

DOM NA MOCZARACH

HOUSE ON THE MARSH



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CHAPTER 1

THE WALL THREE MILES LONG

*Mr. Harry Dickson, Esq.
Baker Street
London*

*Dear Mr. Dickson,
I'm begging you to help me and my whole family. Somebody has put a curse on all of us and the house of my father. We have already tried everything to stop it but without success. So you are our last hope. Only you can solve this mystery and save us from death.*

Robert Riderswood

Harry Dickson received this letter two days ago. He was not very busy and was going to rest for some time but all his plans had to be changed. As a man who enjoyed good health, he used to say that relaxation makes him tired and is more exhausting than the hardest work.

So, after settling his most important matters, he packed his suitcases and left for Norwich.

The letter was sent from a town called Bolton, from the Riderswoods' property, which is situated in the heart of the least-known area of Wash—a land of lakes, mud and swamps.

When Dickson arrived at Norwich, he took the letter out of his pocket and read it once again. He wanted to make sure that the sender's name was Riderswood and to check the address.

Dickson called a taxi.

"We'll go to Bolton!"

"Yes, sir."

The Riderswoods were the biggest landowners in the area so the chauffeur should know them. When Dickson asked him about the family, the chauffeur turned round and looked at the detective with his eyes wide open:

"What? Are you going to the Riderswoods? Is it possible?"

"Why would it be impossible? Why are you so surprised?"

The chauffeur took off his hat:

"Can you see this, sir?" he said. "I have grey hair. I'm already fifty years old. But I have never in my life driven anybody to the Riderswoods. Everybody knows that Lord Riderswood does not allow any visitors in his gloomy house."

Harry Dickson didn't show how much he became interested in this news.

"One day it had to happen. I may be the first visitor there but I hope not the last one. Let's go! First, however, I'd like to stop at an inn in Bolton. I will leave my suitcases there and then we will go directly to the Lord's house."

The chauffeur nodded his head and added, this time with a smile:

"You won't be able to see the house anyway, sir. Only the wall. But I do not believe you have seen such a wall anywhere in the world."

The car was moving fast along the road while Dickson was thinking

Esq. Esquire, used when you're writing a man's name and address on an envelope (formal, old-fashioned)

beg błagać

curse klątwa, przekleństwo

solve rozwiązać

mystery tajemnica

save ocalić

receive otrzymać

exhausting wyczerpujący

matter sprawa

Norwich a town in eastern England

property *tu*: nieruchomości

Wash area in the central part of eastern England

swamp mokradła

landowner właściciel ziemski

gloomy ponury

inn gospoda, zajazd

nod skinąć

take a nap zdrzemnąć się
(*nap* drzemka)

plain gładki

entrance wejście

indeed faktycznie

despite pomimo

gate brama

Medieval Era an epoch in

history, culture and literature

dating from the end of the 5th

to the 15th century

fortress forteca, twierdza

about the content of the letter. He compared it with information he had received from the chauffeur and said to himself:

“Yes, it is correct . . .”

He took a short nap. He could fall asleep whenever he wanted but this time it was not a deep sleep.

“Hallo, sir!”

Dickson woke up.

“This is where the wall starts. It is worth seeing. I’ll drive slower.”

Dickson couldn’t believe his eyes. The wall was 25 feet high, plain, and a dirty grey colour. It reminded him of the Santé prison walls on Boulevard Arago in Paris.

“Old Lord Riderswood, father of the present owner, spent nearly all his money on building this wall. All of the members of his family have been strange for generations. The present owner is no different from the others.”

The chauffeur was almost proud that he could personally show this most spectacular construction to the detective.

