



# THE BIRTHMARK

## PART ONE

### A Beautiful Young Woman

During the last part of the eighteenth century there lived a man of science. One day he left his laboratory because he had found a beautiful young woman who became his wife. Aylmer loved his young wife very much, but his real passion was science and the mysteries of Nature.

One day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer stared at his wife with a worried expression.

"Georgiana," he said, "did you know that the mark on your cheek can be eliminated?"

"No, I didn't," she said smiling. "People have called it a charm, and I believed it."

"Perhaps on another face it could be a charm, but not on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, your beauty is almost perfect. But I hate that birthmark."

"You hate it!" exclaimed Georgiana, who started crying. "Then why did you marry me? You cannot love me if you hate my birthmark!"

In the center of Georgiana's left cheek there was a strange red mark. It had the shape of a very tiny human hand. In the past young men had liked the tiny hand. They said a fairy had put her tiny hand on her beautiful cheek. Some envious young women said that it destroyed Georgiana's beauty.

Before their marriage Aylmer did not think about the birthmark. But now it had become a frightening obsession. Georgiana's beauty was almost perfect and he could not tolerate this defect. It was an imperfection of Nature. It was Nature's way of showing that we are only mortals.

Their happiness was ruined by this birthmark. When Aylmer woke up in the morning and opened his eyes, the first thing he saw was Georgiana's crimson mark. When they sat together by the fire in the evening, his eyes always looked at the birthmark on Georgiana's cheek. It was the mark of her imperfection.

Georgiana shuddered when Aylmer looked at her. And the pink color of her cheeks turned white and the little red hand became more evident. It looked like a red ruby on a white stone.

Late one night Georgiana said, "My dear Aylmer, do you remember anything about a dream you had last night " a dream about this horrible little hand?"

"No, I don't!" replied Aylmer, who was surprised. But then he added coldly, "Maybe I did dream about it, because before sleeping I thought about the hand."

"And you dreamed about it," continued Georgiana, who was almost crying. "It was a terrible dream. How can you forget it? How can you forget this sentence: 'It is in her heart now and we must take it out!' Do you remember the dream?"

Aylmer now remembered his dream. He dreamed that he was with his servant Aminadab. He was trying to remove the red birthmark. But as his knife went deeper into the cheek, the little hand went deeper and deeper. At last the little hand caught Georgiana's heart and Aylmer wanted to cut it away.

When he remembered the dream clearly, Aylmer felt ashamed. The truth often comes out in our dreams. Until now he did not realize that the birthmark had had a terrible influence on him.

"Aylmer," continued Georgiana seriously, "What can we do to eliminate this birthmark? Maybe it will cause a deformity, or perhaps the mark is as deep as life. But can we eliminate it forever?"

"Dearest Georgiana, I have thought about this a lot. And I am sure it can be eliminated."

"Oh, then please do it! I am not afraid of the risk because life with this birthmark is awful. Either eliminate it or take my life! You are a great man of science. All the world knows you. I am certain that you can do it. Please save me from madness."

"My dear wife," cried Aylmer, "don't worry. I have thought about this problem very much. I am certain that I can make your cheek as perfect as the other. I know I can correct this error of Nature and my happiness will be great."

"Then the problem is solved," said Georgiana.

Her husband kissed her right cheek which was perfect.

The next day Aylmer told his wife about his plan. "We will both live in the apartment which I used as a laboratory when I was young."

He had made important discoveries in that laboratory, and he had learned about the mysteries of Nature and the universe. Georgiana was frightened when Aylmer took her to the apartment. He looked at her happily, but the birthmark on her white cheek made him shudder and Georgiana fainted.

"Aminadab! Aminadab!" shouted Aylmer violently.

A short, robust man with long hair came out of another room. This strange man had been Aylmer's assistant for many years. He did not understand scientific principles but he followed instructions and did his job well.

"Georgiana has fainted! Quickly, open the door and burn a special candle," cried Aylmer.

"Yes, master," answered Aminadab, looking at poor Georgiana. Then he said to himself, "He should never eliminate that birthmark!"

Aylmer was at his wife's side when she woke up.

"Where am I? Ah, I remember," said Georgiana quietly. And she put her hand over her cheek to hide the terrible mark from her husband's eyes.

"Don't be afraid, dear Georgiana," he said. "It will be a pleasure to remove it."

"Oh, please, do not look at it again. I can never forget that terrible shudder."

To help Georgiana forget her problem, Aylmer tried to entertain her. He showed her a little plant that grew slowly before her eyes. When a lovely flower appeared Georgiana exclaimed, "It's magic! I won't touch it."

"No, you can touch it! Pick the flower and enjoy its perfume."

But when Georgiana touched the flower the plant died immediately and its leaves became black.

Then Aylmer decided to create her portrait on a piece of metal. He used a scientific process that he had invented. The result was frightening because the portrait was difficult to see, but the birthmark was clearly visible. Aylmer was angry and threw the piece of metal away.

He soon forgot these failures and continued studying science and making experiments. He often went to Georgiana and told her about the mysteries of science and about the history of alchemy. He told her that science could do many incredible things. And it could easily remove the little hand from her cheek.

