“Thrilling Tales, A Storytime for Grownups” presents: “Mrs. Morrel's Last Séance” by Edgar Jepson and “The Bus Conductor” by E.F. Benson

[00:00:05] [upbeat piano solo begins and fades to background music] **Podcast Announcer:** Welcome to The Seattle Public Library's podcasts of author readings and library events, a series of readings, performances, lectures, and discussions. Library podcasts are brought to you by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation. To learn more about our programs and podcasts, visit our website at: www.spl.org. To learn how you can help the Library Foundation support The Seattle Public Library, go to: foundation.spl.org. [background music fades to silence]

[00:00:39] **I: “Mrs. Morrell's Last Séance” by Edgar Jepson**

David: Good afternoon, Everybody. Welcome to “Thrilling Tales,” Seattle Public Library’s storytime for adults. “Thrilling Tales” happens usually on the first and third Monday of every month. My name is David. I'm a librarian here; I work on the third floor. Nice to see you! Thanks for coming.

Today we have two old—“ghost” stories? I won't I won't judge them—let’s see if they’re ghost stories are not. The first one is from 1912, which I think is really interesting because it's a time when people talked about their spirit medium the way you or I might talk about our massage therapist or yoga instructor. It's called “Mrs. Morrel's Last Séance” by Edgar Jepson.

I had attended all of the séances of Mrs. Joaquine Morrel during the two previous winters, and of all the mediums I have sat with in the States or in Europe, she was the best. Sometimes, of course, she was not in the right mood or condition—or whatever it is—and the phenomena were trivial. Sometimes we got mere trickery—and that, poorly done. Like most other mediums—public or even private—if real phenomena did not come, Mrs. Morrel would do her best to produce imitations. Sometimes she would quite deliberately use trickery rather than endure the exhaustion and nausea which always followed the genuine exercise of her powers.

But often at her séances, I have seen phenomena which I did not believe to have been produced by trickery. I did not profess to be able to find any explanation for them. I was profoundly skeptical about their having anything to do with the spirits of the dead. I inclined to the theory that they were produced by the obscure and mysterious action of the subconscious, or—if you prefer it—the

subliminal self. But whatever their cause, I saw phenomena which I accounted genuine. And as I say, after these, Mrs. Morrel was in a state of utter prostration. She seemed not only to have lost vital force, but actually to have lost blood, so weak and pale and shrunken was she.

I came to the séance on the fourth of last December with no great expectations, for it was a mere chance whether the phenomena would be interesting, or more or less trickery. Besides, the night was very cold and the weather had been abominable, and that was against Mrs. Morrel's being in a favorable condition for the best exercise of her powers. But I had not been in the room with her three minutes before I was sure that she was in uncommonly good spirits, and I began to expect a good sitting.

I was the first to arrive and we chatted for a few minutes about what she'd been doing since the last séance I had attended and about the members of the circle, which was to sit that night. I became aware that one of the reasons of her good spirits was that she was wearing a new dress—a black, watered silk. I complimented her on it, and she made me feel the material. What a good, thick, serviceable silk it was! She was plainly so proud of it that I again complimented her on her taste and congratulated her on having got so exactly what she wanted and such an excellent fit. Indeed, the dress suited her very well, for she was a dark, almost swarthy, black-haired, biggish woman, and stout—weighing over 11 stone. Her rather heavy face lighted up and grew quite animated at my compliments.

Then the other members of the circle began to arrive, singly or two at a time. There was Eric Magnus, who was even more skeptical than I, though for the last year, he had ceased to deny in anything like his old tone of conviction, that we did sometimes get genuine, inexplicable phenomena at Mrs. Morrel's séances. There were Harold Beveridge; and Walters, the professor of mathematics—both of them very careful and shrewd observers of psychical phenomena. And there were Dr. and Mrs. Patterson; and Mrs. Grant; Admiral Norton; and a man of the name of Thompson, whom I knew very little since he had only lately attended the séances. These five were of the credulous type which sees—or makes itself see—anything, and were of very little account in matters psychical.

Of course, the circle was rather too large. I've always seen the best phenomena when the circle has been composed of three men and two women.

