ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

DOCTOR IZARD

Anna Katharine Green

Doctor Izard

EAN 8596547221449

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

Table of Contents

I. NO. THIRTEEN, WARD THIRTEEN.
II. HADLEY’S CAVE.
III. THE YOUNG HEIRESS.
IV. DR. IZARD.
V. NOCTURNAL WANDERINGS.
VI. THE PORTRAIT.
VII. WHAT THE STROKE OF A BELL CAN DO.
VIII. THE HOUSE ON THE HILL.
IX. ASK DR. IZARD.
X. AN INCREDIBLE OCCURRENCE.
XI. FACE TO FACE.
XII. AT HOME.
XIII. A TEST.
XIV. GRACE.
XV. THE SMALL, SLIGHT MAN.
XVI. THE LETTER.
XVII. MIDNIGHT AT THE OLD IZARD PLACE.
XVIII. A DECISION.
XIX. TO-MORROW.
XX. DR. IZARD’S LAST DAY IN HAMILTON.

I.

NO. THIRTEEN, WARD THIRTEEN.

Table of Contents

IT was after midnight. Quiet had settled over the hospital, and in Ward 13 there was no sound and scarcely a movement. The nurse, a strong and beautiful figure, had fallen into a reverie, and the two patients, which were all the ward contained, lay in a sleep so deep that it seemed to foreshadow the death which was hovering over them both.

They were both men. The one on the right of the nurse was middle-aged; the one on the left somewhat older. Both were gaunt, both were hollow-eyed, both had been given up by the doctors and attendants. Yet there was one point of difference between them. He on the left, the older of the two, had an incurable complaint for which no remedy was possible, while he on the right, though seemingly as ill as his fellow, was less seriously affected, and stood some chance of being saved if only he would arouse from his apathy and exert his will toward living. But nothing had as yet been found to interest him, and he seemed likely to die from sheer inanition. It is through this man’s eyes that we must observe the scene which presently took place in this quiet room.

He had been lying, as I have said, in a dreamless sleep, when something—he never knew what—made him conscious of himself and partially awake to his surroundings.

He found himself listening, but there was no sound; and his eyes, which he had not unclosed for hours, slowly opened, and through the shadows which encompassed him broke a dim vision of the silent ward and the sitting figure of the weary nurse. It was an accustomed sight, and his eyes were softly re-closing when a sudden movement on the part of the nurse roused him again to something like interest, and though his apathy was yet too great for him to make a movement or utter a sound, he perceived, though with dim eyes at first, that the door at the other end of the ward had slowly opened, and that two men were advancing down the room to the place where the nurse stood waiting in evident surprise to greet them. One was the hospital doctor, and on him the sick man cast but a single glance; but the person with him was a stranger, and upon him the attention of the silent watcher became presently concentrated, for his appearance was singular and his errand one of evident mystery.

There was but one light in the room, and this was burning low, so that the impression received was general rather than particular. He saw before him a medium-sized man who sought to hide his face from observation, though this face was already sufficiently shielded by the semi-darkness and by the brim of a large hat which for some reason he had omitted to remove. Around his shoulders there hung a cloak of an old-fashioned type, and as he approached the spot where the nurse stood, his form, which had shown some dignity while he was advancing, contracted itself in such a fashion that he looked smaller than he really was.

The physician who accompanied him was the first to speak.

“Is No. Twelve asleep?” he asked.

The nurse bowed slightly, half turning her head as she did so.

The watching man was No. Thirteen, not No. Twelve, but his eyes shut at the question, perhaps because he was still overcome by his apathy, perhaps because his curiosity had been aroused and he feared to stop events by betraying his interest in them.

“I am afraid we shall have to wake him,” pursued the attendant physician. “This gentleman here, who declines to give his name, but who has brought letters which sufficiently recommend him to our regard, professes to have business with this patient which will not keep till morning. Has the patient shown any further signs of sinking?”

She answered in a cheerful tone that he had slept since ten without waking, and the two men began to approach. As they did so both turned toward the bed of the second sick man, and one of them, the stranger, remarked with something like doubt in his tones, “Is this man as low as he looks? Is he dying, too?”

The answer was a qualified one, and the stranger appeared to turn his back, but presently the strained ears of the seemingly unconscious man heard a breath panting near his own, and was conscious of some person bending over his cot. Next minute the question was whispered in his hearing:

“Are you sure this man is asleep?”

The doctor, who was standing close by, murmured an affirmative, and the nurse to whom the questioner had apparently turned, observed without any hesitation in her slightly mystified tone:

“I have not seen him move since eight o’clock; besides, if he were awake, he would show no consciousness. He is dying from sheer hopelessness, and a cannon fired at his side would not rouse him.”

