

To Cesare Lombroso

My illustrious friend,

Last April, when your scientific jubilee was celebrated, seeing the draft of this little volume once again, I had the idea to unite my own faint storyteller's voice with the unanimous applause of Scientists around the world in reverent homage to you.

And it was not only my old affectionate devotion that led me to this, but also the idea that, with the subject of the two novellas united here, having some connection to your recent, most objective studies of psychic phenomena, and of which we spoke in Rome each time I had the pleasure of seeing you, I would avoid striking too false a note of homage.

Accept this, my Illustrious Friend, with your characteristic kindness, and trust that I am always

your most affectionate
Luigi Capuana

Catania, June 28, 1906

A Vampire

“No, don't laugh!” exclaimed Lelio Giorgi, interrupting himself.

“What do you mean don't laugh?” replied Mongeri. “I don't believe in ghosts.”

“I didn't used to believe in them . . . and I didn't want to believe in them, either,” Giorgi responded.

“I've come to you precisely to get an explanation of certain facts which could destroy my happiness, facts that have already troubled my reason extraordinarily.”

“Facts? . . . You mean hallucinations. It means you're sick and you need to take care of yourself.

Hallucinations, yes, are facts, too; but what they represent can't be found outside of ourselves, in reality. They are, to explain myself better, sensations that move from inside to the outside; a kind of projection from our organism. And so the eye sees that which it really does not see; the ear hears that which it really does not hear. Previous sensations, often accumulated unknowingly, re-awaken inside us, and organize themselves as in dreams. Why? How? We still don't know. . . . And we dream (that is the correct expression) with our eyes open. You must distinguish. There are momentary, rapid hallucinations, which don't imply any kind of organic or psychic disorder. Then there are persistent ones, and then . . . But, this isn't the case with you.”

“Yes; mine and my wife's!”

“You're not understanding. The hallucinations that lunatics have are what we scientists call persistent. I don't believe it's necessary to explain myself with examples . . . The fact then that both of you are suffering from the same hallucination, and at the same time, is a simple case of induction. It's probably you that are influencing your wife's nervous system.”

“No; first it was her.”

“Then that means that your nervous system is weaker or has greater receptiveness . . . Don't make such

a face, my dear poet, at the sound of such of horrible vocabulary, which perhaps does not exist in your dictionaries. We find it comfortable and it serves us well.”

“If you had let me speak . . . “

“It's better not to stir certain things up. You wanted a scientific explanation? Well then, in the name of science, I tell you that, for now, there isn't any sort of explanation to give you. We're in the hypothesis stage. We make one each day; today's isn't the same as yesterday's; tomorrow's won't be the same as today's. You artists are so curious! When it benefits you, you deride science, you don't give due value to the trials, the studies, the hypotheses that allow science to progress; then, if you have a case that interests you personally, you expect it to give you clear, precise, categorical answers. There are, unfortunately, scientists who lend themselves to this game, either through conviction or vanity. I am not one of these. Do you want me to tell you loud and clear? Science is the greatest proof of our ignorance. To calm you, I've spoken to you about hallucinations, inductions, receptiveness . . . Words, my dear! The more I study, the more I despair of ever knowing anything for sure. It seems intentional; we scientists are still congratulating ourselves for having verified a law, when slap! a fact shows up, a discovery that disproves it, with a back-handed slap. You must resign yourself. And just let it go, what's happening to you and your wife and has happened to many others. It will pass. Is it that you care to know why and how it could have happened? Perhaps your dreams worry you?”

“If you would allow me to speak . . .”

“Please, speak, since you want to unburden yourself; but I tell you in advance that you'll make it worse. The only way to overcome certain impressions is to distract yourself, to impose stronger impressions over them, distancing yourself from the places that likely contributed to producing them. One devil drives out another: it's a very wise proverb.”

“We've tried that; it was useless. The first phenomenon, the initial manifestations happened in the country, at our villa in Foscolara . . . We ran away. But the same night that we arrived in the city . . .”

“It's natural. What kind of distraction could your house have given you? You should have stayed away, stayed in hotels, a day here, a day there; run around all day going to churches, monuments, museums, theaters, and returned to the hotel at night tired, dead tired . . .”

“We did that too, but . . .”

“The two of you alone, I imagine. You should have found some friends to keep you company, a party . . .”