Last of all came two strangers, who, I gathered, had never sat with Mrs. Morrel or with anyone else—a Mr. and Mrs. Longridge. Longridge was a man of about forty-five of a short, square, stout figure, clean-shaven, with a heavy, masterful jaw, thin lips, and keen black eyes, deep-set under projecting brows. He looked a man of uncommon force of character, and I hoped that Mrs. Morrel would keep off trickery, for he was the very man, if he detected it, to make a row. I fancied that I had seen his face among a set of portraits of captains of industry in a magazine.

His wife was a very pretty—even beautiful—woman of about twenty-eight, with large, dark-brown eyes and dark-brown hair. Her cheeks were pale and she looked fragile. She gave me the

impression of having been broken down by some great trouble. It was plain that she was strung up to the highest pitch. Her eyes were restless and excited, and her lips kept twitching. Longridge looked rather bored.

Mrs. Morrel welcomed them with great deference, and Mrs. Longridge came into the room wearing a cloak of sables over her black evening gown. All the members of the circle—except Professor Walters—are rich people, but not to the point of being able to pay two thousand pounds for a sable cloak! I took it that Longridge was a millionaire. When his wife found that the room was quite warm, she gave him the cloak, and he laid it on the little writing-table against the wall, by the door.

We were all assembled by a quarter to nine; and I explained to the Longridges the conditions of the séance, especially begging them on no account, whatever happened, to break the circle by loosing the hand of the person on either side of them. Then we settled down on our chairs in a half-circle before the cabinet, which was formed by a curtain hung on a rod across a corner of the room. The curtain was drawn back and it was quite plain that, but for Mrs. Morrel's chair, the cabinet was empty.

Mrs. Morrel went into it and drew the curtain. Magnus turned out two of the gas-jets of the chandelier and left the third burning about three-quarters of an inch—it gave less light than a candle would have done.

We joined hands and Mrs. Grant went to the piano and began to play, softly. We talked, quietly. I had placed myself between Mr. and Mrs. Longridge. Magnus sat on the other side of Longridge. I realized, even more clearly, that Mrs. Longridge was strung up to a pitch of extraordinary tenseness. She answered my occasional remarks to her in strained tones, and her hand was rigid and so cold that it kept mine chilled! Two or three times I begged her to let herself relax, but it was no use.

Every now and then I felt her quiver. Longridge was relaxed enough. He was leaning back in his chair. His hand was warm and limp in mine. And two or three times I heard him sigh impatiently. It was plain that he had only come to please his wife and expected nothing.

We sang the hymn “Lead, Kindly Light,” and then we went on talking. It was about half an hour after we sat down that I heard in the cabinet the sound of scratching, which always preceded Mrs. Morrel's going into a trance.

The talk died down in a momentary hush. Mrs. Grant left the piano and sat down in her chair at the end of the half-circle nearest the piano. And Mrs. Longridge said in a shaky whisper, “Is it going to begin?”

“Very soon,” I said. And I felt that she was quivering or—to be exact—trembling violently. And after that, she was trembling most of the time.

The first phenomena was a ball of light. It began in a faint luminousness about three feet from the floor in front of a curtain of the cabinet, and it grew stronger and stronger till it was a ball of greenish,

phosphorescent light, some six inches in diameter, and about the strength of the light given out by those marine animalcula which are called sea stars; not, that is, as bright as the light of a glow worm. Longridge sat upright in his chair.

The ball of light disappeared suddenly and from beyond the end of the half-circle a voice began to speak—the voice of Thomas. We were familiar with it. Sometimes he would materialize and move about the room. Mrs. Longridge was still no longer trembling, but breathing, quickly.

I knew that we were going to have an interesting sitting, but it seemed to me that the atmosphere was different from that of any other sitting at which I had been present. There was a sense of strain in it, rather oppressive and unnerving. I thought Mrs. Longridge's emotion had infected me.

Two or three lights floated across the room and faded. As one of them passed, I caught a glimpse of Thomas' rather impish face—only his face.

He talked for a while. The usual, aimless, trivial, rather tiresome talk, chiefly to Admiral Norton, who wanted to know what would be the upshot of a naval scandal which was agitating the public mind. Thomas' views on it were those of a schoolboy of fourteen.

Then he said, "Sister Sylvia is coming."