The “humph” which this assurance called forth from the stranger had a peculiar sound in it, but the attention which had been directed to No. Thirteen now passed to his neighbor, and the former, feeling himself for the instant unobserved, partially opened his eyes to see how that neighbor was affected by it. A few whispered words had accomplished what a cannon had been thought unable to do, and he was beginning to realize an interest in life, or at least in what was going on in reference to his fellow patient. The words were these:

“This is a hopeless case, is it?”

“Yes, sir.”

“How long a time do you give him?”

The tone was professional, though not entirely unsympathetic.

“Dr. Sweet says a week; I say three days.”

The stranger bent over the patient, and it was at this point that the watcher’s eyes opened.

“Three days is nearer the mark,” the visitor at last declared.

At which the attending physician bowed.

“I should be glad to have a few moments’ conversation with your patient,” the stranger now pursued. “If he is unhappy, I think I can bring him comfort. He has relatives, you say.”

“Yes, a daughter, over whose helpless position he constantly grieves.”

“He is poor, then?”

“Very.”

“Good! I have pleasant news for him. Will you allow me to rouse him?”

“Certainly, if you have a communication justifying the slight shock.”

The stranger, whose head had sunk upon his breast, cast a keen look around. “I beg your pardon,” said he, “but I must speak to the man alone; he himself would choose it, but neither you nor the nurse need leave the room.”

The doctor bowed and withdrew with marked respect; the nurse lingered a moment, during which both of the sick men lay equally quiet and death-like; then she also stepped aside. The stranger was left standing between the two beds.

Soon the sensitive ears of the watchful one heard these words: “Your little daughter sends her love.”

Opening his eyes a trifle, he saw the stranger bending over the other’s pillow. A sigh which was not new to his ears rose from his dying companion, at sound of which the stranger added softly:

“You fear to leave the child, but God is merciful. He makes it possible for you to provide for her; do you want to hear how?”

A low cry, then a sudden feeble move, and No. Twelve was speaking in hurried, startled words:

“Who are you, sir? What do you want with me, and what are you saying about my child? I don’t know you.”

“No? And yet I am likely to be your greatest benefactor. But first take these few drops; they will help you to understand me. You are afraid? You need not be. I am—” He whispered a name into the sick man’s ear which his companion could not catch. “That is our secret,” he added, “and one which I charge you to preserve.”

No. Thirteen, unable to restrain his curiosity at this, stole another glance at the adjoining cot from under his scarcely lifted lids. His moribund neighbor had risen partially on his pillow and was gazing with burning intensity at the man who was leaning toward him.

“O sir,” came from the pale and working lips, as he tried to raise a feeble hand. “You mean to help my little one, you? But why should you do it? What claim has my misfortune or her innocence on you that you should concern yourself with our desperate condition?”

“No claim,” came in the stranger’s calm but impressive tones. “It is not charity I seek to bestow on you, but payment for a service you can render me. A perfectly legitimate, though somewhat unusual one,” he hastened to add, as the man’s face showed doubt.

“What—what is it?” faltered from the sick man’s lips in mingled doubt and hope. “What can a poor and wretched being, doomed to speedy death, do for a man like you? I fear you are mocking me, sir.”

“You can be the medium—” the words came slowly and with some hesitation—“for the payment of a debt I dare not liquidate in my own person. I owe someone—a large amount—of money. If I give it to you—” (he leaned closer and spoke lower, but the ears that were listening were very sharp, and not a syllable was lost) “will you give it to the person whom I will name?”

“But how? When? I am dying, they say, and——”

“Do not worry about the whens and hows. I will make all that easy. The question is, will you, for the sum of five thousand dollars, which I here show you in ten five-hundred-dollar bills, consent to sign a will, bequeathing this other little package of money to a certain young woman whom I will name?”

“Five thousand dollars? O sir, do not mislead a dying man. Five thousand dollars? Why, it would be a fortune to Lucy!”

“A fortune that she shall have,” the other assured him.

“Just for signing my name?”

“Just for signing your name to a will which will bequeath the rest of your belongings, namely, this little package, to an equally young and equally unfortunate girl.”

“It seems right. I do not see anything wrong in it,” murmured the dying father in a voice that had strangely strengthened. “Will you assure me that it is all right, and that no one will suffer by my action?”

“Did I not tell you who I was?” asked the stranger, “and cannot you trust one of my reputation? You will be doing a good act, a retributive act; one that will have the blessing of Providence upon it.”

“But why this secrecy? Why do you come to me instead of paying the debt yourself? Is she——”

“She is who she is,” was the somewhat stern interruption. “You do not know her; no one here knows her. Will you do what I ask or must I turn to your companion who seems as ill as yourself?”

