

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGE MAN'S ARRIVAL

The stranger came in February, as it was snowing heavily, walking from Bramblehurst Railway Station, and carrying a little black bag. He came into the "**Coach and Horses**"¹ more dead than alive. "A fire!" he cried, "A room and a fire!" He shook the snow off himself, and followed Mrs. Hall into her guest room, where he put some sovereigns on the table.

Mrs. Hall lit the fire and left him there while she went to prepare him a meal. A guest to stop at Iping in the winter time was an **unheard-of piece of luck**², especially a guest who paid in cash.

When lunch was ready, she carried plates, and glasses into the room. She was surprised to see that her visitor still wore his hat and coat, and stood with his back to her and looking out of the window at the falling snow, with his gloved hands behind him.

"Can I take your hat and coat, sir," she said, "and dry them in the kitchen?"

"No," he said.

He turned his head and looked at her over his shoulder. "I'll keep them on," he said; and she noticed that he wore big blue spectacles and had whiskers. The spectacles, the whiskers, and his coat collar completely hid his face.

“Very well, sir,” she said. “As you like. In a moment the room will be warmer.”

He made no answer, and Mrs. Hall, feeling that it was a bad time for a conversation, quickly laid the table and left the room. When she returned he was still standing there, his collar turned up, his hat hiding his face completely. She put down the eggs and bacon, and said to him:

“Your lunch is served, sir.”

“Thank you,” he said, and did not turn round until she closed the door.

As she went to the kitchen she saw her help Millie still making mustard. “That girl!” she said. “She’s so long!” And she herself finished mixing the mustard. She had cooked the ham and eggs, laid the table, and done everything, while Millie had not mixed the mustard! And a new guest wanted to stay! Then she filled the mustard-pot, and carried it into the guest room.

She knocked and entered at once. She put down the mustard-pot on the table, and then she noticed the coat and hat on a chair in front of the fire. She wanted to take these things to the kitchen. “May take them to dry now?” she asked.

“Leave the hat,” said her visitor in a muffled voice, and turning, she saw he had raised his head and was looking at her.

For a moment she stood looking at him, too surprised to speak.

He held a white napkin, which she had given him, over the lower part of his face, so that his

mouth was completely hidden, and that was the reason of his muffled voice. But what surprised Mrs. Hall most was the fact that all the forehead above his blue glasses was covered by a white bandage, and that another bandage covered his ears, so that only his pink nose could be seen. It was bright pink. He wore a jacket with a high collar turned up about his neck. The thick black hair could be seen between the bandages. This muffled and bandaged head was so strange that for a moment she stood speechless.

He remained holding the napkin, as she saw now, with a gloved hand. "Leave the hat," he said, speaking through the napkin.

She began to recover from the shock she had received. She placed the hat on the chair again by the fire. "I didn't know, sir," she began, "that —" And she stopped, not knowing what to say.

"Thank you," he said dryly, looking from her to the door, and then at her again.

"I'll have them nicely dried, sir, at once," she said, and carried his clothes out of the room. She shivered a little as she closed the door behind her, and her face showed her surprise.

The visitor sat and listened to the sound of her feet. He looked at the window before he took away the napkin; then rose and pulled the blind down. He returned to the table and his lunch.

"The poor man had an accident, or an operation or something," said Mrs. Hall. "And he held that napkin over his mouth all the time. Talked through it!... Perhaps his mouth was hurt too."

When Mrs. Hall went to clear away the stranger's lunch her idea that **his mouth must also have been cut**³ in the accident was confirmed, for he was smoking a pipe, and all the time that she was in the room he held a muffler over the lower part of his face. He sat in an armchair with his back to the window, and spoke now, **having eaten and drunk**⁴, less aggressively than before.

"I have some luggage," he said, "at Bramblehurst Station," and **he asked her how he could have it sent**⁵. Her explanation disappointed him. "Tomorrow!" he said. "Can't I have it today?"

"It's a bad road, sir," she said, "There was an accident there a year ago. A gentleman killed. Accidents, sir, happen in a moment, don't they?"

But the visitor did not feel like talking.

"They do," he said, through his muffler, looking at her quietly from behind his glasses.

"But they take long enough to get well, sir, don't they? My sister's son, Tom, once just cut his arm. He was three months bandaged, sir."

"I can quite understand that," said the visitor.

"We were afraid, one time, that he'd have to have an operation, he was that bad, sir."

The visitor laughed suddenly.

"Was he?" he said.

"He was, sir. **And it was no laughing matter to them**⁶, sir —"

"Will you get me some matches?" said the visitor. "My pipe is out."

Mrs. Hall stopped suddenly. It was certainly rude of him after telling him about her family. She stood for a moment, remembered the sovereigns, and went for the matches.

Evidently he did not want to speak about operations and bandages.

The visitor remained in his room until four o'clock. He was quite still during that time: he sat smoking by the fire.

COMPREHENSION

**Are the following statements true or false?
Correct the false ones.**

1. The stranger arrived at the "Coach and Horses" very tired and went to bed at once.
2. Mrs. Hall was happy to have a guest at the inn because no one stayed there in winter.
3. The stranger did not want to have his clothes taken away because it was cold in the room.
4. The new guest looked odd, even frightening. He had ugly scars in his face.
5. Mrs. Hall thought that her guest had had an accident.
6. Mrs. Hall thought that the stranger had had his mouth hurt because he spoke indistinctly.
7. The guest arrived with only one small bag.
8. Mrs. Hall was very friendly and talked a lot to her guest. She told him about her family.

