



Spooky Stories

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde



An Extract By
Robert Louis Stevenson

Twelve o'clock had scarce rung out over London, ere the knocker sounded very gently on the door. I went myself at the summons, and found a small man crouching against the pillars of the portico.

“Are you come from Dr Jekyll?” I asked.



He told me 'yes' by a constrained gesture, and when I had bidden him enter, he did not obey me without searching backward glance into the darkness of the square. There was a policeman not far off, advancing with his bull's eyes open; and at the sight, I thought my visitor started and made greater haste.



These particulars struck me, I confess, disagreeable, and as I followed him into the bright light of the consulting room, I kept my hand ready on my weapon. Here, at last, I had a chance of clearly seeing him. I had never set eyes on him before, so much was certain.



He was small, as I have said, I was struck besides with the shocking expression of his face, with his remarkable combination of great muscular activity and great apparent debility of constitution, and – last but not least – with the odd, subjective disturbance caused by his neighbourhood. This bore some resemblance to incipient rigour and was accompanied by a marked sinking of the pulse.



At the time, I set it down to some idiosyncratic, personal distaste, and merely wondered at the acuteness of the symptoms, but I have since had reason to believe the cause to lie much deeper in the nature of man, and to turn on some nobler hinge than the principle of hatred.



This person (who had thus, from the first moment of his entrance, struck in me what I can only describe as a disgusting curiosity), was dressed in a fashion that would have made an ordinary person laughable. His clothes, that is to say, although they were of rich and sober fabric, were enormously too large for him in every measurement – the trousers hanging on his legs and rolled up to keep them from the ground, the waist of the coat below his haunches and the collar sprawling wide upon his shoulders.



Strange to relate, this ludicrous accoutrement was far from mobbing me to laughter. Rather, as there was something abnormal and misbegotten in the very essence of the creature that now faced me – something seizing, surprising and revolting – this fresh disparity seemed but to fit in with and to reinforce it, so that to my interest in the man's nature and character there was added a curiosity as to his origin, his life, his fortune and status in the world.



These observations, though they have taken so great a space to be set down in, were yet the work of a few seconds. My visitor was, indeed, on fire with sombre excitement.



“Have you got it?” he cried. “Have you got it?” And so lively was his impatience that he even laid his hand upon my arm and sought to shake me.



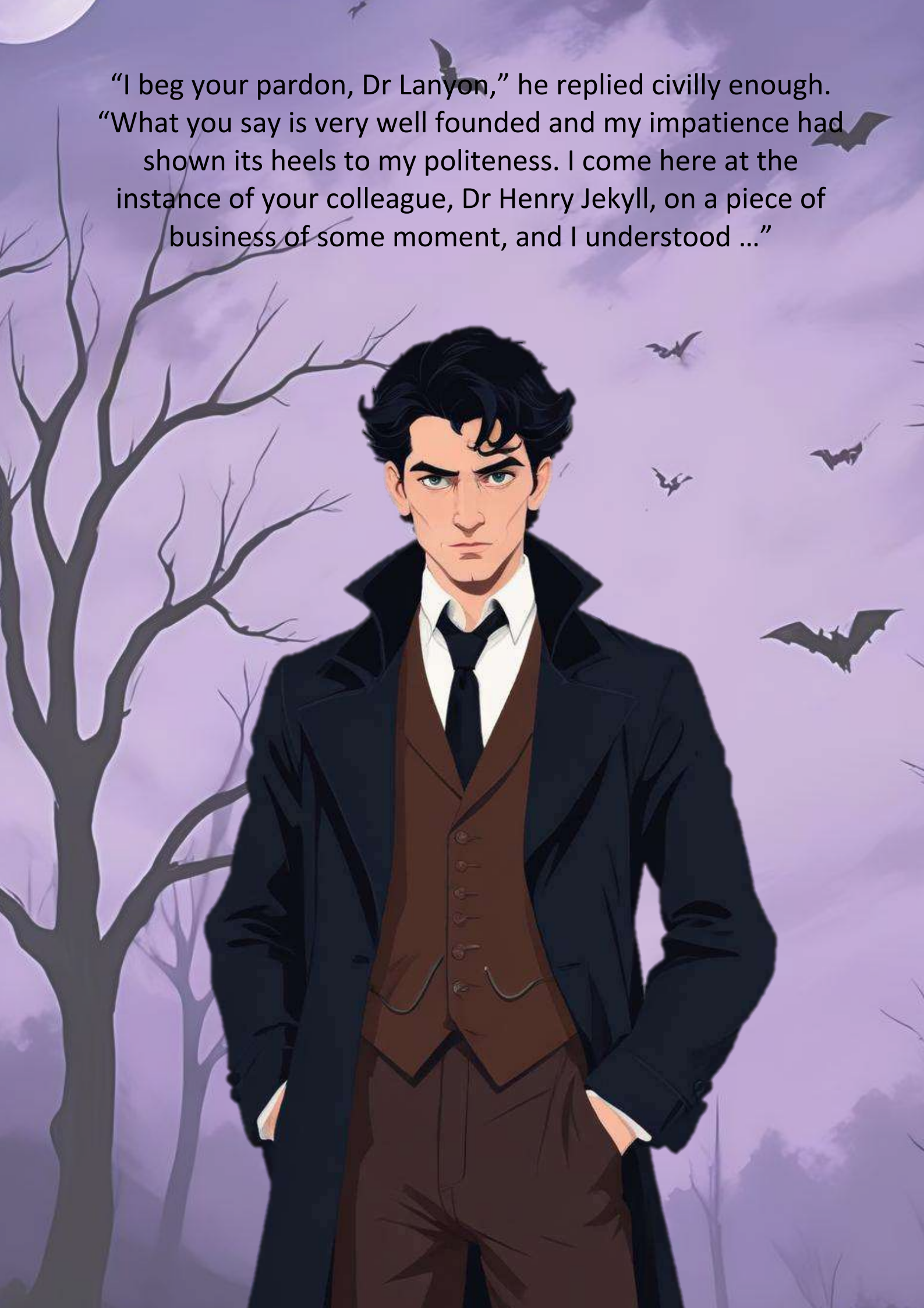
I put him back, conscious at his touch of a certain icy pang along my blood. "Come, sir," said I. "You forget that I have not yet the pleasure of your acquaintance."



