The Story of a Recluse

by Alasdair Gray and Robert Louis Stevenson

My father was the Rev. John Kirkwood of Ediburgh, a man very well known for the rigour of his life and the tenor of his pulpit ministrations. I might have sometimes been tempted to bless Providence for this honourable origin, had not I been forced so much more often to deplore the harshness of my nurture. I have no children of my own, or none that I saw fit to educate, so perhaps speak at random; yet it appears my father may have been too strict. In the matter of pocket-money, he gave me a pittance, insufficient for his son's position, and when, upon one occasion, I took the liberty to protest, he brought me up with this home thrust of inquiry: "Should I give you more, Jamie, will you promise me it shall be spent as I should wish?" I did not answer quickly, but when I did, it was truly: "No," said I. He gave an impatient jostle of his shoulders, and turned his face to the study fire, as though to hide his feelings from his son. Today, however, they are very clear to me; and I know how he was one part delighted with my candour, and three parts revolted by the cynicism of my confession. I went from the room ere he had answered in any form of speech; and I went, I must acknowledge, in despair. I was then two and twenty years of age, a medical student of the University, already somewhat involved with debt, and already more or less (although I can scarce tell how) used to costly dissipations. I had a few shillings in my pocket; in a billiard room in St Andrew's Street I had shortly quadrupled this amount at pyramids, and the billiard room being almost next door to a betting agency, I staked the amount on the hazard of a race. At about five in the afternoon of the next day, I was the possessor of some thirty pounds—six times as much as I had ever dreamed of spending. I was not a bad young man, although a little loose. I may have been merry and lazy; until that cursed night I had never known what it was to be overpow-

ered with drink; so it is possible I was overpowered the more completely. I have never clearly been aware of where I went or what I did, or of how long a time elapsed till my wakening. The night was dry, dark, and cold; the lamps and the clean pavements and bright stars delighted me; I went before me with a baseless exultation in my soul, singing, dancing, wavering in my gait with the most airy inconsequence, and all at once at the corner of a street, which I can still dimly recall, the light of my reason went out and the thread of memory was broken.

I came to myself in bed, whether it was that night or the next I have never known, only the thirty pounds were gone! I had certainly slept some while, for I was sober; it was not yet day, for I was aware through my half-closed eyelids of the light of a gas jet; and I had undressed, for I lay in linen. Some little time, my mind hung upon the brink of consciousness; and then, with a start of recollection, recalling the beastly state to which I had reduced myself, and my father's straitlaced opinions and conspicuous position, I sat suddenly up in bed. As I did so, some sort of hamper tore apart about my waist; I looked down and saw, instead of my night-shirt, a woman's chemise copiously laced about the sleeves and bosom. I sprang to my feet, turned, and saw myself in a cheval glass. The thing fell but a little lower than my knees; it was of a smooth and soft fabric; the lace very fine, the sleeves half way to my elbow. The room was of a piece; the table well supplied with necessaries of the toilet; female dresses hanging upon nails; a wardrobe of some light varnished wood against the wall; a foot bath in the corner. It was not my night-shirt; it was not my room; and yet by its shape and the position of the window, I saw it exactly corresponded with mine; and that the house in which I found myself must be the counterpart of my father's. On the floor in a heap lay my clothes as I had taken them off; on the table my passkey, which I perfectly recognized. The same architect, employing the same locksmith, had built two identical houses and had them fitted with identical locks; in some drunken aberration I had mistaken the door, stumbled into the wrong house, mounted to the wrong room and sottishly gone to sleep in the bed of some young lady. I hurried into my clothes, quaking, and opened the door.

So far it was as I supposed; the stair, the very paint was of the same design as at my father's, only instead of the cloistral quiet which was perennial at home, there rose up to my ears the sound of empty laughter and unsteady voices. I bent over the rail, looking down and listening; when a door opened below, the voices reached me clearer. I heard more than one cry "good night"; and with a natural instinct, I whipped back into the room I had just left and closed the door behind me.

A light step drew rapidly nearer on the stair; fear took hold of me, lest I should be detected, and I had scarce slipped behind the door, when it opened and there entered a girl of about my own age, in evening dress, black of hair, her shoulders naked, a rose in her bosom. She paused as she came in, and sighed; with her back still turned to me, she closed the door, moved towards the glass, and looked for a while very seriously at her own image. Once more she sighed, and as if with a sudden impatience, unclasped her bodice.

Up to that moment, I had not so much as formed a thought; but then it seemed to me I was bound to interfere. "I beg your pardon—" I began, and paused. She turned and faced me without a word; bewilderment, growing surprise, a sudden anger, followed one another on her countenance.

"What on earth—" she said, and paused too.

