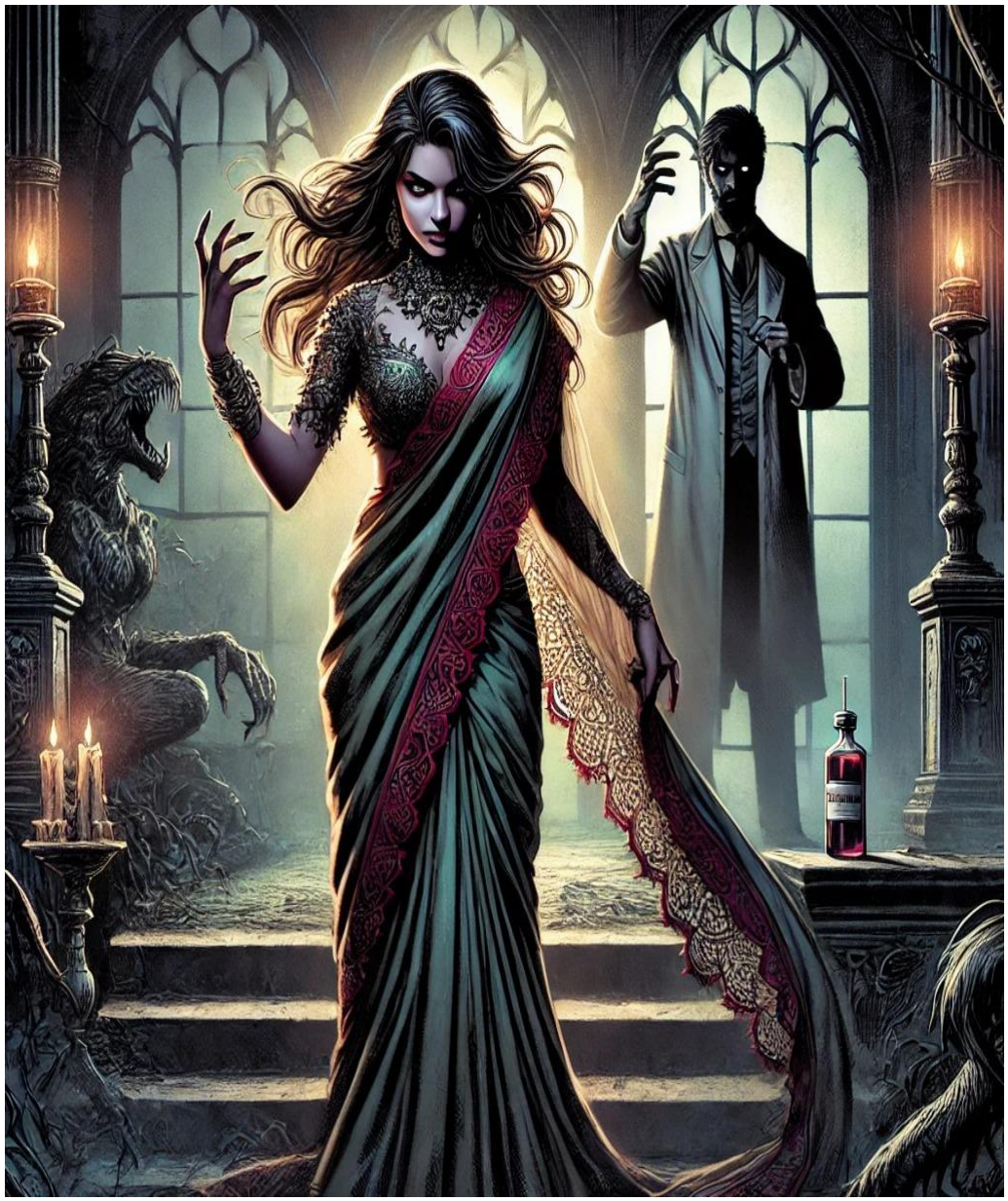
JANE,



JEKYLL & HYDE

Jane, Jekyll and Hyde

Victorian Gothic Terror Quintessentials

By Sunaina Ajit Kumar

The word **"cleave"** is a fascinating example of a **contronym,** a word with two opposing meanings.

On one hand, **"cleave"** can mean **to split apart or sever**, often with force.

On the other hand, **"cleave"** also means **to cling tightly to or adhere to something**.

Its dual nature perfectly captures the protagonist. She unites with her husband and her true self while simultaneously cutting herself off from her fears, traumas, and repressions.