Then there came from the cabinet, the figure of a nun—a familiar figure at Mrs. Morrel's séances. She went by the name of "Sister Sylvia." She talked to one and another of us, and there was very little more to her talk than that of Thomas. Mrs. Longridge was panting, softly, and holding my hand tighter. Longridge, too, had tightened his grip and was leaning forward.

There was a breath of cold air—a very common phenomenon at séances—and then Sister Sylvia said, "There's a little girl here. She wants—"

And I heard Mrs. Longridge gasp. And without finishing her sentence, Sister Sylvia went back into the cabinet with quite unusual swiftness. It was almost as if—one might say so—she had been sucked back into it.

Another light floated across the room and faded, and then the rings of the curtain grated softly along the rod and there came out of the cabinet, the figure of a child—a little girl. And then I saw that the curtain was half-drawn, a thing which had never happened at one of Mrs. Morrel's séances before. And I could see, dimly, the figure of Mrs. Morrel on her chair in the closet.

The child came straight to Mrs. Longridge. Mrs. Longridge sank back in her chair, gasping painfully, and her nerveless hand would have slipped from mine had I not held it firmly.

The child stood before her and said in a faint, shrill voice, "Oh, Mommy!"

Mrs. Longridge burst out sobbing, tried vainly to tear her hand from mine and cried wildly, “Oh, Maisie! Maisie!”

I heard Mrs. Morrel shuffle in the cabinet and then suddenly Longridge’s hand gripped mine with a vise-like, crushing grip! He said hoarsely, “Don't go back, Masie! Stay with us! Try to stay with us, hard!” And then he hissed, “Will her to stay, Grace! Hold her! Will her to stay!”

He crouched forward and I saw that glimmer in his eyes, staring at the dim figure of Mrs. Morrel.

Mrs. Longridge and the child were were murmuring to one another in broken staccato voices, just repeating one another's names. When Longridge had spoken, Mrs. Longridge was silent. She seemed to stiffen and her breathing was slower, coming in low, drawn gasps. Plainly, she was concentrating herself in the effort of will.

Longridge was crushing my hand! I thought that the bones would go. The pain was confusing—I thought that the child had her arms round Mrs. Longridge’s neck.

There were some seconds—perhaps fifteen—of tense stillness. It seemed to me that the air of the room grew more and more oppressive with a sense of a straining, silent struggle. But that feeling might have been caused by the pain of Longridge’s grip. Then I felt—rather than saw—that the child was being drawn back to the cabinet. Longridge crouched forward in his intense effort—never stirred—never loosened his crushing grip.

Mrs. Grant burst out crying. Magnus cried in a high pitched squeaky whisper, “Keep still! Keep still! Don't break the circle!” I heard the admiral rap out an oath. And then I saw that Mrs. Morrel was swaying on her chair.

The child seemed to be about two feet from Mrs. Longridge, bent forward as though her arms were round her neck and she was holding onto it!

Then Mrs. Morrel rose from her chair, swaying—clutching at the air with twisting arms! And then she pitched forward on her face, half in the cabinet and half out of it!

As she came to the ground, the child cried in another voice—a deeper, louder voice—"I can't get back!”

We were all on our feet at once. Longridge cried, “Come along! Come along!” thrust me aside, and picked up the child!

Magnus sprang to the gas, but in his excitement, instead of turning it up, he turned it off, and we were in pitch darkness. The door opened. A sheet of light from the hall, fell into the room, and in it, I saw Longridge’s face, very white and glistening with sweat. He was carrying the child in his arms,

wrapped in his wife's sable cloak! I only caught a glimpse of him as he hurried out of the room. His wife followed him quickly and slammed the door after her.

I made for the door. I ran into a chair; then I ran into Professor Walters. Just as my hand touched the wall, I heard the house door bang.

The Admiral struck a match. I opened the door, ran down the hall, and opened the house door. A big closed motor-car was gliding swiftly down the street.

I came quickly back to the room. The gas had been lighted and everyone was talking at once, wildly. I hurried to Mrs. Morrel, who still lay where she had fallen and raised her. To my amazement, it was no more than if I were lifting a child twelve! As I lay her on the sofa, my sleeve-link caught in her dress. It tore a patch out of that strong new silk as if it had been a tissue paper! The bodice had fitted like a glove. It hung about her, shrunken bust in great wrinkles. Her face was bloodless and shrunken. Her black hair and eyebrows were a curious, dead, lustreless white. And oddest of all, the iris and even the black pupils of her eyes had gone gray, as if the color had been bleached out of them!