“We did that; it was useless.”

“Who knows what kind of party!”

“Happy people . . .”

“Egotists, you mean, and you found yourselves isolated among them, I understand . . .”

“We took part in their happiness, sincerely, we were carefree. But as soon as we were alone . . . We couldn't get them to sleep with us . . .”

“But where did you sleep, then? Now I don't understand whether you speak of hallucinations or just dreams . . .”

“Enough with the hallucinations, with the dreams! We were awake, with our eyes wide open, with our senses and our spirits clear, like I am right now, trying to reason with you, and you insist on not allowing me.”

“As you wish.”

“I at least want to tell you the facts.”

“I know them, I can imagine them; all of the scientific books are chock full of them. There might be insignificant differences in the smallest details . . . they don't count. The essential nature of the phenomenon doesn't change.”

“You don't even want to give me the satisfaction . . . ?”

“A hundred times, if it will make you happy. You're the type that loves to wallow in your misery, you almost want to drink it . . . It's stupid, excuse me! . . . But if it makes you happy . . .”

“Frankly, you seem as though you're afraid.”

“Afraid of what? Wouldn't that be something!”

“Afraid of having to change your opinion. I've told you: I don't believe in ghosts. And what if, afterward, you were forced to believe in them?”

“Okay, yes; that would annoy me. What do you want? This is what we scientists are: we are men, my dear. When our way of seeing, of judging, has taken a turn, the intellect refuses to remain faithful to the senses. Intelligence is a matter of habit, too. You're putting my back against the wall. Go ahead. Let's hear these famous facts.”

“Oh! . . .” exclaimed Lelio Giorgi with a huge sigh. “You are already aware of the unfortunate circumstances that forced me to seek my fortune in America. Luisa's family opposed our marriage; like all families – and I'm not saying they were wrong – they too watched over the financial situation of he who hoped to become their daughter's husband. They didn't have faith in my talent; they even doubted that I was a poet. The one little volume of juvenile verses then published was my biggest disgrace. Not that I have published, or written anything, since then; but you yourself, just now, called me 'my dear poet!' The label has been stuck to me ever since, almost as if it were written in indelible ink. Enough. They say there's a God for drunks and for children. They need to add: And one for poets, too, since I have to pass for a poet.”

“Just look at how literary the lot of you are. We always begin with the egg!”

“Don't get impatient. Listen. During the three years that I lived in Buenos Aires, I never heard from Luisa. An inheritance from an uncle I had never met dropped out of the sky, I returned to Europe, ran to London . . . and with two hundred thousand lire from the Bank of England flew here . . . where the saddest disappointment awaited me. Luisa had been married for six months! And I had loved her first! . . . The poor thing had had to give in to the pressures of her family. I swear I wasn't far from doing something crazy. These details, you see, are not superfluous. . . I made the foolish mistake of writing her a hot-headed letter of reproach, and mailed it to her. I hadn't foreseen that it might end up in her husband's hands. The next day he presented himself at my house. I understood immediately the enormity of my act and told myself to be calm. He was calm, too.

“I've come to return your letter,” he said. “I opened the envelope by mistake, not indiscretion; and it's good that it happened this way. I have been assured that you are a gentleman. I respect your pain, but I hope you don't wish to uselessly disturb my family's peace. If you can find the strength to reflect on it, you will see that no one meant to cause you harm on purpose. We can't escape certain destinies in life. You understand by now what your fate is. I tell you then, without arrogance, that I will defend my domestic happiness at any cost.”

He had gone pale while speaking and his voice shook. “Please forgive my imprudence,” I answered.

“And, to reassure you, I tell you that I will leave for Paris tomorrow.”

I must have been even paler than him; the words left my mouth with difficulty. He held out his hand to me; I shook it. And I kept my word. Six months later, I received a telegram from Luisa: “I am a widow. I still love you. And you?” Her husband had been dead for two months.”

“That's how the world is: one man's misfortune is another man's happiness.”