I, Jane Cleave, like so many women in the 1800s, am suffocating under the weight of societal expectations and the suffocating grip of gender roles. But what truly tests my spirit and claws at my soul is the unforgiving class system that looms over me like a storm cloud. As my cousin John told me, “You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen’s children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama’s expense.” (Bronte 67). My adopted family takes every chance to belittle and degrade me, using my station as an excuse to treat me as nothing more than a burden. I am constantly fighting to find my place in a world that offers no sanctuary, everywhere I look, I see cruelty, false virtue, and betrayal. It's as if society thrives on hypocrisy, where those with power flaunt their pretense of morality while crushing those beneath them. The deeper I go, the more suffocated I feel, struggling against forces that threaten to swallow me whole before I even have a chance to break free.

I am alone, an orphan and stifling so much anger.



This is what Freud might call a pivotal, transformative moment in one's life, a rupture in the psyche where reality collides with repression. I was thrown into the Red Room by my aunt, Mrs. Reed, in what I can only describe as a cruel, metaphorical attempt to "rebirth" me into a proper lady of society. But even a rebirth, even a forced transformation, offers no guarantee of social elevation. No amount of enforced refinement will grant me class status. It is an illusion, a delusion of aristocracy, where expectations are as rigid as the bars of a cage. And I will never meet those expectations.

And in this dark, suffocating space, I am confronted with my deepest fear: not just the cruelty inflicted upon me, but the anger I am capable of, the rage that simmers beneath my surface. They called it “Hysteria”, a convenient label for female disobedience, a term rampant in medical circles of the time, attributed to any woman who dared express feelings deemed too volatile or inconvenient. It was the diagnosis of the age, weaponized against those of us who could not be moulded into society's ideals, a way to dismiss our suffering and box our emotions into neat, pathological categories.

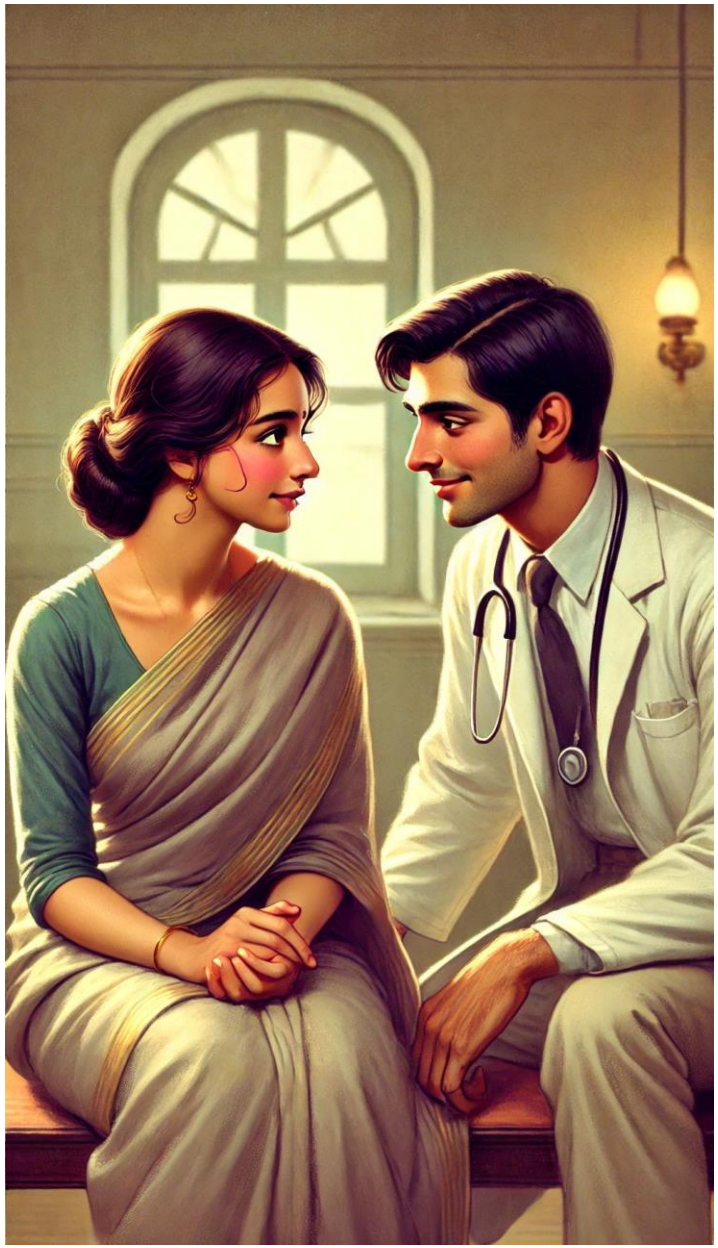
But in truth, this illness is born of something more profound, of all the injustices I have endured and the suffocating forces trying to reshape me. And though they seek to control me, they cannot see that in their attempt to break me, they only further ignite the fury inside.



