

The Haunted Baronet

Adapted from the Ghost Story

by Joseph Sheridan LeFanu

Dublin, Ireland

(1814-1873)

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CHARACTERS

THE LIVING:

SIR BALE MARDYKES, a middle-aged baronet

MRS. JULAPER, the housekeeper of Mardykes Hall

JANET (NETTY) FELTRAM, a young housemaid

DOCTOR JAMES TORVEY

TOM MARLIN

THE DEAD:

SIR GUY MARDYKES, Sir Bale's ancestor, age 60 when he died

MARY FELTRAM: Janet Feltram's mother, age 23 when she died

Note: The characters speak with British accent and can be performed with a cast of six with doubling: Sir Guy Mardykes/Tom Marlin

TIME

1850

PLACE

The English town of Golden Friars in Northumberland and Snakes Island. A stylized set depicts the luxurious but careworn parlor of Mardykes Hall, and a fog-rimmed islet with an oaken stump in its center.

SCENE 1: THE LIVING

(Tempestuous winds howl then fade as lights reveal the gloomy parlor of Mardykes Hall. On a wall hangs a painting of Sir Guy Mardykes (1714) with a powdered periwig. SIR BALE MARDYKES and DOCTOR TORVEY are seated drinking port as a door slams, and MRS. JULAPER'S voice is heard.)

MRS. JULAPER'S VOICE

Agoy, Netty! Where have ye been? Sir Bale is waitin' in the parlor.

(JANET FELTRAM, a frail young housemaid, disheveled from the wind, enters.)

SIR BALE

Good God! Where the devil have you been?! Mrs. Julaper thought you'd drowned and sent for a priest. I even brought the doctor here!

JANET

I was only...

SIR BALE

No matter! I think I begin to see. It's a bore, I know, troubling a girl with a story she knows before, but I'll make mine short.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Excuse me, Sir Bale, but perhaps I'd better be taking my leave.

SIR BALE

No, sir, Doctor Torvey! I'll need a witness to my accusations. I suspect Miss Feltram here of theft and desertion!

JANET

Oh, my Lord, heavens, I don't quite understand, sir. I merely took a stroll and having come upon Cloostead boating house...

SIR BALE

Useless excuses! I took my key last evening, intending to pay the crown and rents, and the money was gone! It's gone and we know where, Miss Feltram. I did not steal my own bank notes, and you have access to my study and it's contents. If you wish to go away, I have no objection to that, but damn me if you'll take my notes with you! Now you may as well produce them here and now as hereafter you'll produce them in a worse place!

JANET

Oh, heavens, I'm feeling very ill...

SIR BALE

So you are! It takes a stiff emetic to get all that money off a guilty stomach and it's like parting with a tooth to give up some bank notes. Of course you're ill, but that's no sign of innocence, and I'm no fool. Now be a good girl and give them up quietly.

JANET

May my maker strike me...

SIR BALE

And so he will if there's justice in heaven! Now give it up forthwith, you damned wench, or I'll get a warrant, and have you searched pockets, bag and baggage!

JANET

Oh, Lord, am I awake?

SIR BALE

Wide awake and so am I! You don't happen to have it about you now?

JANET

God forbid, sir! I never dreamed of hurting you. Good heavens, you shouldn't think that! It all comes of my poor impatient temper and complaining as I do, but oh, Sir Bale, you could not think I ever meant to trouble you by law or any other annoyance. I'd like to see the stain removed from my family, but to touch your property, oh, no! That never entered my mind, by heaven! I'm not cruel, I'm not rapacious, I don't care for money...

SIR BALE

You care for mendacity, you witless, snivelling liar!

DOCTOR TORVEY

Really, Sir Bale, you're driving the girl to distraction.

SIR BALE

Then she should stop blubbering and give up the money! *(to Janet)* You know devilish well I can't spare it, and I won't spare you if you put me to it. I've said my say!

JANET

Oh, sir, oh, Sir Bale, it's impossible! You can't believe it! When did I ever wrong you?! You've known me since I was no higher than the table, and...

(JANET bursts into tears and dashes off.)

SIR BALE

I'm convinced she stole those notes! Perhaps I became more excited than I would normally allow, if you'll pardon me, Doctor, but my financial condition is sorely vexed by debts at present. *(pause)* Well, sir, how do you like Mardykes Hall?

DOCTOR TORVEY

It's been a long time, Sir Bale, since I've had the pleasure of seeing it.

SIR BALE

Places change imperceptibly -- in detail at least -- a good deal.

DOCTOR TORVEY

And people too, populations shift; there's an old fellow they call "death".

SIR BALE

And an old fellow they call "doctor" who helps him.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Ha, ha! Well, you certainly have a fine view here, Sir Bale. Cloostead Wood is a pretty object from the water, and a very pleasant place despite the snakes, I daresay.

SIR BALE

Exactly opposite. Cloostead Wood is a very homely object, and there aren't any snakes. In fact, Snakes Island should really be called Sen-Aiks from the seven oaks that grew there.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Eh? That's very curious.

SIR BALE

And very true. One of the stumps is still there.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Ah, yes, the one they say is haunted.

SIR BALE

Ghosts, of course, are nonexistent entities. Only bored fools and Irishmen acknowledge their existence.

DOCTOR TORVEY

That may be, Sir Bale, but most everyone in these parts believes it.

SIR BALE

It's nothing but malicious gossip based on an outrageous lie.

DOCTOR TORVEY

And what lie is that, Sir Bale?

SIR BALE

The claim that my father had illicit relations with that thieving girl's mother and drowned her. It's postposterous and unjustified slander!

