

Dr. John Motton opens the door to welcome his next client. Ah, but she is really most handsome, and voluptuous, and tall; she moves most gracefully across the Room. She descends carefully on to the designated chair. She sits on the edge of the chair in her hooped skirts; she sits a little forward, very demure. Dr. Motton eases behind his desk, gesturing towards his callipers and the porcelain head.

‘Do you wish yourself to be delineated, my dear, or perhaps you have come about a relative?’

She is perhaps twenty-six or twenty-eight, very fine proportions; indeed, he thinks, she should be exhibited at the Great Exhibition, so fine a woman as this.

‘No, Sir—I merely wish to understand a little of myself.’

‘How very sensible, my dear. Well then, let me first of all take a few particulars.’

He asks her name, her address and, coughing slightly, her age. Each piece of information Mrs. Isabella Raleigh gives without hesitation, her voice velvet smooth.

‘Now, tell me a little about your life, my dear, and about your parentage,’ he encourages.

She is, she purrs, the daughter of a Surrey gentleman, now deceased; her mother died in the childbirth of her younger brother. She married young, the gentleman Robertson Raleigh, who was killed, most tragically, two years previously in a hunting accident. She now lives, she explains, under the excellent care and affection of her brother, who is soon to be ordained into the Anglican Church. A widow: he only now notices her black collar and cuffs, the jet brocade on her dark green coat.

‘Now, my dear, you see these callipers, they are of the finest manufacture. See this polished brass hinge, for

example, and the beauty of this curve, arced to the specifications of the best Phrenologists in Edinburgh. So, if you would keep very, very still.'

He places the callipers over Isabella's handsome head; the crow-black curls are lush between the glistening brass arcs. Dr. Motton peers closely at the callipers and turns a little screw. He breathes in; jasmine, he thinks. He eases the callipers off, takes up his satin and leather tape from its lacquered box and measures the distance he has just created. He writes numbers in his book, looks at his chart, and returns to this—beautiful—woman perched on the edge of her chair. He moves the callipers round to the back of her head, measuring the distance between her crown and her elegant jaw: this side, and the other side. As he does this, Dr. Motton must touch her hair, her scalp, and her neck. He must touch her cerebellum, and once he grazes her ear. Her perfume is a little too powerful for his taste, but he can endure it.

Now, as he quickly writes, he feels the frisson of discovery; he feels pride, like that of a father, as if he himself has created this fine specimen. And he knows at once: both *Amativeness* and *Conjugal* are strong, together with good *Veneration* and excellent *Benevolence*. He notes that all her *Perceptive* organs are satisfactory, and that *Imitation* is large; he knows, indeed, that all she suffers from is—*Perfection*.

'The measuring is complete, my dear.'

Ah, she will be a fine and dutiful wife with this combination, and he begins to think of friends of his who are in need of a fine wife. He begins to think of the prestige of introducing the young woman. But surely he needs to measure her again. He needs to ensure he is absolutely correct if he is to recommend the pretty widow to his gentleman friends.

'If you would kindly return in two days' time, at three o'clock, I shall repeat the measurements—good science requires repetition, Madam—and shortly after that, I shall be

in a position to present you with your chart. Payment may be deferred until that time, thank you.'

Isabella leaves, and Dr. John Motton slips out after her. He follows her to Holland Park Rise where he watches her go up some steps and disappear behind a blue door with elaborate stained glass in its windows. Then he hurries home. He has another client in forty minutes and he has failed to mention to his wife that he was stepping out for a little air. He hurries home thinking about the preparation of his chart for Mrs. Isabella Raleigh. She is really a model woman: she has everything a man could desire, and everything necessary to be a good wife and citizen.