"Madam," I said, "for the love of God, make no mistake. I am no thief, and I give you my word I am a gentleman. I do not know where I am; I have been vilely drunken—that is my paltry confession. It seems that your house is built like mine, that my passkey opens your lock, and that your room is similarly situate to mine. How or when I came here, the Lord knows; but I awakened in your bed five minutes since—and here I am. It is ruin to me if I am found; if you can help me out, you will save a fellow from a dreadful mess; if you can't—or won't—God help me."

"I have never seen you before," she said. "You are none of Manton's friends."

"I never even heard of Manton," said I. "I tell you I don't know where I am. I thought I was in —— Street, No. 15—Rev. Dr Kirkwood's, that is my father."

"You are streets away from that," she said; "you are in the Grange, at Manton Jamieson's. You are not fooling me?"

I said I was not. "And I have torn your night-shirt," cried I. She picked it up, and suddenly laughed, her brow for the first time becoming cleared of suspicion. "Well," she said, "this is not like a thief. But how could you have got in such a state?"

"Oh!" replied I, "the great affair is not to get in such a state again."

"We must get you smuggled out," said she. "Can you get out of the window?"

I went over and looked; it was too high. "Not from this window," I replied, "it will have to be the door."

"The trouble is that Manton's friends—" she began, "they play roulette and sometimes stay late; and the sooner you are gone, the better. Manton must not see you."

"For God's sake not!" I cried.

"I was not thinking of you in the least," she said; "I was thinking of myself."

And then Robert Louis Stevenson laid down his pen, leaving a fragment of perfect prose which has tantalized me since the mid sixties when I read it in a little secondhand book bought for one shilling from Voltaire and Rousseau's shop at the corner of Park Road and Eldon Street. The cover is soft black leatherette with a copy of the author's signature stamped in gold on the front, a grove of three gold palmtrees on the spine, and on the titlepage, in red, the words *Weir of Hermiston: Some Unfinished Stories*.

Suetonius says that the Roman Emperor Tiberius enjoyed asking literary men awkward questions like, what songs the sirens sang? What name Achilles used when disguised as a girl? In the seventeenth century Doctor Browne of Norwich suggested these questions were not wholly unanswerable, so in our century the poet Graves tested his muse by making her answer them. Can I deduce how *The Story of a Recluse* would continue if Stevenson had finished it?

I must first get Jamie out of this house which is so miraculously like and unlike his own. By like and unlike I mean more than the coincidence of ar-

chitecture and doorlocks, the difference of moral tone. In both the Rev. Dr Kirkwood's manse and Manton Jamieson's Grange a spirited youngster of twenty-two, one a boy, one a girl, lives with an older man they are inclined to dread. Stevenson had a habit of creating characters dialectically. Perhaps every author works in this way, but Stevenson's antagonistic or linked opposites are unusually definite. In *Kidnapped* the cautious lowland Whig, David Balfour, contains a pride and a courage which only become evident when he is coupled with the touchy highland Jacobite, Alan Breck Stewart, who displays his pride and courage in his garments. *The Master of Ballantrae* is about two brothers, one a dutiful, long-suffering toiler who hardly anyone likes, the other an adventurous, revengeful waster with charming social manners. In *Weir of Hermiston* each character is the antithesis of one or two others, with the Scottish State Prosecutor, Lord Weir, maintaining unity by being the antithesis of everybody. In *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* a respected healer and detested murderer alternate inside the same skin. Manton Jamieson can only be the counterpart of the Rev. Dr Kirkwood if he is a dominant antifather, a strong lord of misrule. Since men drink and gamble in his house this has been already indicated, but if he too gambles it must be with no fear of losing. He must be formidable. No more need be deduced just now about this character. Several pages will pass before Jamie meets him, because Stevenson had already written a story about a young man blundering at night into a strange house containing a young woman and being caught there by a formidable older man.

The Sire de Malétroit's Door is one of his poorer tales. His imagination works best when he deals with Scotland, and this tale is set in the blood-and-thunder France of *The Three Musketeers*. A young nobleman, fleeing from enemies, escapes through a mysteriously open door at the end of a cul-de-sac. He finds he has got out of one trap into another, a trap set by a rich old man for the lover of his niece. The old man refuses to believe that the nobleman and niece do not know each other, and gives them till dawn to choose between being murdered or married. Stevenson had a deliberate policy of putting heroes into exciting positions for which they are not responsible. He expounds it in his essay, *A Gossip About Romance*, where he declares