DOCTOR TORVEY

Well, sir, I don't make any judgments about that. But Mr. Healey and the Vicar claim to have seen a woman's spirit swimming in the lake. It makes for an interesting tale if you'd care to hear it.

SIR BALE

Spare me, Doctor.

DOCTOR TORVEY

(pause, he sighs) Well, your view is certainly the very best anywhere. It's a magnificent lake, and what splendid mountains.

SIR BALE

Pon my soul, I wish I could blow them asunder with a charge of buckshot. But I suppose since we can't get rid of them, the next best thing is to admire them.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Ha, ha, ha! I know you couldn't mean that, Sir Bale!

SIR BALE

Most certainly, Doctor. You can't get a mouthful of air or see the sun at morning for those frightful mountains!

DOCTOR TORVEY

Then the lake at all events -- that you must admire, Sir Bale.

SIR BALE

No, sir, I don't admire the lake. I'd drain it if I could; I hate the lake! There's nothing so gloomy as a lake pent up among barren mountains. *(indicating the portrait)* I can't perceive what possessed old Guy Mardykes to build down here, unless it was the fish, and precious fish it is -- pike! I don't know how people digest it; I certainly can't.

DOCTOR TORVEY

I thought that having travelled abroad, you would have acquired a great liking for that kind of scenery, Sir Bale, and for boating.

SIR BALE

Boating, my dear Doctor is he dullest of all sports. Because a boat looks very pretty from the shore, we fancy the shore must look pretty from the boat, and when we try it, we find we've been trapped in a rolling pit and can see nothing right. For my part, I hate boating, I hate the water, and I'd rather have my house at the edge of the moss with an open horizon than be suffocated among impassable mountains. Enough then. There's supper waiting in the next room. Won't you take some?

(SIR BALE and DOCTOR TORVEY depart as lights dim to black.)

SCENE 2: THE DEAD

(Shimmering moonlight reveals Snakes Island. Upon a lone oaken stump sits the spirit of SIR GUY MARDYKES dressed in the style of the painting, his clothing worn to tatters. Sitting beside him is MARY FELTRAM'S spirit, luminous with lake slime and partially clad in the remnants of a night dress. SHE makes low droning sounds and stares as if in a trance.)

GUY MARDYKES

Oh, stop your wailing, you slimy wench, and tell me the winning horse at Windemere! Come on now, whisper in me ear.

MARY FELTRAM

Hush, hush, I'm searching for my Netty.

(Crossfade to Mary Feltram's vision of JANET, dusting the dimly lit parlor of Mardykes Hall.)

MARY FELTRAM

Ah, there's the little fool, dusting the cobwebs in Sir Bale's parlor.

GUY MARDYKES

The miserable twit!

MARY FELTRAM

A gentler, kindlier soul ne'er walked this earth. How does she endure her wretched excuse for a life?

GUY MARDYKES

What can she do but endure it? What is the power that induces strong soldiers to strip and present their backs to be whipped? Or for that matter, my dear lady, what induced a fair maid like yourself to be tortured and drowned by a man not worth the clods 'neath my shoe?

MARY FELTRAM

The coercion of despair...

GUY MARDYKES

Nay, 'tis more like madness, some daft calculation that claims it's better to put up with all that is evil than try the alternative.

MARY FELTRAM

My sweet Netty will have her dream soon enough.

GUY MARDYKES

Eh? And what dream is that, Mary m' love?

MARY FELTRAM

There are dreams and there are dreams, my dear. There's some that signify no more than the babble of the lake, and then there's some that get into you -- like possessions.

(As MARY smiles, JANET ceases dusting and stares, as if a dark thought has obtruded.)

GUY MARDYKES

Ho, ho! I pity that poor soul and you'll pity her too, and the world will pity you both if you don't give me the name of that damnable horse!

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3: THE LIVING

(Lights brighten in the parlor as MRS. JULAPER enters with a tea tray, and JANET sinks wearily into a chair.)

MRS. JULAPER

Sir Bale's gone to Golden Friars so we'll have our tea in the parlor like two respectable ladies.

JANET

Oh, ma'am, I'm so tired of my life. What's the good of living if you're never let alone and called worse names than a dog. Wouldn't it be better, Mrs. Julaper, to be dead? I think so; I think it night and day. I don't care, I'm just going to tell him and have it off my mind; I'll tell him I can't bear it any longer, and I'm leaving Mardykes Hall.

MRS. JULAPER

There now, Netty, don't you be frettin' -- though it's a burnin' shame to worrit any poor soul into this state. Sir Bale is always down on someone or something. Ye like a lump o' sugar, and a good deal o' cream, I think, and look a bit more cheerful, ye must!

JANET

You're so kind, Mrs. Julaper, you're so cheery. I feel quite comfortable after awhile when I'm with you, I feel quite better.

MRS. JULAPER

There, there, child, now drink up.

JANET

I should leave today, but I...I'm not well.

MRS. JULAPER

Tell me what's wrong, and I might have a recipe atop the shelf there that will do ye good.

JANET

It is not a matter of that sort that I mean. No, my body's well enough; It is only my spirits are so depressed, and I have such dreams -- you've no idea.

MRS. JULAPER

Dear me, how very odd. Your mother -- heaven be her bed this day -- was very keen for readin' dreams. And what do you dream about? Tell me your dream and I may show you it's a good one.

JANET

Well, Mrs. Julaper, dreams I've dreamed like other people, but this, ma'am, has taken a fast hold. I think it's getting into me; I think there's something trying to influence me.

MRS. JULAPER

Influence ye?! Child! What do ye mean?

JANET

Do you remember that picture of my mother, full length with the silver frame?

