



WILLIAM WILSON

LET me call myself, for the present, William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real name.

I would not, if I could, here or today, describe the later years of unspeakable misery, and unforgivable crime. I want to tell you about the one chain of events that caused my terrible condition. The shadow of death is over me now, and I am dying from the effects of a wild and terrible experience.

I am the child of a family whose imaginative, uncontrolled and violent temper has at all times marked them extraordinary, and, in my earliest infancy, I gave evidence of having fully inherited the family character. As I grew up it was more strongly developed, becoming, for many reasons, a cause of serious worry to my friends, and of great harm to myself. My weak-minded parents could do little to change the evil tendencies which distinguished me. Some poor and ill-directed efforts resulted in complete

failure on their part, and, of course, in total triumph on mine. Since I was a little boy, therefore, I had been left to the guidance of my own will. I became the master of my own actions and my voice became law at home.

My earliest memories of a school-life are connected with a large Elizabethan house, in a misty-looking village of England, where there were a lot of gigantic trees, and ancient houses.

The house was old and irregular. The grounds were extensive, and a high and solid brick wall, covered with broken glass, surrounded the whole. This prison-like wall limited our area. But the house! How quaint an old building was this! Really a palace of magic! There was really no end to its windings. It was difficult, at any given time, to find out which of its two stories one happened to be. From each room to every other there were three or four steps either up or down. During the five years of my residence here, I was never able to know exactly in what locality my little room was.

Surrounded by the massy walls of the school, I passed five years from my tenth birthday. In truth, the eagerness, the enthusiasm, and my unusual character, soon gave me the position of a leader among my schoolmates, and by slow, but natural gradations, gave me a domination over all not greatly older than myself, over all except one. This exception was a pupil, who, although not my relative, had the same Christian and surname as my own. A circumstance, in fact, was not really extraordinary, because my name was one of those common names which seemed, by prescriptive right, to have been the common property of the crowd. In this story I have therefore called myself as William Wilson, which is not very different from my real name. My namesake, who in school phraseology was

called as "our set," was my equal in the class, in the sports and quarrels of the playground. If there is on earth a supreme and unqualified despotism, it is the despotism of a mind in boyhood over the less energetic spirits of its companions. He alone refused to accept my opinions and obey my orders.

Wilson's opposition to me was a source of my greatest annoyance. I secretly felt that I feared him, and could not help thinking about his true superiority. It cost me a continual struggle to be overcome. Yet this superiority, even this equality, was in truth recognized by no one but myself. Although there were times when I could not help noticing, that he showed certain sympathy for me, his injuries and his insults were of a certain delicate manner. I could only consider this singular behaviour to arise from a self-conceit¹ taking the vulgar airs of patronage and protection.

Perhaps it was this latter trait in Wilson's behaviour, connected with our identity of name, and the mere accident that we entered the school on the same day. There were rumours among the senior classes that we were brothers. I have said before, or should have said, that Wilson was not, in any degree, connected with my family. But surely if we had been brothers, we must have been twins. I got to know by chance that my namesake was born on the nineteenth of January, 1813 - the day which is exactly the date of my own birth.

It may seem strange but, in spite of the continual nervousness occasioned me by the competition with Wilson, I could not make myself hate him altogether. We had, to be sure, nearly every day a quarrel in

¹ Self-conceit - *зарозумілість*

public, and, he, in some manner, tried to make me feel that it was he who had deserved the palm of victory.

It is difficult for me to describe real feelings towards him – a colourful and varied mixture of fear, dislike and some respect. Although we could never really be friends, we were never enemies. We were the most inseparable of companions. In fact all my attacks upon him turned into a chain of practical jokes rather than into a more serious aggression.

I soon realized that we were of the same age, the same height and as alike in appearance as two brothers. One of his habits was to copy me in every detail, and he did this perfectly. It was an easy matter for him to dress in the way I dressed. He succeeded even in imitating my movements and general manner, in spite of the weakness in his speech. I made use of this particular weakness, his voice. For some reason, perhaps a disease of the throat, he whispered and couldn't produce my louder sounds, of course, the key was exactly mine. His whisper grew the very echo of my own. The situation upset me more than I can describe. But nothing could more seriously disturb me than rumours about our relation to one family.

Wilson had another habit that made me very angry. It was the disgusting patronage. He liked to interfere with my will. This interference often made with an unpleasant character of advice; advice not openly given, but hinted or insinuated. I received it with a disgust which became strong as I grew in years. But I must admit now that none of his suggestions were mistaken or unwise. His moral sense was far greater than my own. In fact, I might have been a better and a happier man if I had more often accepted him as my guide.

I have said that, in the first years of our connection as schoolmates, my feelings towards him might have