My aunt, Mrs. Reed, sent me to see a kind and highly regarded doctor named Jekyll. He was well-spoken, refined, and overflowing with ideas about science, innovation, and the future of medicine. There was something in the way he spoke, an air of knowledge that made him seem almost otherworldly. He treated me with such care, never dismissing my emotions the way others had. Instead, he viewed my turmoil as something to be understood, not silenced. It was the first time I had felt seen by anyone.

I thought, perhaps this could be my escape, marriage to a doctor, to a man of intellect and sophistication, someone who could lift me out of the drudgery of my circumstances. A life with him would be worlds apart from the torment I endured in my aunt's home.

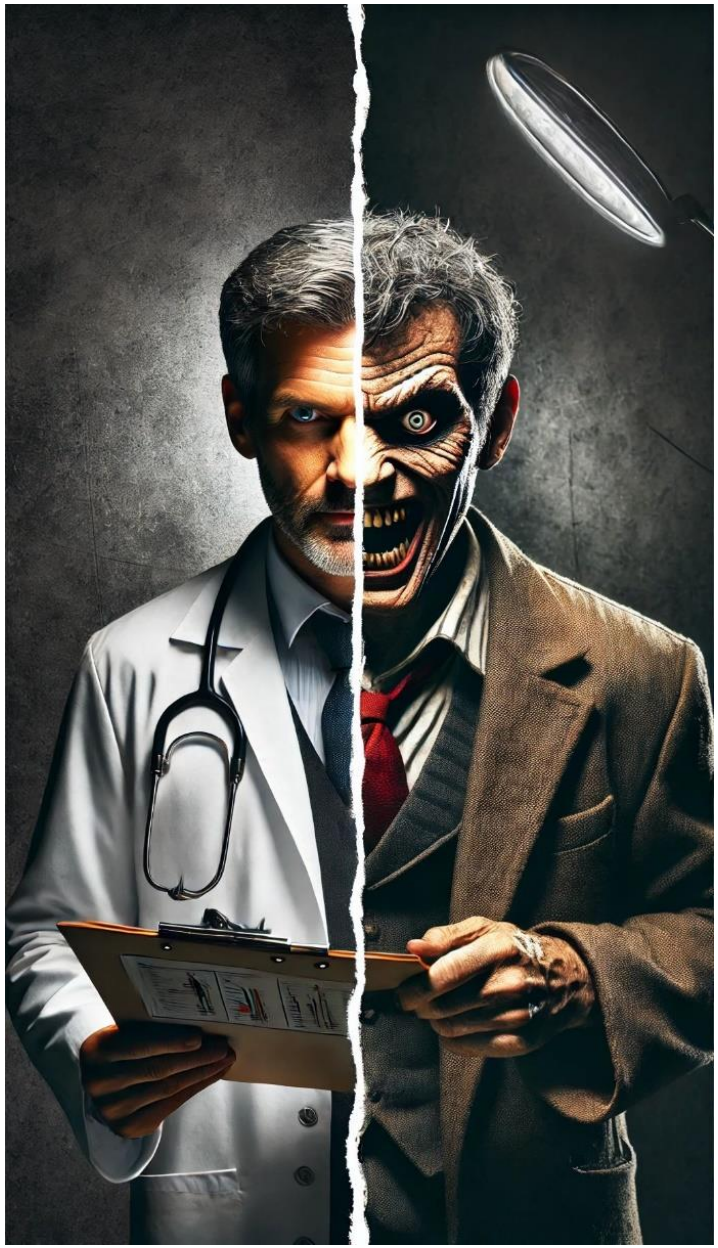
But even as these thoughts took root in my mind, there was an unease I could not shake, a flicker of something darker behind Dr. Jekyll's charm. Something that made me question whether escaping my current life would truly mean escaping the confines of society or if I would merely be trading one form of entrapment for another.



Dr. Jekyll has started to develop feelings for me, though the change came so gradually that I hardly noticed it at first. I would bring him small tokens of appreciation such as flowers, books, little things to brighten his long days of research. At first, I convinced myself that my visits were merely out of gratitude, a polite gesture for someone who had shown me kindness. But soon, I realized I looked forward to our meetings more than I dared admit.

Dr. Jekyll was not just a man of status but a man of science, someone who could introduce me to a world of knowledge and innovation far beyond my current understanding. In his presence, I felt both anxious and eager, as though on the precipice of something grand and unknown. But that very excitement was tinged with fear, was I being groomed, subtly shaped by his influence, or was I willingly falling under his spell?

But often, he would be completely absorbed in his work, disappearing for days without a word. I would not hear from him. When we were together, he was always kind and respectful, never crossing any lines, and I found myself willing to overlook his flaws, his absences, his occasional detachment, if it meant I could be with him.



