, hardly any, if at all, and that's the truth. But then I don't need to convince them all. I don't need to

convince even half. I only need a handful to nod, lend their intellectual weight to a few discussions without resorting to snide remarks and dismissive hand gestures. It will be a slow process, you see, and perhaps I be will among those we seek before I get to see any real progress,” he sighed wearily, suddenly showing his age, “And that would be a shame. Still, the rains of April do not taste the fruits of May.”

I shook my head, “I'm sure it won't come to that, Professor. From what you have shown me here, there's little more to it than being in the right place, at the right time with, perhaps, the right equipment. Is that not so?”

“That is true, to an extent, but you've gone and missed the fundamental point of it all, that is there is the necessity that accurate records are taken from which conclusions can be derived. Can you aid me in this?”

“I can, Professor. I'm ready to do whatever it is that needs to be done.”

“That's the spirit, lad!”

“Ha! Um. Pun intended?”

“Naturally. So, clear your schedule for tonight, and for tomorrow morning as well.”

“Tomorrow morning?”

“Of course. This experiment will go well into the night.”

An experiment? To look for evidence of supernatural activity? My tasks, as described when I took the job, was that I'd be compiling notes and cleaning equipment, readying the laboratory space.

“But, I, er...”

“Had a prior engagement? Lad, to be the man who helps push forth the boundaries of science, you must be willing to be separated from worldly comforts once in a while.”

I blushed, “It's a little embarrassing to say, but, I've started my jobs before the sun comes up, or I've finished them well after it's gone down, but I've not been out all night since,

well, *ever!*”

“Aha! There's a first for everything, then! Now trot home, rest up and ready yourself. I'll need you with wide eyes and wider ears.”

Grosvenor Lane

The Professor, I had decided early on, was not what I would define as a typical employer, and I should know. My poor family, in a bid to get me employment, had called upon all of their resources, and those of family and friends, to pull whatever strings could be pulled.

I had set out under my first employer, the Baker, with great enthusiasm. I woke up early to haul bags of flour and mix gigantic bowls of dough for the morning rush. Under close scrutiny I kept the ovens stoked, the flues clean and the shelves stacked. I pride myself on being a fast learner, and this is undeniable. My problem lies, however, in my inherent clumsiness.

One might consider it a family tradition: My father has fallen off more horses than he has ridden. My mother keeps a pot of glue handy for the plates and bowls she breaks on a daily basis. My brother retired from the army with two bullet wounds to his foot, self inflicted.

Apparently he did not learn the first time to ensure that his musket was empty before cleaning it.

I, on the other hand, was determined to hold my family name high and dispel the notion that our fingers were all thumbs, that our feet were clubs. My second week on the job, however, proved the inescapable fact that a trait is a trait, ingrained into the flesh of the family, and cannot be removed with the sharpest scalpel.

Carrying a bag of flour one morning, the top of the sack came open. Perhaps a rat had nibbled at it, or perhaps the knot was not as securely tied as I thought it might have been. In any case, when I plonked the bag of flour onto the ground, a plume of white dust billowed into my face.

Naturally enough, I staggered about trying to clear the dry, stinging dust from my eyes, clumsily stumbling here and

there. In my throes I knocked over a pitcher of oil upon the floor. Without labouring too much on the story, which, I must admit, is one of the most shameful episodes of my life, I slipped on the oil, bumped into the other apprentice who was coming in behind me, sending him sprawling across the floor.

I tripped over him, headlong into the shelves upon the wall, sending huge pots and metal poles clattering down onto the oven, one of which must have knocked the flue which sent a dark cloud of burning soot over everything.

Suffice to say, I was sent packing before the morning was out. I remember the heat in my ashen cheeks as I sadly returned to my house, unemployed and forlorn.

My subsequent vocations ended in similar tragedies, though none so horrible as that day with the Baker. For the glazier, I managed to break a series of window panes. With the courier, I lost too many packages (which were stolen from under my nose, might I add). With the painter, well, let us just say that my fear of heights did nothing to aid my balance upon the scaffolding.

Pretty soon, every master in town knew of my reputation, and none would have me. Moving Heaven and Earth, my parents pleaded and persuaded anyone who would lend an ear, until we were out of options.

The Professor came as a blessing from the great blue.

Whether he was simply not up with current events, or if he did not care, I shall never know. Quite frankly I shudder to think what would have happened should we not have called upon his favour to give me employment.

I remember, quite distinctly, him rubbing his goatee beard, adjusting his hat a little, thinking hard. I feared his dark eyes and his thin mouth, and I trembled at his direct manner of speech but, to this day, I am grateful for the opportunity he afforded me.

So, determined to please, determined to be more than a

bumbling fool, I had listened and learned as much as I could from the Professor, taking mental notes of everything. So concerned was I to keep me in his favour, that I took extra care when handling anything in his lab, lest I should drop it, and listened so intently that he never needed to repeat himself.

Still, this errand he had me on, it rattled me somewhat. Cleaning up a laboratory or preparing samples or taking notes, these were things I could do easily. Exploring the possibility of a haunted house, well, that simply is not something that I would consider normal.

As the hour drew near, I found that my stomach was all butterflies, my palms were a little sweaty, and my head had that giddy feeling. I practised my breathing, as best I could, and tried to stay focussed as I prepared myself for the night ahead.

That evening I met up with the Professor once more. It was drizzling out, and the cloud cover made the shadows a shade or two darker than usual, denying the light from the gas lamps dotting the street any penetration into their corners.

“It's a fine night you've chosen,” I grumbled, pulling my moth-holed coat around me a bit tighter, “Could you not have waited until spring?”

The Professor, dressed in suitable cold-weather attire, complete with his worn bowler, thick scarf and woollen waistcoat, seemed unperturbed by the chill and damp. In fact, he was positively glowing.

“It's the perfect weather for it, lad. I'll explain on the way. Here is our carriage, late as expected,” he announced, pointing to the growling carriage that heaved up alongside, “Help me load these bags up there, will you? Careful with that one, there are the plates in there.”

Between myself and the driver we managed to stow the bags of equipment safely, and I got into the cabin with the Professor. It was not much warmer than the outside, but at least the drizzle, which had mustered enough strength to turn into

rain, was not upon us.

“South Entrance, my good man,” the Professor called from the window.

The cabby, his oils slicked down against the miserable precipitation, called out the side of his mouth, “An' where'bouts 'n the Sou' Entrance you be wantin', sir?”

“Grosvenor Lane, off Turner and Cummins. Do you know it?”

“I know it well 'nough, sir.”

“If you need directions, I can happily guide you. I've been there once or twice.”

“Won't be nec'rry, sir.”

“Jolly good. Number forty two, then, my good man.”

The cabby's call sounded definitive, “Right y'are, sir.”

And with that, a click of his tongue and flick of the reins, the carriage grumbled its way about the streets. There were a few pedestrians still about. Some were shop owners closing up for the night. Others were certainly of a more nefarious breed, skulking out of sight as the carriage approached, only to leer in from the shadows as we passed.

“South Entrance?” I enquired, hoping to know a little more about what lay before me.

“Yes, there's a house there.”

He paused, looked out the window as if he were gathering his thoughts, but then fell silent.

I joked, “I should think there are many there.”

“But not like this one.”

After a few moments silence, I prodded, “And what would make *this* house so special?”

“Aha! I know what you want me to say, and I won't say it! No! You want me to say it's haunted, that it's filled to the brim with spirits of the dead, that it's crawling with unspeakables and unmentionables and unholies, oh!” he laughed mightily before settling down to his usual rhythm,

“You want me to bring out a pentagram? A cross? Sprinkle some salt across the path and brush it with a widow's broom?”

“No, Professor.”

“But you want me to say that it is haunted. No. That is something that I simply will not declare. For to do so would bias your opinion. For this is a *training* exercise, and as such I cannot allow my words to pollute your experience.”

“But I will need *some* guidance, surely!” I implored, “Otherwise what is the point?”

“Guidance you will get. But we have an array of tools here, implements of measure, and these need to be calibrated.”

“Calibrated?”

“Yes, measured against a base sample so that we can see what is, shall we say, *normal*, and what is abnormal.”

“Abnormal or paranormal?”

“Abnormal, laddy, is the word I choose to use, and deliberately so. For it implies that a measurement was something that was merely out-of-place, you see, that it was unexpected. Whether or not it relates to something being paranormal, well, that comes with the analysis that follows, whether it can be explained through natural phenomena or not.”

“And if it cannot?” I asked, eagerly.

The Professor chuckled a little.

“You're eager, I know. But I must impress this upon you: In the limited experience that I have had so far, most anomalies can be attributed to very reasonable happenings. If I were to label every noise, every flash, every whisper as a spirit, well, I might just as well slap a fools cap on my nonce and spend the rest of my days ranting to the wall. Do you understand what I'm saying?”

I nodded, “I do, Professor. In essence, I should look for the obvious before turning to the not-so obvious.”

“Precisely. More than that, you need to be attentive to

your record taking. Record everything and filter nothing. Do not suppose during an investigation, for there will be plenty of time afterwards, when we collate notes, for sifting through the evidence.”

“I see.”

“Think of it as gold mining. You need to churn through rocks and dirt and mud and muck! You need to sift and poke and prod! It's tiresome, laborious and thankless,” he went on, “And people will call you a fool! They'll say that you're wasting your time and talents! At times like that you need to persevere, persist until you find that fleck of gold, that nugget that makes it all worthwhile!”

We rolled past Callington station, smoke and steam still issuing from the coach that had rolled in that evening. Excited chatter from the remnants that were still rolling out from the doors disturbed the noise within the cabin, then, a few seconds later as the cabby took a sharp right, the noises from the street settled down once more and the rain resumed its thrumming upon the cabin.

His words had inspired me inside the cabin but, looking out, I could not help but feel a sense of the morose creeping in from the windows.

“So why tonight, Professor?”

He looked back from the windows, “Hmm?”

“Why this weather? Why tonight? Of all the miserable times of the year to spend a night at a house in South Entrance...”

“I hear your concerns, but tonight is ideal for calibration, believe it or not.”

“I'll believe it more if you would explain your reasoning behind it.”

“How familiar are you with the sounds and smells and sights of an abandoned house, my lad, hmm? One that has not had a person living inside it for a year or more?”

“I, er, cannot say for certain. I can imagine...”

“Do not imagine. How much experience have you had?”

“Um.”

I did not wish to sound stupid, however that was exactly how my monosyllabic response came out. I wanted to say that, although I could not reasonably be expected to have such knowledge, I was more than capable of learning. The silence of the cabin only made my tongue lazier.

I hastily followed it up with what I thought would come out more eloquently than it did.

“Er?”

The Professor cleared his throat. That was an ominous sign, for it meant that he was getting ready to settle in for a long lecture.

“You have spent a lot of your life inside your house, I might assume, and your house is young and fresh and well established. You light a fire during the colder months? There is food that isn't rotten in your pantry? You have plumbing?”

I nodded, “Yes.”

“Fresh water? Drainage?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have the luxury of piped gas?”

