



Story of the door

This is the beginning of the novel. In the following extract the third-person narrator, who tells most of the story, closely follows the movements of Mr Utterson and introduces the protagonist, the monster Hyde.

Robert Louis Stevenson
*The Strange Case of Dr
Jekyll and Mr Hyde*
(1886)

Chapter 1

Mr Utterson the lawyer was a man of a rugged countenance¹, that was never lighted by a smile; cold, scanty² and embarrassed in discourse; backward in sentiment³; **lean**, long, dusty, dreary, and yet somehow lovable. At friendly meetings, and when the wine was to his taste, something eminently human beaconed⁴ from his eye; something indeed which never found its way into his talk, but which spoke not only in these silent symbols of the after-dinner face, but more often and loudly in the acts of his life. He was austere with himself: drank gin when he was alone, to mortify a taste for vintages⁵; and though he enjoyed the theatre, had not crossed the doors of one for twenty years. But he had an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds⁶; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove. 'I incline to Cain's heresy,' he used to say quaintly⁷: 'I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.' In this character it was frequently his fortune to be the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of down-going men⁸. And to such as these, so long as they came about his chambers, he never marked a shade of change in his **demeanour**.

No doubt the feat⁹ was easy to Mr Utterson; for he was undemonstrative at the best, and even his friendships seemed to be founded in a similar catholicity¹⁰ of good-nature. It is the mark of a modest man to accept his friendly circle ready made from the hands of opportunity; and that was the lawyer's way. His friends were those of his own blood, or those whom he had known the longest; his affections, like ivy¹¹, were the growth of time, they implied no aptness¹² in the object. Hence, no doubt, the bond that united him to Mr Richard Enfield, his distant **kinsman**, the well-known man about town. It was a nut to crack for many¹³, what these two could see in each other, or what subject they could find in common. It was reported by those who encountered them in their Sunday walks, that they said nothing, looked singularly dull¹⁴, and would hail with obvious relief the appearance of a friend. For all that, the two men put the greatest store¹⁵ by these excursions, counted them the chief jewel of each week, and not only set aside occasions of pleasure, but even resisted the calls of business, that they might enjoy them uninterrupted.

It chanced on one of these **rambles** that their way led them down a by street in a busy quarter of London. The street was small and what is called quiet, but it drove a **thriving** trade on the week-days. The inhabitants were all doing well, it seemed, and all emulously¹⁶ hoping to do better still, and laying out the surplus of their gains in coquetry¹⁷; so that the shop fronts stood along that **thoroughfare** with an air of invitation, like rows of smiling saleswomen. Even on Sunday, when it veiled its more florid charms and lay comparatively empty of passage, the street shone out in contrast to its **dingy** neighbourhood, like a fire in a forest; and with its freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses¹⁸, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note, instantly caught and pleased the eye of the passenger.

Two doors from one corner, on the left hand going east, the line was broken by the entry of a court; and just at that point, a certain sinister block of building **thrust forward** its gable¹⁹ on the street. It was two storeys high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower storey and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence. The door, which was equipped with neither bell nor knocker, was blistered and distained²⁰. Tramps slouched²¹ into the recess and struck matches on the panels; children kept shop upon the steps; the schoolboy had tried his knife on the mouldings²²; and for close on a generation no one had appeared to drive away these random visitors or to repair their ravages²³.

Mr Enfield and the lawyer were on the other side of the by street; but when they came abreast²⁴ of the entry, the former lifted up his **cane** and pointed.

- 1 **rugged countenance.** Burbera espressione.
- 2 **scanty.** Reticente.
- 3 **backward in sentiment.** Introverso.
- 4 **beaconed.** Splendeva.
- 5 **vintages.** Vini eccellenti.
- 6 **misdeeds.** Misfatti.
- 7 **quaintly.** In modo bizzarro.
- 8 **down-going men.** Uomini sulla via della rovina.
- 9 **feat.** Impresa.
- 10 **catholicity.** Universalità, eclettismo.
- 11 **ivy.** Edera.
- 12 **aptness.** Abilità, propensione.
- 13 **nut to crack for many.** Problema difficile da risolvere per molti.
- 14 **dull.** Tristi.
- 15 **put the greatest store.** Davano la più grande importanza.
- 16 **emulously.** Ardentemente.
- 17 **laying ... in coquetry.** Investendo l'ecceденza dei propri guadagni in opere di abbellimento (lett.: civetteria).
- 18 **well-polished brasses.** Ottoni ben lucidati.
- 19 **gable.** Tetto a due spioventi.
- 20 **blistered and distained.** Screpolata e stinta.
- 21 **Tramps slouched.** Vagabondi stavano in modo scomposto.
- 22 **mouldings.** Stipiti.
- 23 **ravages.** Rovine.
- 24 **abreast.** Fianco a fianco.



'Did you ever remark that door?' he asked; and when his companion had replied in the affirmative, 'It is connected in my mind,' added he, 'with a very odd story.'

50 'Indeed!' said Mr Utterson, with a slight change of voice, 'and what was that?'