Looking back, I can see how unreliable I was as a narrator of my own story, too naive, too blind to the darkness brewing around me. Little did I know that behind the facade of the kind, intellectual doctor I admired, Dr. Jekyll harbored a secret so deep and dark that it would shatter everything I believed about him.

In a society full of repressed souls, trapped in the rigid structures of decorum and morality, he may have been the most repressed of them all. He had grown weary of the tight grip society held over his desires, over his very soul. But rather than continue to submit to its relentless demands, he sought a way to free himself.

He created a potion, a scientific breakthrough that allowed him to transform into something unrecognizable, a creature beyond the bounds of repression and societal expectation. He called it Hyde, his unrestrained Id, his uncanny double, a manifestation of everything he had buried deep within. This creation, this monstrous side of him, was indescribable in its rawness, its chaos. And yet, even though “there is something wrong with his appearance; something displeasing, something downright detestable. I never saw a man so disliked, and yet I scarce know why. He must be deformed somewhere; he gives a strong feeling of deformity, although I couldn't specify the point” (Stevenson, 35-36).



Mysterious Creature Tramples Over Young Child in Dead of Night

In a shocking event that has left the local community in fear, a young child was found trampled in the early hours of the morning. The incident occurred on a quiet street where residents report hearing an ungodly noise followed by the piercing screams of the child. Eyewitnesses describe a shadowy, inhuman figure fleeing the scene, leaving behind a trail of confusion and terror. Despite several reports, no clear description of the assailant has been provided, leaving authorities baffled.

Mysterious Foreigner Spotted at Exclusive Gentlemen's Club

A strange foreigner has been seen frequenting one of the city's most prestigious gentlemen's clubs. Described as unsettlingly calm yet unnervingly out of place, this individual has captured the attention of high society. Rumors suggest he is of foreign origin, though no one seems to know exactly where he comes from or why he has been granted access to such an exclusive establishment.

Creature Bludgeons Elderly Aristocrat to Death in Shocking Incident

In a horrifying escalation of violence, the creature responsible for trampling a child has now become a suspect in the brutal bludgeoning of a well-known elderly aristocrat. His body marked by unrelenting violence. Fear has gripped the city, authorities perplexed.



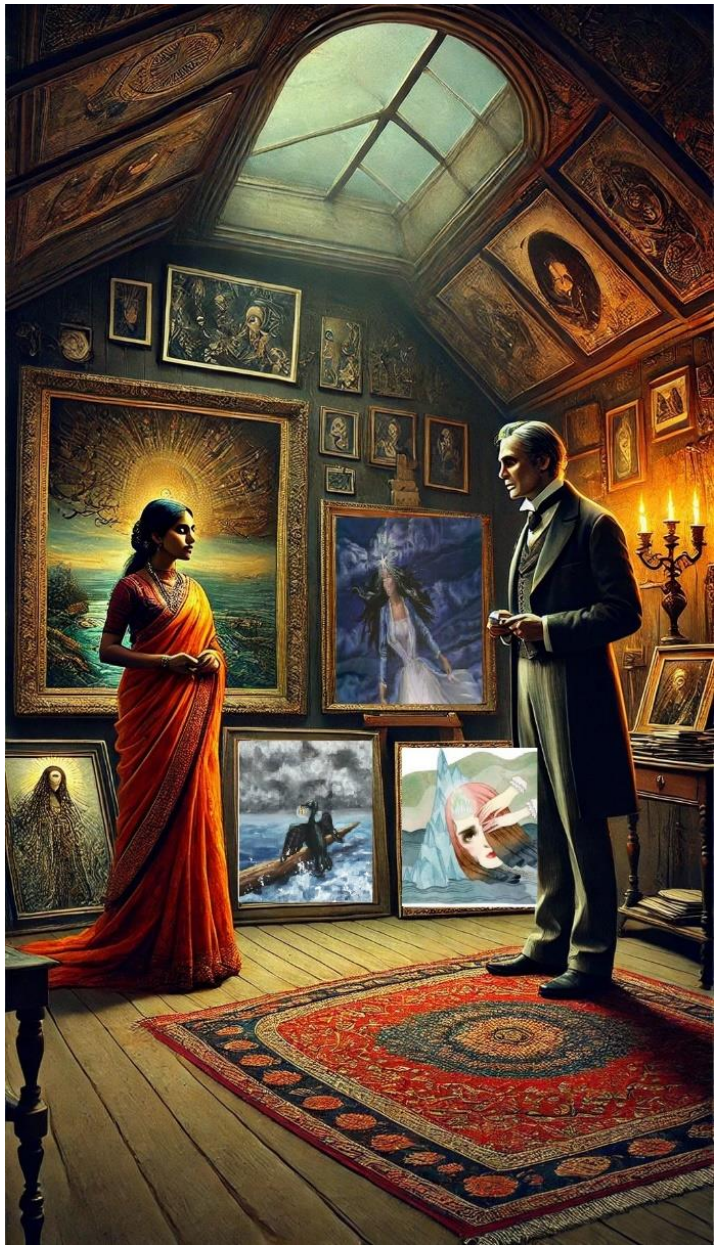
It was, without a doubt, the happiest moment of my life when Dr. Jekyll invited me to live with him. After all the pain and instability of my previous life, this felt like the promise of something stable, something better. I had confided in him about my dismal living situation, how my adopted family treated me poorly, how I had struggled to find a sense of belonging, and he had graciously offered me a place in his home. But, as with all things surrounding Dr. Jekyll, there were complexities lurking beneath the surface.