“No.”

“Not to worry. What's on your roof? Thatch or wooden slats or tiles?”

“Tiles, sir.”

“And I assume that you have neighbours upon either side of you? It's a busy neighbourhood?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you would have carpets and alcohol lamps, candles and perhaps even a gramophone?” he enquired.

“Yes, I do.”

“So your house is very much alive! It's as alive as you are! It's filled with warmth and colour and movement! I dare

say you've spent many nights awake in bed, next to your lamp, reading a solid book? Well, that's just fine, that is, but it won't help you tonight," he said, poking about inside a gladstone bag, "Because tonight you'll be entering a house with no presence of humanity left. There are no lamps, no candles, no lanterns, no artificial sources of light. No carpets are upon the floorboards, no pictures upon the wall. The walls have been stripped bare. No water flows within the pipes, neither from a tap nor a pump, nor down a drain."

"No gramophone either, I suppose?"

"None. So any noises you will find will be that of the house, and the house only, that one may assume occur every night of the year, whether anyone is about to hear them or not," he said, bringing up a glass jar from his bag, "Here, hold this, will you? By the base! By the base! Any lights you may see belong to the house. Any smells you may smell, any sensations you may feel, all of it is uncontaminated by human presence."

"What is this?"

"A piece of equipment that I've had crafted, an *electroscope*, that we will use upon this visit, you know, get some base readings."

I felt a little deflated, "This is how we'll get our calibration, then? By visiting a house with no, um, interest? Nothing going on?"

"Precisely. From my previous exploits, I have found this house to be reliably *uneventful*."

"Uneventful?" I asked again, hoping that my ears had deceived me.

"Decidedly. Unfortunately, for your expectations at least, this may well prove to be a very tedious night."

He was right. I was quietly hoping to be surprised tonight, to exact a find that the Professor might consider worthy to present before his peers. Admittedly, I had butterflies in my stomach up to that point but upon his admission that

there was nothing of interest to be expected, they quickly dispersed into the blackness of the night.

He leaned in, “Your face speaks volumes, lad. You do know that science is not all about amazing discoveries and fantastic notions?”

I openly admitted, “Of course, of course. But I cannot help but feel a little disappointed. I can understand completely, however, the need for some sort of calibration. If not only for the instruments but for myself.”

“Well said!”

“So the house in question would necessarily need to be void of activity.”

He took the electroscope from me and stowed it into his bag, looking distractedly out the window.

“Still, I've a lingering question. The rain, you see...”

“Ah! Just a second,” he piped up, leaning out from the window, ignoring the rain that was collecting in his beard and on his spectacles, “Just off Turner now, my good man!”

“Right y'are, sir,” the cabby replied gruffly, adding, “Nummer for'y two, if my mem'ry ain't as bad as ye thinkin'.”

The rebuke flew past the Professor, “Quite right, number forty two. And we'll not be needing a ride back tonight, so I'll thank you to help with the luggage when we stop.”

The driver's reply was as wet as his slicks, “*Very* good, sir.”

The carriage rolled to a stop. The horses, although thoroughly sodden, were content to droop their heads and examine the reflections off the cobbles while the rain trickled over their muscles in great drops. One let out a whinny, but was admonished promptly by the cabby.

“Easy, there, Bessy! Easy on, girl!” the cabby soothed, getting down from his seat, and helping unload the gear and port it to the door.

I looked about carefully, conscious that South Entrance

was not the most cosmopolitan of areas, and that its shadows were rumoured to hide all sorts of creatures of the night. On such a dreary evening, however, I settled myself by considering that anyone up to no good would be more likely within a tavern or holed up in a hovel. The cabby seemed unperturbed, likewise the Professor.

“Don't just stand there gaping, lad, help with that bag there!” he barked.

It could have been the Professor's outburst, but something got into Bessy. She was no longer content to stand in the rain, rather she was tapping the ground anxiously with her feet, clearly keen to keep moving.

The cabby, setting a bag down, clicked his tongue and called out softly to his horses.

I picked up a solid, leather satchel and slung my own knapsack over my shoulder and ported them to the waiting house. It was a derelict hulk, for sure, with dirt covered windows, hazy and discoloured from lack of attention, curtainless and boarded up from within.

The front garden, the little of which could be called such, was overgrown with weeds and grass and a nasty bush that seemed resentful at having had the bad fortune to be grown in such a rude patch. One side of it had been crushed and broken, no doubt the result of children larking about.

The door was plain but solid. It appeared that there would have been, at some stage, a knocker or a bell attached, along with perhaps some ornate trimmings, but these had all been removed. Even the post-hole's brass edging was no longer present, having been replaced with a hastily applied plank of wood secured with a few nails.

I went back to grab the last bag from the cab.

Bessy whinnied again and paced a little, upsetting the other horse and jiggling the carriage behind her. The cabby, having taken his payment, raced back to his seat to settle his

horses. Bessy, however, was having none of it, and used her insistence to take off. The driver called and clicked his tongue, but Bessy refused to listen, taking him and his carriage off down the street.

“Fair ye well, thanky for ye custom,” he called, doing his best to save face, “Come on, girl! Slow up! Eas' now!”

I was left by the side of the road looking after the driver. It was odd, but, then again, what cabby is without his quirks?

I turned back to the house and stopped, with a queer sensation that I was being watched. I stole a glance left and right, then behind me, before raising my eyes some.

Looking up to the first floor, guarding my eyes from the stinging rain, I was surprised to see a face peeking over the sill, looking down upon me from an upstairs window. It was only the top of a head, beginning with a nose and ending in a sad, floppy cap.

Evidently the Professor had another underling to aid him tonight. It was strange that he did not mention it. Still, mine was not to question.

I waved courteously.

“What are you doing standing out there, lad?” the Professor called out from the shelter of the porch, “You'll catch your death! Come over here at once!”

I hurried over to the doorway and hurriedly put the bag down.

“Sorry about that,” I said, “I was only waving to the chap upstairs. Is he to accompany us also?”

“What are you on about? Come on, it's dry enough on the porch, but it's drier still inside. Well, mostly. The back area has a spot that leaks a bit, but it's easy enough to spot. Do try and stay warm.”

He took out a keyring and flipped through the various shapes and sizes.

“But, Professor, the gentleman upstairs...”

He looked up from the keys, “God? What about him?”

“No, no, no. Upstairs, in this house. Just before, I saw...”

“Aha!” he sniffed, presenting an ordinary key, “It's the one with the point at the end, see? We'll have to lock up when we're done, so take note. I do tend to be a little tired by the end of these exercises, so I'll be getting you to make the place secure when we leave.”

“Yes, Professor. About the...”

“And one last thing,” he said, standing to his full height and looking me square in the eyes, “No more talking until I say. Understood?”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Not a peep.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Any noise you make may contaminate what I am noting. And, by the same token, no smoking, no matches. We have lanterns, and we shall use these after we have set up. Keep your auditory contamination to a minimum.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“And this is very sensitive equipment. The auditory sensor you are holding is especially fragile, and even a loud bang can set it wrong in such a way as that it cannot be set right without sending it back to the manufacturer.”

“And where's that?”

“Dublin. And you've already gone and forgotten what I've just instructed you!” he grumbled, “*No more sound*, no more chit-chat, and if you really, really must relieve yourself of the noises within you, be a good chap and come out here in the rain!”

“But that's...”

His eyes were very sharp. There was no nonsense in them, and I understood this as his final word. I gave in, made a motion with my fingers next to my lips to indicate that they were locked tight, and picked up the bag.

He relented a little, leaned in and whispered in a voice barely audible above the chatter of the rain on the portico, “I understand that at times it is necessary to communicate in the most punctual way possible. This house is quite old and may be rotting in a few spots, so keep your eyes and ears open and if you have such a need, try first whispering, like this.”

I nodded, lips tight, not daring to open my mouth. He smiled a satisfied smile and patted me lightly on the cheek.

“Good lad,” he whispered.

For such an old door, the key turned easily, with the faintest of clicks to betray its complete revolution and the hinges swung with just as much noise. I suspected that, since the Professor had been here before, and that he was so sensitive to contaminating noises about the place, that he would have oiled the mechanisms well.

Now I must say that I had crossed many thresholds in my comparatively short lifetime. It is a simple matter. One puts a foot over the door line, shifts one's weight to that foot, and then brings the other foot to follow.

This door, I remember distinctly, was not so easy to cross. My right foot, being in the lead, refused to budge. My muscles felt a little weak, in truth, like I might collapse from the effort. I lowered my foot and tried with the other, with similar results.

“Oh, come on!” the Professor hissed, pulling me roughly inside, “Enough horseplay.”

I was more than a little shocked at the behaviour of my limbs. Looking back at the door, there was nothing there that should have cause such a strange sensation. I put it down to nerves, inexperience, that which separates the novice from the amateur.

I looked about.

Inside was, naturally enough, dark. The light from the street lamps outside were only just able to penetrate in through

the front door and through the various crack in the boards on the windows. The floorboards were clearly defined, with not an ounce of a carpet or a tile to cover their shame.

The room to the left, facing the street, had a fireplace set into the far wall. A smattering of ash and creosote had burst from its stomach across the floor, made recently, it would seem, since the particulate held no footprints. I suspected that perhaps a downward gush of wind may have kicked it from the flue on a particular blustery night.

As I was looking in the room, I had the odd sensation that the room was looking back at me. Now, I know that sounds absurd, but I can think of no better way to describe it. Imagine, if you will, entering a room where a band is playing merrily, and a party is sitting down to dinner. Now continue with the image and picture the band suddenly ceasing their music and the guests lowering their forks, and then having all eyes turned toward you.

There was no band or guests in this room, no eyes that I could see, and yet I could *feel* a gaze upon me.

A flood of warmth swept over me, followed by a cool blast from my kidneys. In the darkness, I could feel my face turn red from, well, embarrassment!

My heart beat fast. My breathing shallowed some. I felt unwelcome. No, that is not quite right. I felt like I was being inspected.

I came back, stumbling a little, keen to put a some distance between myself and the room, to find the Professor glaring at me. He was standing by the door and pointing angrily to the bags that I had left on the portico. I did not mean to seem insolent, and I would have apologised and said as much, but I remembered quite clearly the requirements of silence administered by the Professor only moments before.

I reluctantly held my tongue, dutifully picked up the bags and carried them in, placing them where he indicated at the

foot of a humble staircase. I stole another glance into the room, upon my return, wondering how such an empty space, with only a dirty old fireplace to break its monotony, could fire up my emotions so.

He closed the door, softening the noise of the brewing wind without to a hush, and turned back noiselessly.

He came up with a pair of lanterns, which he set on the floor, and took out a box of matches, indicating that I should cover my eyes. I confess that I did not honour his appeal, rather I was blinded momentarily by the stark flash and brightness of his match as it flared and shone against the drab surroundings.

Too late was I with my hand to my eyes, that I stood for several seconds, mouth open and blinking like an idiot. I knew the Professor was shaking his head and muttering to himself inside that critical cranium of his, but I did not care. For as my vision cleared with each blink, I became aware of another presence within the room.