“That's what I, selfishly, thought too; but it's not always true. I felt like I had touched the sky on the night of my wedding and during the first few months of our marriage. We avoided, by tacit agreement, speaking of *him*. Luisa had destroyed all traces of him. Not out of ingratitude, since he, fooling himself that he was loved, would have done anything to make her happy; but because she feared that even a shadow of a memory, however insignificant, might upset me. She guessed right. At certain times, the thought that the body of my darling had been in full possession, however legitimate, of another, wrung my heart so that I shuddered from head to toe. I forced myself to hide it from her. Feminine intuition, however, often clouded Luisa's beautiful eyes with melancholy. And so I saw her beaming with joy when she was sure of being able to announce that the fruit of our love was beating within her breast. I remember it perfectly: we were drinking coffee, I was standing, she was sitting with a posture of sweet

weariness. It was the first time a nod to the past escaped her lips.

"I'm so happy," she exclaimed, "that this has only now happened!"

I heard a loud knock at the door, as if someone were beating at it with his fist. We were startled. I ran to see, suspecting the heedlessness of a maid or servant; there was no one in the room next door."

"A crash, perhaps produced by the loss of heat in the wood, due to the season, would have sounded like the knock of a fist."

"I gave such an explanation, seeing that Luisa was very troubled; but I wasn't convinced. A strong sense of embarrassment, I don't know how else to define it, had gotten a hold of me and I couldn't succeed in hiding it. We waited for a few minutes. Nothing. From then on, however, I noticed that Luisa avoided being alone; the disturbance persisted in her, although she didn't dare confess it to me, nor did I to ask her."

"And so, now I understand, you influenced each other, unknowingly."

"Not at all. A few days later I laughed at that foolish impression; and I attributed Luisa's interesting state to the excess of nervous excitement in her actions. Then she seemed to calm down, too. She gave birth. After a few months, however, I realized that that sense of fear, even terror, had returned. One night, all of a sudden, she clutched at me, icy, trembling. "What's wrong? Are you feeling sick?" I asked her anxiously. "I'm scared...Didn't you hear that?" "No." "You didn't hear that?..." she asked the following night. "No." Instead this time I heard the faint sound of footsteps in the room, up and down, around the bed; I said no so as not to frighten her further. I lifted my head, looked... "A mouse must have gotten into the room..." "I'm scared!...I'm scared!". For many nights, at exactly midnight, the same shuffling, that inexplicable coming and going, up and down, of an invisible person, around the bed. We expected it."

"And your heated fantasies did the rest."

"You know me well; I'm not a man who excites easily. I was good, indeed, for Luisa; I tried giving factual explanations: echoes, reverberations of far-away sounds; idiosyncrasies in the construction of the house that made it strangely resonant. . . We returned to the city. But the next night, the phenomenon reproduced itself with greater force. Twice the foot of the bed was shaken violently. I jumped down to better observe it. Luisa, curled up under the blankets, stammered: "It's him! It's him!" "Excuse me," Mongeri interrupted. "I'm not saying this to put any hard feelings between you and your wife, but I wouldn't marry a widow for all the gold in the world! Some part of the dead husband always remains, despite everything, inside the widow. Yes. 'It's him! It's him!' Not, as your wife believes, the ghost of the dead man. It's that *him*, that is that sensation, that impression of *him* that remains indelibly inside her body. We're talking basic physiology."

"It could be. But," responded Lelio Giorgi, "what does your physiology have to do with me?"

"You've been influenced; now it's clear, clear as day."

"Only influenced at night? At a fixed hour?"

"Expectant attention, oh! You're a prodigy."

"And how come the phenomenon changes each time, with unexpected details, when my imagination doesn't work to that extent?"

"So it seems to you. We're not always aware of what goes on inside us. The unconscious! Eh! Eh! You're a prodigy again."

"Let me continue. Save your explanations until I've finished. Note that in the morning, during the day, we thought over the facts with relative tranquility. Luisa reminded me of what she had heard, to compare it with what I had heard, precisely to convince ourselves, as you say, that our overexcited imaginations had invented it, that awful joke. It turned out that we had heard the same identical sound of footsteps, in the same direction, now slow, now fast; the same shaking at the foot of the bed, the same tug at the blankets and under the same circumstances, that is when I tried, with a caress, or a kiss, to soothe her fear, to keep her from crying out: "It's him! It's him!" it was almost as if that kiss, that caress were provoking anger in the invisible person. Then, one night, Luisa, clutching her neck,

bringing her lips to my ear, whispered, in a tone of voice that startled me, "He spoke!" "What did he say?" "I couldn't hear well. . . Did you hear it? He said: You're mine!" And even as I held her tightly to my chest, I could feel that Luisa's arms were being pulled back, violently, by two powerful hands; and they might have had to yield, despite Luisa's resistance."