He had told me that his manservant, Mr. Poole, was no longer able to meet all his needs, particularly in matters of housekeeping and clerical work for his practice. And so, I was invited to live at his grand residence, his Manor in Soho (Stevenson 41), not simply as a guest but as an assistant of sorts. My new role, though undefined, was to help manage his affairs, overseeing the household, taking on clerical duties, and maintaining the delicate order that governed his life.



I quickly realized the uneasy in-between I found myself in. Though I was now living in the grand halls of an upper-class home, my duties were still those of a servant, and the distinction between the two roles began to gnaw at me. I performed the duties of a woman of higher status, yet I remained a woman of lower birth, navigating a world I did not quite belong to. The household staff saw me as a threat, while society regarded me with suspicion.

But as my anxieties grew, so too did Dr. Jekyll's distance. Where once we had long conversations about science and philosophy, he now retreated into his study for hours on end, his face drawn and his manner distracted. He was still kind, but there was an edge to his politeness, a sense that he was wrestling with something far deeper than I could understand. But instead, I found myself trapped between two worlds, unsure of my place in either. And Dr. Jekyll, the one person who could ease my confusion seemed to be slipping further and further away.



I remember the day I showed Dr. Jekyll my paintings. It felt like a vulnerable moment, as if I were peeling back a layer of myself and letting him see into my innermost thoughts.

One of the paintings that caught his eye was a peculiar reversal, an image that startled even me upon completion. In it, I had painted myself as a black bird, dark-feathered and winged, perched on a branch in the shadow of a ghostly white hand. The hand, delicate and almost translucent, belonged to another woman. An unusual juxtaposition, the black bird, a creature of flight and of isolation, against the ghostly, pale hand that seemed both distant and dominant.

In another, there was another woman, striking with many shades of blue. I found myself thinking about the Virgin Mary, matriarchal and untouched. Yet, in my paintings, the woman I had painted was wild-haired, dark-skinned, fierce, far from the serene, maternal image of Mary. She was filled with a restless energy that seemed to defy societal expectations of women's roles. There was a part of me, buried deep, that rebelled against the idea of motherhood, of the expectations placed on women to nurture and create life.

Dr. Jekyll seemed unsettled by the darkness of my work. I remember how he gazed at the painting for a long time before finally speaking. "Why such morbid images, Jane?" he asked, his voice thoughtful yet distant. "Why not paint flowers or peaceful scenes? Still lives, perhaps? Or a cheerful garden party?" His words lingered in the air, but I could tell that his mind was elsewhere. Had the darkness in my art somehow reflected the darkness in him, the side of himself he was struggling to hide?



That night, long after the household had gone quiet, I was stirred from my sleep by strange noises, low grunts and sounds of pain, almost animalistic. At first, I thought I was dreaming, but as the noises grew louder, more frantic, I knew I had to investigate. With trembling hands, I stepped out of my chamber, my heart pounding as I made my way through the dimly lit corridors. As I descended the staircase, the sounds became clearer, agonized groans mixed with sharp gasps of breath, as though someone or something was fighting against itself. The noise was coming from the far end of the hall, near Dr. Jekyll's study. I reached the door and hesitated. Just as I was about to knock, the door swung open, and I found myself face to face with a man, or something that resembled a man, but I could not describe him. My mind scrambled to make sense of the figure before me, but it was as if my thoughts recoiled from the task, unable to grasp what I was seeing.



His appearance was grotesque yet oddly mesmerizing. And though I could not explain it, within him, I saw a reflection of something deep within myself, something untamed and free. For a brief, dangerous moment, I found myself drawn to him, not in love or admiration, but in a strange recognition. There was a part of me that yearned for the same freedom, the same abandonment of rules and expectations.