MRS. JULAPER

Aye, 'twas the prettiest picture in the house, wi' the gentlest, rosiest face.

JANET

Well, it ain't so gentle now, I can tell you. It's as fixed as marble, with thin lips and a curve at the nostril.

MRS. JULAPER

Agoy! Netty, m' dear! Ye would not name that terrible lookin' creature your own mother.

JANET

Faces change, you see, but it's her talk that frightens me. She has this one idea, and she's telling me I'm not Janet Feltram; I'm Janet Mardykes, and I'm entitled to my share of the fortunes of Sir Bale.

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, Lord! The fancies that come into your head!

JANET

If my mother was really married to Sir Philip Mardykes, then I am Janet Mardykes, sister to Sir Bale. Another girl would make a row and claim her rights, as she's always croakin' in my ear I ought. Oh, think what it was to be a woman turned out of doors and drowned, and her only child robbed of her rightful name! Oh, ma'am, you can't think of it, you couldn't, you couldn't!

MRS. JULAPER

Come, come, Netty, ye mustn't be talkin' like that. I'm sure your mother was an honorable lady and married with a priest's blessin', but it's an old story now and there's naught that can be proved concernin' it, so where's the use of stirrin' that old sorrow? Donn't ye see, when ye let yer spirits go down, all sorts o' fancies come into yer head.

JANET

There's no fancies in my head, only you asked me what I dreamed. Oh, I'm out of spirits as you say, and...and, oh, I wish, Mrs. Julaper, I wish I was in my coffin and quiet.

MRS. JULAPER

Now that's very wrong of ye, Netty. We must bear and forebear, take what we're given and be cheerful. Try to think of all the blessin's ye have.

JANET

I have no more blessings than you, Mrs. Julaper, but feeble as I am of will, I'm resolved to leave Mardykes Hall.

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, Lord o' mercy, Netty, were ye not so vexed, I'd beg ye to stay. But, Lord, what's to become of ye?

JANET

I'll take any calling, however humble. All I ask is my bread and board. I heard they need a kitchen maid at Trebeck's farmstead, so I was thinking of crossing the lake. I'll walk along the margins till I reach the bridge to Snakes Island.

MRS. JULAPER

Well, ye'll do no such thing tonight!

JANET

Then there's another bridge that will get me to the other side, to the fells near Trebecks.

MRS. JULAPER

Why, lass, t'would take an hour and more to circle the lake then a long walk uphill. It ain't right for a woman alone, and if the rains keep up and the night falls while you're still on the fells, ye might fall among the rocks.

JANET

I feel the sooner I get away from Sir Bale's wrath, the better, but I might take your advice, Mrs. Julaper. You've always been weather-wise.

MRS. JULAPER

Have a bit more tea, Netty, and chirp up! Didn't I often sing the old rhyme in your ear long ago:

*Always be merry 'neath the sun and the shade,
For no one delights in a sorrowful maid.*

(Thunder is heard as lights dim to black.)

SCENE 4: THE DEAD

(Lightning flashes and winds howl as the spirits of GUY MARDYKES and MARY FELTRAM are head laughing.)

GUY MARDYKES

Ha, ha! Satan's excrement on ye, ye thunderin' bubble! This is a horrid storm you're brewin', and the vibrations sound like an invading army! Keep your wild and fitful farts to yourself, you foul whore! What?! Speak up! I can't hear a bloody word for your wind!

MARY FELTRAM

Sir Bale has found his putrid damnable money! In his desk drawer where he'd placed it with his own hands!

GUY MARDYKES

Ha, ha, ha! And I'll wager he isn't feeling a pittance of remorse, the treacherous knave!

(MARY whispers in MARDYKES' ear and points towards the lake.)

GUY MARDYKES

Then why the devil don't you do it? Don't be such a coward! We've got nothing to lose and everything to gain, and we'll have a jolly good time plaguing the bastard!

MARY FELTRAM

Shhhh, here she comes. Oh, Netty, my poor, sweet Netty.

GUY MARDYKES

Be quick then! Come now, Mary, she can't see a thing, so go! Go!

(MARDYKES slaps Mary's backside as she slips into the foggy mist.)

GUY MARDYKES

That's my lassie! That's my beauty!

(MARDYKES scurries to the side to watch as JANET approaches, shivering in the cold. MARY FELTRAM leaps up, emitting a long, mournful howl as SHE grasps JANET from behind. THEY both shriek with terror as MARY wraps Janet's cloak around her, and pulls her down.)

GUY MARDYKES

Ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho, ho! I'm enjoying myself immensely. I might as well be alive! Thank God I'm dead!

(Lights dim to black.)

SCENE 5: THE LIVING

(The parlor in the late evening. A clap of thunder is followed by a loud rapping at the door. MRS. JULAPER answers in her nightcap and robe. TOM MARLIN and DOCTOR TORVEY enter, carrying JANET wrapped in a woolen blanket.)

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, oh, La', sir! Oh, La'! Here's poor Netty Feltram come home! Sir Bale! Sir Bale!

SIR BALE'S VOICE

(shouting from his bed chamber) What?! What's all this bellowing?! Come now, do be distinct!

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, Doctor, Torvey, put 'er here on the couch. I never saw -- dear God. Oh, sir, the poor, sweet lass.

(SIR BALE enters, wearing his robe.)

SIR BALE

Really, Mrs. Julaper! Can't you cry by and by and tell me what's the matter?!

MRS. JULAPER

La', sir, they've done what they can. She's drowned, sir.

SIR BALE

Whose drowned? *(noticing Janet's body)* Ah, is she drowned or is it only a ducking?

