

**THE HOUSE OF  
STRANGE SECRETS:  
A DETECTIVE STORY**

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The House of Strange Secrets: A Detective Story by A. Eric Bayly

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**A. ERIC BAYLY**

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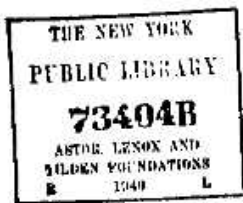
BY

A. Eric Bayly



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## CONTENTS

| CHAPTER   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| I.—THE STRANGE AFFAIR ON THE LONELY MOOR . . . . .              | 1    |
| II.—THE MAN THAT DISAPPEARED . . . . .                          | 9    |
| III.—THE MYSTERY OF THE PADDED FOOT-PRINTS . . . . .            | 17   |
| IV.—GOOD NEWS AND BAD . . . . .                                 | 28   |
| V.—SELENE'S STORY . . . . .                                     | 33   |
| VI.—THE FIRST ENCOUNTER . . . . .                               | 39   |
| VII.—THE HAUNTED BARN AND ITS STRANGE INHABITANT . . . . .      | 52   |
| VIII.—THE SILENT HOUSE AND THE FOLKS THAT DWELT THERE . . . . . | 58   |
| IX.—THE MAJOR'S MESSAGE AND HOW IT WAS DELIVERED . . . . .      | 66   |
| X.—THE AFFAIR OF THE BICYCLE . . . . .                          | 75   |
| XI.—IN THE LION'S DEN . . . . .                                 | 80   |
| XII.—THE MAJOR REVEALS HIS SECRET . . . . .                     | 86   |
| XIII.—THE HORRORS OF DURLEY DENE . . . . .                      | 95   |
| XIV.—THE FIGURE IN THE MOONLIGHT . . . . .                      | 99   |
| XV.—MAJOR JONES' ERRAND . . . . .                               | 106  |

| CHAPTER  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| XXVI.—THE MAN FROM BURTON'S. . . .             | 116  |
| XVII.—MR. POTTER'S SOLUTION . . . .            | 125  |
| XVIII.—AN ASTOUNDING CONFESSION . . . .        | 130  |
| XIX.—A TRUCE AND A PROMISE . . . .             | 139  |
| XX.—MR. HORNCastle, FROM DARTMOOR . . . .      | 145  |
| XXI.—MR. POTTER SHOWS HIS HAND . . . .         | 153  |
| XXII.—WHOSE WAS THE WRITING? . . . .           | 162  |
| XXIII.—THE MYSTERY OF THE MANSE BARN . . . .   | 170  |
| XXIV.—THE FATE OF THE EAVESDROPPER . . . .     | 177  |
| XXV.—IN THE OAK-PANELLED HALL . . . .          | 185  |
| XXVI.—LIGHT IN DARK PLACES . . . .             | 191  |
| XXVII.—THE SQUIRE'S STORY . . . .              | 201  |
| XXVIII.—THE SQUIRE'S STORY (CONTINUED) . . . . | 205  |
| XXIX.—THE SQUIRE'S STORY (CONTINUED) . . . .   | 215  |
| XXX.—THE SQUIRE'S STORY (CONCLUSION) . . . .   | 224  |
| XXXI.—THE BEGINNING OF THE END . . . .         | 230  |
| XXXII.—THE WIZARD'S MARSH . . . .              | 236  |
| XXXIII.—A MAN FROM THE GRAVE . . . .           | 244  |
| XXXIV.—SOLVING THE MYSTERY . . . .             | 249  |
| XXXV.—THE LAST TWIST IN THE YARN . . . .       | 257  |



# The House of Strange Secrets

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## CHAPTER I

### THE STRANGE AFFAIR ON THE LONELY MOOR

"SQUIRE CARRINGTON'S carriage, this way, please," proclaimed this magnificent powdered footman wearing the Marquis of Moorland's livery. His stentorian tones echoing from the porch, over which were suspended the nobleman's arms, interrupted an edifying conversation between Squire Carrington's coachman and the individual who presided over another local dignitary's stables, both of whom, with their carriages, had taken refuge from the inclement weather beneath the stately ash trees which were the pride of their noble owner and his gardener (by the way, a far more important personage).

"Well, good e'ning to yer, Mr. Wilkes," remarked the Carrington coachman, flicking up his

horses; "I'll tell yer some more about the ole man and 'is hexentricities next time I 'ave the pleasure of renooing our acquaintance." And wrapping his topcoat round him, so as to shield his valuable carcase from the drizzling rain, the venerable retainer in charge of Mr. Harold Carrington's spirited greys turned his horses' heads and drew up the carriage—a coach of out-of-date pattern—at the front door, which had been held open for two gentlemen in evening dress who were effecting an early departure from the annual ball given by the Marquis to all the neighbouring gentry.

The elder of the two was an extremely tall, cadaverous, and grizzled man of perhaps sixty years of age. This was Squire Carrington himself, the owner of the manse, situate in the neighbouring village of Northden; while his companion was his only son, Laurence, a handsome young fellow of two-and-twenty, quite as tall as his father, but, unlike Mr. Carrington, senior, well built and of athletic appearance.

The elder man paused for a moment in the porch.

To the casual observer he would have appeared to be buttoning his glove, but to the keen eye of Laurence it seemed that the cause of the older gentleman's sudden stop was to give himself an opportunity of peering nervously into the night be-

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### Strange Affair on the Lonely Moor 3

fore taking the few steps necessary to reach the carriage waiting outside. This scrutiny being evidently satisfactory, Mr. Carrington hurried forward, entered the vehicle, and ensconced himself in the far corner. Laurence followed, after taking a glance back at the capacious hall, brilliantly lighted with fairy lamps and thronged with vivacious ladies and laughing men on their way to or from the supper rooms.

The front door closed, shutting out the gay scene from the young man's gaze. The coachman whipped up his horses, and in a moment the carriage was bowling down the dark avenue, presently emerging into the rain and the high road beyond.

"Shame to leave so awfully early," muttered Laurence, leaning back on the comfortable cushions and lighting a cigarette.

"You know my reasons," answered Mr. Carrington. "I—well, I don't like to have the carriage out too late, and, besides, it 's twelve o'clock already."

"Twelve o'clock, yes; just the best time, dad, you know it is! And why could n't I have walked home or got a lift in the Everards' waggonette, as I suggested? Another of these absurd fears of yours, I suppose. My dear dad, what on earth would the people say if they learned that you, a