Later, in the evening, he swivels on his leather chair and lights up a pipe of tobacco. He finishes writing the provisional chart. It is as he thought: Mrs. Isabella Raleigh, widow, is indeed a perfect specimen. She is modest and conjugal and has good artistic sense for the making of a beautiful home. She is honest and kind, of vital temperament, good intelligence—*Language* in particular. Moreover, she is beautiful and vigorous, sound of mind and judgement and she has another appointment here with him, Dr. John Motton, on Wednesday afternoon. Now his wife Belinda comes in, fussing with the flowers in the vase on the window ledge.

'Leave those!' he cries.

Belinda is startled. 'Yes, dear.' And she backs out of the Room like a servant.

He feels remorse but he does not go to comfort her. The flowers are yellow roses, rather over-blown, he admits, but he wants them there when Mrs. Raleigh arrives. They are his favourite flowers.

It is Wednesday. She arrives. She wears a black coat with a dark green collar now, and carries a matching umbrella. Her lips are red, her cheeks are pink with the cool air. Her black eyes shine out.

'Ma'am.'

Motton finds himself bowing. She is seated opposite him once more, very calm, he observes; seemingly neither apprehensive nor especially curious. He has written the provisional analysis in his very best script (indeed, he tore up the first chart on account of one small mistake).

‘Let me explain, Mrs. Raleigh.’ He draws up a chair next to the woman. He explains the chart. She looks gratified, she smiles; she smiles at him. He is in her orbit, within the strong fragrance of her. He takes up her hand. He kisses her hand.

Dr. Motton can hear his wife in the hallway. He predicts that in approximately fifteen seconds she will call out in her thin, shrill voice. She calls out,

‘John, dear, our son Johnny says he won’t have the daguerreotype made.’

‘Won’t?’

Belinda steps into the Room. ‘He insists it will not be a good likeness.’

Dr. Motton closes the door behind his wife, who remains diminutive despite her ballooning skirts. ‘Then he is exceedingly vain, my dear—and *Combative*, and *Destructive* in the extreme.’

‘Yes, dear.’

‘And *Secretive*. Send Mary to fetch him. Let him show us the exact degree of his perverted *Combateness*.’

Belinda Motton’s features are pointed and small as she calls for Mary.

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Mary finds him at once, as she always does. Today the younger John Motton returns to the house flushed with a new knowledge.

‘Come in, young Sir.’ The father beckons the son into his Room. ‘Sit down there.’

The father is aroused, he begins to pace, to strut, his clean movements become irregular.

‘You are twenty years of age. I can no longer beat you. But I would very much like to beat you—for your pride, young man, for your *Secretiveness*.’

John gazes beyond his father as if towards the bookcases. He is mesmerized by what he has just experienced at the top of Silver Street. A finely-dressed woman of perhaps twenty-five or thirty had moistened her lips with her tongue as he stepped aside to let her pass at the narrow bend, and then she had slipped a printed card into his hand. It was in his pocket now. It could fall from his pocket at any moment. His father is unpredictable, he could lunge at his son, wield a pair of callipers. He is strutting; he watches his father strutting. He knows his father will stop soon, that he will stand stock-still to begin the disassembly of his son’s character. That he will remark upon, with white knuckles, the entirely unacceptable combination of his son’s propensities. The son moves his thoughts back to the printed card: Mrs. Raleigh of Holland Park Mansions. Mrs. Raleigh, who moistened her lips with her tongue as she pressed a printed card into a young man’s hand. Then he feels it. It begins as heat across the back of his neck; and another wave of heat. He crouches, clasping his hands together behind his head. His mother is shrieking. She leans over him now, grasps his wrist, tries to pull him out of the Room.

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Dr. John Motton studies Mrs. Raleigh’s Phrenological Chart, the one he copied out from the original. He keeps it in the small top left-hand drawer of his desk and he looks at it every morning before he begins his day’s work. Today he reads it and closes his eyes, as he does every morning, to imagine the woman, the woman whose beauty is manifest in her moral character just as it is in her face.

On the opposite wall is the new daguerreotype of his son. Regrettably, the silhouette seems to accentuate those very organs of his son’s head that should rather be discreet. He

will have an oil portrait commissioned next year, for his son's birthday; perhaps it will be kinder to the young man.