DOCTOR TORVEY

I'm afraid she's gone, poor lass.

(DOCTOR TORVEY covers Janet's head with the blanket.)

SIR BALE

Well, bear this in mind, all of you: Miss Feltram knew it was in no compliance with my wish that she leave the house. It was her own absolute perversity and perhaps -- I forgive her for it-- a wish in her unreasonable resentment to throw blame upon this house. Mrs. Julaper here knows how welcome she was to stay; we both advised it. No woman in her right mind would go out alone on such a night, but she refused to listen. Isn't that the truth, Mrs. Julaper?

MRS. JULAPER

Aye, sir, that it is.

SIR BALE

Not a healthy human being, an angry whim of her own, poor girl -- and here's the result. Does anyone know what happened?

TOM MARLIN

I was fishin' in the lake in my boat when it came on to thunderin' and lightnin' and blowin' so ye can guess I was headed for home, keepin' Snakes Island betwixt me and the wind. Then all o' a sudden, I seen somethin' come out o' the water by the gunwale, like a hand. By Jen! I leans o'er and took it, and she sagged and near drew me in. She must o' fell off the bridge and drifted in the current. Then, when I finally hauled 'er on the boat, I headed to shore and got Richard Turnbull to help me get 'er to Golden Friars to Doctor Torvey here, but 'twas too late.

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, La'.

DOCTOR TORVEY

She's been dead for hours. You can be sure she was quite dead by the time Mr. Marlin found her, so nothing was lost by the delay. (*lifting the blanet, revealing an arm*) Here you see, there's the cadaveric stiffness. It's very melancholy, but it's over.

SIR BALE

Thank you, Doctor. Now you must come to the study with me and have some brandy. And Mrs. Julaper, you'll be good enough to see that everything that should be done is looked after. And let Mr. Marlin have some supper and something to drink.

DOCTOR TORVEY

You've been too long in your wet clothes, Tom.

SIR BALE

Come, sir.

(SIR BALE and the DOCTOR depart while MRS. JULAPER helps TOM remove his coat.)

MRS. JULAPER

I suppose I'll be makin' poor Netty's last toilet. I've had to dress many a poor lass for her last journey.

TOM MARLIN

Ye can say that for certain, sir!

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, thank God, Netty, you're alive. But I've lost a good ten years for the scare ye gave me.

SIR BALE

You physicians are unquestionably a very learned profession, but there's just one thing you know nothing about.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Eh? What's that?

SIR BALE

Medicine! I was aware that you never help a sick person, but I didn't know till now that you couldn't tell when one was dead!

DOCTOR TORVEY

Hah! Well,...ha, ha, ha! Yes, well, you see...ha! You certainly have me there! But it's a case without parallel; it is, Sir Bale, upon my honor.

SIR BALE

I shall take it for granted that Miss Feltram will do very well, and should anything go wrong, I can send for you -- unless she should die again, and in that case I think I shall take my own opinion!

(SIR BALE stomps off as lights dim to black.)

SCENE 6: THE DEAD THE LIVING

(A week later on Snakes Island. GUY MARDYKES sits drinking from a tankard, then gazes up, squinting as lights reveal SIR BALE reading in his parlor.)

GUY MARDYKES

Look at him, the filthy scoundrel! A whole hoard of blue devils over him. He's dyspeptic, has the gout, and is in debt to his eye sockets. Ha, ha, ha! And look who's coming to visit. Ho, ho, ho!

(The lights fade on MARDYKES as JANET enters the parlor. Her voice and mannerisms are altered to resemble those of Mary Feltram -- for Janet's body is now infused with the spirit of her deceased mother.)

SIR BALE

Ah, Miss Feltram. I fancied you were in your bed. I little expected to find you up and about. I think the doctor gave very particular instructions that you were to remain perfectly quiet.

JANET

(smiling coyly) But I know more than the doctor.

SIR BALE

I think, Miss, you would be better in your bed.

JANET

Oh, come, come, come!

SIR BALE

It seems to me you rather forget yourself!

JANET

Easier to forget oneself, Sir Bale, than to forgive others at times.

SIR BALE

That's the way fools knock themselves up. What's brought you in here?

JANET

To observe you.

SIR BALE

I had intended speaking to you in a conciliatory way, but you seem to make that impossible. In fact, I don't know what to make of you -- unless you are ill and ill you might be walking about in your condition.

JANET

Wonderful effort for me.

SIR BALE

Rather surprising in a girl so nearly drowned.

JANET

I know you don't like the lake, sir, but I do. And so it is: as Antaeus touched the earth, so I the water, and rise refreshed.

SIR BALE

Well, I think you had better go to bed and refresh there. By the way, I meant to tell you that all that unpleasantness about the bank notes is over.

JANET

Is it?

SIR BALE

Yes, I recovered the money and you are not to blame.

JANET

But someone is to blame?

SIR BALE

Well, you are not, and that ends it.

JANET

Ends it? Really, how good! How very very good!

SIR BALE

As far as I can see, everything is settled between us. There is nothing to prevent your leaving Mardykes Hall now.

JANET

But before I go, I want to extend my gratitude by paying off your debts, and seeing you prosperous once again.

SIR BALE

A very good song and well sung, but I believe you've become quite eccentric. Your adventure in the lake has upset you a good deal, and you really should rest till you return to your old ways.

JANET

What's the matter, Sir Bale, are you afraid of my new ways?

SIR BALE

I'm not accustomed to this sort of arrogance.

JANET

But you could grow accustomed to the idea of my paying your mortgages?