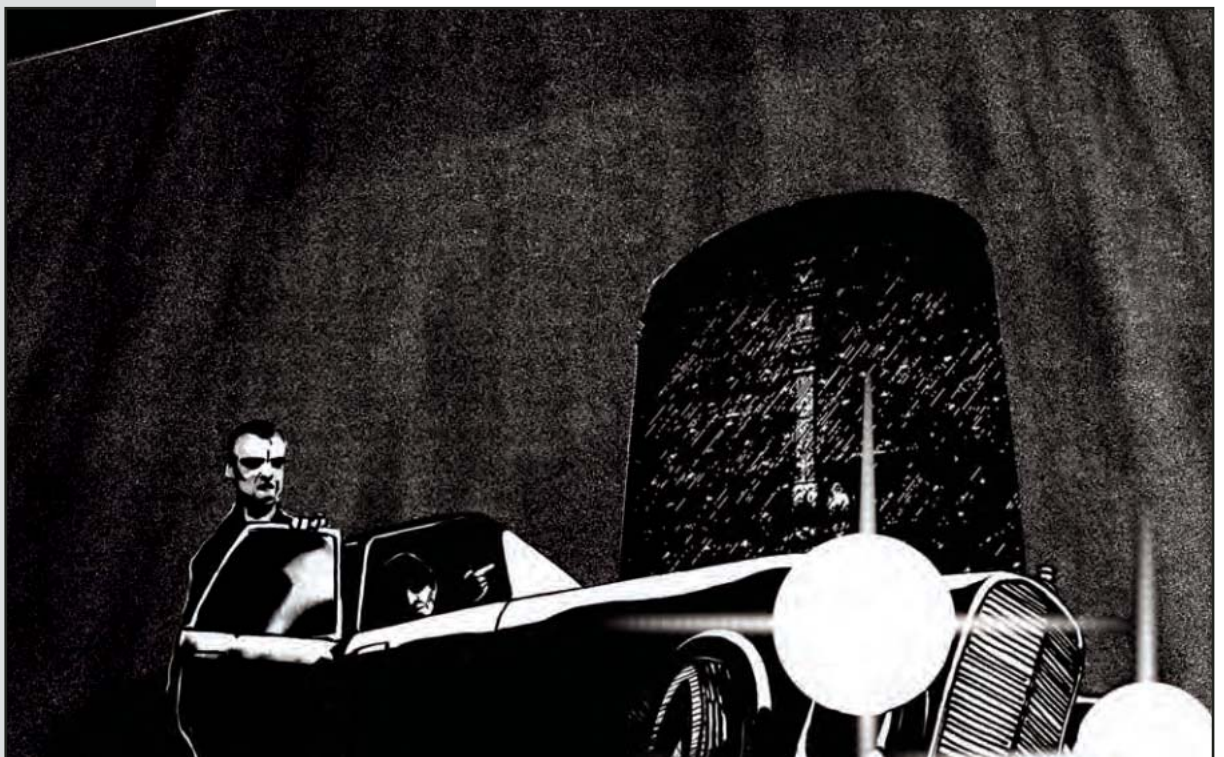
“Three miles of such a wall! Three miles, sir! And just one small entrance. That is how they separated themselves from the outside world.”

Dickson was indeed surprised. But despite that fact, he preferred to go a bit faster.

They arrived at a massive gate, which looked like an entrance to a Medieval fortress.

Dickson was looking for a door-bell when a small door in the gate opened and a young man looked out. He was breathing fast and seemed to be a little scared.

“Are you Mr. Dickson? Yes, I can recognise you. I’ve seen you in thousands of photographs in magazines. I’m Robert Riderswood. I was afraid to go out to meet you, so I waited on top of a tall tree.”



“Three miles of such a wall! Three miles, sir! And just one small entrance. That is how they separated themselves from the outside world.”

“Well, that’s an interesting way of waiting for a guest who has received a special invitation,” replied the detective.

“I wrote to you when I felt really desperate and frightened. To tell you the truth, I started regretting it soon after sending the letter. I was even hoping that you would not listen to my call for help. But now, since you are here, let’s see what’s going to happen.”

Robert Riderswood looked really afraid. His head was enormously big in comparison with his body. He was a bit bent and slim, with skinny hands. He was about 30 years old and dressed casually.

