



The Oath

M. Paris

To you,

He was wandering lonely through the alleys of Bath. It was midnight, and the howling wind was unusually cold. Anyone strolling by would have felt the freezing chill across the body. At that time, however, it was not unusual to find the streets deserted, and only robbers and those of no fixed addresses would be seen. Nevertheless, Arnold was still walking, and clouds of fog were emanating from his mouth as he breathed. He didn't feel the cold packed with the weather, for the flaming rage in his heart dominated his body, leaving him almost numb. As he walked, he swayed absentmindedly, nearly falling on the ground. His green feeble eyes scanned the street, but only emptiness met his eyes. Bristlewood street was fearfully silent, except for a flock of crows that started into the night as Arnold passed by the trees near the sidewalk.

A white parchment stuck on a lamp post fortunately caught his attention. During that time, parchments were considered of great importance for English people. They often held significant announcements from people of higher classes. Arnold, merely out of curiosity, deliberately moved closer, wanting to see what was scribbled. Staggering as he stepped, he took his hand into his frock coat's pocket, revealing a tattered cigar. He laid it between his lips without lighting it and tried to balance himself in front of the lamp post. After taking time to focus, he finally read:

*To whom it may concern,
Sir Bennet, the owner of the Harrietoille manor, is currently looking for a new servant who could decently assist him with his minor errands he regularly undertakes. If you believe you are worthy of holding such a position, you are requested to meet Sir Bennet at the following address:*

*Bath, Gotswolds
Barpond Street
Harrietoille Manor*

The moment Arnold finished deciphering the parchment, a flash of brief memory was evoked in his mind. The scene was blurry: Initially, he was standing in what seemed like a garden, a bewitching one. Blossoms, roses, and foxgloves were scattered everywhere. An elegant stone fountain filled with clear water stood near a pomegranate tree. Behind, a paved lane made its way to an old, yet classy manor house. The sky was inky and nearly

starless, and the tender breeze carried out the refreshing scent of flowers. An air of relaxation and tranquility was settling in the yard. A bellowing aged man, however, tainted the pleasing memory. He was shouting fiercely, waving his right hand alarmingly. In his palm he was clutching a short dagger. The words the man blurted out were incomprehensible and difficult to recall. After what appeared like a barbaric quarrel, the man harshly let Arnold out of the garden. The memory started to fade out of him, leaving him with an echoing, killing voice ringing in his ears.

Arnold found himself staring at the parchment again, bewildered by the scene he has just recalled. It was long ago, and he had almost completely forgotten about it. He froze there for a while, trying to realize where did that fragment of memory come from. He skimmed through his thoughts and memories, trying to recover an inkling that would tell him more. After various attempts, however, he found himself lost in his memories, not even able to call back the day before. He rubbed his eyes with his slender fingers, and continued his way. He was heading home. Although he passed through the same street everyday, he still struggled to find his way.

Arnold stood before his one-story shack's door. He slipped his hand into his coat's pocket, grasping a rusted key. As he opened the door, the smell of dust escaped the shack. The door handle was nearly going to fall when Arnold slammed it from inside. The room was gloomy and pessimistic, only illuminated by a grimy lantern on a shelf. The air was still chilly inside, for the shut windows failed to prevent the cold weather from creeping inside. Despite that, Arnold was still benumbed, pondering. He took off his worn hat and placed it gently on a table near an empty glass bottle. Arnold was definitely weary. Before he could even take off his coat, he found himself lying on his mattress, his eyes semi-closed. The scene he remembered on his way home was still swirling in his mind. He was certain that it wasn't complete, and that a vital part was missing in his cluttered thoughts.