Mrs. Grant had a bottle of strong smelling salts. The Admiral got some brandy from the servant. We tried our best to revive her. Our efforts were useless. She was dead.

We sent for the doctor. He could do nothing. He talked about heart failure and seemed to have it firmly in his mind that Mrs. Morrel was an albino.

Eric Magnus and I were the last to leave, and we came away together.

As we turned up the street, he said, “It was a good thing that I noticed the draft when the door of the room was opened to let the child slip in.”

“I noticed a breath of cold air, in fact, I noticed several during the evening,” I said. “But if the door was open, why didn't the light from the hall lamp fall into the room? It was burning brightly.”

“Oh, it was turned down and then up again,” he said confidently.

“It might have been,” said I. For the next 20 yards, he said nothing.

Then he broke out, “It was a splendid fake—splendid! I never saw better! What accomplices! It was first-rate acting—absolutely first-rate!”

“Yes. Acting that turned the ladies hands icy? And accomplices? An accomplice of Mrs. Morrel’s in a two thousand pound sable cloak! That is a bit hard to swallow,” I said.

“Hired,” my dear fellow—hired,” he said, confidently.

“It might be,” I said. “A hired cloak and a form of heart disease which turns a swarthy woman into an albino.”

“Yes. That was odd. But I have no doubt it sometimes acts like that.”

“Haven't you?” I said.

We separated at the end of the street and I was glad to be rid of him. I wanted to think it out quietly. I could not. My mind was in a whirl and it would not clear.

The next day I set about trying to find out something about the Longridges. I was quite unsuccessful. I could find no trace of them. They were unknown in spiritist circles by name. No medium of my acquaintance recognized either of them from my description. Also, I could find no one of the name of Longridge among our captains of industry. I was forced to the conclusion that, like so many other people, they had come to the séance under false names. So many people are ashamed of their interest in spiritism.

[audience applauds]

[00:18:42] **II: “The Bus Conductor” by E.F. Benson**

The second story is from the same era. (I've got a ghost under the table, I think. It's wobbly!) It's from 1986 and it's by a writer named E.F. Benson and it's called “The Bus Conductor.”

My friend Hugh Granger and I had just returned from two days’ visit in the country where we'd been staying in a house of sinister repute, which is supposed to be haunted by ghosts of a peculiarly fearsome and truculent sort. The house itself was all that such a house should be—Jacobean and oak-paneled, with long, dark passages and light vaulted rooms. It stood, also, very remote and was encompassed by a wood of sombre pines that muttered and whispered in the dark. And all the time we were there, a southwesterly gale with torrents of scolding rain had prevailed, so that by day and night weird voices moaned and fluted in the chimneys. A company of uneasy spirits held colloquy among the trees, and southern tattoo's and tappings beckoned from the window panes. But in spite of these surroundings, which were sufficient in themselves, one would almost say, to spontaneously generate occult phenomena, nothing of any description had occurred. I am bound to add also that my own state of mind was peculiarly well-adapted to receive, or even to invent, sights and sounds we had gone to seek. But I was, I confess, during the whole time that we were there, in a state of abject apprehension, and lay awake both nights, through hours of terrified unrest, afraid of the dark, yet more afraid of what a lighted candle might show me.

Hugh Granger, on the evening after our return to town, had dined with me and after dinner, our conversation, as was natural, soon came back to these entrancing topics.

"But why you go ghost-seeking I cannot imagine," he said, "because your teeth were chattering and your eyes starting out of your head all the time you were there, from sheer fright."

“Or do you like being frightened?"

Hugh, though generally intelligent, is dense in certain ways. This is one of them.

“Of course I like being frightened,” I said. “I want to be made to creep, and creep, and creep. Fear is the most absorbing and luxurious of emotions. One forgets all else if one is afraid.”

“Well, the fact that neither of us saw anything,” he said, “confirms what I have always believed.”

“And what have you always believed?”

“That these phenomena are purely objective, not subjective, and that one state of mind has nothing to do with the perception that perceives them. Nor have circumstances or surroundings anything to do with either. Well, look at Osburton. It has had the reputation of being a haunted house for years, and it certainly has all the accessories of one. And look at yourself, too, with all your nerves on edge, afraid to look round or light a candle for fear of seeing something! Surely, there was the right man in the right place, then, if ghosts are subjective.”