“I haven’t thought yet how to explain your arrival to my father. He does not invite any guests. The opinion of my two older brothers is more important to him than mine, but they don’t like guests, either. I really don’t know.”

“You will tell your father that we met on the road.”

“But you will not mention my letter, will you?” Riderswood interrupted.

“Don’t worry about that . . .”

“Thank you! You are a real gentleman. You are also a great detective and I’m sure you’ll be able to solve this mystery. Tell my father and brothers that we met in front of the house and that you came here all by yourself, please. And find some good reason for your visit because my father will certainly ask about it.”

Robert Riderswood pushed open the door.

Dickson nearly shouted in amazement as they entered a real jungle, not just a park surrounding the house.

“Does anybody take care of this park?”

“Yes, in the past . . . Today this wood is like a second wall around the house. Further on it is better.”

They walked on faded leaves and broken branches until they came to a lawn, which was as big as a meadow. A few sheep were eating grass there.

In a distance they could see the house. It looked more like a castle but had no style and was rather gloomy and ugly.

“Here is our house. I hope you have come up with some explanation. My father has already seen you from his window and he will come here in a minute. He might be angry and even ask you to leave.”

Robert put his head down and became silent. A huge man with a long silver beard appeared at the door leading to the house. Lord Riderswood was observing the detective in an unfriendly way.

“Do I have the honour to speak to the Lord of the Riderswood Valley?”

“Yes, it’s me. How can I help you, sir? Who are you?”

“I am Harry Dickson. Have you ever heard about me, my Lord?”

“Yes, I have. I know you are a famous detective. What are you looking for in my house?”

“The matter that brings me here has nothing to do with you personally. But would you be so kind to speak to me in private, please?”

Dickson sounded self-confident. The Lord showed him the way in, looking at the same time at Robert with real anger.

“I met this gentleman on the road,” said the young Riderswood.

reply odpowiedzieć

regret żałować

since tu: ponieważ

enormously niezwykle

bent zgarbiony

slim szczupły

skinny chudy

casually swobodnie (o ubiorze)

mention wspomnieć

interrupt przerwać

reason tu: powód

amazement zdumienie

enter wejść do

surround otaczać

fade wyblaknąć

lawn trawnik

meadow łąka

ugly brzydki

come up with wpaść na
(pomysł)

become silent zamilknąć

beard broda

appear pojawić się

have the honour mieć zaszczyt

self-confident pewny siebie

anger gniew

host gospodarz

be all ears zamieniać się w słuch

require wymagać

national security

bezpieczeństwo narodowe

object mieć obiekcje, sprzeciwić się

servant służący

rope sznur, lina

old-fashioned staroświecki

pale blady

assist pomagać

bow uklonić się

upstairs na górę, na piętro

wing skrzydło

pond staw

reed trzcina

bank *tu*: brzeg

above ponad

count on liczyć na

“I’m not asking about anything, so please keep quiet,” the Lord criticised his son.

The detective and the host entered the library.

“I’m all ears, Mr. Dickson.”

“Have you ever seen the military map of this area, my Lord? The map of the mud and swamps of the Wash district?”

“I believe I have. So?”

“I’m sure you have noticed that a lot of details are missing from the map. I am here on behalf of the military authorities. The map needs to be corrected as soon as possible. We are mostly interested in the area close to your property.”

“What do you require from me then?”

“Nothing. I’m just asking you to let me stay on your property for a couple of days.”

“No strangers have ever stayed here. But since it’s a question of national security, I cannot object. Where are your suitcases?”

“At the Two Crosses Inn in Bolton.”

“My gardener Soames will bring them. From now on you are my guest.”

“Thank you very much, my Lord. Here are my documents from the London Police.”

“It’s not necessary. I’ve seen you in photographs. I will order my servants to prepare a room for you. We have dinner at 7. And we go to bed rather early. During dinner I will introduce you to the other members of my family.”

The Lord pulled a rope with an old-fashioned bell. A pale and poor-looking servant appeared after a while.