Soothing a while, Arnold eventually fell into a deep sleep. Murkiness swept through his mind, stealing all his confused thoughts and feelings. Gradually, a vivid scene started to materialize in a form of a dream, sneaking throughout every corner of his mind. The scene was too familiar and clear. It was the very same scene Arnold was desperately searching for: He was standing again in the middle of that enchanting garden, ensnared by the heavenly fragrances emitting from the flowers on every side. The stone fountain was still there, spraying clear water into the air. It was the witching hour. The whole garden was peaceful and silent, until the same bellowing man approached. He was shouting, yelling, and waving

his hand that clutched the dagger uneasily. As he advanced toward Arnold, the white moonlight fell on his vexed face. It was Orville Bennet.

“I beg your mercy Mr. Bennet,” said Arnold in the dream, “Consider me truthful. Believe me.”

“How shall I forgive you,” replied Mr. Bennet outrageously, “when you have betrayed me and killed him?”

“Why are you accusing me regarding something I haven't even done?” asked Arnold. He was now stepping backward as Orville threatened his feeble soul with that dagger.

“Are you trying to deceive me again?” continued Orville, “The toxic flask in your room explicitly explains everything. Now leave!” he roared, “Leave before I shall stab you in the heart, and let your soul be tortured in this filthy world, before it diminishes as a consequence of unbearable agony.”

Full of fear, Arnold dashed out of the manor's gate and ran into the cold darkness. Now having no shelter, he sat hopelessly under a leafless tree. In a while, rain started to cascade and small water droplets began trickling on him.

In a matter of seconds, the whole scene blurred again, and Arnold was now lying on the rotten mattress, still clad in his black coat. He was not weary anymore, and several thoughts were swirling in his mind. He now remembered what happened exactly twelve years ago when his life was unexpectedly ruined. After all, he wasn't guilty. Following all these years, Arnold now knew that his mind will not rest before he takes an action, his revenge. He barely knew what to do, until suddenly he realized a wicked conception. He was then sure it was the only solution for extinguishing his flaming anger he has developed all these years. *Nobody would know*, he thought, *if it were executed flawlessly... Now?*

He dashed suddenly to a wooden drawer at the corner of the room where he opened it and looked inside thoughtfully. He was uncertain, yet his deep heart was urging him mercilessly. With his shaking hand, he took what was inside. It was a rusty dagger with a wooden hilt. As he stared at his fist, a river of harsh memories rushed through Arnold's mind. They were memories of days long lived in lanes, of his lost wife and daughter, of many other sufferings no one would ever endure. They were excruciating. He forced himself from the trance and looked through the window, the moon was full. *Perfect*, he thought as he smirked.

He inserted the dagger into his coat's pocket, put on his black hat, and left the shack swiftly. The city of Bath didn't seem to have lost its cold weather. Arnold, however, was resolved on continuing despite his freezing body and shaky legs.

“Barpond Street,” he muttered while walking. He grabbed a cigarette from his pocket and inserted it between his rosy lips. He hurried a little, checking every now and then for any signs of other pedestrians. His stamina was not dependable. He didn't cease anyways. Finding Barpond Street was a hectic task, for Arnold had long been into those streets, and the hope of finding Harrierville showed almost impossible. What made things worse was the anger Arnold held, which left him nearly unconscious of his acts. He kept walking unswervingly, having no idea where his way led to, until he found a huge gate near a big oak tree. Hunch has certainly played its role. A chill went across his spine as he stared upon the gate. An air of mightiness surrounded the area. He moved closer, and found that engraved on the gate were the words *Harrierville Manor*.

“The very same Harrierville.” said Arnold thoughtfully.

He checked his pocket again, and then deliberately knocked on the gate. The sound echoed across the field. Arnold could hear his heart pounding as he breathed heavily. His hands started to shake as the river of cruel memories intruded his thoughts. A clicking behind the gate, however, disturbed his trance. Out of the gray gate appeared what seemed like a startled old man. His face directly showed marks of prejudice and hatred. As Arnold's eyes met the old man's, Arnold recognized him as Orville Bennet. At the first glance, Orville didn't realize whom he was confronting, until Arnold clasped his hat and threw it on the paved ground.

“Arnold?” inquired Orville with eyes full of shock and fear.