that most human life is a matter of responding to circumstances we have not chosen, and that "the interest turns, not upon what a man shall choose to do, but on how he manages to do it; not on the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience, but on the problems of the body and of the practical intelligence, in clean, open-air adventure, the shock of arms and the diplomacy of life. With such material as this it is impossible to build a play, for the serious theatre exists solely on moral grounds, and is a standing proof of the dissemination of the human conscience. But it is possible to build, upon this ground, the most joyous of verses, and the most lively, beautiful, and buoyant tales." The lively, beautiful and buoyant tales Stevenson wrote in accordance with this theory are *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped*. The heroes of these are boys, but so obedient to ordinary, conventional promptings, and keen to be thought adult, and so trusting, and mistaken, and fearful, and capable of the rare brave act, that folk of any age or sex can feel they would be that sort of boy in those circumstances. And the circumstances are so interesting! *The Sire de Malétroit's Door* is a poor story because only the circumstances are of interest. The trap which closes on the young nobleman squeezes nothing out of him but a gallant speech about his readiness to die. This wins him the niece's affectionate respect and a marital conclusion which is meant to be triumphantly life-affirming but is actually servile. This hero is not believable.

But Jamie Kirkwood is believable; and at first sight, and to my mind, is a far more distinct person than Jim Hawkins and David Balfour. No wonder. These youngsters cheerfully leave home with a fortune in view, getting trapped for a few hours on the way to it by Long John Silver and Captain Hoseason. But Jamie Kirkwood, a man of twenty-two, eats and sleeps inside the trap where he was born. His jailer is no 18th century buccaneer but a 19th century, rigidly respectable, damnably ungiving Edinburgh clergyman who offers his son a choice of three courses: servility, hypocrisy, or rebellion. But Jamie will not turn hypocrite to get a little of the freedom he craves. By honestly answering his father's home thrust of enquiry he brands himself—in his father's eye and in his own—as a rebel and a cynic, the last of which he certainly is not. A cynic would have lied to get more money. This is a

moral story about human conduct and the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience. The circumstances which drive Jamie are the circumstances of a father's overbearing nature pressing to a division his son's appetites for freedom and for truth. Truth wins, and drives the son to despair. Despair drives him to gamble and drink the winnings. It is now highly likely that a young man of his class, and city, and century, will impose himself on a strange woman in a disreputable house. Jamie's blackout, the coincidence of doorlocks and bedrooms, lets Stevenson cut whole pages of transitional scenery and present this likely outcome as an achieved fact, while screwing our curiosity to a new, surprising level. What now?

To hold our curiosity, to give Jamie's feelings time to develop through the exercise of his own curiosity, he must leave this house without learning much more about it. Of course, he knows the architecture. The back door opens into a kitchen and cellar region where at least one servant is waiting for guests to depart and the master to go to bed. Jamie must leave by the front door, opening and closing it in stealthy silence. His passkey allows this. The danger is that someone may unexpectedly leave the gaming room and catch him creeping through the hall. The girl, with another sigh, tells Jamie that she will return to the company downstairs, announce she has changed her mind about retiring, and hold their attention for four or five minutes. She seems in no doubt of her ability to do this. She fastens her bodice, ignoring Jamie's thanks and apologies with the look of someone about to lift a familiar, weary burden. She descends the stairs. He follows her halfway, then waits. He hears a door open, one boisterous shout of welcome, a door firmly closed. Shortly afterward a piano strikes out a tune by Offenbach. This is his signal to escape. He therefore uses it to do so.

But in the second paragraph of his story Jamie said, "I came to myself in bed, whether that night or the next I have never known." If this means that he never gets back to the daily calendar of events in his father's home then he *must* be caught by Manton and Manton's friends while attempting, with the girl's help, to leave the Grange. Her conduct shows that Manton is jealous and powerful. If he is also intelligent, and the young people tell him the truth, he will neither quite believe nor disbelieve them. If he is a kind of

19th century de Malétroit, a touchy megalomaniac, he could offer Jamie a choice between emigration or public disgrace. Let Jamie depart at once for America, without the girl, and Manton will pay him something more than the fare out; otherwise Manton will hand him to the police on a charge of unlawful entry. Stevenson certainly had the skill to make such an operatic twist seem plausible, but why should he? It would not bring the end of the story an inch nearer, that end which has been announced at the very start, indeed before the start. This is The Story of a Recluse. Jamie will divide himself from humanity and have no children of his own, or none he sees fit to educate. A high-spirited young man who may be merry and lazy, but is brave enough to be honest while in difficulty, will become a deliberately lonely, coldhearted rake who cares less for his children than his own harsh parent cared for him. If the splendid interview in the study, and the debauch, and the meeting with the girl, produce nothing but Jamie decamping abroad then they are trivialized, because many different stories could start like that. They are equally trivialized if Jamie is charged before a magistrate, reported in the press, expelled from university and disinherited by his father. If we are to feel more than some shoulder-shrugging pity for a very unlucky fellow we must see him develop before attracting the blows which warp him. He must whole-heartedly desire something, and fight hard for it, and be horribly defeated.