Perhaps it was just the shadow cast from the obstruction of the Professor's hand over the match as he brought it to the lantern, or perhaps it was the play of the rain upon the exposed window in the room across the way, but I saw, at least I *think* I saw, a small boy skip lightly, *silently*, up the stairs.

It was really little more than a hurried, pale pair of legs attached to a dark torso, and could just as easily be attributed to my eyes adjusting to the darkness of the house. My mind, though, was stubborn in its assessment.

I rubbed my eyes and looked again, but any form that might have been there was gone. I did not hear any footsteps and, by the age of the staircase, it ought to creak and groan just by looking at it.

With one hand I grabbed the Professor's shoulder, and with the other I pointed warily up the stairs.

He shook his head in annoyance and pointed back to the lantern, fiddling with it to get it lit. While he tinkered with the

wick, I stared up the stairs again, wondering if my eyes were playing tricks. Nothing stirred up there, no matter how hard I stared. Again, I put it down to unfamiliarity with my surroundings, inexperience and nerves. That was all it was.

After a second or two he had the lantern operating, and the bright light it displayed showed me clearly that there was nothing and no one upon the stairs.

Checking behind me, back in the front room, I allowed the Professor's light to reassure my senses that everything was as it should be. After all, this was the Professor's calibration house, one void of anything fancy.

The Kitchen

We brought ourselves into a kitchen area, complete with an aged table. The wood worms had had their fill, and what was left could barely be called the skin and bones of it. The lantern and the lighter pieces of equipment were set upon it and it held them sturdy enough. The rest, for fear of them being too much of a burden for the poor piece of furniture, were placed carefully on the floor.

The Professor, double checking the pieces, drew near and whispered, “Now, we shall begin our calibration.”

I nodded, indicating that I was ready to do what needed to be done, but I was very unsure what that entailed.

“This is our base of operations, you may say, where our equipment lies. If you need me, or if I need you, we shall meet up here. It is central enough to the house. Do you understand?”

I nodded.

“Good lad. Now, let me show you some pieces you will be observing. Don't worry, it doesn't take a scientific eye to read a measurement, although there is a lot of science behind them,” he hummed, not letting his voice go much higher than the permeating sound outside.

He pointed to the camera box, “No one but myself will operate this. However, I will require you, later on, to feed me the plates and handle the spent ones. Have you done so before?”

I nodded. I had worked for a couple of months during a visit to Amsterdam as a photographer's lackey. The pay was not good, and the conditions were terrible. For hours I would wait around while his Grand Highness, the Maestro (as he *insisted* I call him), prepared his equipment and set up the flash and measured the angles and readjusted the lens, only to be yelled at and clipped across the ears as I hastily reset the camera plates after his shots.

Only once had I dropped the plate. Well, it was several plates. The whole box, in fact. After a long day of shooting, I was carrying the plates back with me to his studio, when I noticed that his Greatness, the Maestro, had left a shroud on the ground. I stopped and turned to go back and pick it up, naturally enough, only that I had not noticed that his Eminence, bringing with him his mighty stomach, was walking closely behind me.

He brushed past me, well, more of a bump than a brush. Actually, one might describe it that he slammed into me with his gut and bowled me over like a skittle! In any case, the box flew from my hands, spilling its contents about the grass. Each plate was exposed to the burning sun, ruining the day's work.

For this I endured such a broadside that I shall never forget, followed closely by the dreaded stare and those ominous words I would hear all too often from my employers.

“Fresh plates are here. Used ones go in here. I shan't need to explain the manner in which they must be treated?” asked the Professor carefully.

“Do you have a shroud?” I whispered, my voice sounding strangely foreign to me for having been silent for more than a few minutes.

“Yes, in that bag there. And the flash powder is a concoction of my own, designed to produce a more dull light, suitable for indoors. So the process will be,” he said as he held up one finger at a time, “Load the plate, charge the flash, I take the photograph, unload the plate, clean the flash, repeat.”

I nodded. My neck was feeling a little loose from it all. Sitting in the dark like that, huddling about a lantern on a mouldy table, the situation became a little more clear to me. This was something very out of the ordinary.

Sure, I wanted the experience, I wanted to learn what it was like to be a scholar of a scientific field. I had visions of peering through a microscope or handling a crucible filled with

a bubbling, molten concoction, not squatting in decaying houses taking photographs of rotten furniture.

“First we need to do some base readings. Now, to the equipment. This,” he said, pointing to the glass bell-jar he had showed me earlier, “Is an electroscope. If the air above the plate here becomes charged, the repulsion of these filaments here becomes greater than the gravity that restrains them, and they will separate.”

“Charged?” I whispered, “But how?”

“Good question. One that I greatly wish to investigate. I've only witnessed it directly a handful of times, and each time I've scored a hit or two on my other instruments,” he explained with more than a little enthusiasm, “Although this really only gives a qualitative analysis. It cannot, for example, demonstrate the sign of the charge, or the amount, so I use it as an indicator. Should you see motion of the filaments inside, please note it in your journal.”

My stomach sank, “Journal?”

“Yes. I did ask you to bring one.”

I bit my lip, “I'm afraid I must not have heard.”

“Humph. Well, clean your ears out next time. Here, use this one. Mark the date and time of any occurrence, in this border here, then as much detail as you care next to it,” he said, handing me a leather journal, “If it is too dark to see by, then use these bumps at the edge of the page to begin your pencil. Messy notes are better than no notes.”

“What do I record?”

“Anything and everything. *Nothing* is insignificant during an investigation! It may be deemed as such during the analysis, but a measurement is a measurement, a reading is a reading, and an observation is an observation. Note it down, note it well,” he lectured, letting his voice rise above his whisper.

He stopped and settled himself down.

He pointed to the other instruments on the table, saying, "This is a thermometer. I've had it constructed to show fine degrees of separation from a base reading. Note that I have turned this dial to squeeze the mercury to zero. Note also that the increments go both positively and negatively. This is so that we can detect fluctuations in temperature from a base reading, for I have found that ambient temperature itself is not so much of an indicator as the *change* in the temperature."

He held his hand on the bulb, letting it warm the contents. The mercury within rose noticeable. He released it and it slowly came back down again.

"I see."

"Please record this temperature change, and the time of course, whenever you pass by. Here is another one for your personal use. Hold it by the handle there, that's right, and try not to interfere with it too much by breathing on it or holding it close to your own body."

"I will," I said, taking a thermometer, "What is that?"

"That is a vibrometer. This stretched diaphragm is attached to that levered stylus you see in there. See? Notice that it is moving ever so slightly as I speak. If I tap the table," he demonstrated, "Like so, the vibrations in the air move the diaphragm which, in turn, moves the stylus which, in turn pushes upon this indicator here. So the indicator will stop at the loudest vibration, allowing you to take a reading. To reset it, wait until the noise has diminished and press this little catch. But you'll note that the ambient noise from the rain tonight is preventing it from reaching stability?"

"Yes, Professor. I see."

"Yes, you do. Mark my words well, this is a very sensitive device and must be used with utmost care. It took me that long to design it, and even longer to have it built to a satisfactory level. The stylus is as light as a feather and will not suffer undue force," he warned, replacing it gently on the table

and resetting the marker.

“Is that all?” I asked.

“Yes. Between the thermometer, the vibrometer, the electroscope, plus, of course, your own highly sophisticated senses, you should end this night with a journal filled to the brim with measurements. Remember to note anything you see or hear, or even smell!”

“Jolly good,” I muttered, resigning myself to the long night ahead.

“And I will enforce, once more, my policy of silence. I do not want to have spent my night recording your grumblings!”

I held up my hand. I knew this may provoke the ire of the Professor, considering he had just reiterated how essential silence was, but I had to ask.

“Yes,” he sighed, “What is it?”

“It is just *us* in this house, Professor?”

“Of course, lad! Otherwise I'd be clamping their mouths as well as yours! Now tread carefully. We shall begin by taking base readings, then return here to the kitchen. You take the larder, just over there, for half an hour, I shall be at the front.”

“What about upstairs?”

“We shall look upstairs later, laddy,” he said impatiently, “Now shh! Go!”

He waved me off.

The Larder

The larder was smelly. It was cold and it was dark and it was, as one might imagine, exactly what the larder of a disused, neglected house might be. My lantern lit the room quite nicely, it being only a small room, showing up the empty shelves littered with black scraps and mouse droppings.

I set my equipment down, the thermometer and the electroscope, and sat on an old tin. It was not the most comfortable position, but it was preferable to standing for half an hour, and much better than sitting on the floor.

The vibrometer was with the Professor. He said that he wanted to see how it would perform in taking readings of the noises reaching in from the street. Personally I think that he did not want to leave such a delicate instrument in the hands of one so inexperienced as myself.

As I sat on my tin, it dawned on me why he wanted the night to be raining as it was: the constant background noise, the hiss, the hush, was a regular pattern against which to compare notes. A normal, 'silent' night would easily be broken by the clopping of horses, or the rolling of wheels, or the care-free yawping of drunkards stumbling home from the tavern.

Such a silent night was, then, anything but silent. On a fierce and raining night such as this, however, the only folk who would be outside would be those hurrying to get indoors. The birds would not be calling their good-nights, the drunkards would spend a little longer in the warm environs of the tavern, or even give the night a miss and stay at home.

Any noises, then, that were manifest, would be more likely to come from within than from without. I patted myself on the back for being so clever. Perhaps, I remember thinking, perhaps being a scientist was not all that hard. It was just a matter of putting details into some sort of context.

I sat and listened, having very little to look at. There was

the odd pop or groan as the house settled itself down for the night. Every now and then I could hear the rattle of the windows as the wind tried to open them, or the rough scraping of overgrown branches against the outside wall.

This was what the Professor was on about, I realised, this was the noise of a house with no life left inside it. Whether my eyes were closed or open, it made little difference. The same as if I was there or not. The house would have made those noises regardless; I was not a factor.

So the pops and groans continued along and on top of it all was the humming, thrumming rain and the faint gurgle of water running down the drain-pipes.

It was soothing, in a way, being surrounded by nothing but the sound of falling water. I took the journal to hand and noted the time from my watch, and the readings of the thermometer. The electroscope's filaments were pointing down. There was nothing left but to record my findings:

10:38 Entered Larder. Smelly. Rain Falling. A little cold.

10:40 E-Scope = flat. Thermo = +0.2

After five minutes, looking at the walls and thinking about how I should keep myself occupied, I noted the readings once more. At the rate I was going, I would fill a page of the journal within an hour:

10:45 Still in larder. E-Scope = flat. Thermo = +0.2. Still raining. Still smelly. Can hear branch outside.

It was slightly warmer in the larder than in the kitchen, I mused, perhaps because the decaying rodent faeces let off slightly more warmth, or, I pondered, because the larder was more enclosed than the kitchen, with fewer recesses through which the ambient air might leech its warmth. As an experiment, I touched a marble shelf with my splayed hand.