“I—I want to do it, sir. Five thousand dollars! Let me feel of the bills that represent so much.”

There was a movement, and the sick and feeble voice rose again in a tone of ecstatic delight. “And I need not worry any more about her feet without shoes and her pretty head without shelter. She will be a lady and go to school, and by and by can learn a trade and live respectably. Oh, thank God, sir! I know who I would like to have made her guardian.”

“Then you consent?” cried the stranger, with a thrill of some strong feeling in his voice.

“I do, sir, and thank you; only you must be quick, for there is no knowing how soon the end may come.” The stranger, who seemed to be equally apprehensive of the results of this strong excitement, raised himself upright and motioned to the doctor and the nurse.

“You will say nothing of our compact,” he enjoined in a final whisper, as the two summoned ones approached. “Nor will you express surprise at the wording of the will or, indeed, at anything I may say.”

“No,” came in an almost undistinguishable murmur, and then there was silence, till the doctor and the nurse were within hearing, when the stranger said:

“Our friend here has a small matter of business on his mind. It has been my pleasure, as I perhaps intimated to you, to bring him a considerable sum of money which he had quite despaired of ever having paid him; and as for reasons he is not willing to communicate, he desires to bequeath a portion of it to a person not related to him, he naturally finds it necessary to leave a will. Foreseeing this, I had the draft of one drawn up, which, if agreeable to you, I will read to him in your presence.”

The amazement in the nurse’s eye gave way to a look of deference, and she bowed slightly. The doctor nodded his head, and both took their stand at the foot of the small cot. The man in the adjoining bed neither murmured nor moved. Had they looked at him, they would have doubtless thought his sleep was doing him but little good, for his pallor had increased and an icy sweat glistened on his forehead.

“Mr. Hazlitt’s property,” continued the stranger in a low and mechanical tone, “consists entirely of money. Is that not so?” he asked, smiling upon the dazed but yet strangely happy face of the patient lying before him. “Namely, this roll of bills, amounting as you see to five thousand dollars, and this small package of banknotes, of which the amount is not stated, but of whose value he is probably aware. Are you willing,” and he turned to the doctor, “to take charge of these valuables, and see that they are forthcoming at the proper time?”

The doctor bowed, glanced at his patient, and meeting his eager eye, took the roll of bills and the package, and putting them into his breast pocket, remarked, “I will have them placed in the safe deposit vaults to-morrow.”

“Very well,” cried the stranger; “that will be all right, will it not?” he asked, consulting in his turn the man before him.

Mr. Hazlitt, as they called him, gave him a short look, smiled again, and said: “You know best; anything, so that my Lucy gets her five thousand.”

The stranger, straightening himself, asked if he could not have more light, at which the nurse brought a candle. Immediately the stranger took a paper from under his cloak and opened it. The nurse held the candle and the stranger began to read:

The last will and testament of Abram Hazlitt of Chicago, Cook county, Illinois.

First: I direct all my just debts and funeral expenses to be paid.

Second: I give, devise, and bequeath to——

“Is your daughter’s name Lucy, and is the sum you wish given her five thousand dollars exact?” asked the stranger, sitting down at the small table near by and taking out a pen from his pocket.

“Yes,” was the feeble response, “five thousand dollars to Lucy Ellen, my only and much-beloved child.”

The stranger rapidly wrote in the words, adding, “she lives in Chicago, I suppose.”

It was the nurse who answered:

“She is in this hospital, too, sir; but not for any mortal complaint. Time and care will restore her.”

The stranger went on reading:

I give, devise, and bequeath to my only and much-loved child, Lucy Ellen of Chicago, Cook county, Illinois, the sum of five thousand dollars.

Second: I give, devise, and bequeath to——

“Did you say the name was Mary Earle, and that she lived in Hamilton, —— county, Massachusetts?” he interjected, looking inquiringly at the man whose sagacity he thus trusted.

“Yes, yes,” was the hurried, almost faint answer. “You know, you know; go on quickly, for I’m feeling very weak.”

They gave him stimulants, while the stranger rapidly wrote in certain words, which he as rapidly read in what one listener thought to be a much relieved tone.

I give, devise, and bequeath to Mary Earle of Hamilton, —— county, Massachusetts, all my remaining property as found in the package of banknotes deposited in the safe deposit vaults of this city, in payment of an old debt to her father, and as an expression of my regret that my hitherto destitute circumstances have prevented me from sooner recognizing her claims upon me.

Third: I appoint Dr. Cusack of the Chicago General Hospital sole executor of this, my last will and testament.

Witness my hand this thirteenth day of April in the year eighteen hundred and ninety-two.

Signed, published, and declared
by the testator to be
his last will and testament, in
our presence, who at his request
and in his presence and
in the presence of each other
have subscribed our names
hereto as witnesses on this
thirteenth day of April, 1892.