Mary comes in with his coffee and toast. Everything is exactly as he likes: the toast cut into triangles and slotted into a silver rack; butter and marmalade on plates painted over with tiny blue pagodas, and all laid out carefully on a starched white tray cloth. Mary is a good girl, new; he made her delineation only two months ago, before he and Belinda could agree to take her on. Yes, a good girl, modest, occasionally a little bit excitable. Of course, he could see straight away at the first interview that the girl would be neat and orderly in her work: the centre of her forehead was full, her eyes were not sunken at all but very open and fresh, and her eyebrows, moreover, were full at the corners.

Dr. Motton spreads a little marmalade on his toast. He takes a sip of his coffee. The sun shines in through the windows: light falls on his breakfast and on his copy of George Combe's *Constitution of Man*. In fact, the sunlight is glinting on the curves of the porcelain head; ah, now it is falling directly, and charmingly, on *Benevolence*. It is nine o'clock. He looks again at Isabella's Chart, and places it back in the drawer. In half an hour his first client of the day will be arriving. He has time to call his son down for a fifteen-minute discussion on the Organ of *Wonder*.

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Johnny appears before him at the desk, and for a moment Dr. John Motton ceases to breathe. His son is wearing one of his own, one of his own very best, yellow silk cravats. The pale primrose Indian silk: the Paterson. Dr. John Motton pushes away his tray of breakfast.

'Mother insisted...' starts Johnny. 'I'm giving my first Lecture at the Club this afternoon—you remember.'

It is surely greasy, his son's neck, wrapped illegitimately in the best pale silk.

'*Wonder*,' the father hisses. 'Let us discuss the Organ of *Wonder*. Please, close your eyes and find it on the model.'

The son closes his eyes and steps forward. He stumbles as he feels toward the phrenological head. It falls to the floor. Miraculously it is not broken, its fall softened by the Persian rug. The head lies on its side, *Wonder* to the fore.

‘There, look at that!’ says the young man jocularly. ‘*Wonder*—look at the light shining on it now.’

The two men bend down over the head. Dr. John Motton is experiencing a constriction in his chest. The head is a little dusty from the rug; the young Motton pulls out his handkerchief ready to polish. From his pocket there also falls a little visiting card and it lies there between the two men, illuminated by the morning sun.

*Mrs. Isabella Raleigh,
6b Holland Park Mansions W.*

The words are printed in red ink. There is a decorative black swirl under the address. The father looks at the son. The son looks at the card. The father looks at the card. There is a strange silence in Dr. John Motton’s head, a void. The two men are crouched over the phrenological head and the visiting card and the silence continues. Then the clock is ticking, and the young man is saying, very casually, that the woman pressed the card into his hand the other day—just outside in the street—he presumed she was a prostitute — not that he would ever visit a prostitute, of course—and he’d stuffed it into his pocket and forgotten about it. He says all this with a sort of caddish, bullish pride.

The father stands up. ‘You’re lying, boy,’ he says, very low. The son stands up too. The father now repeats the words at a much greater volume. ‘You’re lying. Where did you get this card? What do you mean, she “pressed it into your hand in the street”? Who did? When?’

The young man steps backwards.

‘It’s nothing, Sir, just one of those tarts—you know, high class tarts—at the top of Silver Street...’

The father is pushing the son out of the Consulting Room, the young man is resisting, uncomprehending; he pushes back. The two are joined, the father is trying to get the boy out of the house, the front door is being pulled open, Mary is at the back of the hallway, Belinda is at the door of the drawing room. The older man pushes his son on to the steps, the two stumble down, the father pushing the son hard against the railings. They are on the pavement, they are one, shirt-tails and jackets, the yellow cravat is off, lying on the pavement. The two men are in the road.

Someone is screaming. Mary is there, someone is holding Mother back at the top of the steps.

The driver of a hansom is doubled over, being sick. Dr. John Motton's head is covered with his son's jacket.