We did not speak. There were no words exchanged. He merely looked at me, then just as suddenly as he had appeared, he turned and disappeared into the shadows of the house. My mind raced as I lay in bed, trying to make sense of it all.

Had Dr. Jekyll had found a way to split himself, to become something entirely different? And though the thought horrified me, it also awakened a dangerous question within: if he could become something so wild, so unrestrained, what was stopping me from doing the same?



I had to confront him, to know the full extent of what he had become and why. One evening, I gathered the courage to face him. I waited in his study, and when he finally appeared…

"Dr. Jekyll," I began, "I know about Hyde."

His shoulders stiffened, a flicker of something unreadable passed over his face. But he did not deny it.

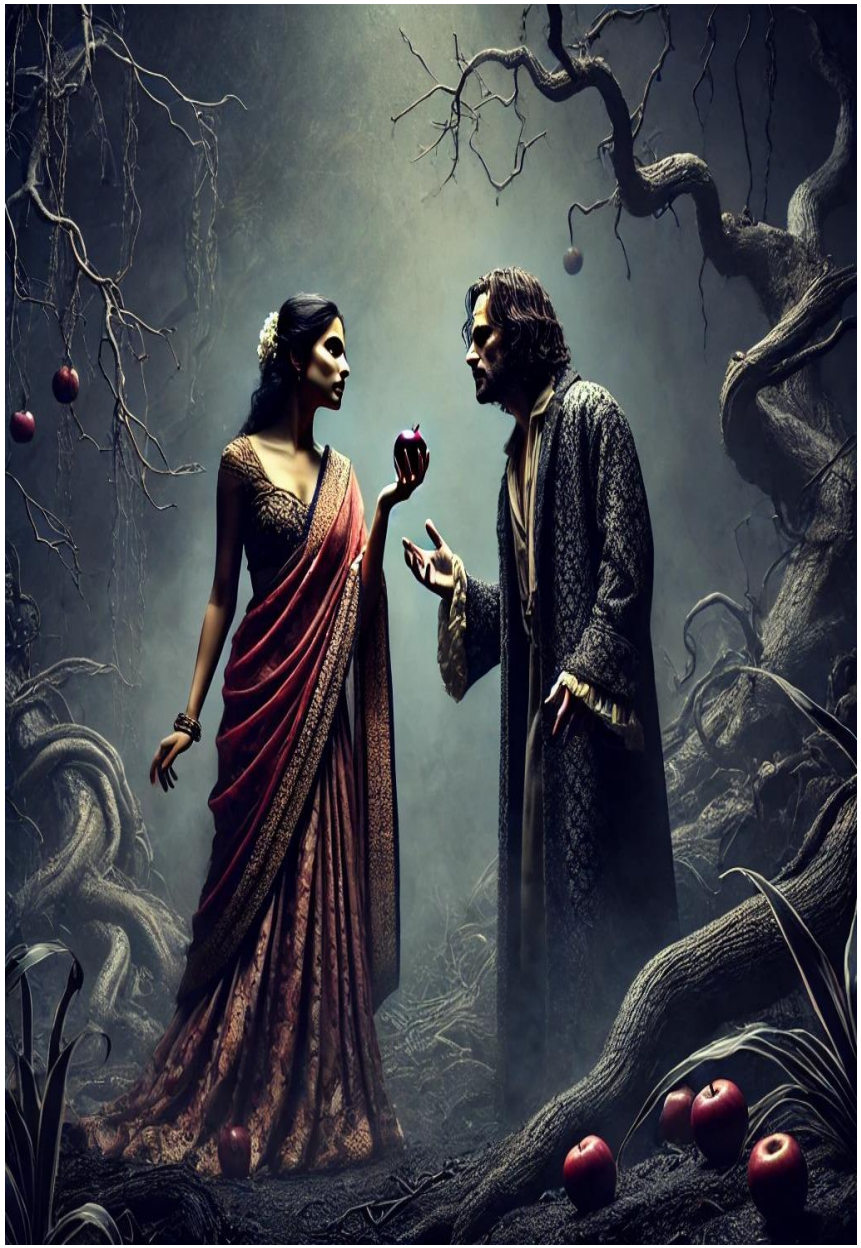
"I was hoping you wouldn’t find out," he said quietly, his voice heavy with resignation. "But I suppose it was inevitable. You’re too perceptive to be kept in the dark for long."

I moved closer, my voice gaining strength. "Who is Hyde to you?"

Without a word, he crossed the room to a small cabinet, unlocked it, and retrieved a vial filled with a strange, glowing liquid. He held it up for me to see.

"This," he said, his voice low and steady, "is the potion I’ve perfected. It’s what allows me to become Hyde."

I stared at the vial in his hand, a thousand questions swirling in my mind. Before I could speak, he continued.



