

The Testimony of Mr. William Cary Falling

I understand, or am compelled to, that it all may seem very odd to you. Truthfully, I sit here now, and you ask me to tell you the story again—it will end with the same conclusion. Do you think me a liar? I said that I understand you, but I cannot be sure. I must admit, your inability to comprehend my actions, and even more so, my motives for them, goes beyond a sheer inconvenience. I am a man of curiosity. I desire knowledge, knowledge that I would not otherwise obtain without trial, and regretfully, error.

But I did not make a mistake—no, not at all, sir—on the contrary, everything had gone as planned. Here, I will explain it to you again:

My friend, or so you call him (for I saw him as more of a brother), had indeed known me for many years prior. It seemed as if we had known each other, one might say, even before the turn of the twentieth century. As it happened, we were very close, and I often saw him for dinner, or for some other occurrence. You may find it intriguing, and perhaps even pertinent to my story, that John and I were strikingly similar. In appearance, I mean to say, except that John kept no facial hair, and I would rarely shave mine. His full name? You make me laugh. How would I forget my own brother, a good man and a good friend? His name was John Marshall Hancock. I apologize if I seem to chuckle, it just excites me, the irony of it. I suppose you'll ask me if I can do so well as to remember my own title. I shall save you the trouble, sir, for my name is William Cary Falling. Now, I shall continue. I do remember one of those nights, at dinner, a time ago. I had arrived late—much too occupied with my own thoughts to remember the date—and as I entered the room I was welcomed with such a sweet smile from my dear friend's wife that I could only imagine she had similar admiration for me. You will forgive me for not stating her name: Elizabeth. Dear, dear Elizabeth. This had not been the only time she looked at me so. There were many looks before, and I felt, at this point, that Elizabeth gazed at me in the same manner she did at her husband. So you will understand, then, my reasoning. I was curious—merely curious—if Elizabeth would accept me as her partner, whether in ignorance or in sincerity.

Oh, what an experiment! What a test! With this desire driving me, I devised a plan. I

carefully crafted the story myself—the story of William Cary Falling, sorrowfully passing in his bed at night; how unfortunate! Yes, of William regretfully dying an early death, albeit a peaceful one. I, William, of course, was not going to be on my deathbed. John, in taking my place—how? Oh, sir, I wouldn't dream of boring you with the details. And in fact, it was quite a careful action. Ha-ha-ha! He would be found in my room, sound asleep the next morning! I acquired his wardrobe, and exchanged with him mine; I even shaved my face and fastened a beard on him, so as to be entirely convincing. So, now, Elizabeth was missing her dear husband, and I was presumed dead!

However, as you know, this was not the end of my inquiries. There were steps in this quest for knowledge yet to be taken. As such, I made the preparations to attend the funeral, my

funeral—indeed, they had one—and on the day of the event, I installed myself in the utmost back of the room, nearer the left. I had resolved to address Elizabeth after the fact. First, I said to myself, I must enjoy the consequences of my effort! Taking my seat, I laid eyes upon dear Elizabeth, on the right side and in the third row, and—here I looked again—were her eyes swollen? I could not be sure. The anticipation in waiting for the result of my trial was unbearable, and yet, so exhilarating! Through every song the whole of us sang—it is an interesting thing, to sing in mourning—I kept my eyes on her and the empty place beside her. And the most pleasing, the most exciting thing that happened during this time, was this: while the reverend said his message, as he delivered his words on my behalf, Elizabeth wept! She wept! Bitterly! Oh, I was delighted! Here it is, I said to myself! Here is the peak, the perfect conclusion to my research! These were great tears, many tears, tears that led me to believe—only for a moment, for it couldn't be—that they were for her own husband. She was devastated by my parting. How could it not be so, when I had been so sure after those many nights at dinner? To Elizabeth, her beloved husband was missing, and his dearest friend had left this dreary world all too soon. Her tears must be for that friend, that friend who through death had brought her true heart to life.

With such enthusiasm I listened to the reverend's compulsory kindness. Yes, I suppose he was never quite fond of me, but I did not know to what extent! To some of his words about me I simply could not react with anything but an audible laugh! The man stood, in front of his blessed

congregation, describing me with such remarks as “a curious man” and “perturbed in the mind”. All of these declarations forced me to chuckle. But—oh sir, I cannot contain myself—you must hear the last of his condolences. If you would allow me one moment to recall it—oh yes: “Alas, the man has met his end. And as he passes on to a new life, wherever that may be, he leaves behind a memory that I am convinced cannot be continued by any other. Mr. Falling will certainly be in our thoughts—as an intriguing acquaintance to any who knew him, and to us...” Here I would swear he uttered, “an unholy man”! To this I roared aloud!

It was now nearing the end of the event. This I remember vividly. By this time my face was cheerfully red. A funeral, becoming such a lively gathering? Is it not almost natural for it to be so, when even the dead receive flowers on this day? Nevertheless, I attempted to collect myself. I suppose it is not customary to see a man smiling in mourning. I collected myself and rose from my seat. Oh, I was still smiling beneath my silent demeanor. For I could not do anything to stop my emotion! This was a cheerful day, sir, I will not pretend. The surrounding guests may even attest to having seen me skip on my way to approach Elizabeth! Ha-ha-ha! If I had cried, it would have been tears of joy.

Do your best not to interrupt me, kind sir, at this most important part of my story. I rose, and I approached Elizabeth—quite hastily; I then introduced myself quickly as her beloved husband, who had been absent, raising my hand to replace the hat on my head and tip it. I smiled, just subtly. I still refuse to comprehend it! You would expect her to welcome me home, to be elated, would you not? I, or rather, her husband, had been misplaced for some days now! But, to no avail. As I greeted her with a warm introduction, Elizabeth stood—slowly and carefully—turning to face me. It was her eyes. Her eyes I did not understand. She merely stood,

and she set her eyes on me so that they were almost matching mine, but not fully—and she remained there. I do not know for how long. An estimate I cannot even begin to imagine. In her gaze were several years of words, all in the matter of a few minutes. A glance that must have held the world in it—and yet, the meaning was revealed to all but me. So hidden! So peculiar! How, how can I describe it—?

I apologize, sir, I have just remained silent for several minutes. Only... There is a red

sensation in my head that, that I cannot recognize... Slower? I am speaking slower, and softer? I had not known. My face feels hot—ah, I realize that I have shed tears—I cannot see now... Nor could I see then, standing before Elizabeth. Yet I still kept a smile, as I feel myself doing presently... Aah, ha-ha... Hah!—do I tremble?... That gaze had me lost, I am lost, I tell you! I am sorry, I do not mean to increase my voice. I have just had a minute to compose myself. As you require, sir, I shall end my story. You tell me that Elizabeth herself was responsible for its ending, and this I refuse to believe. Even so, I will finish it: Elizabeth's eyes must have held me in a trance, as you now are well aware of. She must have some force that I, or any other man, cannot perceive. Such a strong force, indeed, that after she had held me there, I felt my hands being taken and restrained, quite indifferently. For some seconds more I understood not where this grip was coming from, until I looked left and right and behind myself to see three policemen clasp iron on my wrists, and I heard, "You are under arrest, Mr. Falling, for the murder of John Marshall Hancock."