Be seated, if you please.” And I showed him an example, and sat down myself in my customary seat and with as fair an imitation of my ordinary manner to a patient, as the lateness of the hour, the nature of my preoccupations, and the horror I had of my visitor, would suffer me to muster.



“I beg your pardon, Dr Lanyon,” he replied civilly enough. “What you say is very well founded and my impatience had shown its heels to my politeness. I come here at the instance of your colleague, Dr Henry Jekyll, on a piece of business of some moment, and I understood ...”



“There is it, sir,” said I, pointing to the drawer, where it lay on the floor behind a table and still covered with the sheet. He sprang to it, and then paused, and laid his hand upon his heart – I could hear his teeth grate with the convulsive action of his jaws – and his face was so ghastly to see that I grew alarmed both for his life and reason.



“Compose yourself,” said I.

He turned a dreadful smile to me, and as if with the decision of despair, plucked away the sheet. At sight of the contents, he uttered one loud sob of such immense relief that I sat petrified. And the next moment, in a voice that was already fairly well under control, “Have you a graduated glass?” He asked.



I rose from my place with something of an effort and gave him what he asked.

He thanked me with a smiling nod, measured out a few minims of the red tincture and added one of the powders. The mixture, which was at first of a reddish hue, began, in proportion as the crystals melted, to brighten in colour, to effervesce audibly, and to throw off small fumes of vapour.



Suddenly and at the same moment, the boiling ceased and the compound changed to a dark purple. Which faded again more slowly to a watery green. My visitor, who had watched these metamorphoses with a keen eye, smiled, set down the glass upon the table, and then turned and looked upon me with an air scrutiny.



“And now,” said he, “to settle that remains. Will you be wise? Will you be guided? Will you suffer me to take this glass in my hand and go to forth from your house without further parley? Or has the greed of curiosity too much command of you? Think before you answer, for it shall be done as you decide.



As you decide, you shall be left as you were before, and neither richer nor wiser, unless the sense of service rendered to a man in mortal distress may be counted as a kind of riches of the soul. Or, if you shall so prefer to choose, a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power shall be laid open to you, here, in this room, upon the instant, and your sight shall be blasted by a prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan.”



“Sir,” said I, affecting a coolness that I was far from truly possessing, “you speak enigmas, and you will perhaps not wonder that I hear you with no very strong impression of belief. But I have gone too far in the way of inexplicable service to pause before I see the end.”