It was as cold as could be expected, being a smooth, polished shelf. There was nothing unusual about it, I thought. It was, however, quite dusty.

My fingers and palm left a deep, dark print in the fluffy coating. I wiped my hand on my pants, and rubbed my fingers together, watching the dust sparkle to the floor in the glow of my lamp. I smiled to myself, remembering the Professor's lecture about dust and photography.

10:50 Larder. E-Scope = flat. Thermo = +0.02.

Then, unwittingly, I let out a yawn. It just popped out. It was not a very loud yawn, and on any other day of the week it would not have bothered me, but I knew the Professor was only a few rooms away. There was a chance he would have heard it, even above the rain, and would be noting the event, right now, in his journal.

I bit my lip and rolled my eyes, thinking about the lecture that I would have to endure when we next met. I wanted to call out, to apologise, to let him know that it was only me. Wisely, I went against my feelings and stifled the rest of my yawn. Inspiration took me, and I noted it down in my journal.

10:51 Yawn. My sincerest apologies. It won't happen again.

And that would be the end of the matter. Afterwards, when we compared notes, I would point out my transgression and he would consider any note he may have taken at that time void.

Just as I closed the journal, however, I heard, quite distinctly, a yawn carry through from the kitchen. It sounded like a youngster, I declare, and the suddenness of the out-of-place noise gave me a jolt. Unless the Professor could project his voice like that of a child, then there was someone else skulking about in the kitchen.

Aha! So that was the Professor's game. He was to make me think that we were alone, alone in this smelly house, when, in reality, he had hired another body to poke about. Perhaps he was there to test me, or to cause mischief.

I smiled. Though I regretted having yawned, and would

surely be rebuked for it, there is the common fact that yawns are contagious and my indiscretion had triggered a similar response in my elusive companion!

10:51 Heard yawn from kitchen.

I wanted to pop into the kitchen to see for myself, but I thought it best not to. If the lad was there to fool me, it would be more beneficial if he believed that I was unaware of his existence and intentions. So there was nothing left to do, yet, except keep on listening and watching and recording my notes.

Maybe later on I would catch him out again. Still, his yawn was only in response to mine, so could hardly be called a mistake.

I pinched myself for having been so careless. Determined not to make the same mistake again, I concentrated very hard on performing the duty for which I was tasked. There was only one reason, after all, why I found myself in the horrid house, and that was because I was in the Professor's employ.

As I sat, I thought a little more about the stranger in the house, and what he might be up to. What if, I thought, the stranger was an apprentice like myself, and while I was in the larder listening out for him, he was in the kitchen doing the same!

Each of us could be secretly noting the other's movements and noises, and the Professor, of course, would have instructed both of us to remain as quiet as possible.

Well, if that did not make the Professor a rotten cheat, lying to his apprentices like that!

Still, he was paying me, and I was his dutiful (and only, as far as I knew) assistant, so his word was my command. I rubbed my nose a little, adjusted my britches and kept vigil on my watch.

10:55 Larder. E-Scope = flat. Thermo = -0.5

So it had gotten colder. Not perceptibly, not that I could feel it with my own senses. I thought about the room, how it,

being a larder, was supposed to be cooler than the rest of the house. My attention then turned to the matter of thermal energy.

The sources of heat in the room were myself and my lantern. It, burning brightly, may have been letting out heat, so artificially altering the temperature of the room, or, at least, of the air about the thermometer, so I stood up and moved it to the far end of the larder, near the door.

The floorboards creaked a little under my weight, even though I tried very hard to mask my footsteps by rolling my feet as I trod.

Sque-eak!

I thought I made a very good effort of it, but they emitted noise, nonetheless.

My face flushed red as I wrote in my journal.

10:57 Larder. Floorboard squeaked. My apologies once more.

As I returned to my seat on the tin, I heard the distinct sound of a floorboard creaking from the kitchen. It sounded like a mocking parody of the noise that I had just made.

Sque-eak!

Well! I am not one to be mocked. I could not help it if the house was noisy. That noise I emitted was due in no part to my clumsiness, but the returning noise was an outright offence! Infuriated, I defiantly pressed my foot on the loose floorboard to let it squeak again.

Again I heard a replying groan from the kitchen, a little louder this time. Not one to be outdone, I pushed with all my might on the board, letting it ripple out a high-pitched squeak.

Squeeee-eak!

I listened to the silence that ensued. After a minute without any event, I considered that I had made my point well enough, and sat back down, preparing to take the next reading.

11:00 – Larder. E-Sco –

But I got no further, for there was an almighty door slam that rippled through the house! *Boom!* Just like that!

I dropped my pencil with the shock and raced into the kitchen, looking about for the offending little scamp, keen to teach him a thing or two about respecting his seniors. If he turned out to be my peer, well, I should have given him something to think about, let me tell you!

When I turned the corner, however, there was nothing there but our bags upon the floor and some equipment on the table. The house sounded like it had since we entered. Outside the branches rubbed themselves mournfully against the wall.

I listened carefully, expecting to hear breathing or running footsteps, anything that might betray the presence of the interloper, but there was nothing. I remained there, standing next to a ruined, smelly sink, looking and listening. I was furious.

When anger boils over without release, it has to escape any way it can. My cheeks were burning, my breathing was heavy. My pulse raced not with fear, as I might have thought it would, but with ire.

I was convinced that the scamp was hiding from me. He was, I pictured, tucked down behind a wall or squatting in some recess in the hallway just outside. If this was the case, I concluded, then he was not the Professor's underling.

Rather he was a brat off the streets, perhaps homeless, perhaps not. In any case he was intruding where he should not.

For a few minutes I heard nothing but the rain outside. I saw nothing but the still shadows of the kitchen. I smelled nothing but the rank sink. I felt nothing but a slight chill from the night air. The chill cooled me down gradually and let the last of my anger waft into the air.

It was such that I began to doubt that I had even heard the slam! But I had, my ears reminded me, without a doubt. Why else would I be standing there?

Returning to the larder, I picked up my pencil from the floor and lowered myself down carefully, listening intently all the while.

11:07 Interrupted by loud bang. Suspected intruder. Chased him, but he was gone.

After this I sat perfectly still, noting my readings in five minute intervals, until the time came to return to the kitchen. I was in the process of gathering up the various devices, when I turned to check to make sure I had not left anything next to my seat. The lantern showed up a light cloud of dust, barely perceptible, falling down to the ground.

The particles were visible for only a second or two, after which they camouflaged themselves among the similarly sized specks upon the floor. I blinked, waiting to see if more dust would fall, perhaps thrown off by some wind or unsettled by my motion, but there was nothing.

While falling dust is not curious in and of itself, I felt compelled to investigate a little closer, given the scientific observations I was charged with taking that night.

As I crept back to where the dust fell, my lantern shone its light upon the shelf whose surface I had touched earlier with my hand. The mark I had left was still there, along with another, somewhat smaller sized, placed alongside it. I looked at it, blinked, and looked at it again.

It did not change in any way, no matter how hard I pressed my eyelids together before bringing them open. It was there, a hand print, right next to mine.

Clearly this was an oddity, and I put my equipment hastily down to make a note in my journal:

11:14: Saw falling dust. Found a hand print made in dust upon a shelf. I did not see the hand print there when I entered.

For a minute I peered at the hand print, trying to decide whether I was just unobservant, as I had so often been accused, and that it was already there to being with, or whether it truly

had been made *after* I entered the room.

Considering the amount of dust upon the shelves, and how little there was in the that print, and in mine, I decided that it must have been created that night, at least. There was a good chance, then, that someone was in the house, or had been in the house, that evening. The thought crossed my mind that this would void the entire investigation: If we could not ensure that it was only us, then the evidence might be contaminated.

I sat looking at my journal, wondering whether I would be criticised for such weak observation. I thought that the Professor might bail me up about wasting time jotting down things that were of no concern, or that I should have noted that there was no other hand print a I entered the room. But how could I have noted the *absence* of something?

I remembered, then, that he had mentioned that any observation was to be recorded, and was to be assessed after, not during, the investigation.

So I stopped myself from amending it or crossing it out and appended:

Not my hand print. Looks smaller than mine. Is fresh.

I picked up the rest of my gear and walked back into the kitchen, listening to the noises of the house as I shifted my weight across its bearers. The Professor came in shortly afterwards, quite wet.

He had been outside, it would seem.

I made a signal as if to speak. He held up his hand, decoupled the vibrometer, and pointed to my journal. I handed it over.

After scanning the page with his finger, he frowned.

“Yawn?” he whispered, “You’ve written here, yawn.”

“Yes, I had yawned.”

“*You* had yawned.”

“Yes, *I* had yawned,” I repeated.

“Then you should have written, *I have yawned.*”

Otherwise it implies that someone else yawned.”

“Yes, Professor, someone did...”

But my words were ignored.

“And here, again, you have *floorboard squeaked*. Was that you upon the floorboard, or did the floorboard squeak for some other reason?” he clarified.

“Me again, Professor. Hence the apology.”

“I don't want apologies, lad, I want data! It's well that you have attempted to record your own mistakes, and this is admirable, but, really, you need to be a more thorough in your note taking,” he hissed, raising his voice a little, “I know this is your first time in the field, I do, so I can only expect that such mistakes are part of the territory. And you've left this entry undone.”

“I left it to chase the intruder.”

He looked alarmed, “What intruder?”

“The, um, there was someone in the kitchen here,” I faltered, “He, um... when I creaked the floorboard, um...”

“What the devil are you talking about? What intruder? Where is he?” he whispered, looking about.

“I don't know, Professor, I didn't see him.”

His mouth dropped a little. He shook his head.

“Then *how* did you know that there was an intruder?”

“Well, there was the yawn, and the floorboards squeaked, and then there was that loud door slamming.”

“Which door?”

“Didn't you hear it?”

“No, I didn't.”

“You didn't?”

“No, I didn't. And I know this because I didn't write it down in my journal, see?”

He held his up to show me. Meticulous notes, lined up perfectly, repetitive and neat, filled the journal. I studied them, mentally comparing them to my own, hastily jotted points.

“Now, if *you* say a door slammed, which door was it?”

I began to sweat, “I don't know! I heard a door slam, which made me come out to find him...”

“Him? You said yourself you didn't see anyone. How do you know the gender of a person you cannot see, hey?”

My mouth flapped uselessly. I had that sinking feeling in my stomach, the same I had gotten every other time shortly before my employer handed me my papers.

“Now, look here! I brought you in to take notes, not to go making stories about intruders and slamming doors.”

“It's not a story.”

“Then where is it written? You've said something about a loud bang, and then an intruder, neither of which give much detail about any such event,” he seethed, “It's worse than useless.”

Worse than useless? I felt a little warm under my collar from that remark. My work has been called many things from my past employers, from *wanting* to *half-baked*, but being something worse than useless was new to me. It cut me to the bone.

“I must protest!”

“You can protest all you like, later,” he grumble, ignoring me and turning back to the journal, “Now, what about this mark in the dust?”

“That? Well, I had made a mark in the dust with my hand, you see...”