'Well, it was this way,' returned Mr Enfield: 'I was coming home from some place at the end of the world, about three o'clock of a black winter morning, and my way lay through a part of town where there was literally nothing to be seen but lamps. Street after street, and all the folks asleep – street after street, all lighted up as if for a procession, and all as empty

55 as a church – till at last I got into that state of mind when a man listens and listens and begins to long for the sight of a policeman. All at once, I saw two figures: one a little man who was stumping along²⁵ eastward at a good walk, and the other a girl of maybe eight or ten who was running as hard as she was able down a cross-street. Well, sir, the two ran into one another naturally enough at the corner; and then came the horrible part of the thing;

60 for the man trampled calmly over²⁶ the child's body and left her screaming on the ground. It sounds nothing to hear, but it was hellish to see. It wasn't like a man; it was like some damned Juggernaut²⁷. I gave a view halloo²⁸, took to my heels, collared my gentleman, and brought him back to where there was already quite a group about the screaming child. He was perfectly cool and made no resistance, but gave me one look, so ugly that it brought out

65 the **sweat** on me like running. The people who had turned out were the girl's own family; and pretty soon the doctor, for whom she had been sent, put in his appearance. Well, the child was not much the worse, more frightened, according to the Sawbones²⁹; and there you might have supposed would be an end to it. But there was one curious circumstance. I had taken a loathing³⁰ to my gentleman at first sight. So had the child's family, which

70 was only natural. But the doctor's case was what struck me. He was the usual cut-and-dry apothecary³¹, of no particular age and colour, with a strong Edinburgh accent, and about as emotional as a bagpipe³². Well, sir, he was like the rest of us: every time he looked at my prisoner, I saw that Sawbones turned sick and white with the desire to kill him. I knew what was in his mind, just as he knew what was in mine; and killing being out of the question, we did the next best. We told the man we could and would make such a scandal out of this, as

75 should make his name stink³³ from one end of London to the other. If he had any friends or any credit, we undertook that he should lose them. And all the time, as we were pitching it in red hot³⁴, we were keeping the women off him as best we could, for they were as wild as harpies. I never saw a circle of such hateful faces; and there was the man in the middle, with a kind of black **sneering** coolness – frightened too, I could see that – but carrying it off, sir, really like Satan.

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- 25 **stumping along.** Camminando.
 26 **trampled ... over.** Calpestò tranquillamente.
 27 **Juggernaut.** Idolo indù, che si trascinava per le vie su un grosso carro mentre i fanatici si gettavano sotto le ruote; si usa per indicare chi calpesta tutto quello che incontra sul cammino per raggiungere il proprio scopo.
 28 **view halloo.** Forte urlo (incitamento usato nella caccia alla volpe).
 29 **Sawbones.** Medico (termine dispregiativo; lett.: segaossi).
 30 **loathing.** Disgusto.
 31 **apothecary.** Farmacista.
 32 **bagpipe.** Cornamusa.
 33 **stink.** Lett.: puzzare; qui: rendere odioso.
 34 **we were pitching it in red hot.** Lo tenevamo sulle spine.

READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the text and match the highlighted words with their Italian translation.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 beffarda | 7 sudore |
| 2 parente | 8 squallido |
| 3 bastone | 9 passeggiare |
| 4 magro | 10 strada principale |
| 5 fiorentino | 11 contegno |
| 6 triste, malinconico | 12 spingeva in avanti |

2 READ the text again and do the following activities.

- 1 Focus on lines 1-36 and answer the questions.
 - 1 What was Mr Utterson's job?
 - 2 Who was Mr Enfield?
 - 3 What was Mr Utterson's relationship with Mr Enfield like?
 - 4 Where did they happen to wander one Sunday?



2 Describe the features of the 'by street' on weekdays and on Sundays. How do they differ?

3 Consider the description of the house in lines 37-45 and complete the following notes.

Height	The door
Number of windows	The panels
Number of doors	The steps
The façade	The mouldings

4 Focus on the final part of the text and decide whether the following statements are true or false.

1 Mr Enfield had spent the night at his usual place.	T F
2 The street he was walking along was dull.	T F
3 He felt uneasy.	T F
4 The little man was crippled.	T F
5 He hurt the little girl.	T F
6 He ran away with her.	T F
7 He was not frightened at all.	T F
8 The doctor was very sensitive.	T F
9 Mr Enfield and the doctor decided to kill the man.	T F

5 Say who the narrator is. Whose points of view are adopted?

6 Complete the table about Mr Utterson.

Physical appearance	
Way of speaking	
Behaviour	
Interests	
Attitudes	

7 Underline all the expressions about 'the little man'.

1 What do they connote?

2 What kind of person do you think he is?

3 What feelings does this creature provoke in the others?

<input type="checkbox"/> Repulsion.	<input type="checkbox"/> Antipathy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Curiosity.
<input type="checkbox"/> Anguish.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fright.	<input type="checkbox"/> Disgust.

8 Lines 58-59 contain the expression 'two [...] into one', which has a symbolic meaning. Can you explain it?

3 COMPLETE the summary of the text with the words from the box.

discomfort	cane	screaming	had gathered
respectable	calm	devilish	reminds
relative	stepped	seized	



The novel opens with two men, Mr Utterson – a quiet, **(1)** lawyer – and his distant **(2)** Richard Enfield. They are out for their customary Sunday walk in London. On their way, Enfield raises his **(3)** and indicates a particular door, which **(4)** him of a strange experience he had on this very street. Enfield says that at about three o'clock on a black winter morning, he was coming back home feeling a vague sense of **(5)** because the street was deserted. Suddenly, he saw two figures, a man and a little girl. They ran into each other, and the man **(6)** heavily on the child's body leaving her **(7)** on the ground. Enfield describes the scene as hellish. He tells Utterson that he **(8)** the man by the collar, dragged him back, and by that time a crowd **(9)** Like Enfield, they all seemed to hate the **(10)** man, who, on the contrary, was very **(11)** and cool.



➤ COMPETENCE: CONTRASTING AUTHORS

4

DISCUSS. Compare the figure of Hyde with that of the monster created by Dr Frankenstein (→ 4.10) and point out similarities and differences.