“Topkins,” said the Lord, “this gentleman will stay with us for some time. Take him to the pink room and assist him with whatever he needs.”

Topkins was so amazed that he opened his mouth wide. But then he bowed and said:

“Yes, my Lord. Could you follow me, sir?”

They passed a few dark rooms, walked through two long corridors and went upstairs to the first floor.

The pink room was located at the end of the left wing of the house. A large pond with reeds on its banks could be seen from the window. There were beautiful white lilies on the surface of water.

“I’m afraid,” said Topkins, “that the noise made by frogs will disturb you during the night. But the room is comfortable and high above the ground. I’ll make a fire in a minute.”

“Thank you, Topkins. I hope we’ll be satisfied with each other.”

A pleasant smile appeared on the servant’s face:

“I will try to serve you as well as I can. I am very happy that finally somebody is visiting this place.”

“Would you like a cigarette?”

“A cigarette? . . . With pleasure. But I will keep it for later and smoke it in the evening when the others can’t see me.”

“Who are the others? Servants?”

“Yes, sir. But please don’t tell anybody.”

“You can count on me. I’ll keep it a secret, Topkins. In the evening, when you come to my room, we will have a glass of whisky. Is that all right?”

Poor Topkins was so touched that Dickson thought he would start crying in a moment. But the Lord's servant did not reply, just bowed and went out of the room.

Dickson refreshed himself a bit and, because there was still half an hour left before dinner, he sat down in an armchair and smoked a pipe of his favourite tobacco "Navy Cut".

The pond, which he could see through the window, was as narrow as a river. There were several islands on it.

The park did not actually look as bad as he had thought at the beginning. He even noticed a few white sculptures.

It was quiet. The detective was in a strange mood created by the huge wall, the pond and the gloomy house. He felt that there was some mystery behind it and he was happy to be a part of it. He was preparing for some adventures, he was ready for dangers, he was like a hunter setting off for a chase.

Suddenly . . .

Dickson heard something—a bird or . . . The tone of the voice was getting stronger, it was becoming more human, more . . . womanly. The silence of the pond and the wood was broken. Somebody was singing. The melody was short but full of longing. It stopped as unexpectedly as it had begun.

Dickson straightened up his tie and put down the pipe. He heard the bell calling everybody for dinner.

CHAPTER 2

A STRANGE NIGHT

The dining room was lit by a great number of bronze chandeliers, which showed how rich the host was but at the same time they proved that he had no taste.

"Miss Louise Addison—my niece," the Lord started presenting the people living in his house. "Miss Sophy Winsham—her governess . . . My older son Hugo . . . My son Michael . . . You have met Robert already."

All the looks directed at Dickson were more curious than friendly. Miss Addison didn't even seem to notice him. She was a pretty girl but she looked sick. Only the governess smiled at him, the way spinsters do.

They sat down and started eating. The food was wonderful, but the atmosphere was cold.

Dickson noticed that when the host ordered wine, all the members of his family looked at one another truly surprised. The whole family appeared to be teetotalers.

The Lord had already informed his sons that Dickson was going to stay for a few days and hunt on their property.

"You won't have to leave our park in order to shoot several interesting animals," said Hugo Riderswood. "It's enough to step out of the house and you'll see a lot of birds. There are too many pheasants, partridges and rabbits in the neighbourhood. To tell you the truth, the hunting

touched wzruszony

refresh oneself *tu:* ogarnąć się

narrow wąski

actually tak naprawdę

sculpture rzeźba

mood nastrój

set off wyruszać

chase pościg

silence cisza

longing tęsknota

unexpectedly nieoczekiwanie

straighten up *tu:* poprawić

chandeliers kandelabr

prove *tu:* świadczyć

niece siostrzenica

governess guwernantka

curious ciekawski

notice zauważyć

the way spinsters do tak jak to

bywa w przypadku starych

panien

truly prawdziwie

teetotaler abstynent

step out wyjść

pheasant bażant

partridge kuropatwa