

CHAPTER IV - A Strange Disappearance

CHAPTER IV - A Strange Disappearance unfolds with growing tension as Mr. Gryce and the narrator begin to untangle the baffling disappearance of a young sewing girl. Her vanishing act, apparently involving a ladder and blood-stained traces, raises questions not just about how she left, but why. Gryce, methodical and unsentimental, wishes for something as simple yet powerful as a photograph to assist in identifying the girl across a sprawling, indifferent city. But the trail is faint, and time is slipping away. As investigators piece together the scene, the absence of panic in the household feels unnatural. Something vital, perhaps emotional or reputational, is being concealed behind composed exteriors and vague statements. The mystery isn't just logistical—it's personal.

Questioning Mr. Blake yields little in terms of clarity. He appears unconcerned, even uninterested, in the identity or well-being of the girl. According to him, household affairs are beneath his attention and entirely managed by Mrs. Daniels. Not only does he fail to recognize the missing woman's name, but he also shrugs off knowledge of past servants, such as a valet named Henry who was dismissed under unclear circumstances. This detachment feels rehearsed, as though he is shielding himself from responsibility—or from memory. His responses are too measured, his expressions too blank. The narrator senses a lack not only of emotion but of engagement with the world outside his books and studio. Mr. Blake is a man who has chosen disconnection.

This emotional distance is not unprecedented in his family. As the narrator learns, the Blakes are known for their eccentricities, especially when it comes to forming bonds. His father was fixated on religion, and his grandfather on coins. Now Mr. Blake's own aloofness seems to be his inherited legacy—one shaped by selective withdrawal rather

than any single trauma. Yet, despite this pattern, there's an inconsistency. A name keeps resurfacing: Evelyn Blake. A wealthy widow, elegant and sharp-minded, she is not just his cousin, but perhaps his only known emotional entanglement. Their shared past hints at affection, maybe even something deeper. And this connection adds a layer of tension the detective cannot ignore.

It is whispered within the household that Mr. Blake once paid more attention to Miss Evelyn than to anyone else. Their conversations were frequent, their walks lengthy, and their silences comfortable. But whatever spark may have existed was never publicly acknowledged. Instead, Evelyn married abroad, returning only after her husband's death. The way Mr. Blake now speaks of her—reserved but never dismissive—raises suspicion. He mentions her with a restraint that doesn't feel natural. His measured tone hides something unspoken. Perhaps there was love, or perhaps guilt. Either way, her reappearance around the time of the sewing girl's disappearance cannot be overlooked.

Mr. Gryce, who rarely jumps to conclusions, remains quiet as he digests these developments. He does not say it aloud, but his mind is clearly racing. The relationship between Blake and Evelyn may not just be background—it might hold the key to everything. Could jealousy, rejection, or a need to protect a family name be involved? Could Evelyn's return have unearthed an old tension, one now projected onto another young woman? These are not certainties, but the presence of unresolved emotion in an otherwise indifferent man is too sharp a contrast to ignore. Gryce doesn't press Blake further—for now, his silence is a more revealing tool.

The chapter's strength lies in how it reveals character through avoidance. The missing girl is barely remembered by those around her, yet her absence has started to disrupt the polished surfaces of a household built on routine and control. This imbalance—between memory and disappearance, between indifference and past affection—creates a subtle but growing sense of unease. Readers are not just pulled deeper into the mystery of the girl's fate, but into the strange psychology of those who surrounded her. Each conversation, each refusal to feel, becomes a clue of its own.

This isn't just about finding a missing person. It's about understanding why no one seems eager to find her—except the detective, and the narrator who's beginning to see that truth hides best in plain sight.

