



NIGHTMARE ABBEY

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK

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each other expressively. The princess changes colour several times. The Mogul takes snuff in great agitation. Several grains are heard to fall on the stage. His heart is seen to beat through his upper benjamin.—THE MOGUL (with a mournful look at his left shoe). 'My shoe-string is broken.'—THE PRINCESS (after an interval of melancholy reflection). 'I know it.' THE MOGUL. 'My second shoe-string! The first broke when I lost my empire: the second has broken to-day. When will my poor heart break?'—THE PRINCESS. 'Shoe-strings, hearts, and empires! Mysterious sympathy!'

'Nonsense, sir,' interrupted Mr Glowry. 'That is not at all like the voice I heard.'

'But, sir,' said Scythrop, 'a key-hole may be so constructed as to act like an acoustic tube, and an acoustic tube, sir, will modify sound in a very remarkable manner. Consider the construction of the ear, and the nature and causes of sound. The external part of the ear is a cartilaginous funnel.'

'It wo'n't do, Scythrop. There is a girl concealed in this tower, and find her I will. There are such things as sliding panels and secret closets.'—He sounded round the room with his cane, but detected no hollowness.—'I have heard, sir,' he continued, 'that during my absence, two years ago, you had a dumb carpenter closeted with you day after day. I did not dream that you were laying contrivances for carrying on secret intrigues. Young men will have their way: I had my way when I was a young man: but, sir, when your cousin Marionetta—'

Scythrop now saw that the affair was growing serious. To have clapped his hand upon his father's mouth, to have entreated him to be silent, would, in the first place, not have made him so; and, in the second, would have shown a dread of being overheard by somebody. His only resource, therefore, was to try to drown Mr Glowry's voice; and, having no other subject, he continued his description of the ear, raising his voice continually as Mr Glowry raised his.

'When your cousin Marionetta,' said Mr Glowry, 'whom you profess to love—whom you profess to love, sir—'

'The internal canal of the ear,' said Scythrop, 'is partly bony and partly cartilaginous. This internal canal is—'

'Is actually in the house, sir; and, when you are so shortly to be—as I expect—'

'Closed at the further end by the *membrana tympani*—'

'Joined together in holy matrimony—'

'Under which is carried a branch of the fifth pair of nerves—'

'I say, sir, when you are so shortly to be married to your cousin Marionetta—'

'The *cavitas tympani*—'

A loud noise was heard behind the book-case, which, to the astonishment of Mr Glowry, opened in the middle, and the massy compartments, with all their weight of books, receding from each other in the manner of a theatrical scene, with a heavy rolling sound (which Mr Glowry immediately recognised to be the same which had excited his curiosity,) disclosed an interior apartment, in the entrance of which stood the beautiful Stella, who, stepping forward, exclaimed, 'Married! Is he going to be married? The profligate!'

'Really, madam,' said Mr Glowry, 'I do not know what he is going to do, or what I am going to do, or what any one is going to do; for all this is incomprehensible.'

'I can explain it all,' said Scythrop, 'in a most satisfactory manner, if you will but have the goodness to leave us alone.'

'Pray, sir, to which act of the tragedy of the Great Mogul does this incident belong?'

'I entreat you, my dear sir, leave us alone.'

Stella threw herself into a chair, and burst into a tempest of tears. Scythrop sat down by her, and took her hand. She snatched her hand away, and turned her back upon him. He rose, sat down on the other side, and took her other hand. She snatched it away, and turned from him again. Scythrop continued entreating Mr Glowry to leave them alone; but the old gentleman was obstinate, and would not go.

'Gone. And Mr and Mrs Hilary, and Miss O'Carroll: they are all gone. There is nobody left but Mr Asterias and his son, and they are going to-night.'

'Then I have lost them both.'

'Won't you come to dinner?'

'No.'

'Shall I bring your dinner here?'

'Yes.'

'What will you have?'

'A pint of port and a pistol.'¹⁴

'A pistol!'

'And a pint of port. I will make my exit like Werter. Go. Stay. Did Miss O'Carroll say any thing?'

'No.'

'Did Miss Toobad say any thing?'

'The strange lady? No.'

'Did either of them cry?'

'No.'

'What did they do?'

'Nothing.'

'What did Mr Toobad say?'

'He said, fifty times over, the devil was come among us.'

'And they are gone?'

'Yes; and the dinner is getting cold. There is a time for every thing under the sun. You may as well dine first, and be miserable afterwards.'

¹⁴ *a pint of port and a pistol*: See *The Sorrows of Werter*, Letter 93.

