

Genevieve

By Sunaina Salagame, Hornsby Girls High School

After dinner we retired to the drawing room, adjusted the gaslights and sat in front of the fire. It had been a splendid meal. Major Clennet was in fine form with his stories of India, while Professor Maxwell shared hilarious tales of university life. Lady Stimson entertained us with her African exploits and showed us one of the tribal idols she'd been given - the rest having been presented to our good Queen Victoria. Then, as was customary, we moved to the telling of ghost stories. In turn we told stories that chilled the blood – until one guest was left.

“Jamieson,” I said “What about you?”

Rupert Jamieson was a young friend of Professor Maxwell's. I didn't know him very well, but the professor had vouched for him, saying that his radical theories on high-energy wireless electrical power were dangerous but first-class. The professor confided that Jamieson hadn't wanted to come to dinner – he'd virtually dragged the lad from the laboratory where he'd been working so feverishly since the death of his fiancée.

Jamieson stood and it was then that I noticed he was trembling. “I appreciate the invitation, but I really must get back to my work.”

Naturally, this prompted a chorus of good-natured disapproval. A round of ghost stories simply can't be left incomplete.

Jamieson subsided into the armchair. He glanced at his pocket watch and then the window.

“It's probably too late, anyway.” He muttered – and he laughed unpleasantly. “Alright, then. How would you like to hear something really frightening?”

I looked at him, and then said quietly, "Alright then, go on." ‘

"As most of you know," Jamieson began, sinking into the velvet, red armchair, "my fiancée, Genevieve, died six months, three weeks and five days ago."

"Cholera," everyone nodded empathetically.

I stole a quick glance at the battered, brown grandfather clock, 'half past nine' it read. The room was warm and toasty, and I could hear the crackling of the flames as Jamieson continued his tale.

"On her deathbed, Genevieve made me promise that I would go to her parents' house in a village near Nottinghamshire and sell it after collecting her belongings. When she died, I wept for days. I would do anything for her. I visited her grave everyday and put fresh roses – her favourite – on the headstone. It was on one chilly morning, as I sat by her grave that I remembered what I had promised her a few weeks ago. I immediately made arrangements for my trip to Nottinghamshire, as it was quite a distance. I traveled the distance to Genevieve's village in three days, where I stayed at the local inn. The next morning, I approached different villagers, asking them about Genevieve's past and where her house was. No one would talk to me about her, and as soon as I uttered her name everyone would either look at me suspiciously or simply walk away, leaving me utterly baffled! This continued for days. No one wanted to be associated with Genevieve's family or life, until one kind lady gave me the directions to her house. It was isolated from the rest of the village, built amongst sloped, grassy hills. The small house stood abandoned, like it hadn't been touched in years. I made my way across all the hills and slowly walked to the front door cautiously, each step bringing me closer to Genevieve's past. The old door's paint was peeling off and there were cobwebs hanging from all the corners. A rusty key was lodged in the keyhole. I turned the key and the door creaked open. A musty smell hung around the old house, and everything was covered in a layer of thick dust and grime. My steps echoed against the cracked walls, shattering the stone cold silence. Finally, I reached the last room, small and bare and empty. Unlike the other rooms in the house the walls were plain and whitewashed, the paint peeling off. There was no furniture and no windows and it had a high ceiling.

As I turned back in disappointment, something caught my eye; leather bound book. I tucked it into the pocket of my coat, and left for the inn. Later that night, I asked the innkeeper why nobody would talk about Genevieve's family; why everyone shunned me when I uttered her name. The innkeeper laughed and told me. They say my Genevieve was known for certain dark and mysterious happenings in the village, and she communicated with the dead and the spirits.

The dying flames flickered, casting an eerie shadow that danced along the length of the wall. The last, burnt orange embers were fading, leaving more ash in the fireplace, until there was only one pin of light. The clock struck ten, the hollow rings pounding against my ears. An eerie feeling crept into me, into all of us in fact, and as the night grew old, the more we wished that we had never asked Jamieson to share his tale. Lady Stimson looked pale and uncomfortable, whereas Professor Maxwell and Major Clennet were listening intently, absorbing every one of Jamieson's words. My splendid dinner was now just a bitter taste in my mouth. . There was definitely more to both Jamieson and Genevieve's life than met the eye.

"The innkeeper told me a few stories," Jamieson continued, "When Abigail was found strangled near the river one morning, Genevieve was seen chanting nearby a few minutes before Abigail was found, but when they went to her home, there she was in her nightgown."

Lady Stimson gasped.

"Or when Henry's paintings were splattered with blood, Genevieve was seen near the art studio, with a deep cut in her arm, for which she had no explanation. When all the horses mysteriously perished, save for Genevieve's horse. Or when the golden crucifix from the church was found abandoned in a farm, Genevieve's hat was found near the trail. She had an explanation for all this," said Jamieson, "But not one good enough for the villagers. They spoke about her in hushed tones and pointed at her whenever she came by."

I didn't know what to think. Who was this man in front of me? In the window behind him sat a yellow moon; casting an ethereal glow over his pale skin. He continued his story.

"I've been working so hard in the laboratory to erase my memory of Genevieve. At first I could not believe those deeds were hers. For a year she was the angel of my life. But the diary I found..."muttered Jamieson, as he sank further into the chair, his head bowed in anguish.

"Confessions"