“*You* made the mark?”

I nodded, “Yes, but not that one.”

He blinked with confusion, “Come again? Did you make a mark?”

“Yes, but that was before.”

“Before? When?”

“About ten forty five, I think,” I muttered, immediately regretting my words.

“You think? You *think*? I'm beginning to believe that you *don't* think! Where is that written?”

“Well, it's...”

“You interfered with an environment and didn't bother to jot that down? A little note saying, made a mark? Hmm?”

“But Professor...”

“This kind of nonsense renders this data useless! How much more did you decide not to record?”

“Well, I...”

He had finished his castigation and was waiting for an answer to his final question. I fought to think but my brain was only just keeping up.

“I didn't record a few things, I suppose,” I confessed, determined to put everything on the table so that he might see me as being ignorant, rather than lazy or insolent, “Thinking back upon it, I did not note where I sat...”

“Hmph.”

“...nor when I moved the lantern away from the thermometer.”

“Pfft.”

“And I could certainly have written more about when I entered the kitchen to investigate.”

“Pah.”

“Looking at your notes, and comparing them to mine,” I relented, penitent, “I can see that my skills are still wanting. Like with whoever was in the kitchen, I thought...”

His face had turned an unsightly colour of red, and he blustered, “No, you didn't think, you *assumed*! You assumed! Didn't I tell you to take a note of *any* observation? Hmm?”

“Yes, you did, Professor.”

“And that it is during analysis that we assess the data, not during an investigation.”

I nodded, quickly pointing to the entry regarding the dust, “That's why I noted this. I was about to ignore it, thinking that

it might be trivial, but then I remembered your words..."

"It's a pity you did not remember them back here. And here. And here!"

"Well, now that I'm aware, can't we note the missing entries down now?"

His eyes blinked in disbelief, "What? No! You can't insert it after the fact! That would be falsifying evidence!"

"But it won't be false," I protested, "It happened!"

"It was not recorded!"

"I can record it *now*!"

"No, you should have recorded it *then*."

He sighed, wearily. It was not a sigh born of anger, but a realisation.

He put his hand on my shoulder and said, nodding, "This is all my fault. I'm sorry. I brought you into this too hastily, and for this I'm sorry, lad. I shouldn't be berating you for something which, really, was a product of my creation."

I started, but he held up his hand for me to stop and opened a bag, packing the equipment away.

"Professor..."

"We'll call it a night, eh?"

"I must protest. The lessons I have learnt already, um, can be built upon. Should we give up so easily?"

He sighed again, "We're not giving up, laddy, we're going home to plan a little better, eh? Get a bit more experience into you before we try again."

"But we are here, now, and I understand more fully what is required," I urged, conscious that the house was listening.

It was like the walls were holding their breath. Even the branches outside ceased their rustling for an instant, leaving only the rain tumbling down to fill the void.

"Give me another chance."

He paused, fingering the dial on the vibrometer as he held it above the bag. He was considering my appeal, it

seemed, so I pushed a little harder.

“The night is still young, and my journal is quite empty.”

“Can you be trusted to record everything? Will you stay at your post no matter what? Will you follow my instructions without question?”

“Now that I understand, of course,” I said, adding, “Come on, Professor. If I learn tonight or back in the lab, what is the difference? Surely it would be more effective to learn in the field?”

His eyebrows lifted a little from their furrowed state. He nodded slowly to himself.

“I guess we've still got a bit more investigating to do,” he said, “I didn't haul this camera and these plates here for nothing, now, did I?”

My shoulders dropped a little from relief and, I declare, the house did so too.

The Encounter

We left the kitchen and went back to the stairwell near the parlour.

He took the lead, taking me up the stairs to the first floor, aiming for the room, a bedroom it would appear, positioned above the kitchen. I kept my eyes open all the while, scanning every corner, every nook, every shadow.

To be honest, I had fully expected to find a cheeky face hiding out among the rooms or running down the stairs as we ascended. The fact that we discovered neither was a little disconcerting. However, if the brat was hiding somewhere on the first floor, we should find him. The stairs were the only means of getting up or down, and they creaked and groaned with even the lightest touch of my foot.

I indicated that I wished to speak. The Professor shook his head, sternly. Knowing that I had already tested his patience to its limit, to the point where he was prepared to leave, I accepted his decision and kept mum.

Quickly ducking my head into the two rooms at the head of the stairs, I scouted for any signs of the presence I saw when I first came up to the house. All I found was dust and shadows.

The rooms were void of all furniture except for a couple of chests, a broken chair, a bed-head and what may have been a desk. The rooms I checked had nowhere to hide, so I had to remain content that who I saw was still in one of the rooms yet to be investigated, or, more likely, that he was no longer in the house, having sneaked out the back way when we entered.

If the former, we would most certainly hear and see him should he attempt to move about. If the latter, well, at least he could not contaminate the measurements any more.

11:35 Upstairs Bedroom (Above Kitchen). Professor and myself. No others present. Raining heavily. Thermo -0.6.

We set down the other pieces of equipment and I noted

their readings. Finding a place on the floor, resting my back against the wall, I faced the door, keen to see if anything should move about in the shadows without the room. From my vantage point, I could see clearly the railings of the stairs. Unless a body were to noiselessly slither down like a snake, I should see and hear them plainly.

The room in which we set up looked oddly familiar. I had not seen it before, of course, having never been inside the house, or having ever even been in this district of South Entrance. Still, while I sat and watched and waited and listened, I could not help but think that I knew more of this place than I perhaps should.

My mind played around with this thought, forgetting for a second the unease which I had felt up until now.

The Professor seemed unconcerned. It was because he was use to such investigations, I told myself, and that I was just being silly. I watched as he fixed the camera upon a tripod, screwing this bit in here and tightening that bit there.

He peered through the portal, adjusting this and that, getting everything in focus. With a final nod of approval, he held his finger up and indicated that I should cover my eyes. I did so, and, a moment later, my retina was scarred with the brilliant light that sneaked its way through the cracks between my fingers.

When they had adjusted themselves back to cope with the darkness once more, I found the Professor staring over at me impatiently. With nimble fingers I unloaded the plate and stored it securely before adding in another one.

I was about to charge the flash again, when he stopped me.

I was doubtful, but, given such a direct order, I let it be. The Professor adjusted the camera once more and held up his finger. Instinctively, I put my hand over my eyes, even though I knew the flash could not fire without a fresh charge of

magnesium powder.

All I heard was the click of the shutter.

I noted the times in my diary, and what I had seen and heard.

*11:20 Up Bedroom. Photograph taken with flash. Thermo
-0.7*

*11:23 Up Bedroom. Photograph taken. No flash. Thermo
-0.7*

We repeated the same routine, taking photographs with and without a flash, for a few instances, before the Professor took out a new box which held his infra-red sensitive plates.

“No flash,” he mouthed, waving his hand to speed me along.

I nodded my acquiescence, turned back to the machine and loaded the plate. A few more photographs later and I was certainly in a rhythm, loading and noting and loading again, so much so that I neglected my other tasks.

11:38 Up Loading IR plate. No flash.

11:40 Up Loading IR plate. No flash.

11:42 Up Loading IR plate. No flash.

It was close to midnight when, upon returning with a fresh plate, I paused in my stride. My mind indicated to me that something needed my attention, but what that was, I could not say for sure. The air felt thick and icy and *sticky* all at once, and I had that sensation of being watched, scrutinised, once more.

My mind shuffled and rearranged itself, tackling the problem from different angles before pointing out wildly a discover. The room *was* familiar, or, rather, something within the room was.

I looked up at the subject matter.

Realisation dawned upon me as the Professor adjusted his camera. With my mouth limp, I pointed to the bedroom door.

It was the very same door that was in the photograph the Professor had shown me in his study. I could see, now, the paint flecks, the slight embossing, the formless features upon the other side.

My heart thumped a little harder. Certainly this was not a house for the Professor's *calibration*. A shudder sprang out from my chest and wiggled its way across my body.

The Professor looked up at me, then to my finger, then back to me again. He nodded, pointing stiffly back to the camera, clearly impatient to get ready.

With trembling hands I retrieved a plate from the kit and loaded the camera. Breathing carefully, so as not to slip with the plate or expose it prematurely, I secured the latch and nodded to the Professor, stealing a look back to the door.

The Professor's eyes rolled with impatience. He waved me out of the way and pointed me over to the equipment.

A chill swept over me, not from anything external this time but because I feared a rebuke from the Professor. I had not taken readings for a bit, I noticed. Not wishing to offend any further, or provide a reason for a lecture, I took the time used by the Professor to adjust the camera to note the readings on the other pieces of equipment.

11:54 Thermo -6.5.

So, the temperature had certainly dropped. It did feel chilly. Oddly so. And the thermometer agreed.

Vibro 9.7.

Nothing unusual there. The clicks from the shutter seemed to be loud enough to make the reading.

E-Scope...

I stared at it. The filaments seemed to have spread apart some. I looked a little closer, holding my lantern to it. My breathing got a little heavier.

Spread.

And they were. Not a lot, but for the whole night up to

now the fine fingers had been pointing straight down, happily positioned together without any deviation. Now, as I watched, they were apart.

With my heart thudding lightly in my throat I looked closer. As I continued to stare, they continued to steadily separate.

Spreading! Half an inch apart.

The hairs upon my arm bristled. I could feel them, underneath my shirt, pushing their way up against the material as a wave of expectancy swept over me.

The motion inside the bell jar was distinct. The Professor was still by the door with his camera, I was not touching the electroscope in any way, yet something was manipulating the fronds within. An eerie feeling walked from my eyes, down my spine and spread out slowly to my extremities. An overwhelming notion that there was someone by my side, looking to the jar as intently as I was, filled my thoughts.

I froze. There was someone next to me. It was a sensation that I have only experienced a handful of times since. When someone stands next to you, often their presence is betrayed by body heat, or odour, or their breathing. But there was none of these.

I wanted to turn back to the Professor, to ensure that he was not the one whose presence I could feel just beside me and, it seemed, getting closer. The electroscope held my attention, it being the sanest, most tangible thing in the room.

Silly though it sounds, it was almost as if I feared that should I take my gaze away then I should be faced with something unspeakable, something that should challenge my grip on reality.

I wanted to stand up and take a few steps backward away from the instruments. I, I will admit it, I wanted to run!

My mind was torn between taking further notes, alerting the Professor, and bolting downstairs. As it was, I stayed there,

as still as stone, squatting stupidly and staring at the electroscope.

It was then that icy tendrils suddenly grabbed my hand!

That is the best way that I can describe it. It was not nerves or a shudder, for these sensations are quite familiar to me, and I have been in a few scary situations in my time. No, it felt more like I had opened an ice-box and a plume of cold fingers had wafted up and wrapped themselves over the skin of my hand.

As I think back upon it, I can still remember the distinct impression of four cold spots on top, and one on the bottom, just as if a child wanted to take my palm to get my attention.

And my attention it had! Had I been carrying anything fragile I fear I should have broken it, so sudden and frightful was the sensation. As it was, I only just succeeded in keeping my journal from falling.