“Who else?” replied Arnold.

“Raymond!” cried Orville as he looked behind. But Arnold, grasping the dagger in his pocket, quickly leaped on Orville, with both of them falling on the pavement and Arnold on top of the old man. Without hesitation, he let slip the rusty dagger from his pocket and pointed it at Orville's neck. At that particular moment, maximum fright was plain on Orville's face.

“What is it that you want?” said Orville with a forehead packed with sweat. “Money?” he asked Arnold. “Just leave me, and I promise you will not leave without three hundred pounds.”

“I neither want money nor gold.” said Arnold fiercely. “I want your precious life!”

“Why? Stop!” said Orville with a clammy face, for Arnold has lightly tapped the dagger with his neck.

“Why should I stop? Why didn't you stop twelve years ago when you accused me of murdering my best friend, Clark?” said Arnold with an aggressive tone. “Since then and my soul has been killed everyday. I can tell that you have completely demolished my life. Do you still remember Rosaline?” asked Arnold. And as he pronounced her name, tears ran down his cheeks. “Do you remember my daughter, that little angel who was hated by no one? She passed away with her mother ten years ago during the last years of the plague that took over Bath. It was all your fault. You have ruthlessly obliged me to live in the streets. They couldn't have died if..” he choked, “They could have been beside me right now if you hadn't done what you did. I'm saying it again, I'm not guilty. Clark's murder has been executed by one of his kinsmen. And now, I believe, is the time to take revenge. My life would be meaningless with you still alive.”

Orville was lost for words. His face showed how much he resented what he did to Arnold. Tears filled his eyes before he muttered, “I'm sorry.”

These were his last words before Arnold held the dagger's hilt and stabbed Orville twice: in his arm, and then directly in his heart. Seconds later, the old man was lying down on the red grass, motionless. He was lying on the same spot Arnold has had the quarrel with him long ago, in that same garden. Nothing could be heard save the sound of water rushing out of the fountain. Removing the dagger from the Orville's body, Arnold stood up, wrapped the dagger with a white handkerchief he had brought, closed the manor's gate and escaped. He ran through the quiet streets and into the darkness. He was willing to return back to his shack before the dawn arrives. Throughout his way, his mind swirled with unpleasant thoughts concerning the crime he has just done; he tried the best he can to sooth his mind and convince himself that what he had done was the pure just. He again remembered his wife and Rosaline, and felt a tiny sparkle of victory inside his heart, for he finally got rid of the one who caused their death.

Now his thoughts turned to himself. He halted for a second. *What am I to do now?* Arnold thought to himself. Mr. Orville Bennet was a well-known figure in Bath, and his death would definitely stir the city. After much contemplation on his way, he determined on moving to London and run from all the mess he had left in Bath. He would start a new life there and Mr. Bennet's murderer would never be found. He eventually rested on this decision. When he finally reached his shack's door all of his strength has been consumed. He was barely able to open the door before he threw himself onto the dusty mattress again, drowning in a long sleep. His night, or in fact his day, turned out to be a peaceful one. Arnold woke up and regained his power at noon. Shock didn't appear to have abandoned him since the murder he had committed the night before. He didn't have enough time to feel the taste of guiltiness for the reason that he must travel to London the same day.

He took out a grimy leather bag from under his bed and opened it. The moth inside sent an odor that was unbearable, yet Arnold insisted on using it to pack his clothes, for he didn't have any other. He laid inside a couple of shoes and coats, along with some pants, and forced a small pillow. Arnold knew that he was going to live a meaningless, hard life in the next years, but he then realized how easier his life will flow with Orville away from this world.

He spent the remaining hours before night came arranging for his department. He was to leave at night before midnight on a train that stopped by Bath and continued to London. He was not sure whether what he was doing was appropriate for the situation, nevertheless, he was determined on moving.