"What resistance could she put up, if it was she herself shaking that way, without being aware of it?"

"All right . . . But I felt an obstruction too, someone interfering between me and her, someone who wanted to obstruct, at all costs, contact between me and her . . . I saw my wife thrown backwards, she was shoved . . . Since Luisa wanted to stay up, because the baby was sleeping in the cradle next to the bed, and we had heard the bars that the cradle hung from creaking, and had seen the cradle rocking and wobbling, and the covers go flying across the room, thrown into the air . . . That wasn't a hallucination. We gathered the covers; Luisa, trembling, put them back in place; but not long after they flew into the air again, and the baby, roused by the shaking, cried. Three nights ago, it got worse . . . Luisa seemed overpowered by *his* evil charm . . . She no longer heard me; if I called for her, she didn't realize that I was in front of her . . . She talked to *him* and, from her responses, I understood what *he* was saying.

"What fault is it of mine if you're dead? Oh! No, no! . . . How can you think it? Me, poison you? . . . To rid myself of you? . . . How shameful! And the baby, what fault is it of his? You're suffering? I'll pray for you, I'll have Masses said . . . You don't want Masses? . . . You want me? . . . But how? You're dead! . . ." In vain I shook her, I called to her to rouse her from her fixation, her hallucination . . . All of a sudden Luisa recomposed herself. "Did you hear that?" she said to me, "They're accusing me of poisoning him. You don't believe it . . . You wouldn't think me capable . . . oh God! And what will we do about the baby? He'll kill him! Did you hear him?" I hadn't heard anything, but I understood perfectly well that Luisa wasn't crazy, she wasn't delirious . . . She cried, taking the baby out of the cradle and holding it very tightly to protect it from *his* evil. "What will we do? What will we do?"

"But the baby was fine. This should have calmed you down."

"What do you want? Even the most solid-headed person can't witness something of that nature without being shaken. I'm not superstitious, but neither am I a free thinker. I'm the type that either believes or doesn't believe, the type that isn't interested in religious matters that I don't have the time or the desire . . . But in my situation, and under the influence of my wife's words: "I'll have Masses said for you," naturally I thought of having a priest intervene."

"You had an exorcism?"

"No, but I had him bless the house, with lots of holy water scattered around . . . to make an impression on poor Luisa's imagination, too, as if it were a case of exaggerated imagination, of upset nerves . . . Luisa is a believer. You laugh, but I'd like to have seen you in my shoes."

"And the holy water?"

"Useless. As if it hadn't been used."

"It wasn't a bad idea. At times science, too, resorts to similar methods in cases of nervous illness. We had a case of someone who believed his nose had grown enormously long. The doctor pretended to operate on him, with all of the instruments, tying up of veins, bandages . . . and the patient healed."

"The holy water, instead, made it worse. The next night . . . Oh! . . . I feel a shudder just thinking about it. Now all of his hatred was directed towards the baby . . . How to protect him? . . . Soon Luisa saw . . ."

"Or she thought she saw . . ."

"She saw, my friend, she saw . . . I saw too, almost. Since my wife couldn't get any closer to the cradle; a strange force blocked her . . . I trembled at the sight of her with her arms desolately reaching towards the cradle, while he – Luisa told me – stooped over the sleeping baby, was doing something terrible, mouth to mouth, as if he were sucking out its life, its blood . . . Three nights in a row the same nefarious operation was repeated and the baby, our dear little boy . . . he was no longer recognizable. Pale white, when he had been such a rosy child! As if he had really sucked out his blood; so incredibly wasted, in just three nights! Is this my imagination? Is it my imagination? You come and look."

“Then it must be? . . .”

Mongeri was pensive for a few minutes, his head down, knitting his eyebrows. A somewhat sarcastic, somewhat compassionate smile had appeared on his lips while Lelio Giorgi spoke, but it had suddenly disappeared. Then he raised his eyes, looked at his friend, who was watching him and anxiously waiting, and repeated:

“Then it must be? . . . Listen closely. I'm not going to explain anything to you, because I'm convinced that I can't explain anything. It's hard to be any more frank than this. But I can give you advice . . . empirical advice, that might make you laugh, especially coming from me . . . Use it how you wish.”