He got up and lit a cigarette, and looking at him—he was about six feet high and as broad as he is long—I felt a retort on my lips.

I could not help my mind going back to a certain period in his life when, from some cause, which as far as I knew, he had never told anybody, he had become a mere quivering mass of disordered nerves. Oddly enough, at the same moment, and for the first time, he began to speak of it himself.

“You may reply that it was not worth my while to go either,” he said, “because I was so clearly the wrong man in the wrong place, but I wasn't. You—for all your apprehensions and expectancy—have never seen a ghost. But I have. Though I am the last person in the world you would have thought likely to do so. And though my nerves are steady enough again now, it knocked me all to bits.”

He sat down again in his chair.

“No doubt you remember my going to bits,” he said. “And since I believe that I am sound again now, I should rather like to tell you about it. But before I couldn't. I couldn't speak of it to anybody. Yet there ought to have been nothing frightening about it. What I saw was certainly a most useful and friendly ghost, but it came from the shaded-side of things. It looked suddenly out of the night and the mystery with which life is surrounded.

I want first to tell you, quite shortly, my theory about ghost-seeing,” he continued, “and I can explain it best by a simile, an image. Imagine, then, that you and I, and everybody in the world are like people

whose eye is directly opposite a little tiny hole in a sheet of cardboard, which is continually shifting, and revolving, and moving about. Back-to-back, with that sheet of cardboard, is another, which also, by laws of its own, is in perpetual, but independent, motion. In it, too, there's another hole. And when, fortuitously, it would seem, these two holes—the one through which we are always looking, and the other in the spiritual plane—come opposite one another, we see through. And only then, do sights and sounds of the spiritual world become visible or audible to us. With most people, these holes never come opposite each other during their life. But at the hour of death, they do. And then, they remain stationary. And that, I fancy, is how we 'pass over.'

"Now, in some natures, these holes are comparatively large and are constantly coming into opposition. Clairvoyants, mediums are like that. But as far as I know, I have no clairvoyant or mediumistic powers at all. I, therefore, am the sort of person who long ago made up his mind that he never would see a ghost. It was, so to speak, an incalculable chance that my minute spy-hole should come into opposition with the other. But it did, and it knocked me out of time."

I had heard some such theory before, and though Hugh put it rather picturesquely, there was nothing in the least convincing or practical about it. It might be so, or again, it might not.

"I hope your ghost was more original than your theory," said I, in order to bring him to the point.

"Yes. I think it was. You shall judge."

I put on more coal and poked up the fire.

Hugh has got—so I've always considered—great talent for telling stories, and that sense of drama which is so necessary for the narrator. Indeed, before now, I have suggested to him that he should take this up as a profession— sit by the fountain in Piccadilly Circus when times are, as usual, bad, and tell stories to passers-by in the street, Arabian-fashion, for reward. The most part of mankind, I am aware, do not like long stories, but to the few, among whom I number myself, who really like to listen to lengthy accounts of experiences, Hugh is an ideal narrator. I do not care for his theories or his similes, but when it comes to facts, the things that happened, I like him to be lengthy.

"Go on, please—and slowly," I said. "Brevity maybe the soul of wit, but it is the ruin of storytelling. I want to hear when, and where, and how it all was, and what you had for lunch, and where you dined, and what—"

Hugh began.

"It was the 24th of June, just 18 months ago," he said. "I had left my flat. You may remember and I came up from the country to stay with you for a week. We had dined alone here—"

I could not help interrupting.

“Did you see a ghost here!?” I asked. “In this square little box of a house in a modern street!?”

“I was in the house when I saw it.”

I hugged myself in silence.

“We had dined alone, here in Graham Street,” he said, “and after dinner I went out to some party and you stopped at home. At dinner, your man did not wait. And when I asked where he was, you told me he was ill, and I thought you changed the subject rather abruptly.

“You gave me your latchkey when I went out and on coming back, I found you had gone to bed. There were, however, several letters for me which required answers. I wrote them, there and then, and posted them at the pillar box, opposite. So, I suppose it was rather late when I went upstairs.