The night arrived, and Arnold has not yet left the shack. He was still sitting on the mattress, still sane. He was waiting until the streets were empty, for precaution seemed necessary. He looked through one of his thin windows. *I believe it's the time*, he thought to himself. He then turned to an old shelf on one of the walls and held the only lantern that was illuminating the room. With a wave from his arm, he threw it on the wooden floor, igniting a small flame. The raging fire started to spread until it reached his bed. Before the whole shack was caught in fire, Arnold took his leather bag and hastily rushed into the gloomy streets. A while later, he turned back to notice that the flames has spread all around his shack. With a bitter smile drawn on his face, Arnold continued his way.

This time, he knew were he was going. He was heading north to an old train station that used to be a bustling area where people who desired to travel across England grouped there.

But now, and after news of some kind of a new plague spreading throughout London, less people were encouraged to go there. In fact, when Arnold arrived to the station, the place was nearly deserted. As he walked through the narrow lane between two railways on either sides, he found a vacant wooden bench near a broken lamp post. He sat there with his bag, and waited patiently for the train. He was certain that a train leading to London will arrive soon, but he wasn't sure exactly when.

A sense of irritation flooded Arnold's heart as a tall figure descended down the stairs on the left and walked down the lane, holding a small bag in his right hand. He had visible blonde hair beneath a gray wool hat he was wearing, and his dark brown eyes surveyed the area for any abnormalities. As he approached Arnold briskly, a flicker of memory told Arnold who the man was. Squinting a little, he was almost sure it was Raymond Hollingberry, Orville's current servant, and an old friend of Arnold. Both of them, along with Clark, the third servant whom Orville accused Arnold of murdering, were almost best friends.

When Raymond finally walked past Arnold, he gave him a stern look before he came into a complete stop. Arnold hoped he wouldn't notice him, but it was too late.

“It's you again?” muttered Raymond. Arnold has clearly heard him.

“Raymond! What errand would bring you here?” asked Arnold with unease. Puzzling thoughts began to whirl in his head.

“It's your acts that brought me here.” replied Raymond. Bad temper was obvious on his face.

“What have I done?” stuttered Arnold.

“You know what you did.” cried Raymond as he inserted his hand into his coat's pocket. “It seems you have forgotten the oath we had taken years ago.” he continued.

“What oath?” said Arnold. At that moment, he felt what seemed like life turning against him, betraying him. He skimmed his frail memory, at least hoping to find an answer, but he was lost again.

“That oath Arnold.” said Raymond, “That oath we took long ago with Clark, when we promised to murder anyone who would assault our chief master, Mr. Bennet. You have agreed to protect our savior, even it would cost you your life. But you have failed. You have broken...”

“May you stop!” interrupted Arnold, his tears already pouring, “Haven't you seen what he had done to my life too? Life bitterness has corrupted my thoughts and memories, and I was obliged to do so.” he continued to sob helplessly, “Now tell me, how did you know it was me who murdered him?”

“I heard his weak screams while I was inside and so rushed to see what happened, and saw you retrieving your dagger from his body and escaping.” Raymond's eyes now went into tears. “I was literally terrified, and knew that people would accuse me of his murder if I didn't escape too. I hid his body in the basement, and here I am waiting for the train to arrive, to start a new life, and end the one you have corrupted with your own hands.” Arnold finally began to feel the guilt he should have felt long ago. He couldn't stop sobbing, but he knew that nothing could undo the past. With all the remaining power, he stood up and gave Raymond a nostalgic hug.

“I'm sorry.” Arnold told his friend, “Let's forget the past.”

Not acknowledging Arnold's apology, Raymond replied, “I'm sorry too, but oaths are not meant to be broken. It's for our sake.” He wanted to fulfill the oath and take revenge for the future days he'll live in misery and wretchedness. Hesitantly but quickly, he took out his cold hand from his pocket, revealing with it a small dagger thirsty for blood. With a strong push, he stabbed Arnold in his back, forcing the rusty metal in between his spines. A pathetic shriek came out of Arnold before his body fell on the floor, still.

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