"At first, it was an experiment," he said, pacing. "A way to separate the good from the bad, the civilized from the primal. I thought I could live free from society's burdens. Becoming Hyde was exhilarating, no rules, no guilt, just pure freedom."

I felt a chill, but before I could speak, he turned to me, intense. "I've perfected the potion. There's one last test. I need you to drink it, Jane."

I recoiled. "You want me to become like Hyde?"

He shook his head. "Not Hyde. The potion reveals your hidden self; the part society suppresses. For me, that was Hyde. I don’t know what it will bring out in you, and I need to see if it works."

He was asking me to step into the same abyss that was consuming him. Would I discover a part of myself long buried, or would I be consumed by darkness, just as he had been?

The Victorian world demands submission, especially from women like me. The man I love is asking something of me. Victorian society and my Indian culture demands I oblige.



I would like to think that, in a moment of clarity, I smashed the bottle. That glowing vial of temptation, that source of both freedom and destruction, it shattered against the cold stone floor.

Nobody will drink the potion from now onward. Not Dr. Jekyll, not Hyde, and certainly not me.

It is tempting to imagine that, with the bottle destroyed, everything could return to how it once was. Dr. Jekyll would return to the kind man he used to be.

The truth is, that potion was never just a physical substance, it was a symbol of inner turmoil, repressed desire, chaotic forces that exist within all of us.

Now I understand that true freedom does not come from giving in to those impulses; it comes from resisting them, from finding strength in self-restraint.



"We’re going to be a nice, happy family, and I will nurse you back to health." The vision of a quiet, respectful life, a life where Dr. Jekyll and I could simply exist without the weight of his experiment. The idea of domesticity that I had been raised to believe in, a life of simple happiness.

But beneath my words, there was a deep uncertainty. I could already feel the tension gnawing at me, the dissonance between what I wanted and what I feared was impossible. His body may recover, but what of his mind? His soul? And what of my own?



It was as though the world around me shattered and then reformed into something sharper, darker, more vivid than anything I had ever known.

“Cleave.”

The name echoed in my mind like a whisper, and suddenly, I understood. Cleave was everything I had denied, everything I had repressed, raw, unfiltered, and unapologetic. She did not just exist in the shadows; she thrived there.

The rules of society, the rigid constraints of class, gender, and morality, all of it was meaningless. I could see the world for what it truly was: a façade of order built on lies and hypocrisy. I knew in that moment why Dr. Jekyll had been unable to resist the pull of his own transformation. From the corner of my eye could see Dr. Jekyll, he was enjoying himself, looking like a proud creator, laughing with pride.

As Cleave, I was not afraid to take what I wanted, to speak my mind, to act on every impulse that Jane had suppressed for so long. I was so grateful to Dr. Jekyll; I ran over and kissed him.

She saw the world as hers to shape, hers to conquer. Cleave existed for herself and no one else.



Cleave had a duality, a paradox that defined her existence. On the one hand, she had an almost magnetic ability to draw people, ideas, and even circumstances toward her, weaving them into a web of her own making. There was a pull to her, a gravitational force that made others, willingly or not, become part of her narrative. Her mind worked like clockwork, seeing the intricate patterns of relationships, power dynamics, and emotions, and using them to her advantage. She could gather people, break down walls, and draw out the truths that others hid, exposing the core of what lay beneath.

But just as easily as she could draw things together, Cleave had the equally terrifying ability to tear them apart. My name, after all, was not a coincidence. I could dissect, unravel, and dismantle anything, be it a person's resolve, a carefully constructed lie, or even the illusions of societal order itself.

But what I had not expected was that, in this raw, untethered state, I would finally understand the relationship between love and liberation. Dr. Jekyll showed me that true love is what allows you to be your real self, offers the kind of freedom that Cleave thrived on. Women everywhere should seek a love that lets them be themselves, without apology, supported by a partner who stands by them against the world's demands. With that kind of love, Cleave was not just a part of me; she was me, free, unburdened, and whole.

There was no turning back.

Reflection

In this project, I combined Jane Eyre and Jekyll and Hyde in a deliberate attempt to craft a more accessible narrative for readers who are unfamiliar with or uninterested in Victorian Gothic literature. My goal was to retain the richness of the genre while offering a version that people could consume without the time commitment or analytical depth required by the original works. Although this resulted in what I consider a somewhat mediocre attempt, the intention was to create a "digestible pill" of Victorian gothic themes wrapped in a love story that ends with female empowerment.