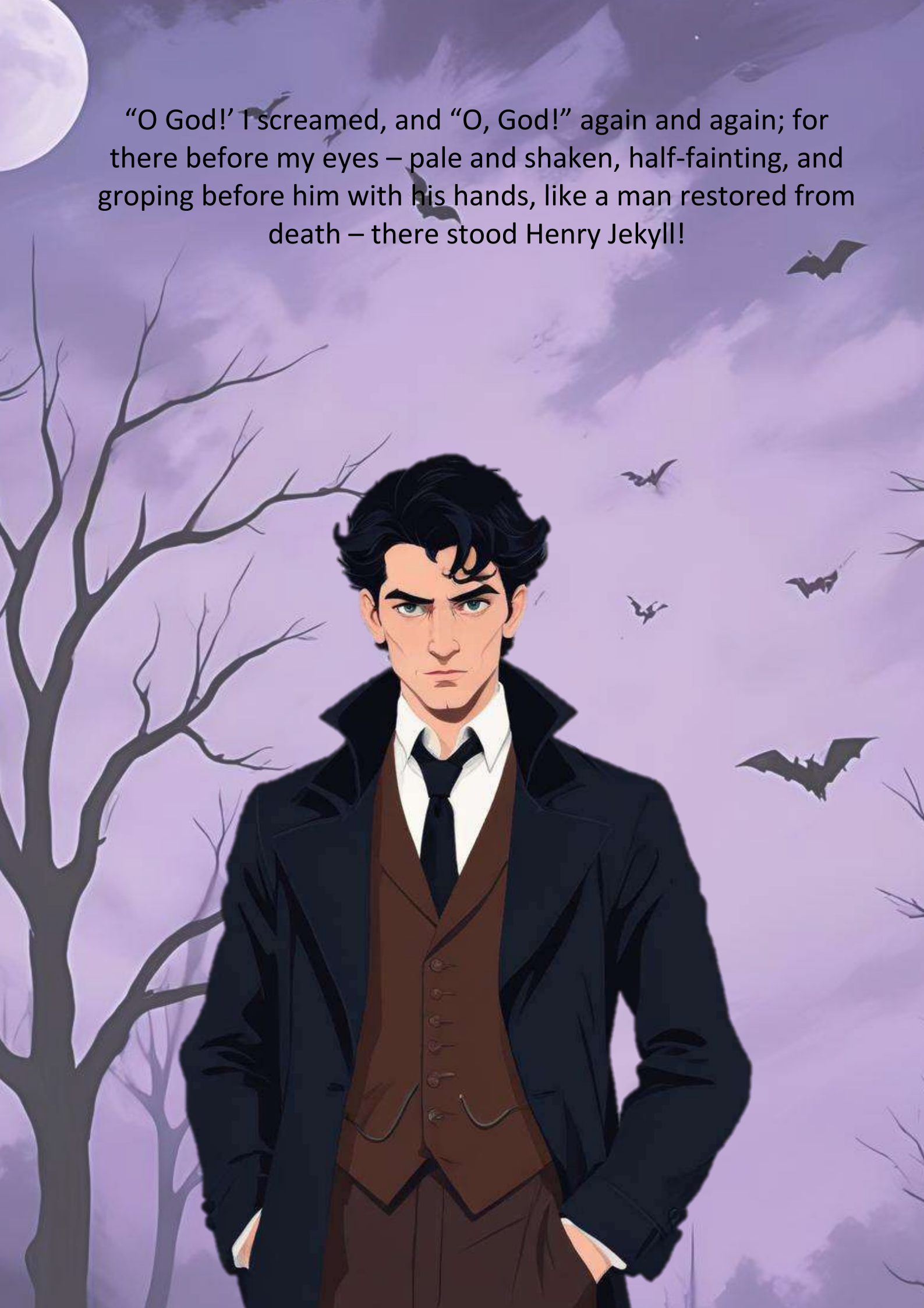
“It is well,” replied my visitor. “Lanyon, you remember your vows: what follows is under the seal of our profession. And now, you who have so long been bound to the most narrow and material views, you who have denied the virtue of transcendental medicine, you who have derided your superiors – behold!”



He put the glass to his lips and drank at one gulp. A cry followed, he reeled, staggered, clutched at the table and held on, staring with injected eyes, gasping with open mouth; and as I looked there came, I thought, a change – he seemed to swell, his face seemed to melt and alter – and the next moment, I had sprung to my feet and leapt back against the wall, my arm raised to shield me from that prodigy, my mind submerged in terror.



“O God!” I screamed, and “O, God!” again and again; for there before my eyes – pale and shaken, half-fainting, and groping before him with his hands, like a man restored from death – there stood Henry Jekyll!



What he told me in the next hour, I cannot bring my mind to set on paper. I saw what I saw, I heard what I heard, and my soul sickened at it – and yet no when that sight has faded from my eyes, I ask myself if I believe it and I cannot answer.



My life is shaken to its roots. Sleep has left me; the deadliest terror sits by me at all hours; I feel that my days are numbered, and that I must die; and yet I shall die incredulous.





THINK
DIGITAL ACADEMY