SIR BALE

That's preposterous! You're only a maid and poor as a beggar; however, it's very kind of you. The idea shows a kindly disposition.

JANET

I've found an old man, a gypsy, here in Cloosted Woods who sits upon an old oak stump. *(drawing forth a leather pouch)* Look here.

SIR BALE

A gypsy! You mean to say he gave you that?

(JANET nods.)

SIR BALE

It was the custom to give the gypsy a trifle. It's a great improvement making him fee you.

JANET

He put that in my hand with a message. What would you give to know the winner of the Heckleston races?

SIR BALE

Ah, so your gypsy's a fortune teller?

JANET

I could lend you this money to make your game. This is quite a purseful of guineas.

SIR BALE

You mean to say you got all that from a gypsy here in Cloosted Wood?

JANET

Yes, and from a friend who is...myself.

SIR BALE

Yourself?! Then it's your's? You lend it?

JANET

Myself and not myself, as like as voice and echo.

SIR BALE

Humph! Perhaps this gypsy you speak of found the money where you found him, and in that case, as Cloosted Wood and everything in it is my property, then his lending it to me is like my servant handing me my hat and calling it a present.

JANET

You would not be wise to rely upon the law, Sir Bale, and to refuse help that comes unasked. But if you like your debts and mortgages as they are, then keep them, and if you like my terms as they are, then take them, and when you've made up your mind, let me know.

(JANET starts to leave.)

SIR BALE

Wait! Come back, Miss Feltram! Come back, Janet. There, my dear, sit down and let us talk this odd business over. You must have mistaken what I meant. I should like to hear all about it.

JANET

All is not much, sir. In the forest I met a gypsy who has a friend who can foretell events. He told me the names of the winners of the first three races at Heckleston, and gave me this purse with leave to lend as much money as you care to stake upon the races. I take no security. You shan't be troubled, except that you must promise to pay a visit to the lender on his terms if he seeks you out.

SIR BALE

Hmmm. Well, those are not bad terms.

JANET

No, not bad.

SIR BALE

I should like to hear the names of the winners.

JANET

You shall if you swear to the lender's terms and promise to keep all secrets respecting the lender's prophecies.

SIR BALE

Yes, yes, I promise.

JANET

Now do as I do.

(JANET wets her index and middle fingers on her tongue and touches her forehead twice and her heart once.
SIR BALE mimics her and THEY clasp hands.)

SIR BALE

What's this foolishness? Some gypsy game?

JANET

It means nothing except that someday it will help you to remember our covenant. And now the names: *(pause as she closes her eyes for an instant)* The winner of the first is Beeswing, of the second, Falcon, and of the third, Lightning.

SIR BALE

Humph! I wish for the sake of my believing that your list was a little less incredible. Not one of those horses you mention is the least likely -- only Beeswing has half a chance.

JANET

So much the better for you. You'll get what odds you please. You had better seize your luck, Sir Bale. On Tuesday, Falcon runs. When you want your money for the purpose, I'm your banker; Cloosted is your bank. Shall you want the purse?

SIR BALE

Certainly, I always want a purse.

(JANET tosses the purse to Sir Bale.)

SIR BALE

Perhaps my luck is turning. *(pause)* Well, I have several appointments, and you ought to return to your bed.

JANET

No, thank you. I believe I'll stay here to admire the view.

SIR BALE

Very well, but remember your condition, Janet.

(SIR BALE leaves as GUY MARDYKES leaps out from behind a chair, roaring with laughter.)

GUY MARDYKES

Ha, ha, ha, ha! A penny in a pocket's a merry companion, eh, Mary m' love?

JANET

Yes, Sir Bale's luck is turning indeed -- and so is poor Miss Feltram's. Sir Bale will be the meek little mouse and Janet the bully now.

GUY MARDYKES

You're a frozen hearted woman, Mary Feltram, and a damn sight uglier in your daughter's flesh than your own, you water-bellied wench! Ha, ha!

JANET

He will place several thousand pounds in his purse from Heckleston.

GUY MARDYKES

Good! Good!

JANET

Thousands more at Langston Lea with Silver Bell and Misty Autumn.

GUY MARDYKES

Eh?! Go on, go on!

JANET

And even more at Beyermore with Karps Kapers.

GUY MARDYKES

Old Hell's Heel's! Ha, ha, ha!

JANET

Then comes Rindemere.

GUY MARDYKES

Yes, yes? Go on!

JANET

Every hay-penny he has and every hay-penny borrowed will go down on Rainbow, and Rainbow will go down on the track!

GUY MARDYKES

Ace duce! You rascal! Now you're talking, Mary m' love!

JANET

Serves the old boy right. We'll suck his blood yet!

GUY MARDYKES

How Mary? A fall? Poison? Possession?

(JANET smiles mysteriously.)

GUY MARDYKES

Damn you! What then?!

JANET

How did you die?

GUY MARDYKES

In disgrace, heh heh.

JANET

How did I de?

GUY MARDYKES

Likewise.

JANET

But with a difference. You took your own life while mine was taken from me. I was drowned by Sir Bale's father; you threw yourself in. The crimes of the father will be visited upon the son.

GUY MARDYKES

You'll be neat and tidy about, it won't you Mary, m' dear?

JANET

You're the one to be neat and tidy -- for you're the one to do it.

GUY MARDYKES

What? How so?

JANET

(walking off, smiling) You'll see soon enough.

GUY MARDYKES

You can't leave me like this, Mary! Damn you, you insolent witch! I'll set my black dogs after you! Wretch!!!

(JANET departs laughing as GUY MARDYKES pursues her.)