What stops him noticing the day of the week for a long time is a sudden, almost total lack of interest in his immediate circumstances. This begins a few moments after leaving the Grange. As Jamie strides along the pavement, each street lamp casting his shadow before him as he passes it and behind him as he approaches it, his feeling of delighted release is replaced by astonishment at his close dealings with an attractive, brave, interesting woman. Everything to do with her which embarrassed and frightened him is now a vivid, intimate memory. He has worn her night-dress, slept in her bed, seen her in a privacy allowed only to lovers and husbands. She has talked to him as an equal, conspired with him as a friend, and saved him from social ruin. He and she now share a secret unknown to anyone else in the world, yet he does not even know her name! He cannot believe that he

will not meet her again.

He gets home, stealthily opens the door and closes it more stealthily behind him. He is perplexed to see that the hall, dimly lit through the fanlight window by a lamp in the street beyond, is exactly as it was when he last saw it—surely it should have changed as much as he has changed? And it is doubly familiar, for without the different arrangement of hats and coats on the hallstand he could be entering the house he left half an hour before. He tiptoes across the hall and upstairs, so exactly reversing his recent actions that he hesitates before his bedroom door, heart thudding in hope and in fear that when he opens it he will again see the girl's bedroom. However, this is no tale of the supernatural. He undresses, puts on his own night-gown, slips into bed and lies remembering what happened after he last found himself in this situation. He recalls especially the girl's sigh and her long, very serious look at herself in the mirror. He is sure he knows what she was thinking at the time: "Who am I, and why?" Although most young people ask themselves that question the thought makes him feel nearer her. And who is Manton Jamieson, this man she lives with but dare not trust with the truth about herself? Her husband? (The idea brings a touch of panic. He dismisses it.) Her brother? Uncle? Step-father? (Few women in Scotland, in those days, would call their own father by his first name.) Whoever Manton is, he gambles for money with his guests while providing them with strong drink; no wonder the girl is discontent. (And Jamie, who has so recently gambled and drunk, does not notice he is viewing Manton from his father's standpoint.) In the midst of these speculations he falls asleep.

And is roused as usual next morning by a housemaid tapping his door, and lies for a while staring blankly at the ceiling, knowing he is in love. I assume that Jamie's nurture has depended so exclusively on his father because his mother died young—perhaps in childbirth. Before what now seems a dreamlike encounter with the girl, Jamie has met only two kinds of women: the mainly elderly and unco good who belong to his father's congregation, and those who drink in pubs and shebeens used by nearly penniless medical students. Jamie cannot *not* be in love with the girl. He feels no need, at this stage of his passion, to be more than gloriously astonished by it. He dresses,

goes downstairs and breakfasts with his father. This meal is usually eaten in a taciturn silence broken only by his brief replies to infrequent paternal questions. These questions always take the form of remarks. His father never asks Jamie where he spent a day or evening, but says, "I am informed that you were seen last Thursday in Rose Street," or, "You did not come directly home from college last night." This morning his father makes several such remarks which Jamie hardly hears but responds to with a nod or a murmur of "Yes indeed." Near the end of the meal he notices that his father has risen and now stands with his back to the fireplace, declaring in firm tones that he fears Jamie is not attending properly to his studies; that man is born to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow; that a minister of religion is required to set an example to the community and that he, personally, has no intention of supporting a mere idler, wastrel and profligate. Instead of hearing these familiar words with an expression of sullen resentment, Jamie nods a little, murmurs that he will give the matter thought, and absentmindedly leaves the room and the house.

Thirty minutes later, passkey in hand, he discovers himself about to enter the drive of the Grange. With a quickened pace he continues along the road, almost amused. He has been too busy mixing hopes and speculations with memories of the night before to notice where he is going. He spends most of that day and the next two or three days in the same walking dream. The Grange is a fairly new building so I imagine it in a line of prosperous villa residences, part of the western suburbs along the Glasgow road near Corstorphine hill. Twice or thrice a day he strolls past the front of it from a great distance on one side to a great distance on the other. More frequently, and taking care not to be seen by servants, he prowls the mews lane at the back, for there he can see her high bedroom window. Sometimes, like someone shaking off a lassitude, he hurries into the city and wanders the city streets near the kind of fashionable shop she must occasionally visit, or sits on a bench in Princes Street gardens, watching the strollers in the comforting but not yet urgent knowledge that if he could sit there for three or four weeks he would certainly see her passing. He believes that the chance which brought them together will certainly, if he stays ready and alert for it, bring

them together in a perfectly ordinary, social way which he will manage to build upon. He fears she cannot be thinking about him as much as he thinks of her, but is certain she thinks of him sometimes, and if it is with even a fraction of his own emotion, he believes he can persuade her to break free of twenty Mantons. Meanwhile the notion of a strong, jealous Manton strengthens him. If the girl was wholly free or only slightly confined he might feel compelled to hurry, but he is sure that Manton can keep her for him. He is also fascinated by the kind of person he is becoming under her influence: patient, determined and steady. He has nothing now to say to the friends he met in pubs and betting shops. None are fit to share the secret he is nursing. He is close to monomania. All the loving capacities of a soul starved of love are flowing, silently, in one direction. The nearly unbroken silence in which he breakfasts and dines with his father no longer seems a gloomy oppression to be avoided. His spirit is grateful for it. This is fortunate. Days must elapse before his next small allowance and he lacks the means to eat elsewhere.