“I'll follow it today, right away.”

“It will take a few days, for several steps are required. I'll help you get through them as quickly as possible. I don't doubt the things that you have told me. I must add that, while science is reluctant to get involved with phenomena of such a nature, it has for a while now been less contemptuous than in the past: it is trying to restore these things to the realm of natural phenomena. For science, nothing else exists outside of the material world. Ghosts . . . science leaves ghosts to the believers, the mystics, and those imaginative people that today we call spiritualists. . . . For science, only the body is real, this structure of flesh and bone that makes up an individual and which disintegrates upon his death, resolving itself into the chemical elements that make up life and thought. Disintegrated . . . But soon the question is reduced, according to some, to knowing whether putrefaction, the disintegration of atoms, or better their organic function, stops instantaneously upon death, annulling individuality ipso facto, or whether it endures, according to circumstances, for a shorter or longer time after death . . . You begin to suspect . . . And on this point science would find itself in agreement with popular belief . . . For the past three years I have been studying the folk remedies of old women, peasants, to explain to myself what their value is . . . Quite often they heal poorly what science doesn't know how to heal . . . Do you know what my opinion is today? These folk remedies are the remains, the fragments of an ancient, secret science, and, more likely, of the instincts that animals are proven to have. From the beginning, when man was much closer to beasts than he is now, even he deduced the therapeutic value of certain herbs: and their use has perpetuated, passed down from generation to generation, as with the beasts. They still operate by instinct; in man, with the development of his faculties, this primitive virtue became obscured, but the tradition persists all the same. These old women, who are more firmly attached to the practice, have retained some tips from natural medicine; and I think science should be paying attention to this fact, because in every superstition hides something that is not just a deceptive observation of ignorance . . . Please excuse my long digression. Some scientists now admit, that is, that with the apparent death of the individual, the functioning of individual existence doesn't really cease until all of the elements have completely disintegrated. Popular superstition – for this is the word we use – has already divined it, in part, with its belief in Vampires, and it had divined the remedy. Vampires would have a more persistent individuality than others, in rare cases, yes, but it's possible even without admitting the immortality of the soul, of the spirit . . . Don't look at me like that . . . It's a fact, and not so uncommon, that so-called popular superstition – or, better said – primitive divination could find itself in agreement with science. . . . And do you know what the defense against the evil actions of Vampires is, these persistent individualities who believe they can prolong their existence by sucking the blood or vital essence from healthy people? . . . To accelerate the destruction of their bodies. In the places where this happens, the old women, the peasants, run to the cemetery, dig up the corpse, and burn it . . . It's proven then that the Vampire has really died; and in fact the phenomenon ceases. . . . You say that your child . . .”

“Come and see him; he not recognizable anymore. Luisa is mad with pain and fear. . . I feel I might go mad myself, or even be possessed by that diabolical suspect . . . But . . . In vain I tell myself: It's not true! It can't be true! . . . In vain I tried to comfort myself, thinking: And what if it were true? . . . It's a proof of love. She poisoned him for you! . . . In vain! I don't know, I'm sick of defending myself from a living repugnance, from this heartbreakingly violent distancing, another one of *his* evil acts! . . . He

insists on reproach: I understand it from Luisa's responses, when *he* had her under his horrid spell, and the poor thing protested. "Poison you? Me? . . . How can you think it? . . ." Oh! We can't go on, my friend. For months and months we've withstood this torment, without saying a word to anyone for fear of being laughed at by unscrupulous friends . . . You're the first person that I've had the courage to confide in, out of desperation, to seek advice, a way out. . . And still we would have patiently withstood everything, fooling ourselves that such strange phenomena couldn't go on for so long, if our little child weren't now in danger."

"You must burn the corpse. It's an experiment that interests me, not just as a friend but as a scientist. Your wife, although no longer a widow, will be easily granted permission; I will help you in matters regarding the authorities. And I'm not ashamed for science, of which I am a poor lover. Science doesn't lose any dignity when it runs to folk wisdom, turning superstition into its prize, if you can then prove that it is only superstition in appearance; then science will be inspired to try new research, to discover unexpected truths. Science must be modest, good, while continuing its heritage of facts and truths. You must burn the corpse. I'm telling you quite seriously," added Mongeri, reading the doubt in his friend's eyes of being treated by old women or ignorant people.