Then, just as suddenly, an inquisitive, breathy voice whispered:

“So what’s that, then?”

My arm jerked backward, I stifled a yelp, and I tumbled back onto my bottom.

The Professor stopped fiddling with the camera and looked over, clearly annoyed. I held my palms out, desiring nothing more than to explain to him what had just happened. He frowned and pointed angrily to my journal.

With a shaking hand I managed to scrawl out a few words:

Cold hand.

Then, thinking a little more clearly upon what had just happened, I added:

Something held me. P on other side of room. Not P. Words spoken: So what’s that then? Four syllables. Not me. Not P. Something grabbed my hand.

I breathed a little, regaining my composure. It would not

do to dwell too much on what was rapidly becoming a memory of my nerves. To indicate to the prying eyes of the Professor that I within my faculties, I returned my attentions to electroscope. The filaments had returned to their flaccid position. I looked to the thermometer. It had risen some.

The air felt, if I may say, *normal* in every respect. The creepy, thickened sensation had disappeared. I looked down at my palm. The coldness was gone. My hairs had settled back down upon my arm.

11:48 E-Scope normal. Thermo -1.2. Hand no longer cold. No voices heard.

I put my journal away, doing my best to hide my shaking hand, and returned to the Professor to help unload the camera, not daring to look into his eyes.

He was simmering, I could tell, the way he sucked the air through his teeth. Clearly he did not understand what I had just experienced; he thought I was playing the fool.

He broke the silence with a harsh whisper, "I think that's about all the tomfoolery I can handle! Come on, lad, we'd best call it a night."

The End

The rain was easing up outside, and the noise of the water on the window panes and down the drain-pipes became less pronounced. The Professor nodded to himself and began to pack everything away. There was nothing else for it. He was too annoyed, I could tell, and it was getting late.

My failure dogged me all the way out from the room, down the stairs and into the kitchen.

We packed the bags, secured the boxes of photographic plates, stowed the vibrometer and thermometer and electroscope, and got ourselves ready to leave.

It was half past twelve when we finally closed the front door behind us and locked it securely. My heart sank a little. With the closing of the door went any chance that I might salvage my employment. More than that, though, I noticed that he did not even bother to instruct me to lock up as he suggested that he might.

History is a brutal teacher. One of the lessons I learnt early on is that responsibility is a measure of performance. The fact that the Professor did not see that I was fit even to turn a key in the lock meant that my days as a scientist were all but over.

With nothing left to lose, I ventured, "So that's my first investigation, then."

He said nothing for a bit. Instead he checked and double checked his equipment, the keys, his hat, then the equipment again. I could tell he was not used to firing his apprentices.

Eventually he muttered, "Perhaps I was wrong about you. I thought that your skull might have housed a scientific mind, yes, one that is mature in thought and analytical in its approach."

"No, I -"

"We won't get a cab here. We'll need to reach Turner at

least. Come on, grab the bags and let's get going. We've got some walking to do," he muttered, checking that the door was locked before hauling a satchel onto his back.

And that was the end of the night, really. I trailed behind the Professor, dutifully carrying the bags like a porter. I felt less like a scientist, and more like a lost boy. I wanted to explain everything, tell him all that had happened, but I knew that it would do no good. He had that look on his face, that look I knew only too well.

Employers past had had that look and it meant two things. The first was that the opportunity for discussion was over. The second was that my chance of seeing another pay packet was dropping rapidly.

We hailed a passing cab just further on. I was dropped off to my home, and bid a rough farewell. The manner of his departure left me thinking that the Professor would have no more to do with me.

It was unfair, is what it was! Should the Professor have experienced all that I had, should he have felt the icy touch, heard the disembodied voice, seen the hand print in the dust, surely he would have behaved as I had!

I turned the key to my door and trudged up to my room, not even bothering to clean my face. I was too wound up for that. I lay on my bed and stared at the ceiling, quite tired, yet quite thoughtful. When the mind has too many unanswered questions, it battles other concerns for dominance.

I slept fitfully and ate little for breakfast. I think I was hungry, and I most certainly was tired, but my mind was preoccupied running through all that had happened.

By midday my thoughts had turned to salvaging what was left of my contract with the Professor. He had not said as much, but the silence in the cab ride back home, the stern look on his face, the way he averted his eyes; I was sure my employment was on the rocks.

Inevitably, I would have to declare to my family with much shame and regret that my tenure with the Professor was over, that I would have to rely upon them once more until I found another, generous benefactor to take in an inexperienced youngster.

There was a rough knock on the door, followed by another in quick succession.

“I’m coming, I’m coming!” I huffed, getting up from the kitchen table and shaking the melancholy from my shoulders.

It would do no good to present myself to whoever was at the door in such a glum state. I may have been unemployed, a failure without prospects, but the world did not need to know it. Forcing what I hoped would pass as a pleasant smile on my lips, I opened the door to find the Professor, biting his lip, hopping from one foot to the other.

“Professor!” I started, but he pushed passed me and made himself at home in the lounge.

“You thought you’d take the day off, laddy?” he hooted, dropping a satchel down and poking at a couple of the seats like he might poke at a dead rat.

“Ah, well, no, but...” I began, utterly lost for words.

“Ah, well, no, but what? Science doesn’t take a holiday, you know? It keeps on, whether we’re taking note of it or not. The world, lad, it’s still kicking.”

“Yes, Professor, but...”

“But what? You’re thinking that because you stayed up a little later last night that you could take the next day off?”

“No, Professor, but...”

“But what?”

“It’s *Saturday*, Professor!” I burst.

His face dropped an inch. He hurriedly checked his watch, put it away and then checked his chronometer. His goatee beard wiggled a little.

“Oh. Well – So it is,” he accepted, then looked up

suddenly, “Never mind that! Never mind that! There's much to be discussed!”

“Like the terms of my employment, I suppose,” I sighed.

I had performed a similar routine with many of my former employers. They would dance around the topic, um-ing, ah-ing, unwilling to get to the point, being that my services were no longer necessary. That I would have a bright future, somewhere else, under someone else's watch. That I had much to learn, youth was on my side, and careers were very malleable at my age.

“What about them?” he asked, confused, “Is there something I need to know?”

“Uh, no? I mean, that's why you're here, isn't it? To tell me that my contract is to be terminated?”

“Good Lord! Whatever for?”

“Well, you know. Last night. I was sure that you were upset with my performance.”

“You mean when you failed to note important happenings? When you disobeyed my direct orders? When you fell backward upon your rump?”

I nodded, ashamed, “Yes, Professor.”

“I see.”

He pulled on his beard a little, thinking to himself. Evidently I had made a good case for my own termination. In my mind, I kicked myself relentlessly.

“Hmm. Learning! That's what it comes down to! You make mistakes. I make mistakes. We all do! It's how we learn! But enough of this!” he cried as he looked about the lounge room with an air of dissatisfaction, “This won't do, not at all. No, this is not a proper environment for a scientific discussion. Besides, all of my materials are back at the laboratory.”

“Oh.”

“I need you at the laboratory, post haste!”

So sure was I that I would have been ushering him from

the door, hat in hand, apologising and nodding, that I was completely unprepared. In fact, I was dumbstruck.

“Oh.”

“Well, don't just stand there like a bass, lad, get to the cab! It's waiting outside! Come on, get a move on!”

My legs were moving before my brain had a chance to catch up. The Professor nattered on about this and that on the way, important things, I am sure, of which I should have taken note, but my stomach was still running two feet behind the hansom, and my brain another two feet behind that!

At the laboratory, I used the time taken for the Professor to unlock the various doors leading off from the passages of his abode to bring the situation back under control. Up to this point, my mind was a blur. Now that I had a little breathing space, I became calmer.

Some of the words that he had spoken on the journey trickled back from my auditory memory.

“Exciting... water... conclusion,” he had said, “Amazing... incompetence... are you listening?”

“Yes, Professor,” I blurted.

He turned around, key in hand, “Eh?”

“I, ah. I was listening.”

“I'm not so sure that you are, unless that outburst was in response to a voice you only just heard,” he said, peering at me closely through his circular glasses, “Are you feeling alright? Are you hearing voices even now?”

“Hearing voices? No, Professor, only yours.”

“Because if you are that could alter the outcome of the experiment greatly. Your recording of the voice within your ear relies on your being of sound mind and body,” he said, looking at me closer, “And you do appear a little off-colour.”

“I'm fine, Professor. I must confess that I was a little worked up over last night.”

He turned the last key and swung the door open, “Hmm. I

can imagine.”

Revelation

The Professor announced, "It's the *water*, you see."

"I'm afraid I don't."

"Water! You know what water is, don't you?"

"Um. Yes," I said, altogether unsure of my answer, "But I thought that you said that it was about the light."

"Yes, yes! That's my end hypothesis, lad! The reaction and interaction with light is what I hope to demonstrate or at least provide reasonable grounds for further investigations. Well, actually interaction with matter might have to come before that, but overall I'm glad you were paying attention," he said gruffly, annoyed that I should have interrupted his run, "But that's all the way over there, in the future. We're over here, at the start, and we need, first of all, to investigate causality between the environment and the activity of our subjects."

"Yes, Professor."

"But back to water! Why water? Why *not* water! It's the stuff of life. Remove water, you remove life; this is unquestionable. By symmetry, add water, you add life. Hmm. I need an example..."

The Professor took a book out from his shelf and flipped through with his fingers before pointing to any entry. I looked at it, surprised.

"Yeast?"

"Yeast!" he cried, turning the book back to himself, "It's not the best example, I am sure, for there are other nematodes and seeds that would suit as better examples, but this is one with which you are familiar, yes?"

"Yes, Professor. I once worked at a bakery."

"Then you'll know all about it! Yeast, you see, is a living organism. We know this, because it grows and multiplies. It thrives, you know, on your skin, in bread, in beer! *Beer!*"

With that, he darted from the room, coming back with a

bottle and two glasses. He seemed to be in an extraordinarily good mood. Certainly much more chipper than I suspected he might have been, given my poor performance. He poured out the brew and handed me a glass, complete with a crisp, frothing head.

“Cheers!” he said.

“Cheers,” I replied uncertainly, “Is this standard for a laboratory?”

“Um. No. No, laddy, but, like you mentioned, it's Saturday, and, what's more, I think a celebration is in order. And, um, it's part of the demonstration,” he said hurriedly, “The yeast, you see, can lie dormant when dehydrated, sitting happily in a state of nullity for years on end, only to spring back into life when a drop of water touches it!”

“I see.”

“Tell me, how long can a man live without water?”

“Not long, I would imagine.”

“But *how* long? Days at most. Yes? Without food he might survive even a month, who knows, but *water*, water is the stuff that keeps him going! It's what makes plants grow. It's what makes fish swim! It's what drives the clouds and the rain and the sea! Rivers flow from the mountains to the sea. The tide moves everyday. Water gives motion and motion gives life.”

“I see.”