But if Jamie's obsession is not fed by a new occurrence he will be driven to keep it alive by some rash initiative which I cannot imagine. I have read, and so has Jamie, of lovers who further their intrigues by bribing and plotting with a servant, but Jamie is too stiff-necked to make a social inferior his confidant. He also assumes that even servants are inclined to honesty, so any approach he makes will be reported to the master of the house. Also he has no money for bribes. His love is doomed to fade and dwindle unless providence—who in this story is me masquerading as Robert Louis Stevenson—provides another useful coincidence, and why should I not? Nowadays the wealthier folk of Edinburgh know each other very well; they were certainly not more ignorant a century back. After a few days Jamie, in mere restlessness of spirit, resumes attendance at the university. He tries to hammer down his memories of the girl (which are no longer pleasurable, but frustrating) by concentrating on the demonstrations of his lecturers. He tries to believe that everything which disturbs him is located in a circulatory, respiratory, digestive system animated by nervous shocks similar to those generated in the Galvanic pile or Wimshurst apparatus, but here generated in a cere-

bral cortex reacting to external stimuli. Later, feeling very dismal, he stands in the cold dusk on the range of steps overlooking the great, grey, classically pillared and pilastered, gaslit and cobbled quadrangle. Let there be a haze of fog in it, seafog from the Firth tinted brown and smelling of smoke from the Edinburgh lums, and making opal haloes around the lamps, and making ghostly the figures of the students hurrying singly and in groups toward the gate, and making their voices very distinct in the thickened air.

"Good night, Charlie! Will I see you later at Manton's place?" cries someone.

"Not me. I'm clean out of funds," says another. Jamie leaps down the steps and overtakes the last speaker, who is known to him, under the high arch of the entrance. They turn side by side into Nicolson Street. Jamie asks, "Who is Manton Jamieson?"

In answering this question I must describe the person who does so, for Stevenson, like nature and like every good storyteller, creates nobody to inform and change someone else without giving them an equal fulness of life. Those who appear most briefly speak for whole professions or communities. See the doctor in *Macbeth*, the housepainters in *Crime and Punishment*, the itinerant barber at the start of *Kidnapped*. If they are a bigger part of the plot, they often emphasize the main characters' obsession by lacking it while resembling them in other ways: thus Macduff is given the same rank, courage and royal prospects as Macbeth, but less ambition and a less ambitious wife; Raskolnikov's best friend is also a clever student in poor circumstances, one who works to get money by translating textbooks instead of murdering a pawnbroker. Stevenson frequently coupled young men in this contrasting way because (quite apart from his dialectical habit of mind) young men often do go in twos, and he was more fascinated by the beginnings of lives than by the middle and later periods. Since I have hinted that Charlie is a fellow student who has also lost money by gambling I will enlarge him by basing him partly on Alan in the novella *John Nicholson* and partly on Francie in *Weir of Hermiston*. He is more elegant and popular than Jamie and his guardian grants him a far larger allowance, but he has squandered it and will be poor for a while to come. Though in love with nobody but himself, he

greatly likes company. He has recently started avoiding his wealthy and fashionable friends because he owes money to some of them. He is shrewd enough to know that the casually superior manner which makes him acceptable to such people will make him obnoxious to those he considers their inferiors. Although Jamie is a very slight acquaintance, and not one he would normally want to cultivate, he is disposed to treat him, for the time being, as a kindred spirit. He assumes that Jamie's interest in Manton is the same as his own, and the most natural thing in the world: the interest of an outsider in a special sort of glamorous elite. It will soothe his hurt pride to instruct Jamie in the ways of Manton's world, and eventually lead him into it.