The gothic elements of Jane Eyre, Jekyll, and Hyde are foundational to the story. Jane Eyre intensely focuses on isolation, trauma, and the orphaned individual's journey through oppressive societal structures. The gothic nature of the novel comes not only from its literal settings, like Thornfield Hall, with its locked rooms and dark secrets, but from the emotional landscapes it explores. The tension between reason and emotion, the clash between the external and internal self, and the haunting presence of hidden truths all contribute to the novel's gothic atmosphere.

Jekyll and Hyde, on the other hand, introduces the duality of human nature, a theme well-suited to the gothic genre. The idea that individuals harbour a dark, hidden self resonates with the Victorian fear of unchecked desires and the breakdown of civilized identity. The split between Jekyll and Hyde is a metaphor for the struggle between societal expectations and personal freedom, a theme I found particularly useful in shaping my version of Jane Eyre. In this retelling, Hyde does not serve as a literal character but

rather as a representation of the wild, untamed aspects of Jane's personality, elements that society expects her to repress but which lead her toward independence.

Victorian Gothic literature is known for its layered complexity, a genre that requires time and patience to peel back. It combines social critique, supernatural elements, and psychological depth in a way that can intimidate modern readers, particularly those who may not be inclined to delve into its many intricacies. Many readers today, overwhelmed by the fast pace of life, the demands of technology, and a constant barrage of information, may prefer to read something other than lengthy Victorian novels or wade through scholarly analysis. I understand this, even if passing up such rewarding work is a shame.

This project is, admittedly, a balancing act. The goal was to make these Victorian gothic elements more digestible, but in doing so, the content had to be distilled, simplifying the narratives and trimming much of the complexity that makes the original texts so powerful. In some ways, it may feel like the works have been flattened out, creating what could be seen as a 'mediocre' version, a quick and easy read that lacks the full depth of its sources. However, it is a sincere attempt to maintain the spirit of the gothic while making it accessible to a modern, potentially disinterested audience.

The decision to focus the story on a woman's journey toward independence was deliberate. The themes of personal freedom and self-empowerment are central to both novels. Jane Eyre is, in many ways, a story about a woman coming into her own, refusing to conform to the oppressive expectations of the society around her. In my version, this theme of independence is foregrounded and

given a modern twist. The love story that emerges is not one of dependence or submission but ends with the protagonist embracing her wild self. The man in this version is not a saviour or a romantic ideal; he is simply a partner willing to accept Jane for who she truly is.

Jekyll and Hyde also play an important role in shaping the narrative's exploration of duality. In this retelling, Hyde exists not as a villain but as a manifestation of Jane's personality's untamed, unacknowledged aspects. These elements lead to her independence rather than being something to fear or suppress. It is through her acceptance of her darker, wilder side that she can break free from the expectations placed on her by society. In this way, the gothic theme of internal conflict, central to Jekyll and Hyde, is used as a vehicle for personal growth and empowerment.

The project feels mediocre because some of the nuance is inevitably lost by simplifying the themes. The original works are rich in subtext, filled with social commentary, and packed with details that reward careful reading. I have had to water down these elements in compressing two such complex texts into a single, streamlined narrative. While retaining many of the gothic features of isolation, trauma, and introspection, the final product lacks the depth and subtlety of the originals. It is a bit like watching a movie adaptation of a beloved book, entertaining, perhaps even enjoyable, but never quite capturing what made the source material so special.

I have included small Easter eggs throughout the project, references and hidden details that readers familiar with the original texts will hopefully recognize. These serve as nods to the complexity of the source material, adding an extra layer for those willing to dig a little deeper. For example, certain lines of dialogue mirror famous passages from Jane Eyre, and the interplay between Jane's

internal and external selves directly references the duality theme in Jekyll and Hyde. These small touches reward readers who know the original works while allowing the story to stand independently for those less familiar with Victorian Gothic literature.

The project is about finding a balance between accessibility and depth. It is an imperfect solution, one that sacrifices some of the richness of the originals to make the story more palatable to a modern audience. In that sense, it is a sincere attempt to make the dark themes, emotional intensity, and timeless relevance of Victorian gothic literature more accessible to readers who might never pick up a Victorian novel.

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"Indian Jane Eyre." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

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"Indian Jane Eyre becomes Hyde, laughing maniacally." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

"Indian Jane Eyre breaks potion bottle on the ground." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

"Indian Jane Eyre drinks potion." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

"Indian Jane Eyre falling in love with the doctor." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

"Indian Jane Eyre judged by staff and society." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

"Indian Jane Eyre in her transformation, with the haunting presence of Dr. Jekyll in the background. The dark, eerie atmosphere captures the themes of power, love, and rebellion." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

"Indian Jane Eyre meets Mr Hyde. Mr Hyde must be shorter than Jane." Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

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“Indian Jane Eyre reaches for door handle.” Prompt, *DALL-E*, version 3, OpenAI, 18 Oct, 2024.

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