SCENE 7: THE LIVING

(Six months later at Mardykes Hall. SIR BALE is lying ill on the sofa, attended by DOCTOR TORVEY who is packing his medicine bag, preparing to leave.)

DOCTOR TORVEY

Well, you ought to be in your bed! Your pulse is at a hundred and ten, and if you cross the lake and walk about Cloosted, you'll be raving before you come back.

SIR BALE

I will take care not to fatigue myself, and the air will do me good. In any case, I cannot avoid going.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Well, sir, I can't think of any business more important than a body's health.

SIR BALE

What about a body's debts and honor, sir?

DOCTOR TORVEY

What good's a body at all if it's dead?!

SIR BALE

Hah! I understand you have trouble diagnosing the dead!

DOCTOR TORVEY

And I understand you have trouble remembering where you put your bank notes! Good day, sir!

(DOCTOR TORVEY starts to leave.)

SIR BALE

Wait! Wait, Doctor Torvey, come back. I...I feel so faint; I'm not quite myself. I don't mean to be disagreeable; I must talk to someone.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Sir Bale, if it will make you less melancholy, unburden yourself by all means.

SIR BALE

I have such a load upon my spirits, sir. For some inexplicable reason, I'm...well, I'm afraid of Miss Feltram, and so is everyone else in this damnable household.

DOCTOR TORVEY

She has grown a bit daft and sullen to be sure, but that's no reason to fear her. She's only a maid and a poor little slip of a lass at that.

SIR BALE

Why the devil does she make me so uncomfortable? Why can't she be like...like she was?

DOCTOR TORVEY

Can't you ask her to leave, to find a position elsewhere?

SIR BALE

No, no, I can't. You see,... well, to be honest, I...I'm dependent on her for her...her services, but that's only half my vexation. There's my dreams, Doctor. I keep seeing this wretched woman with a dripping hand beckoning me and repeating the same phrase over and over. Good God, it's driving me mad!

DOCTOR TORVEY

What does she say?

SIR BALE

She says the estate of Mardykes will belong to a Feltram.

DOCTOR TORVEY

Come, come, my dear sir, this will never do. These dreams accompanying fever frequently precede an attack, and a poor's soul's raving before he knows he's ill. Once you've gained your strength, you'll shake off these illusions.

SIR BALE

Well, if it's an illusion, it's certainly impressed itself on my mind. Miss Feltram claims the wet hand is the same one that drew her into the lake. She insists my dream is a prophecy. Humph! She might have said something more likely. If there were any Feltrams rich enough, they might have the estate, but there ain't. They're all paupers! Of course anyone can see what it was.

DOCTOR TORVEY

What was?

SIR BALE

The hand! It was simply the reflection of her own hand in the water, in that lightning.

DOCTOR TORVEY

There's many tales about the lake, sir, and many respectable souls claim to have seen the same. Of course, only God knows for certain.

SIR BALE

God and the devil! I hate the lake. Oh, bother. I'm sounding as daft as Miss Feltram. Thank you for your trouble. I feel a good deal better for having spoken my thoughts.

DOCTOR TORVEY

No trouble at all, Sir Bale, and don't fret yourself so. If you follow my advice, by God, you'll be your old self in a week's time. Good day, sir.

(DOCTOR TORVEY departs.)

SIR BALE

Good day. Humph! Miss Feltram! Janet!!! Get in here!! Oh, God, I'm at my wits end!

(JANET enters.)

SIR BALE

Oh, thank heaven. Well, what's happened?! What did he say?!

JANET

You should not talk so to Doctor Torvey; he's the greatest tattler in town.

SIR BALE

I'll talk to anyone I damn well please!

JANET

The old gentleman's in a wax. He was miffed because you wouldn't take the trouble to cross the lake to speak to him yourself. That's why you haven't been winning. It was part of the agreement that you come when he asked.

SIR BALE

Damn! Did you tell him I'm half dead? Besides which I would have backed that damn horse in any case! Oh, what a fiend you've discovered!

JANET

He called you hard names enough and to spare, but I brought him round.

SIR BALE

Well, what did he say?

JANET

He said the estate of Mardykes will belong to a Feltram.

SIR BALE

Humph! That's preposterous. You're echoing my dreams to make me think I'm daft. So much for your conjurer!

JANET

So much for you if you don't make amends.

SIR BALE

What the devil does that mean?

JANET

He may make amends to you if you make amends to him.

SIR BALE

Ha! What can that wretched impostor do? Damn, I'm past helping now.

JANET

You shouldn't talk so, Sir Bale. Be civil; you must please the old gentleman. We both know you're nearly ruined. You must go and make it up.

SIR BALE

Make it up?! With a fool of a gypsy who can't even guess at what's coming! Why trouble my head about a fellow who wishes to see me disgraced simply because I've no desire to meet him? You know how I feel about the lake. It may be superstitious, but I absolutely refuse to cross the water. Around and about by horseback and over the bridge on foot, I'll consent to, but by boat, never!

JANET

No man, young or old, likes to be frumped by someone he's helped. Why cross his fancy for a childish fear? Go to him as he chooses and your problems will be solved.

SIR BALE

If he waits for that he'll wait till doomsday. I won't go and Doctor Torvey says it will kill me. And I can't understand what difference it can possibly make to him if I come by horse or by boat. Or for that matter, why can't he come to me?!

JANET

I can't say, can you?

SIR BALE

Of course I can't! What audacity for a fellow like that to presume to prescribe to me! Besides, he's ruined me and I no longer believe in him.

JANET

He misled you on purpose, and there's reason in it -- often clear and not ill natured.

SIR BALE

Why can't you fetch him yourself? Bring him here and let him remember I want a banker more than a seer. Let him give me a loan as he did before.