So what strong lord of misrule can preside in this douce, commercially respectable, late 19th century city where even religious fanaticism reinforces unadventurous mediocrity? Scotland had many wealthy landowners who were equally indifferent to gambling losses and bourgeois opinion but almost all these had shifted their town houses from Edinburgh to London a generation earlier, and the names of the few who remained would be known to the sons of the professional classes, especially if they had the same social habits as the Prince of Wales. Jamie has not heard of Manton Jamieson when the story starts. Despite Manton's Scottish surname he is a wealthy, recent incomer. Let him be the son of depressed gentry or educated tradespeople or a mixture of both. The death of his parents at an early age leaves him a little money, but not enough to buy an officer's commission or a professional education. He has no special talent but a deal of energy, courage and practical ability, so he takes these abroad to where they will best profit him. He is pleasant, tough, cautious, and whatever he does is done well, but for many years he keeps losing his gains by shifting to places where there are rumours of better opportunities. Let him eventually (though this is a cliché) make a pile of money in the Californian gold fields, not by prospecting but by selling necessities to prospectors. Let him take it to San Francisco where he manages to increase it on the stock exchange. He resides with, perhaps even marries (this is vague) the widow or mistress of a dead rich friend. She also dies, leaving him her money and making him guardian of either her daughter or her much younger sister—this also is vague. And now he tires of

San Francisco. One reason for his many restless shiftings has been a secret desire for social eminence. He knows he can never shine among the millionaires of Nob Hill because their lavish expenditure would bankrupt him; it also strikes him as childish and hysterical. He is almost fifty, and because he has formed no strong attachment to any other place, the memories of his native city are increasingly dear to him. He decides to return there. This is a mistake.

Since the days of Dick Whittington, the exile who returns transformed by foreign adventure is as common in popular fiction as in history books, and a lot more distinct. His earliest struggles are described in *Robinson Crusoe* and parodied in *Gulliver's Travels*. He arrives unexpectedly in Gaskell's *Cranford* to save his genteel old aunt from working in a sweetie shop, and in Galt's *The Member* he cheerfully uses a fortune made in India to make another in the corruption of British politics. Suddenly, in Dickens's day, his cheerful bloom quite vanishes. *Little Dorrit* has him sent to China by an unloving mother and returning, after years of clerical toil, to confront a land run by greedy rentiers, callous civil servants, venal aristocrats and shady capitalists. *Great Expectations* has him transported to Australia by an oppressive government and returning, after years of manual toil, to a land where he is a hunted criminal and an embarrassment to those he enriched. In Stevenson's day stories about prosperous, rather stuffy citizens suddenly shocked by intrusions from a dangerously unBritish past had become commonplace. They were plausible because although middle-class conventions had become more rigidly confining, the middle class was full of monied adventurers who adopted these conventions. Manton cannot adopt them because he never learned them. His memory of the homeland is, like that of all returned exiles, out of date. The Edinburgh of his youth was dominated by free-thinking, hard-drinking lawyers and the remnant of a gentry who could still entertain themselves by using that demotic lowland speech which had been the language of the Scottish kings. Manton was sure that only poverty excluded him from this society. His notion of good living is to dine, drink and converse where his wide knowledge of life will receive attention, followed by some gentlemanly gambling where his superior skill will bring a profit. He

knows this last amenity is enjoyed by many thousands in Paris, the German spas and Saint Petersburg. He finds it is now illegal in Britain and thought wicked and foolish in an Edinburgh whose social leaders belong to rival kinds of Presbyterian church. Manton is no churchgoer and his social chances are further reduced by the young woman he introduces as "My ward, Miss Juliette O'Sullivan, the daughter of a very dear friend". He jealously oversees all her actions but is silent (so is she) about her marriage prospects. In such a man, in an age when marriage is a respectable girl's only prospect, this suggests she is his mistress or his bastard. Only rakish bachelors, itinerant members of the acting profession and defiant youths of Jamie's age visit the Grange. Manton must feed his sense of eminence by teaching college students his own slightly vulgar notion of gentlemanly conduct.

The superficial part of all this is told by Charlie to Jamie as they stroll south along Nicolson Street, their breath adding puffs of whiter density to the haze of the fog. Jamie learns little more than he suspected already, but Charlie's suspicions of the girl's status in that household fill him with a queer sick excitement. He stands still and says, "Can you take me there?"

"Nothing easier," says Charlie. "You're a sort Manton would take to. The deuce of it is, I'm clean out of funds just now. Not that gaming is compulsory at the Grange, but it's the done thing. We'll be given all the champagne we want, so it's common decency that at least one of us hazards something on a game. How much have you got?"

"Nothing!" cries Jamie, staring at him.

"Not even a watch?"

Jamie hesitates, then detaches a watch from within his overcoat and hands it over. Charlie snaps open the silver case and brings it near his eye with something like the professional regard of a pawnbroker. He says, "This is a good watch—we can raise quite a bit on it. Shall I show you where?"

An hour later, with coin in their pockets, they are received by Manton at the Grange.

