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A Very Odd Story

Mr. Utterson the lawyer was a rugged-looking man. His face rarely lit up in a smile. His conversation was cold, brief, and embarrassed. People saw him as lean, long, dusty, and dreary. Yet he could sometimes be lovable. At friendly meetings—and when the wine was to his taste—something wonderfully human shone from his eye. At these times one could see an inviting warmth in his face.

He was quite strict with himself. Though he enjoyed the theater, he had not attended a play for 20 years. But he was easygoing with others. He used to say, “I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.”

Mr. Utterson was rather shy. He did not seek out friends, but welcomed those who came his

way. His friends were those of his own blood, or those whom he had known the longest.

This, no doubt, was the bond that united him to Mr. Richard Enfield. He was a distant cousin, and a well-known man about town. Their friendship was a nut to crack for many. What could these two see in each other? What subject could they find in common? People said that when they met Mr. Utterson and Mr. Enfield on their Sunday walks, the two men said nothing. Yet for all that, both men counted their walks as the chief jewel of the week.

By chance, one of these walks led them down a back street in a busy part of London. The street was small, but on the weekdays it was very busy. The shop fronts had an inviting air, as if they were rows of smiling saleswomen. Even on Sunday, when it was almost empty, the street shone out in contrast to its dingy neighborhood.

But on the east side, there was a certain sinister building. It was two stories high. There were no windows, only a door with no bell or knocker. Tramps slouched against it and struck matches on the panels. A schoolboy had tried his knife on the molding. For close

to a generation, no one had bothered to drive away these destructive visitors, or to repair their damage.

As the men walked by the door, Mr. Enfield pointed to it with his cane. "Did you ever notice that door before?" he asked. "It is connected in my mind with a very odd story."

Mr. Utterson's voice changed slightly. He said, "Indeed? And what was that?"

"I was on my way home from a long journey," Mr. Enfield said. "It was about three o'clock on a black winter morning. The streets were so empty that I began to long for the sight of a policeman. All at once I saw two figures: One was a little man walking along quickly. The other was a girl of eight or ten. She was running as fast as she could down a cross street.

"Well, naturally, the man and the girl ran into each other at the corner. But then came the horrible part of the thing. The man trampled right over the child's body! He left her screaming on the ground. It may sound like nothing to hear, but I assure you it was a hellish thing to see!

"I took to my heels and seized the man by the collar. When I brought him back to where

he'd left the child, there was already quite a group around her.

“The people who had turned out were the child's own family. They had sent for a doctor who had just arrived. Well, the child was not much the worse for the fall. She was more frightened than anything else. And there you might have supposed this strange event would have ended.

“But there was one curious point. I had taken a loathing to the hateful man at first sight. So had the child's family—which was only natural. But the doctor's behavior was what struck me. He was the usual cut and dried doctor. He had a strong Edinburgh accent, and was about as emotional as a bagpipe.

“Well, sir, when he turned to my prisoner, he went white and looked as if he wanted to kill him! I knew what was in his mind, just as he knew what was in mine. Since killing him was ridiculous, we decided to do the next best thing.

“We told the man we would make a scandal out of this. We promised that we would make his name stink from one end of London to the other.