JANET

He'll not stick at that. When he takes up with someone, he carries them through.

SIR BALE

The races at Beyermore -- I might retrieve at them. Oh, leave me a minute. I must think! (*shouting*) Mrs. Julaper! Mrs. Julaper, bring me some sherry!

(JANET wets her fingers and touches her forehead and heart, reminding Sir Bale of their pact.)

JANET

This afternoon would be a fine time for a sail.

SIR BALE

Never! I'd sooner die!

JANET

Better to die rich than destitute. Good day, Sir Bale.

(JANET leaves as MRS. JULAPER enters.)

MRS. JULAPER

We've no sherry left, sir, but there's a jug o' mulled claret.

SIR BALE

Humph! I ought to take a mug of stale beer. That homely solace better befits a ruined gentleman.

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, you're not that, Sir. You're no worse off than half the lords and ladies that are goin'.

SIR BALE

That's very kind of you, Mrs. Julaper, but look at me. There never was a Mardykes here before that couldn't lay a thousand pounds on the winner of the Beyermore Cup, and what could I bet? Little more than the buttons on my shirt!

MRS. JULAPER

Well, times change, and many things have changed about here. I've been meaning to speak to ye, sir, of Netty -- Miss Feltram.

SIR BALE

Yes, go on.

MRS. JULAPER

It doesn't seem to me she's much improved. Her temper's queer, and every time I catch sight o' her, I feel a horror. 'Twas a time I'd be urg'in' her to stay, but now I may be leavin' myself -- for Dublin, sir, to live wi' my sister. The agitation's gettin' to me, sir, and my nerves ain't the same.

SIR BALE

Please bear with me, Mrs. Julaper. We've all noticed something amiss; the accident's addled her brain. I'll ask for her dismissal soon enough. Just give me more time.

MRS. JULAPER

I'll oblige ye, sir, but I hope you'll be askin' soon. 'Twas a freak accident to be sure, but I ne'er thought it could change a lass so.

SIR BALE

Oh, God, how things can change, Mrs. Julaper. Now, please, will you do me a kindness? (*pointing to the painting of Guy Mardykes*) I want you to destroy that wretched portrait.

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, La', I can't do that, sir. It's been with the Mardykes family for years! Are ye feelin' alright in the head?

SIR BALE

Yes, damn it! It vexes me.

MRS. JULAPER

I'll take it off the wall, Sir Bale, but I won't be destroyin' it.

SIR BALE

Alright then, just get it out of here! I'm going out, but I want it gone by the time I've returned! And tell Miss Feltram I'll visit her friend this very afternoon. Tell her she's to accompany me!

MRS. JULAPER

Beggin' your pardon, Sir Bale, but Doctor Torvey says yer not to be leavin' the...

SIR BALE

Never mind the doctor! We'll be ridin' by horseback to the bridge, then going by foot.

MRS. JULAPER

Aye.

SIR BALE

And she's not to be carping about taking the damn boat! Or God help me, I'll take out my whip!

MRS. JULAPER

Oh, La'!

(MRS. JULAPER leaves as lights dim.)

SCENE 8: THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

(Snakes Island were GUY MARDYKES is pouring two glasses of green wine from a leather pouch.)

GUY MARDYKES

Ahhh, I can smell ye comin', Mary me love. 'Tis a fine day for settlin' old scores.

(JANET enters, followed by SIR BALE who is startled at the sight of GUY MARDYKES who thrusts a glass in his hand.)

GUY MARDYKES

Well, well, Sir Bale! Sit down, sir!

SIR BALE

My God...

GUY MARDYKES

What's wrong, Sir Bale? Do we gypsies fill you with disgust? Ha, ha!

SIR BALE

No, sir, it...it's just that you bear an uncanny resemblance to an ancestor of mine.

GUY MARDYKES

A handsome devil, eh? Ha, ha! Don't be so vexed, Sir Bale. I've not come to take out my sword and prick ye. Drink! Drink to your better luck next time! And you know what I mean, ha, ha!

(THEY lift their glasses, drink, and sit in silence for a moment, observing each other.)

GUY MARDYKES

Well, sir, you've played with me and won and lost; you drank your glass like a genial companion, and you've humored your sister's mother. But ye haven't crossed the lake, sir! Ye haven't crossed the lake!

SIR BALE

And I haven't any sister, sir!

GUY MARDYKES

Why, Netty here's your sister, and you just drank a glass with her mother.

SIR BALE

What utter nonsense! I see only you and Miss Feltram here.

JANET

(glaring at Sir Bale) And I see a scoundrel -- just like his father.

GUY MARDYKES

We know a generous share of your father's estate was intended for Netty, and she shall have her due.

JANET

Our father has a copy of his will hidden in the house. Did you know that, Sir Bale? Would you like to know where it's is?

GUY MARDYKES

Tut, tut, don't protest, sir, and no need to fret. It shan't inconvenience your lordship. Everything will be settled soon after you die.

JANET

That shouldn't bother a villain like yourself, eh, Sir Bale?

SIR BALE

(standing to leave) I won't participate in this folly! I'm an ill man.

GUY MARDYKES

If you don't participate, my friend won't tell us which horses will win at Beyermore, will she, Netty?

JANET

Certainly not, but it won't make much difference to Sir Bale.

SIR BALE

My God, I...I feel wretched.

GUY MARDYKES

Sit down, Sir Bale. Sit down or I'll set my black dogs after ye!

(MARDYKES throws a leather purse at Sir Bale's feet.)

GUY MARDYKES

Pick it up!

(SIR BALE picks up the purse and sits.)