“You had put me in the front room on the third floor overlooking the street, a room which I thought you generally occupied yourself. It was a very hot night, and though there had been a moon when I started to my party, on my return, the whole sky was cloud-covered, and it both looked and felt as if we might have a thunderstorm before morning. I was feeling very sleepy and heavy, and it was not till after I got into bed that I noticed, by the shadows of the window frames on the blind, that only one of the windows was open. But it did not seem worthwhile to get out of bed in order to open it—though I felt rather airless and uncomfortable—and I went to sleep.

“What time it was when I awoke, I do not know, but it was certainly not yet dawn and I never remember being conscious of such an extraordinary stillness as prevailed. There was no sound, either of foot-passengers or wheeled-traffic. The music of life appeared to be absolutely mute. But now, instead of being sleepy and heavy I felt—although I must have slept an hour or two at most, since it was not yet dawn—perfectly fresh and wide awake. And the effort which had seemed not worth making before, that of getting out of bed and opening the other window, was quite easy now, and I pulled up the blind and threw it wide open and leaned out, for somehow I parched and pined for air. But even outside, the oppression was very noticeable. And though, as you know, I'm not easily given to feel the mental effects of climate, I was aware of an awful creepiness coming over me. I tried to analyze it away, but without success. The past day had been pleasant. I look forward to another pleasant day tomorrow, and yet I was full of some nameless apprehension. I felt too dreadfully lonely in this stillness before the dawn.

“And then I heard, suddenly and not very far away, the sound of some approaching vehicle. I could distinguish the tread of two horses walking at a slow-foot’s pace. They were, though not yet visible, coming up the street, and yet this indication of life did not abate that dreadful sense of loneliness, which I've spoken of. Also, in some dim, unformulated way, that which was coming seemed to me to have something to do with the cause of my oppression.

“Then the vehicle came into sight. At first I could not distinguish what it was, and then I saw that the horses were black and had long tails and that what they dragged was made of glass, but had a black frame. It was a hearse.

“Empty. It was moving up the side of the street. It stopped at your door.

“Then the obvious solution struck me—you had said, at dinner, that your man was ill and you were, I thought, unwilling to speak more about his illness. No doubt—so I imagine now—he was dead, and for some reason, perhaps because you did not want me to know anything about it, you were having the body removed at night. This, I must tell you, passed through my mind quite instantaneously, and it did not occur to me how unlikely it really was before the next thing happened.

“I was still leaning out of the window, and I remember also wondering, yet only momentarily, how odd it was that I saw things—or rather the one thing I was looking at—so very distinctly! Of course, there was a moon behind the clouds, but it was curious how every detail of the hearse and the horses was visible. There was only one man, the driver, with it, and the street was otherwise absolutely empty. It was him I was looking at now. I could see every detail of his clothes, but from where I was, so high above him, I could not see his face. He had on gray trousers, brown boots, a black coat buttoned all the way up, and a straw hat. And over his shoulder, there was a strap which seemed to support some sort of little bag. He looked exactly like— Well, from my description, what did he look exactly like?”

“Why—a bus conductor!” I said instantly.

“So I thought! And even while I was thinking this, he looked up at me—he had a rather long, thin face, and on his left cheek, there was a mole with a growth of dark hair on it. And all of this was as distinct as if it had been noonday and I was within a yard of him! But so instantaneous was all that takes so long in the telling, I had not time to think it strange that the driver of a hearse should be so unfunereally dressed.

“Then he touched his hat to me and jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

‘Just room for one inside, Sir,’ he said.

“There was something so odious, so coarse, so unfeeling about this that I instantly drew my head in, pulled the blind down again, and then, for what reason I do not know, I turned on the electric light in order to see what time it was.

“The hands of my watch pointed to half-past eleven.

“It was then, for the first time, I think, that a doubt crossed my mind as to the nature of what I had just seen. But I put out the light again and I got into bed and I began to think. We had dined. I'd gone to

a party. I'd come back and written letters. I had gone to bed. I had slept. So how could it be half-past eleven? Or—what half-past eleven was it?

“And then, another easy solution struck me—my watch must have stopped. But it had not. I could hear it ticking.

“There was stillness and silence again. I expected, every moment, to hear muffled footsteps on the stairs—footsteps moving slowly and smally under the weight of a heavy burden. But from inside the house there was no sound, whatever. Outside, too, there was the same dead-silence while the hearse waited at the door and the minutes ticked on and on.