“Does this paper express your wishes and all your wishes?” asked the stranger pausing. “Is there any change you would like made or is the will as it stands right?”

“Right! right!” came in more feeble tones from the fast sinking sufferer.

“Then if you will call in another witness, I will submit the paper to him to sign,” said the stranger turning toward the doctor. “As executor you cannot act as witness.”

The doctor turned to the nurse and a momentary consultation passed between them. Then she quietly withdrew, and in a few minutes returned with a man who from his appearance evidently occupied some such position as watchman. The sick man was raised higher in his bed and a pen put in his hand.

“Mr. Hazlitt is about to sign his will,” explained the stranger; and turning to the sick man, he put the formal question: “Is this paper which I here place before you, your last will and testament? And do you accept these two persons now before you as witnesses to your signing of the same?”

A feeble assent followed both these questions, whereupon the stranger put his finger on the place where the dying man was expected to write his name. As he did so a strange sensation seemed to affect every one present, for the men with an involuntary movement all raised their eyes to the ceiling upon which the stooping form of the stranger made such a weird shadow, while the nurse gave evident signs of momentary perturbation, which she as a woman of many experiences would doubtless have found it hard to explain even to herself.

A short silence followed, which was presently broken by the scratching of a pen. The patient was writing his name, but how slowly! He seemed to be minutes in doing it.

Suddenly he fell back, a smile of perfect peace lighting up his shrunken features.

“Lucy’s future is assured,” he murmured, and lost or seemed to lose all connection with the scene in which he had just played such an important part.

A deep sigh answered him. Whose? It had the sound of relief in it, a great soul-satisfying relief. Had the stranger uttered it? It would seem so, but his manner was too professional to be the cloak of so much emotion, or so it seemed to all eyes but one.

The witnesses’ signatures were soon in place, and the stranger rose to go. As he did so his eyes flashed suddenly over his shoulder and rested for an instant on the man who occupied the neighboring cot. The movement was so quick that No. Thirteen had scarcely time to close his eyes undetected. Indeed, some glint of the half-hidden eyeball must have met the stranger’s eye, for he turned quickly and bent over the seemingly unconscious man with a gaze of such intentness that it took all the strength of what had once been called a most obstinate will for the man thus surveyed not to respond to it.

Suddenly the stranger thrust his hand out and laid it on the unknown sufferer’s heart, and a slight smile crossed his features.

“Is there anything I can do for you?” were the words he dropped, cold and stinging, into the apparently deaf ear.

But the man’s will was indomitable and an icy silence was the sole answer which the intruder received.

“I have still a thousand to give away,” was whispered so close into his face that he felt the hot breath that conveyed

it.

But even these words fell, or seemed to fall, upon ears of stony deafness, and the stranger rising, moved quietly away, saying as he did so, “This case here is on the mend. His heart has a very normal beat.”

Some few more words were said, and he and his companion were left alone again with the nurse.

At three o’clock No. Twelve called feebly for some water; as the nurse returned from giving it to him she felt her dress pulled slightly by a feeble hand. Turning to No. Thirteen she was astonished to see that his eyes were burning with quite an eager light.

“I could drink some broth,” said he.

“Why, you are better!” she cried.

But he shook his head. “No,” said he, “but—” The voice trailed off into a feeble murmur, but the eye continued bright. He was afraid to speak for fear his lips would frame aloud the words that he had been repeating to himself for the last two hours. “Mary Earle! Mary Earle, of Hamilton, —— county, Massachusetts.”

He had found the interest which had been lacking to his recovery.

PART II.
THE MAN WITH THE DOG.

II.

HADLEY’S CAVE.

Table of Contents

ON the first day of June, 1892, there could be seen on the highway near the small village of Hamilton, a dusty wanderer with a long beard and rough, unkempt hair. From the silver streaks in the latter, and from his general appearance and feeble walk, he had already passed the virile point of life and had entered upon, or was about to enter upon, the stage of decrepitude. And yet the eyes which burned beneath the gray and shaggy brows were strangely bright, and had an alertness of expression which contradicted the weary bend of the head and the slow dragging of the rough-shod feet.

His dress was that of a farm laborer, and from the smallness of the bundle which he carried on a stick over his shoulder, he had evidently been out of work for some time and was as poor as he was old and helpless.

At the junction of the two roads leading to Leadington and Wells, he stopped and drew a long breath. Then he sat down on a huge stone in the cross of the roads and, drooping his head, gazed long and earnestly at the length of dusty road which separated him from the cluster of steeples and house roofs before him. Was he dreaming or planning, or was he merely weary? A sound at his side startled him. Turning his head, he saw a dog. It was a very lean one, and