DISCUSSION

1. Why was the stranger more dead than alive when he arrived at the “Coach and Horses”?
2. Why do you think Mrs. Hall lay the table in the guest room? Is it regularly done in modern hotels?
3. Do you think Mrs. Hall was a good landlady? Why (not)?
4. Why did Mrs. Hall feel hurt after the conversation with the stranger?
5. Do you think the stranger was hiding from somebody? What makes you think so?

CHAPTER II

MR. TEDDY HENFREY'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS

At four o'clock, when it was already dark, and Mrs. Hall wanted to go in and ask her visitor if he would take some tea, Teddy Henfrey, the **clock-jobber**¹, came into the bar.

"**Lord**², Mrs. Hall," said he, "but this is terrible weather!"

Mrs. Hall agreed, and then noticed he had his bag with him. "Now you're here," said she, "I'd be glad if you looked at the clock. The hour hand only points at six."

And she led the way to the guest room, knocked and entered.

As she opened the door, she saw her visitor sitting in the armchair before the fire. The only light in the room was from the fire. It was quite dark. But for a second it seemed to her that the man had an enormous mouth wide open, it took the whole of the lower portion of his face. It was the impression of a moment. Then he put up his hand. She opened the door wide so that the room was lighter, and she saw him more clearly, with the muffler held to his face, just as she had seen him hold the napkin before. The shadows, she thought, had tricked her.

"Would you mind, sir, this man looking at the clock, sir?" she said.

“Look at the clock?” he said, speaking through his muffler; and then, “Certainly.”

Mr. Teddy Henfrey said he was “taken aback” when he saw this bandaged person.

“Good afternoon,” said the stranger. “I understand,” he said, turning to Mrs. Hall, “that this room is for my private use.”

“I thought, sir,” said Mrs. Hall, “you’d prefer the clock —”

“Certainly,” said the stranger, “certainly — but as a rule I like to be alone and undisturbed.”

Then he asked Mrs. Hall if she had asked anybody to bring his boxes from Bramblehurst. She told him she had spoken to the postman, and that they would be here tomorrow.

“Can’t it be done earlier?” he said. She answered coldly it couldn’t.

“I’ll explain,” he added, “what I haven’t explained before because I was too cold and tired. I am a scientist.”

“Indeed, sir,” said Mrs. Hall. She was much impressed.

“And my luggage contains some apparatus. And I’m anxious to get on with my experiments.”

“Of course, sir.”

“I came to Iping,” he went on, “to be alone. I do not want to be disturbed in my work. I had an accident —”

“I thought as much³,” said Mrs. Hall to herself.

“My eyes are sometimes so weak and painful that I have to be in the dark for hours. I want you to understand this.”

“Certainly, sir,” said Mrs. Hall. “And may I ask you —”

“That is all, I think” said the stranger, putting an end to the conversation.

Mr. Henfrey worked with the lamp close to him, which left the rest of the room in shadow. As he was curious by nature, Mr. Henfrey was not in a hurry to finish his work with the idea of having a conversation with the stranger. But the stranger stood there, perfectly silent and still. Henfrey looked up, and there was the bandaged head and huge, dark glasses. For a minute they remained staring at one another. Then Henfrey looked down again. Very uncomfortable position! Should he say that the weather was very cold for the time of the year?

“The weather —” he began.

“Why don’t you finish and go?” said the stranger, evidently in a state of rage. “All you’ve got to do is to fix the hour hand. You’re simply humbugging.”

“One minute more, sir.” And Mr. Henfrey finished and went.

But he went off feeling very annoyed. “Damn it!” said Mr. Henfrey to himself, walking through the falling snow, “If the police wanted you, you couldn’t be more bandaged.”

At the moment he saw Hall, who had married the owner of the “Coach and Horses” a few months before. “How are you, Teddy?” Hall asked.

“You got a suspicious man at home!” said Teddy Henfrey.

“What’s that?” Hall asked.

“A strange customer is at the ‘Coach and Horses’, ” said Teddy.

And he gave Hall a description of his wife’s guest. “Looks a bit like a disguise, doesn’t it? I’d like to see a man’s face if I had him in my place,” said Henfrey. “But women trust strangers. He’s taken your rooms, and he hasn’t even given a name, Hall.”

“**You don’t say so!**” said Hall.

“Yes,” said Teddy. “For a week. And he’s got a lot of luggage coming tomorrow, so he says.”

Teddy walked on feeling much better.

On his return, Hall instructed his wife to find out more about their guest and to look very closely at his luggage when it came next day.

“You mind your own business, Hall,” said Mrs. Hall, “and I’ll mind mine.”

She was very annoyed by Hall because she herself had some doubts about the stranger.

COMPREHENSION

Are the following statements true or false? Correct the false ones.

1. When Mrs. Hall entered the guest room, it was dark there and she had an impression that her guest had an enormous mouth wide open.
2. Mrs. Hall brought Mr. Henfrey with her because she was afraid of her guest.

3. The stranger thanked Mrs. Hall for bringing someone to repair the clock.
4. The stranger was a scientist and he was planning to make experiments in the inn.
5. The stranger preferred to stay in the darkness because his eyes had been hurt in the accident.
6. The stranger was an educated man and behaved very politely to everyone.
7. Mr. Henfrey thought that the stranger was a criminal hiding from the police.
8. Mr. Hall was the owner of the "Coach and Horses", and Mrs. Hall helped him to keep the inn.
9. Mrs. Hall was annoyed by Mr. Hall's instructions because she thought them silly.

DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think the stranger was rude to Mrs. Hall when she brought Mr. Henfrey to repair the clock?
2. Why was Mr. Henfrey "taken aback"?
3. Why do you think the stranger told Mrs. Hall he was a scientist and had come there to work?
4. Why was Mr. Henfrey slow with his work?
5. Why do you think Mr. Henfrey felt better after his conversation with Mr. Hall?