He is a calm, bulky man with a quietly attentive manner. His heavy lidded, rather narrow eyes, and bushy, welltrimmed whiskers, and mouth half-

hidden by a neatly brushed moustache, all convey amusement without definitely smiling. I am modelling him slightly on Edward, Prince of Wales, whom Stevenson found interesting enough to parody in two quite different ways, as the hapless hero of *John Nicholson* and as Prince Florizel of Bohemia in *The New Arabian Nights*. For this reason I will also have him playing baccarat when the young men call—roulette is kept for later in the evening. But first he introduces Jamie to, "My ward, Miss Juliette O'Sullivan, the daughter of a very dear friend."

The girl regards Jamie with a face as impassive as his own. Does she wear the black velvet gown he remembers? He is too full of whirling emotions to notice. It is her face he wants to gaze and gaze into, so he tries not to see her at all, bowing deeply and turning again to Manton. He hears her murmur "Good evening" and on a louder, welcoming note greet Charlie with a "How nice to see you, Mr Gemmel." He is glad she knows how to dissemble. She is the only woman present and plays hostess to those not engaged by the cardplay. Jamie stands watching it, ensuring, by slight turns of the head, that she is always in the corner of his eye, never the centre of it. This is easy, for he can now see that the gown she wears is white satin. He is not jealous of those who chat with her, for they cannot know her as intimately as he does, and he is sure she is now as conscious of him as he of her. Meanwhile he watches the baccarat, a game unknown to him. It is a form of the games known nowadays as pontoon and Black Jack. Manton, being host and the richest person present, is of course the banker. Charlie joins the game and wins a little, then loses a little, then wins more, then much more, then loses everything. Charlie suggests that Jamie take his place at the table. Jamie refuses but gives Charlie money to play for him. In a pause for refreshment Juliette goes to the piano and accompanies herself in a song. Her voice is slight but sounds sweet and brave for she is clever enough not to force it beyond its range. If Jamie attended closely it would bring him to tears, so he stands beside the fire with his host, for it is from Manton that the girl must be won. Manton's conversation is entertaining, anecdotal, and polished by years of use. A bawdy element in it is not too heavily emphasized. He presents himself as onlooker or victim rather than cause of strange

events, and seems as ready to listen as to speak. By occasional questions and an unmoving, attentive expression he usually draws from raw young men news of their families, college experience, hopes and opinions; but he draws very little from Jamie. Jamie sees that Manton is condescending to him, and dislikes it, but he still attends as closely to Manton as he did to the cardplay, and for the same reason—he wants to defeat him. So he notices what few others notice on their first visit to the Grange. Whether gaming or conversing, Manton's mind is only half occupied with his immediate company. As he and Jamie stand side by side with their back to the fire, both are keeping half an eye on the white figure at the opposite end of the room. Manton is less sure of her than Jamie is! The thought fills Jamie with a giddy foretaste of supremacy. Gaming is resumed. Again Jamie watches, but with greater understanding, and all at once his close-contained, highly stimulated, busily searching mind conceives a plan, a plot which will bring together himself, the girl, the Grange, Manton, cardplay, his father's tiny allowance and even Charlie in a single scheme of conquest. Throughout the evening Jamie (like Manton) has drunk almost nothing. The slightly tipsy Charlie is about to stake the last of the money on a new game. Jamie lays a firm hand on his shoulder and says, "We must go now."

He approaches his hostess, says "Good night, Miss O'Sullivan," and is now bold enough to give her one steady glance. She turns to him the bright smile she has been bestowing on someone else, bids him good night and turns away, leaving him disconcerted by her powers as an actress. Manton, perhaps flattered by the close attention of this taciturn guest, escorts both young men to the door, cheerfully commiserating with Charlie's misfortune and inviting both young men back, with a particular nod to Jamie.

The cold night air slightly sobers Charlie. He says glumly, "I shan't be back there in a hurry. It's nearly a month till my next allowance and my brute of a governor won't allow me another advance on it. You are walking beside a desperate man, Kirkwood. You were wise to drag me away when you did. I usually hang on to the bitter end, because of Juliette, you know—the beautiful Miss Juliette O'Sullivan. But I've no hopes there. What do you think of her, Kirkwood? Isn't she a woman to die for?"

Jamie finds these remarks impertinent. He holds out his hand, palm upward, and with a sigh Charlie places the last sovereign on it, saying, "Sorry I didn't do better for you, but luck was against me."

"Luck does not exist," says Jamie firmly. "Luck is superstitious nonsense. You lost to Manton like everybody else did, because he is skilful and you are idiots."

Charlie is inclined to be angry but is daunted by the small tight smile Jamie gives him. He says, "Could you have done better?"

"Of course not, so I did not play. When I go back there, Charlie—when we go back there, Charlie—we will play and win because we will have made ourselves better than Manton."

"How?"

"By study and practice. By practice and study. There are books about cardgames, are there not? Books by dependable authorities?"