“I don't think you do! And that's not a slight at you, not at all, because it needs a little more explanation. For if we make the statement that water is the stuff of life, so what is to say that water, with its amazing properties, is not *bound to life*?”

“Bound to it?”

“In science, we have the principle of symmetry, and it works well on many levels. If A leads to B, one may argue, then surely B can lead to A? For example, if an electric current may make a magnetic field, then cannot a magnetic field create

an electric current?"

"I don't know. Can it?"

"Yes, from what I have heard. It's an exciting prospect, isn't it, that one might create a current without the use of messy piles, only from a bunch of magnets so arranged," he hummed, looking off to the wall, "Electromagnetism, it is called, a most fascinating read, but that is not in my field of expertise, and that is not what we are discussing right now. No, it was only to serve as an example."

"Yes, Professor."

"So, you see, using the principle lets us imagine that, if one thing leads to another then, given the right circumstances, the other may lead back to the one."

"So with water?"

"Yes, water. Imagine, if you will, a parched field. It has a few tufts of grass poking out from it, all barren and dry, looking much like a desert. Then the rain comes! It soaks the ground. It threatens to flood it, it is so strong! All night and all day it rains, the skies rumble, the lightning strikes," he bellowed, enacting with his hands the rain clouds, "The wind blows to a gale, and the water drenches everything above and everything below, to a depth we cannot imagine! Then, to the barren field, life springs forth!"

"But there must be a difference between a field of wheat that has been sown and a dilapidated house off Grosvenor."

"The principle is still the same! Now, listen. I'm not sure how good your mathematics is, and there is no doubt in my mind that we will need to work upon it rigorously, but trust me when I say that, through my research I have derived that there is a strong correlation between water and suspected activity," he explained, "And that includes running water, subterranean water, precipitation, lakes, rivers, bogs, ha! Even just the damp."

"Yes, Professor."

“It was raining last night.”

“I noticed.”

“And the house received that rain. It rained over the roof and down the pipes, it leaked into the cavity and dripped onto the floor. It made a couple of puddles. It probably even added to the musty smell by allowing a mould colony or three to propagate, eh?” he giggled, a foreign noise to pass from his lips, “And so, can we not suggest, from the principle of symmetry, that if the waters bring life to the fields, if they bring life to the desert, surely, surely they can bring life to the barren house?”

My eyebrows dropped. I was conscious of them. I did not wish to appear doubtful, or angry, or show any emotion, really, but there they were, pushed down so hard over my eyes that I had trouble seeing the Professor.

I drank some of my beer to hide my face.

“What is it, lad?” he asked.

Evidently my manner showed through the glass. I took my time, lowering the glass carefully, so that I might choose my words carefully.

“Professor,” I said, “I’m a little out of sorts at the moment. There’s something, well, many things, but one thing in particular I should s...”

“Oh, out with it!”

“You said, um, in fact, you made it quite clear, precisely, that there was no mistake...”

“I haven’t got all day, lad!”

I blustered, “You said that the house was for calibration! You said that there was nothing unusual about it! But there was *everything* unusual about it! Everything!”

A dribble of beer trickled down my chin, but I was so maddened that I did not care for it, nor for the light spray that came with my words.

“I expected to be within a house without motion, without

noises, without *voices!* I was prepared to do my best, to record instruments with as much accuracy and diligence as I could. What kind of base reading could I get from a house that was so – so troublesome?” I burst.

The Professor put his glass down, smirking to himself. I did not know him so well as I do now, and, if I had known then what I know now, I would have suspected straight away that the cunning fox had well and truly pulled the wool over my eyes.

He hitched himself onto a stool, so that he was perched above my small frame, and he smoothed his goatee in thought.

“Lad,” he said, tugging a little at the end, “Could you be calm for a second, just breathe a little, and think. Think about my position as a scientist. I needed readings. I can train a monkey to take readings.”

“So I'm a monkey?” I fumed.

“No. Listen. I needed readings. But I needed *accurate* readings. I can train any vagrant off the street for this.”

I remained silent. He was building up to something, and interrupting him would do no good.

“But more than this, I need *unbiased*, accurate readings. And this is something that I cannot drill into just anyone.”

“I am unbiased, Professor,” I blurted, “I only recorded what I heard and saw!”

“And I would accuse you of being nothing but! That, my laddy, is why I had to bend the truth a little. That particular house, you see, had presented me with many, many opportunities as a scientist to explore and investigate things that do not belong,” he explained, “It is a house rich in activity, and, if I could, I'd spend more time than is healthy in that place. But, back to you. If you had gone in, expecting to experience this or that, why, the recordings would have to be thrown out! Your own interpretations would have biased the results and made the whole investigation useless.”

I scratched my head, unsure.

He went on, "Now I have excellent evidence, lad, excellent, untainted evidence. This is such wonderful stuff! Can you testify to all that you wrote?"

I nodded, "Of course, Professor."

"And you would do so undo scrutiny by my peers?"

"What, um, *kind* of scrutiny?"

"The intense kind. The only kind that matters. That kind that will determine whether you are a liar, a blithering fool, or someone of reasonably sound mind and body. I should hope you prove yourself to be the latter," he said pushing his chest out.

"My notes hardly constitute strong evidence, Professor. Would it not be considered hearsay?"

His smile dropped from his face a little, then returned just as quickly. I thought I might have offended him some, but, if this was the case, he did not show it.

"Indeed it would. Indeed. And that is why you must be strong in your resolve."

He poked underneath his desk and drew out an envelope.

"I returned to the house this morning, bright and early."

"Did you?"

"I took the liberty of investigating the shelf you mentioned. I saw, immediately, where it was that you had placed your hand, and I saw, too, the print next to it. Both were fresh marks."

"Yes, Professor, that's right."

"Rather than take a photograph, which would hardly be of interest, I applied a technique I learned a little while ago. I took some parchment, applied some solvent to one side and, with a steady hand, I took an impression of the dust!" he said, drawing out the parchment.

I looked at it with curiosity, seeing how the dust clung to the white cloth. Rather than leave the evidence where it might

spoil, I understood, the Professor decided to take it with him! The two prints, parallel to each other, showed up quite clearly.

“Can you say which one is yours?” he asked excitedly.

“That's my hand,” I said, pointing to the lighter patch on the left.

“Are you certain?”

His tone of voice made me doubt myself. I squinted as I looked a little closer. Something was not right.

“No, that won't do, lad! You need to be definitive! I ask you a straightforward question, and any answer you give must be as straightforward. My peers will accept nothing less.”

“Oh. Well, in that case, um, yes, that's the one,” I said, nodding my head.

“And there is no doubt?”

“It's the right shape and size, I suppose, only that, if my memory is correct, I made my mark on the left, but that one on the right, I am *certain*, is mine.”

“Aha! Good lad. Well spotted. Well spotted indeed!” he laughed, turning the parchment around, “That's because when I took the impression, like so, the prints come out as a reflection of their true self. Your honesty is compelling.”

I patted myself on the back mentally, remaining stoic on the outside, “Yes, Professor.”

“What makes this remarkable are a few things. Firstly, as you have noted the event in your journal, it corroborates exactly what it was that you recorded, to the point where it is the actual evidence that we are looking at. Secondly, the size and shape of this print doesn't match your hand, and it certainly doesn't match mine,” he said, holding up his plumper digits for inspection, “And unless you have hands of differing sizes, then it indicates quite clearly that this print was made by someone else!”

“Yes, Professor.”

“But let us go one step further. Here, please put your

hand in this, then make a hand print on this other parchment,” he said, offering a bowl of charcoal.

Very soon I had made an impression that very closely resembled my hand print in the dust.

The Professor looked satisfied, “That will do. Thank you, lad. While it's not proof, it certainly locks in the evidence for scrutiny at a later date, you know, in case anything should happen.”

“Like what?”

“Oh, I don't know. Maybe if your hand grows bigger, or you lose a finger or an arm! Ha!” he laughed, then grew a little more sombre, “The second, more interesting facet, is that your hand has a definite form to it. See? It looks like a hand print. There are your fingers. This is your palm. In fact, if you look closely enough you can even make out features here and here, lines that exist on your hand that make you unique.”

I looked at the print, then my own, blackened hand, “I see. Like this bit here.”

“You might want to wash that off. But, yes, there are features and there is form. But this print here, this unknown hand, what can we say about it? It looks very much like your hand print, in the same attitude and finger spacing,” he said demonstrating in the air, “But it lacks the definition! It is, without question, a hand print, as you and I both agree, but it is obscure, almost like a memory of a hand print. I contend, therefore, that without anything definitive about it, with nothing to make it unique as a hand print, *that no human hand made this mark.*”

My mouth dropped a little. His words rippled through the laboratory. I swallowed involuntarily.

I clarified, “An animal, perhaps?”

“What animal do you know of with a hand shaped like ours, with the same form of digits, with no prints or lines and that could have been in the house at the same time as

yourself?"

"But," I began, "I don't understand, Professor! Something must have made that mark!"

"Indeed. That is possibly the only conclusion we can draw, however weak it may seem, for anything further is speculation."

"So it's useless as evidence, then?" I asked, both dismayed and confused.

"Not at all. Evidence is still evidence. It relies upon the nature of its derivation and its persistence. Its strength, however, comes from the context, the circumstances surrounding its discovery. Since we've ascertained that neither you, nor I, could have made the mark, that it was fresh, and that there was no one in the house besides ourselves, it holds more weight than if it had been taken under different circumstances," he explained, "And this is why your credibility must be infrangible."

"Yes, Professor."

He sealed the parchments in an envelope, wrote the date and time upon the outside, then returned to his seat.

"Now all that's left to do is transcribe the notes from the journal, side by side, and compile a formal record of the night," he said, sighing quietly, "Science is mostly administration, you know."

He indicated to his shelves on the wall opposite, each of them holding books upon books, each filled with meticulously recorded notes.

"We'll start on Monday."

"Will that be all, Professor?" I asked.

He looked up with annoyance, "What? No, lad, that will not be all!"

I guess my tone must have sounded a little impudent. I had been fired for less. Familiarity was not something favoured by employers, it would seem.

“I – I didn't mean...” I began.

“For there was one more thing to come out of last night! One very, very important piece of evidence. My lad, I owe you an apology!”

It was such a strange notion, that my employer might apologise to *me*, I was at a loss, “No, Professor, um...”

“Don't argue! An apology you deserve and one you shall get! I am sorry. There. I admit that when you first came to my door, I thought you were just another light-headed whelp.”

My face blushed. What sort of apology was this? I had nothing to say, so that was what I said.

He went on, “I'm a proud man, too proud in many respects, but not so proud to know when I should be contrite. You, you see, have a special characteristic about you. You're a fast learner, this I can see already, and you have an attention to detail, despite your inattention to the obvious.”

He swigged his beer, smacked his lips and looked up at me.

I shook my head, “Um.”

“I haven't finished. You see, while I thought you were fooling about when we were upstairs, for that is certainly what it seemed, you were obviously experiencing something altogether unworldly.”

“Yes, Professor, I was,” I blurted, “It was like my head, um, and the air, it was, ah, thick, and then, and then...”

