



Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

by Robert Louis Stevenson



5. Incident of the letter

It was late in the afternoon, when Mr Utterson found his way to Dr Jekyll's door, where he was at once admitted by Poole, and carried down by the offices across a yard to the building which was known as the laboratory or dissecting rooms. It was the first time that the lawyer had been received in that part of his friend's quarters; and he gazed round with a distasteful sense of strangeness.

The tables were laden with chemical apparatus, the floor strewn with crates and littered with packing straw. At the further end, a flight of stairs mounted to a door covered with red baize; and through this, Mr Utterson was received into the doctor's cabinet. It was a large room fitted round with glass presses, furnished, among other things, with a cheval-glass and a business table.

The fire burned in the grate and there, close up to the warmth, sat Dr Jekyll, looking deathly sick. He did not rise to meet his visitor, but held out a cold hand and bade him welcome in a changed voice.

"You have heard the news?" Mr Utterson said.

The doctor shuddered. "They were crying it in the square."

"Carew was my client, but so are you, and I want to know what I am doing. You have not been mad enough to hide this fellow?"

"Utterson," cried the doctor, "I swear to God I will never set eyes on him again. I bind my honour to you that I am done with him in this world. It is all at an end. He will never more be heard of."

The lawyer listened gloomily; he did not like his friend's feverish manner. "For your sake, I hope you may be right. If it came to a trial, your name might appear."

"I am quite sure of him," replied Jekyll; "I have grounds for certainty that I cannot share with any one. But there is one thing on which you may advise me. I have received a letter; and I am at a loss whether I should show it to the police. I should like to leave it in your hands, Utterson; you would judge wisely, I am sure; I have so great a trust in you."

"You fear that it might lead to his detection?" asked the lawyer.

"No," said the other. "I cannot say that I care what becomes of Hyde; I am quite done with him. I was thinking of my own character, which this hateful business has rather exposed."

Utterson ruminated awhile; he was surprised at his friend's selfishness, and

yet relieved by it. "Let me see the letter," he said at last.

The letter was written in an odd, upright hand and signed "Edward Hyde": and it signified, briefly enough, that the writer's benefactor, Dr Jekyll, whom he had long so unworthily repaid for a thousand generousities, need labour under no alarm for his safety, as he had means of escape on which he placed a sure dependence. The lawyer liked this letter well enough; it put a better colour on the intimacy than he had looked for.

"Have you the envelope?" he asked.

"I burned it," replied Jekyll, "before I thought what I was about. But it bore no postmark. The note was handed in."

"Shall I keep this and sleep upon it?" asked Utterson.

"I wish you to judge for me entirely," was the reply. "I have lost confidence in myself."

"Well, I shall consider," returned the lawyer. "And now one word more: it was Hyde who dictated the terms in your will about that disappearance?"

The doctor seemed seized with a qualm of faintness; he shut his mouth tight and nodded.

"I knew it," said Utterson. "He meant to murder you. You had a fine escape."

"Utterson, what a lesson I have had!"

returned the doctor solemnly and he covered his face for a moment with his hands.

On his way out, the lawyer stopped and had a word with Poole. "There was a letter handed in today: what was the messenger like?" But Poole was positive nothing had come except by post.

This news sent off the visitor with his fears renewed. Plainly the letter had come by the laboratory door; possibly, indeed, it had been written in the cabinet; and if that were so, it must be differently judged, and handled with the more caution.

The newsboys, as he went, were crying themselves hoarse along the footways: "Special edition. Shocking murder of an MP."

Presently after, he sat on one side of his own hearth, with Mr Guest, his head clerk, upon the other. There was no man from whom he kept fewer secrets than Mr Guest and he might draw conclusions. Above all Guest was a great student and critic of handwriting.

"This is a sad business about Sir Danvers," Mr Utterson said.

"Yes, sir, indeed. It has elicited a great deal of public feeling," returned Guest. "The man, of course, was mad."

"I should like to hear your views on that," replied Utterson. "I have a document here in his handwriting; it is between ourselves, for I scarce know what to

do about it; it is an ugly business at the best. But there it is; quite in your way: a murderer's autograph."

Guest's eyes brightened, and he sat down at once and studied it with passion.

"No sir," he said: "not mad; but it is an odd hand."

"And by all accounts a very odd writer," added the lawyer.

Just then the servant entered with a note. "Is that from Dr Jekyll, sir?" inquired the clerk. "I thought I knew the writing. Anything private, Mr Utterson?"

"Only an invitation to dinner. Why? Do you want to see it?"

"One moment. I thank you, sir," and the clerk laid the two sheets of paper alongside and compared their contents.

"Thank you, sir," he said at last, returning both; "it's a very interesting autograph."

"Why did you compare them, Guest?" Mr Utterson inquired, suddenly.

"Well, sir," returned the clerk, "there's a rather singular resemblance; the two hands are in many points identical: only differently sloped."

No sooner was Mr Utterson alone that night, than he locked the note into his safe, where it reposed from that time forward.

"What!" he thought. "Henry Jekyll forge for a murderer!"

And his blood ran cold in his veins.