"And the baby, meanwhile?" exclaimed Lelio Giorgi, wringing his hands. "One night I felt a surge of anger; I hurled myself against *him*, following the direction in which Luisa was looking, as if he were a person that I could grab and choke; I hurled myself against him, crying: "Go away! Go away, you devil! . . ." But after a few steps I was stopped, paralyzed, nailed in place, at a distance, with the words dying in my throat, unable even to translate themselves into an indistinct moan . . . You can't believe, you can't imagine . . ."

"If you would allow me to keep you company tonight . . ."

"There: you asked me in such a suspicious tone . . ."

"You're mistaken."

"Maybe we'll make it worse: I fear that your presence might irritate him more, like having the house blessed. No, not tonight. I'll come to see you tomorrow . . ."

And, the next day, he returned so frightened, so defeated than Mongeri entertained certain doubts about the integrity of his friend's mental faculties.

"He knows!" stammered Lelio Giorgi as soon as he entered the study. "Ah, what a hellish night! Luisa heard him cursing, shouting, threatening terrible punishments if we dare."

"All the more reason that we must dare," replied Mongeri.

"If you had seen that cradle shaking, so hard that I don't even know how the baby didn't fall to the ground! Luisa was forced to get down on her knees, invoking his pity, crying to him: "Yes, I'll be yours, all yours! . . . But spare this innocent baby . . ." And at that moment it seemed that my every tie with her was broken, that she was no longer really mine, but his, *his!*"

"Calm down! . . . We will win. Calm down! . . . I'd like to be with you tonight."

Mongeri went with the conviction that his presence would prevent the phenomenon from taking place. He thought: "It nearly always works this way. These unknown forces are neutralized by indifferent, foreign forces. It nearly always works this way. How? Why? One day, certainly, we'll know. We need to observe it, to study it."

And, in the early hours of the night, it happened just like he had thought it would. Luisa turned her frightened eyes around the room, pricked up her ears anxiously . . . Nothing. The cradle remained motionless: the baby, quite pale, and thin, slept calmly. Lelio Giorgi, holding back his agitation with difficulty, looked now at his wife, now at Mongeri, who was smiling, satisfied.

Meanwhile they discussed things that, despite their preoccupation, managed now and then to distract them. Mongeri had begun to tell the story of a very entertaining trip he had taken.

A good speaker, free of any affectation of scientific gravity, he intended to divert their attention, and in

the meantime to keep an eye on them, in order to take note of all of the phases of the phenomenon in case it should ever repeat itself, and he had already begun to persuade himself that his intervention had been beneficial when, just as he had turned his gaze towards the cradle, he noticed it move lightly, in a way that could not have been caused by any of them, since Luisa and Lelio were seated far from the cradle. He couldn't help but pause, and be noticed, and so Luisa and Lelio leapt to their feet.

The movement grew stronger by degrees, and when Luisa turned to look where Mongeri's eyes were involuntarily fixed, the cradle was rocking and jerking.

"There he is!" she cried. "Oh, God! My poor little son!"

She went to run, but she couldn't. And she fell upside down on the couch where she had been sitting. Pale, her entire body shaking, with her eyes open wide and her pupils motionless, she stammered something that gurgled in her throat but didn't take the form of words, and seemed as if it would suffocate her.

"It's nothing!" said Mongeri, having stood up, squeezing Lelio's hand, which had come towards him in vivid terror, almost in defense.

Luisa, at first stiffened, shook even more violently and then suddenly seemed to return to her ordinary state; except that her attention was fully directed towards watching something that the other two didn't see, towards listening to words that they didn't hear, the meaning of which they deduced through her responses.

"Why do you say that I want to keep hurting you? . . . I've prayed for you! I've had Masses said for you! . . ." "But you can't annul! You're dead . . ." "You're not dead? . . . Then why did you accuse me of poisoning you? . . ." "Agreement with him? Oh! . . ." "He promised you, yes; and he kept it . . . Pretend? We planned it all along? He sent me the poison? . . . It's absurd! You must not believe that if it's true that the dead can see the truth . . ." "All right. I won't consider you dead . . . I won't repeat it again."