“And then you were grasped by an icy hand?”

“Yes! Yes, I noted it down!” I said, unsure whether I wanted to remember the experience.

“And how would you describe it?” he asked, “I have your notes here, and these are fine, but do you think, while the memory is fresh in your mind, that you could put down in words the sensations you felt?”

I put my beer down, picked up a pencil and started to jot down everything. I noted how the air was viscous, how it

became almost laborious to breathe, how the temperature dropped palpably. I noted how the fingers felt upon my palms, the attitude of my hand in the air and the proximity to the electroscope. Then I wrote of the voice!

“So, what's that then?” it had said, no, it had *asked!*

My writing became shaky at this point.

“I see that this has disturbed you somewhat?” the Professor asked, raising his eyebrows.

“Yes, Professor. Although, strangely enough, writing this down here has helped to, um, make things more clear.”

He humphed, “Clarification. Always comes when you lay things out in front of you. Now, if you would, could you discern the nature of the voice? Male? Female? Old? Young? Foreigner? Native?”

“Please, Professor, how can I if I didn't *see* the speaker?”

“Every voice has traits, laddy, and as humans we are perfectly adept at picking these traits up. I'm not asking for your word, I only want your opinion.”

“Well, in that case, I should say it sounded young and feminine. Perhaps that's not quite right. It sounded like young boy.”

“A boy?”

“Yes.”

“Would you write that down in your statement?”

I did so. He looked pleased with himself as he read over what I had written.

“Huh. A boy. How about that, eh? Thank you, lad. You given me much today, so I shall give you something. Here.”

He carefully finished his beer and put the glass to one side. I tried to do the same, but could finish but a mouthful. From his satchel he produced a series of photographs.

“I had these developed this morning. These you can see are with flash. These dark one here are no flash. These ones are the infra red ones.”

He put them onto the desk, adjusted his spectacles and fiddled with his goatee and flipped through a few of them with me.

“The problem with science, you see, is that if something is not repeatable, then it cannot be admitted. I was looking for that little orb, and I spent all morning, all damn morning looking for it. As soon as they were developed I was stooped over these pictures, magnifying glass in hand, poring over every minute detail. I was convinced, you see, that there was nothing of merit in the photographs,” he lamented, “I was *this* close to throwing them in the rubbish! Only the requisite rigours of my scientific training stopped me.”

He shuddered lightly.

“I was so sure, so sure! So much so that I fell victim to the very same problem I accused you of.”

I ventured, “Which is?”

“I didn't look for the bloody obvious, lad!” he hissed, removing the top photographs from the pile.

I looked down, letting my half empty beer glass slip from my fingers to fall messily on the floor. On any other day I would have apologised profusely to make up for it, but my eyes had arrested my full attention. There was no orb, or flecks of dust in this image instead, there, on the photograph, was me, my back turned to the camera, stooping low over the equipment.

Next to me was the unmistakable impression of a small boy, squatting down next to me, appearing to be looking inquisitively at the equipment upon the floor. His arm was outstretched, and his hand, the image shows quite clearly, was resting upon mine.

“It seems you've made a friend,” the Professor giggled, “I can only assume he is attracted to your youth. What possible interest could an aged, doddering coot be to a young boy?”

I nodded, being the best movement I could muster. I

traced the outline of the boy with my finger lightly, remembering the sensation of his touch. I shuddered at the memory.

“Again, I was blinded by my surety. For so long I had probed and prodded at that old house, convinced that the haunting there was nothing more than what we might call a *residual* haunting.”

I looked up, confused, “Residual?”

“It's a classification that I've noted from my studies. Things happen at the same time around the same place, the same number of bangs upon a wall, the same creak of a floorboard. This is the reason I chose to study this house. As a scientist, there can be nothing better than repeatable data!” he said, thrusting his finger into the air, “And so I diligently treated the house as such, expecting the same thing to happen each night and, sure enough, it did not.”

“It didn't?”

“No. For some nights there was nothing at all, other nights were full. I analysed my records and compiled some numbers. From this, I noted the relationship between activity and water, running water, and storms especially.”

“Hence the need for inclement weather.”

“Precisely. I rushed you, which was a mistake really, so that I wouldn't lose the fantastic rain last night! Oh, what a happy mistake!”

He stopped, walked to the window then back again. He sat down in his chair, fidgeted for a bit then got up. His beard was wiggling about furiously. I thought it was his excitement but I was wrong.

“Is everything alright Professor?” I asked.

“Fine!” he snapped, then lessened his rattled face a little, “I'm fine, thank you. I'm just...”

He made a few little notes on a pad, doodles I noticed, nothing useful. He nibbled a bit at his nails. Something was

eating at him. Eventually he gave in.

“I can't help but feel a little annoyed, though, for all that time I spent in there, taking notes, night after night. I guess I can see the trend, now that I look back upon it.”

He nibbled at his nail a bit more before slamming his fist on the desk. I jumped at the sudden outburst.

“I was proud! Too damn stubborn and too damn proud to admit that my original classification was wrong,” he grumbled, turning slightly red in the cheeks, “Even now I am ashamed at myself. A re-evaluation after the second or third or fifth investigation would have changed the outcome.”

He nibbled too hard at his nail and winced in pain.

“Perhaps it changed. My initial classification was based on solid, repetitive evidence, and so it was valid at the time – see! There I go again, trying to validate my errors! I'm too proud, lad, and if there's any advice I can give you before you go thundering your way into this realm of science, it's this: Get rid of your pride, hmm, you don't sodding well need it!”

He breathed slowly to calm himself. He took out his marble-balls and swirled them in his hand, muttering to himself. He looked suddenly dismayed. His face could simply not drop any further.

We sat in silence in the laboratory, only the swirl of his marble-balls could be heard. The echo of his thumping outburst had diminished from the room but was still reverberating through my ears.

“Professor?” I asked after a period.

He looked up sullenly.

“Huh? Oh. You're still here.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“You, ah. Ahem. You see the problem now, don't you?”

“Um. I'm afraid I don't.”

“Good. Good. No point lying if there's nothing in it for you. But there is a problem. I just don't want to face it. There is

a problem with all of this. Oh, I'm cursed!" he cried, dragging his hands down his face.

This strange turn of his emotion, from excitement and elation to this morose, twisted face I saw now was utterly perplexing.

"The photographs. My evidence. Isn't this good news? What could possibly be a problem?"

He breathed carefully. I saw he was steadying his nerves so that he would be able to talk without emotion. I did not press him, but waited until he was composed enough.

"The problem now is that the Grosvenor house is no longer suitable for my studies!"

I started, "What? Why?"

"Because it has broken its classification! First the orb, now the voice and manifestation into a full bodied apparition! It's an intelligent haunting! It's obvious! There can be no doubt about it, no matter how I play it over in my mind! It asked you a direct question!"

The Professor was yanking so hard on his beard I thought it might fall out.

"If it *is* the ghost of a child, then that would explain the repetition I first experienced. Children love repetition!"

"Wouldn't that be a positive thing? Isn't this something ground-breaking?"

"Hardly. That there is just another photograph. And that's just another hand print. And this," he said, pointing to the envelope that held my notes, "Is yet another unverifiable testimony. None of it can ever be reproduced reliably."

"But there *is* a ghost in there! You saw it, I felt it and heard it! Can't we try to talk to him?"

"Pah!" he spat, "Pah! And reduce the science to mere clairvoyance? Mediums and psychics and quacks and all of that? Let's bring in an Fakir and a Shaman while we're at it. Pah!"

“I still don't see why...”

He plonked his marble-balls on the desk and cried, “The repeatability is no longer there! All the notes and photographs in the world would do no good if the events are not repeatably demonstrable! What's the point of bringing along the electroscope and vibrometer and thermometer if we cannot show a direct relationship between readings and phenomena? Intelligent hauntings are like that! They are only as active as the sodding spirits want to be. Bring in a crew, set up experiments, get everything ready to go, and...”

He held up his fists and opened them as if he were releasing a dove.

“...nothing! You get labelled a fool. You lose any credibility you might have garnered over the years. The only following you get is the money hungry shysters, those hyenas, or the journalists looking for a scandal. You lose any backing. You lose any standing you might have had, even in your own institute!”

I could see that he was talking from some hard experience, the details of which I only learnt about later. His eyelids drooped.

“The problem is that those spirits just don't want to come out on cue. You can't make them dance if they don't want to dance. There is no incantation.”

“But it came out yesterday. Can't you wait for the next storm?”

He leant forward and hissed, “It's not worth the risk! We could have every condition perfect and if the spirit decided not to appear, it would not appear.”

“But...”

“Trust me, lad, trust me on this.”

I was dumbstruck. From being on such a high, I came, wobbling, back down to earth. When I regained my grip on reality, I was sitting down in a chair, opposite the Professor

who was tapping nervously on the desk with his pencil.

“We need another house,” he said eventually, “Grosvenor Lane is no longer suitable for my studies. I need repeatable, precise data. You will learn, should you continue in this field, lad, that for every great man of science who comes upon a discovery, there are a hundred others who must suffer the pain of data retrieval, compilation and a fixed field of study. It's a thankless task, one that receives no further recognition than a footnote at the end of a calculation.”

I rubbed my nose and examined the Professor's face. He appeared tired, worn out.

“It's too late in the game to change. No, we have to find another house,” he said, rising from his chair and putting the photograph away solemnly, “Perhaps, if I can find the evidence I'm after, if I can convince my peers that there is something of merit to all of this, then maybe on that day these photographs and your testimony will make their way under other learned noses.”

He shut his drawer and locked it with a key. He shook himself and straightened his back, as I would see him do time and time again after a setback. His face was flushed with renewed vigour and he looked at me steadfast.

“So?” he asked directly.

“So, um, *what* Professor?”

“Will you stay on as my assistant?”

With the answer to that question I committed myself to a life of science, working on the borders of what was deemed acceptable study. Years later, as I write these memoirs, we are still compiling the evidence required to bring the field forth into the light of common practice.

That was my first real experience with such encounters and, let me tell you, it has not been my last. Alas, amazing as they might seem, I can share them with no one, for the moment at least.

I still have the envelope with me. I have my notes, the imprint of my hand next to that of the hidden stranger. I still have the photograph showing me, a young man, accompanied by the shade of a young boy. Every so often, when an investigation fails to yield fruit, I take the picture out and look at it, trace my finger upon the boy and reaffirm my conviction.

But then it all gets put away once more.

The world is not ready for such evidence just yet, this I have come to learn from the Professor's experience. There is still a long way to go before even a hint at the possibilities comes to light.

The Professor and I will only get one chance to convince our peers, and failure can only result in mockery, contempt, belittling. We are stronger than that, of course, for we have more than enough for our own convictions to stand against the wages of their abuse, but time is not on our side.

One day, however, I hope to show to you, with pride, with conviction, all that we have found.

Thank you for reading Grosvenor Lane Ghost. You can find more in the Paranormology series, or other great works by visiting

www.jeztyr.com



Jeztyr