"Well, Cavendish is considered pretty good, and two or three French fellows."

"We'll work on them. A month just might be sufficient if we apply ourselves hard. After all, you have nothing better to do with your time."

And at breakfast next morning Jamie says to his father, "I have a favour to ask you, sir. I believe I will do better in my studies if I share them with a college friend, Charlie Gemmel. Since this house is a quieter place than his lodgings, I want us to work most evenings in the privacy of my bedroom. Would you object to him sharing our evening meal beforehand?"

The Rev. Dr Kirkwood looks at his son for a while. Jamie's face flushes a hot red. The father says quietly, "I can have no objection to that."

So each evening and for most of the weekends Jamie shuts himself up with Charlie in that room which is so like yet unlike *her* room. On the doorward side of a small table they make a barricade of medical books high enough to hide a card-pack and Cavendish's book on games of chance. (This is mainly a guilty ritual, for the Rev. Dr Kirkwood is not one who would enter his son's room unannounced.) They play game after game, and catechize each other on the details of the Cavendish strategy, and sometimes probe a foreign work which gives other strategy and teaches the techniques

of foul play under the guise of warning against them. But at this stage Jamie neither intends to cheat nor suspects Manton of doing so. He is striving for purely conventional mastery. His obsessions with the girl and with the game are now identical. Each card dealt or lifted seems to put him in touch with her, with every petty victory he feels she is closer. Since Charlie does not share this erotic drive he is frequently exhausted, less by the games than by the intricate post-mortems which follow. He scratches his head woefully and cries, "We would soon be qualified doctors if we gave our medical studies this degree of attention."

Jamie smiles and shuffles the pack and says, "You're tired, Gemmel. Be banker this time."

So Charlie also becomes an obsessive player. The manse is a good place to evade his creditors and responsibilities. The meals there are well cooked, well served, and cost nothing. His only social life now is cardplay with Jamie. We can become addicts of almost any activity prolonged past the healthy limit. People have drunk themselves to death on water, the anorexic finds hunger intoxicating, some of the worst-treated learn to welcome pain. The freedom of pushing faster toward death than our body or society requires is the essence of every perverse satisfaction, gambling included. Charlie, in the circumstances, is bound to get hooked on this cardgame, though not as absolutely as Jamie. When outside his room Jamie now plays imaginary games in his head. He no longer seems obstinately silent or fretful in his father's company, just thoughtful and deliberate. His step is firm, his manner composed, and though he eats as much as ever, he has grown thinner. He never visits public houses, billiard rooms or betting shops. All pocket money is hoarded for the decisive game with Manton.

And one day, on the corner of the study table where a certain number of florins are usually placed for him, he finds as many guineas. He stares at his father with open mouth. The elder Kirkwood says, "I am giving you more, Jamie, because you deserve more. A while ago you asked for an allowance worthy of a gentleman's son while declaring that you would not spend it as a gentleman ought. You have changed since then, Jamie! When I look at you I no longer see an ordinary, thankless young drifter, I see a man

determined to make his way in the world, a man I can trust."

Jamie continues to stare. His father is smiling at him with a futile expression of pride and approval and Jamie has a desolate feeling of loss. This is the first proof he ever received that his father loves him. He remembers once being a person who longed for such proof and would have been changed by it. That person no longer exists. Jamie would like to weep for him as for a dead brother, and also yell with laughter at the good money he has earned, yes, earned, by his love of a woman and devotion to a game his father would abhor. He sighs, whispers, "Thank you sir," picks up the guineas and leaves the room.

For me that is the climax of the story. The catastrophe may be sketched rapidly and lightly.

That evening or the next Jamie suddenly grasps the nature of this baccarat which Cavendish so clearly explains. It is only partly a game of skill—anyone following the Cavendish system will play it as well as it can be played but, as in roulette, the main chances will always favour the banker: the banker has most money and therefore most staying power. Manton's superior skill merely maintains his lead in a game which is already on his side. Banks, of course, can be broken by *runs of luck*, but very seldom. Jamie knows that the chance which introduced him to Juliette will not wed him to her. With rage, then horror, then resignation, he sees that to win by skill he must win by cheating. He has now complete ascendancy over Charlie. They devise and practise signals which strike them as impenetrable, but are not. They decide to hazard all they can on a game: Charlie's quarterly allowance, Jamie's hoarded pocket-money, and money borrowed at exorbitant interest from a professional lender. I imagine an evening at the Grange when the whole company gradually gather round the table to watch the play between Jamie and an increasingly grim-faced Manton. Just before or just after Jamie breaks the bank, his fraud is exposed by the girl, who is Manton's accomplice and supporter in every possible way. We have no reason to think she ever found Jamie interesting. He was not, perhaps, an attractive young man.