"She's gone into a spontaneous *trance*!" said Mongeri into Lelio's ear. "Allow me."

Taking hold of her thumbs, after a few minutes he called out in a loud voice:

"Madam! . . ."

On hearing the deep, annoyed, robust, and masculine voice with which she responded, Mongeri jumped back. Luisa had risen from the grave, with such a darkened face, with such hardness in her features, that she seemed another person. The special beauty of her physiognomy, so gentle, good, almost virginal, that came from the sweet gaze of her beautiful blue eyes and the light smile that roamed her lips, like a delicate pulse, had completely disappeared.

"What do you want? Why are you meddling?"

Mongeri regained his self-control almost immediately. His habitual scientist's mistrust made him suspect that he, too, must have felt, by induction, by consent of his nervous system, the influence of the strong hallucinatory state of those two, if he had seemed to see the cradle rocking and jerking, which he could see quite well was now still, with the baby inside quietly sleeping, now that his attention was drawn from the extraordinary phenomenon of the ghost's personification. He approached, with a sense of spite against himself for that backwards jump at the sound of the rough voice that had nearly run him over, and imperiously responded:

"Stop it! I order you!"

He had put such force of will into his expression that the command should have asserted its authority over the woman's nervous excitement, should have overcome it – he thought – . The long and sardonic laugh that immediately replied to "I order you," shook him, made him hesitate for an instant.

"Stop it! I order you!," he responded with greater force.

"Ah! Ah! You want to be the third . . . enjoying . . . Poison him too?"

"You lie! Wickedly!"

Mongeri didn't have to restrain himself from responding like with a living person. And the already slightly disturbed lucidity of his mind, notwithstanding the efforts he made to remain an attentive and

impartial observer, all of a sudden became very upset when he felt two blows to his back by an invisible hand, and in the same instant he saw a gray, semi-transparent hand appear in front of the light, almost made of smoke, that contracted and relaxed its fingers rapidly, growing thinner as though the heat of the candle's flame were making it evaporate.

“Do you see? Do you see?” Giorgi asked him. There were tears in his voice.

Suddenly the phenomenon stopped. Luisa woke up from her *trance*, almost as if she were waking from a natural dream, and looked around the room, questioning her husband and Mongeri with a brief nod of her head. Lelio and Mongeri questioned themselves, in turn, bewildered by the sense of serenity, or better liberation that eased their breathing and returned their heartbeats to normal. No one dared to speak. Only a faint cry from the baby made them run anxiously towards the cradle. The baby wailed and wailed, struggling under the oppression of something that appeared to aggravate his mouth and impede his cries . . . Suddenly, this phenomenon stopped too, and nothing more happened.

In the morning, as he was leaving, Mongeri was thinking not only that scientists were wrong not to want to study up close those cases that coincided with popular superstition, but he repeated to himself, in his mind, what he had told his friend two days ago: *I wouldn't marry a widow for all the gold in the world.*

As a scientist he had acted admirably, leading the experiment until the end without minding at all if (in case burning the corpse of Luisa's first husband hadn't worked) his reputation with his colleagues and with the public had to suffer. Although the experiment had confirmed the popular belief, and since the day that the remains of the corpse had been burned the phenomena had completely ceased, to the great relief of Lelio Giorgi and his good wife Luisa, in its relation, not yet published, Mongeri had proved unable to be entirely sincere. He hadn't said: “These are the facts, and this the result of the remedy: the claims of popular superstition were right in their negation of science: the Vampire *died completely* as soon as his corpse was burned.” No. He had placed many “ifs,” many “buts” in the smallest circumstances, had shown off the words “*hallucination*,” “*suggestion*,” “*nervous influence*” many times in his scientific reasoning, in order to confirm what he had confessed previously, that is: that even intelligence is a matter of habit and that having to change his opinion had annoyed him. Most curious is that he did not prove to be more coherent as a man. He who had proclaimed: “I wouldn't marry a widow for all the gold in the world” later married one for much less, a 60,000 lira dowry! And to Lelio Giorgi, who had naively said: “But how? . . . You! . . .”, he replied: “Right now not two atoms of the first husband's corpse exist. He's been dead six years!,” without realizing that, in saying this, he was contradicting the author of the scientific memoir *An Alleged Case of Vampirism*, that is, he himself.