When Aylmer mentioned the birthmark Georgiana was always very unhappy.

Aylmer worked many hours in his laboratory with the help of Aminadab. One day he showed his wife a small crystal ball.

"What is this?" asked Georgiana, looking at the small crystal ball with a gold-colored liquid. "It is very beautiful. It looks like the potion of life."

"In one sense it is. It is the potion of immortality. It can prolong life or destroy life."

"Why do you keep such a terrible potion?" asked Georgiana in horror.

"Oh, don't worry, dearest Georgiana," replied Aylmer. "Look at this powerful cosmetic for the skin."

"Are you going to use it on my cheek?" asked Georgiana.

"Oh, no. Your cheek needs something that will go deeper, much deeper."

When she looked in the mirror and saw the red birthmark, she hated it more than anything.

## PART TWO

### Perfection is Dangerous

While Aylmer worked in his laboratory, Georgiana looked at the books in his library. There were books by scientists, poets and philosophers. But the most interesting work was a big book written by her husband, in which he wrote down every experiment of his scientific career.

The book was the history of his intense and ambitious life. As Georgiana read it she loved Aylmer more and more. She knew he was a great scientist. However, many of his experiments were failures. And this made her very sad. One day she put her face on the open book and started crying.

When Aylmer entered the room and saw her he said, "It is dangerous to read a wizard's books."

"Now that I have read this book I adore you more than ever," said Georgiana.

"Ah, but wait for THIS success," he said, "and then adore me if you want. But now I would like to hear your beautiful voice. Please sing to me, my dearest."

So Georgiana sang and Aylmer was very pleased. Then he returned to his laboratory. But Georgiana had forgotten to tell her husband about a strange sensation she had felt on her left cheek for the last two or three hours. So she entered into her husband's laboratory for the first time.

The first thing she noticed was the furnace with its intense fire. All around the room there were tubes, cylinders and other scientific instruments. The air was filled with strange vapors and odors. But what really surprised her was Aylmer himself. He was as pale as death and worried as he prepared a strange new potion. He was so different from the man she had seen a few moments before!

"Carefully, Aminadab, carefully!" he cried. "This is a very important moment."

"Ho! Ho!" said Aminadab. "Look, master, look!"

Aylmer raised his eyes quickly and became very angry when he saw Georgiana. He went to her and took her arm.

"Why did you come here? Don't you trust your husband?" he cried angrily. "Now go away!"

"No, Aylmer," said Georgiana firmly. "You don't trust me and you don't tell me your worries about this experiment. I will accept all the risks."

"No, no, Georgiana," said Aylmer impatiently.

"I will drink any potion you give me. I trust you completely."

"My dear wife," said Aylmer, "you must know that this red hand is deep inside you. There could be danger."

"Danger? There is only one danger " that this horrible birthmark remains on my cheek," cried Georgiana. "Remove it, remove it, or we will both go mad."

"Your words are very true," said Aylmer sadly. "And now, please go back to your rooms. The potion will soon be tested." When Georgiana returned to her rooms she thought about Aylmer's noble character and his great love for her. He wanted her to be perfect because he loved her so much.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Aylmer's footsteps. He carried a glass with a bright, colorless, transparent liquid. He was pale but didn't seem worried or afraid.

"This potion is perfect," he said looking at Georgiana. "It cannot fail."

"My dearest Aylmer, life has become very difficult. I think death is the best solution for me."

"But why do you speak of death? The potion cannot fail. Look at its effect on this plant."

Near the window there was an old geranium plant. Its leaves were yellow and ugly. Aylmer poured a small quantity of the potion in the plant. After a short time the ugly yellow leaves became green.

"I did not need any proof," said Georgiana quietly. "I believe you. Give me the potion. I am happy to drink it."

"Drink then, my dearest wife. Soon your body will be as perfect as your spirit."

Georgiana drank the potion and gave Aylmer the empty glass.

"It is like water from a magic fountain. Now, dearest Aylmer, let me sleep."

She fell asleep almost immediately. Aylmer sat by her side and watched her very carefully. He often looked at the birthmark on her white cheek. At first it was very visible. Then it slowly disappeared.

"It's almost gone!" said Aylmer to himself. "Success! Success! But Georgiana is so pale!"

He heard his servant laugh. He too was delighted.

Aylmer looked at Aminadab and said, "You served me well. Heaven and earth have done their part. The experiment is a success, Aminadab!"

These exclamations disturbed Georgiana's sleep. She opened her eyes and looked in the mirror. She smiled weakly when she saw that the little red hand had almost disappeared. Then she looked at Aylmer. She was worried.

"My poor Aylmer," she said quietly.

"Poor? No! I am the richest and happiest man! And you are my splendid wife! Now you are perfect!"

"My poor Aylmer," she repeated lovingly. "You have done your best. Your intention was very noble, but now I am dying."

It was true! The fatal hand was linked to Georgiana's life. When it disappeared, Georgiana's life disappeared too. And so she died.

Aylmer had wanted perfection but he did not realize that perfection was not part of this world. And so he lost the woman he loved and destroyed his happiness forever.

- THE END -

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