And at length I began to see a difference in the light in the room, and I knew that dawn was beginning to break outside. But how had it happened, then, that if the corpse was to be removed at night it had not gone, and that the hearse still waited, when morning was already coming?

“Presently, I got out of bed again with a sense of strong physical shrinking, I went to the window and I pulled back the blind. The dawn was coming, fast. The whole street was lit by that silver hueless light of morning, but there was no hearse there.

“Once again, I looked at my watch. It was just a quarter-past four. But I would swear that not half an hour had passed since it had told me that it was half-past eleven!

“Then, a curious double-sense, as if I was living in the present and that same moment had been living in some other time, came over me. It was dawn on June 25th and the street, as natural, was empty. But a little while ago, the driver of a hearse had spoken to me and it was half-past eleven! What was that driver? To what plane did he belong? And again, what, half-past eleven was it that I had seen recorded on the dial of my watch?

“And then, I told myself that this whole thing had been a dream. But if you ask me whether I believed what I told myself, I must confess that I did not.

“Your man did not appear at breakfast the next morning, nor did I see him again before I left that afternoon. I think if I had, I should have told you all about all this. But it was still possible, you see, that what I had seen was a real hearse driven by a real driver. And for all the ghastly gaiety of the face that had looked up to mine, and the levity of his pointing hand, I might possibly have fallen asleep soon after seeing him and slumbered through the removal of the body in the departure of the hearse. So I did not speak to you of it.

“There was something wonderfully straight-forward and prosaic in all of this. Here were no Jacobean houses, oak-paneled and surrounded by weeping pine trees, and somehow the very absence of suitable surroundings made the story more impressive. But for a moment, a doubt assailed me. ‘Don't tell me it was all a dream,’ I said.

“Well, I don't know whether it was or not. I can only say that I believe myself to have been wide awake. In any case, the rest of the story is—odd.

“I went out of town again that afternoon, and I may say that I don't think that even for a moment did I get that haunting sense of what I had seen or dreamed that night out of my mind. It was present to me, always, as some vision unfulfilled It was as if some clock had struck the four quarters, and I was still waiting to hear the hour it would be.

“Exactly a month afterwards, I was in London again, but only for the day. I arrived at Victoria about 11:00, and I took the underground to Sloane Square in order to see if you were in town and would give me lunch. It was a baking hot morning and I intended to take a bus from Kings Road as far as Graham Street. There was one standing at the corner just as I came out of the station, but I saw that the top was full, and inside appeared to be full, also. Just as I came up to it, the conductor, who I suppose had been inside—collecting fares and whatnot—came out on the step, within a few feet of me. He wore grey trousers, brown boots, a black coat—buttoned—a straw hat, and over his shoulder was a strap on which hung his little machine for punching tickets.

“Now, I saw his face, too. It was the face of the driver of the hearse with a mole on the left cheek!

“Then, he spoke to me, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

‘Just room for one inside, Sir,” he said.

“At that, a sort of panic—terror took possession of me, and I know I gesticulated wildly with my arms and I cried, 'No! No!’

“But at that moment, I was living not in the hour that was then passing, but in the hour which had passed a month ago, when I leaned from the window of your bedroom, here, just before the dawn broke.

“At this moment, too, I knew that my spy-hole had been opposite the spy-hole into the spiritual world.

“What I had seen there had some significance, now being fulfilled, beyond the significance of the trivial happenings of today and tomorrow. The powers, of which we know so little, were visibly working before me, and I stood there on the pavement shaking and trembling!

“I was opposite the post office at the corner, and just as the bus started, my eye fell on the clock in the window there. I need not tell you what the time was.

“Perhaps I need not tell you all the rest, for you probably conjecture it since you will not have forgotten what happened at the corner of Sloane Square at the end of July, the summer before last. The bus pulled out from the pavement into the street in order to get round a van that was standing in

front of it. At that moment, there came down the King's Road, a big motor going at a hideously dangerous pace. It crashed full into the bus, burrowing into it as a gimlet burrows into a board!”

He paused.

“And that's my story,” he said.

[audience applauds]

[00:39:52] [upbeat piano solo begins and fades to background music] **Podcast Announcer:** This podcast was presented by The Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening. [background music ends]