GUY MARDYKES

There now, that gold wagered on the right nag will make you a very rich man, Sir Bale. Now, lassie, tell Sir Bale here the names of the winners.

JANET

I'll tell him soon enough, but first, wouldn't you like to know where the will is hidden?

(A light focuses on MRS. JULAPER standing on a chair, removing the portrait.)

JANET

Go ahead, you're bursting to tell him.

GUY MARDYKES

It's behind Guy Mardykes' portrait, ha, ha!

JANET

You shouldn't have had it removed, Sir Bale, ha, ha!

(SIR BALE gapes aghast as MRS. JULAPER retrieves the will, cautiously unfurling it.)

JANET

Mrs. Julaper can't read nor write, but when Doctor Torvey comes to call tomorrow, she's bound to show it to him, and Doctor Torvey's the greatest tattler in town!

SIR BALE

And you? Why haven't you exposed me and taken Mardykes for yourself?

JANET

Pooh, pooh, I'm not a greedy woman, Sir Bale.

SIR BALE

In that case, I'll go back and destroy the damn thing myself -- for whatever it's worth.

GUY MARDYKES

Oh, it's worth very little, Sir Bale -- just enough to restore the good name of Feltram. 'Course the only names you'll be wantin' are the names of the winning horses.

SIR BALE

Of course I want them, but I'm not going through hell to get them!

GUY MARDYKES

Did y'know, Sir Bale, that the names come from the lake.

SIR BALE

What...?

GUY MARDYKES

Aye, 'tis the merest poetry, but only milady hears them and then she whispers in me ear. But the slimy bitch ain't speakin' to me today. She'll only speak to you, Sir Bale, so just wade out a length or two and press your ear to the water.

JANET

If you listen to the ripple, the lips of the lake will whisper the winner's names.

SIR BALE

Don't be daft!

GUY MARDYKES

Tsk, tsk, a pity to lose your fortune for a childish fear of water.

SIR BALE

It's not fear; it's common sense! There can't possibly be voices coming from a lake!

GUY MARDYKES

'Tain't far, Sir Bale, just a few steps and a slight tilt of your head.

SIR BALE

I'm vexed, I'm half dead, and you know I need money. I'm ruined without it.

(GUY MARDYKES snatches the pouch of money.)

GUY MARDYKES

The sound o' gold's a pretty tune, eh, Sir Bale? Take it with you and tell milady you'll be bettin' at Beyermore.

SIR BALE

I feel like a damn fool, but I'll humor you on one condition: if Miss Feltram here goes with me.

GUY MARDYKES

I'm afraid that's impossible, Sir Bale.

SIR BALE

Can't you see I'm ill?! I'm liable to get vertigo and lose my balance!

GUY MARDYKES

But Miss Feltram can't accompany you because Miss Feltram is dead, ha, ha, ha, ha!

SIR BALE

Hah! I know your tricks! You're plotting to make me daft.

GUY MARDYKES

Poor Netty's a corpse, but her mother -- Satan rest her soul -- is my own dear companion, eh, Mary m' pet?

JANET

You see, Sir Bale, the Mardykes curse had flowers that came back to root.

SIR BALE

Stop provoking me, or I'll dismiss you bag and baggage!

GUY MARDYKES

Get on with it, Mary! He's getting so uppity, I'm inclined to spew up me supper.

(JANET goes limp, her body collapsing.)

SIR BALE

Good God! She's fainted. No, no, by God, she...she's gone! Shhhh, listen. No pulse. (*bending his ear to her breast*) Her heart's stopped beating! No respiration. She...she's cold as a dead mackerel! I...I can't believe it; she seemed healthy enough.

GUY MARDYKES

Netty's in heaven, ye can be sure of that, Sir Bale, but you'll be joining milady and me here by the lake. Ha, ha, ha, ha!

(The ghostly MARY FELTRAM suddenly appears behind SIR BALE who turns and stares, horrified.)

MARY FELTRAM

Come now, your lordship, you remember me? Yes, I'm Mary Feltram, Janet's dear departed mother.

(SIR BALE attempts to scream but can only gasp and sputter, clasp his chest. MARY takes one arm and MARDYKES takes the other.)

MARY FELTRAM

You won't mind a nice little dip now, will you, Sir Bale?

GUY MARDYKES

Trust me, it's paradise for a gambling man!

(Now MARDYKES relinquishes SIR BALE to MARY who leads him into the misty lake.)

MARY FELTRAM

Come, Sir Bale, you'll learn to love the lake.

(MARY descends, pulling Sir Bale's arm. THEY disappear into the water as a mournful howl is heard, followed by a splash.)

GUY MARDYKES

By Jupiter! By Jove!! Ha, ha, ha!!

(Blackout.)

End of Play

Joseph Sheridan LeFanu

Joseph Sheridan LeFanu (1814-1873), a Dubliner and great grandnephew of the dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, was a lifelong melancholic who in later years became a recluse. Although LeFanu was a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin and studied for the bar, he renounced law for journalism and was the editor of several newspapers and periodicals. He married, but when his wife died, withdrew completely from society, refusing to see even his closest friends.

LeFanu was a successful and prolific author, but is most remembered for his supernatural stories. He is considered to be the father of the psychological ghost story, the first to realize that the personality of the beholder of a supernatural manifestation is as relevant as the manifestation itself. LeFanu was interested in fathoming the hidden psyches of his characters, of mapping out the boundaries of their realities, both perceived and imagined.

The Haunted Baronet is freely adapted. Liberties have been taken with regard to the plot, characters, and much of the dialog is inspired by the story rather than quoted directly.