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The Flawless Stranger

The Personality That Does the Job Without Feeling

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Chapter 1: The Signature — the Flawless Stranger at a Glance

The Telltale Manner

The file opens on the scene that defines the type, because it is the scene everyone else remembers: the room where something has gone badly wrong — the crash, the collapse, the diagnosis delivered in a hallway, the project dying in real time — and the crowd of distressed faces, and among them one person whose face is working correctly and nothing more. Not cold; the file is precise about this. Coldness pushes. The Professional's face simply receives: it processes the scene with the exact bandwidth the scene requires, allocates no additional resource to display, and gets on with the work — and the room, without knowing why, begins to calm itself around the one person who is not performing distress. The voice matches the face: level in the emergency, level in the meeting after the emergency, level when asked to explain the emergency, with the type's telltale complete answers that close — sentences that end without a hook, answers that cannot be followed with a personal question, information delivered with the door politely shut behind it. The small talk is handled like a task in the queue: correctly, briefly, with a punctuation that ends it. The office gives nothing away — no photographs that mean anything, no coffee mug that tells you anything, the desk of a person who could be reassigned to another building by Friday and leave nothing behind but results. The type is early, is prepared, is never seen rehearsing, is never seen rattled, never gossips, never overshoots — and the file's shorthand, collected from colleagues' testimony across every case in the record: the most reliable person I know, and I couldn't tell you one thing about them.

The Backstory Signature

The founding scene is the invoice — and the file finds it, in every case, by looking for the moment feeling was billed. The child cried and the crying was turned into entertainment; the child confessed and the confession was returned as ammunition; the child needed and the needing was itemized, priced, and presented — after all we do for you — and the child, who was keeping books even then, made the entry that the whole adult life is built on top of: feeling has a cost, and I will not be billed again. What follows, and the file marks it as the signature beat, is the separation: the hands taken off the heart like an instrument taken off a person, and mounted on the bench — and from that day the report cards improve, the tasks get flawless, the room stops laughing at anything, because the work now runs through a professional who has removed the self from the process — and the adults, the file notes with the record's driest anger, applaud the result: so mature, so easy, so strong — the child praised with one hand and billed with the other, until the policy was set for life. The backstory signature is therefore the praise: look for the child who got better at everything the

year the feeling went missing, and the family that called the disappearance growing up.

The Childhood Album

The file keeps four photographs, and the album explains the machine better than the machine's own manual. In the first, the child is crying at the dinner table and the table is laughing — one sibling doing the imitation, the parent not stopping it — and the child's face in the photograph has already begun the pivot the type will perfect: the tears stopping on command, mid-scene, and the child finishing dinner in silence while the laughter moves on to other things. In the second, the confession — told in trust at eleven years old, repeated back as evidence at twelve, in an argument the child did not even know was being held — and the face in this photograph is the file's most instructive: not betrayed, not yet; auditing. The lesson is being booked in real time: the interior is not a sanctuary but an evidence locker, and the child who hands over the evidence will be tried with it. In the third, the invoice itself — the parent's face during the recital, the sigh with the price tag in it, the itemized gratitude demanded at the door — and the child learning to perform gratitude before the bill arrives, which is the direct ancestor of the adult who performs warmth on schedule and cannot find it off-schedule. And in the fourth, the photograph the range book keeps last because it is the one the adult keeps in the wallet: the child alone with the task — the model, the project, the long wait of whatever kind — building it perfectly, for hours, happily, because the task is the one place where the self is not a liability but an irrelevance, and the work goes better with the self removed from it. The file's caption for the whole album: this is not the childhood of a cold person; it is the childhood of a warm person who was billed for the warmth. And the album's fifth photograph, kept last because the adult keeps it in the wallet, is the one the file calls the first contract: the child, thirteen, handed a real task by a teacher who did not laugh at anything — the project, the shop window, the perfect Saturday inventory — and the child working it, flawless, invisible, happy; the teacher's praise afterward, the first praise in the record that arrived without an invoice attached, and the child's face in the photograph doing the arithmetic the type still does every working morning: this is the room where I am not a liability; I will get very good at this room, and I will live in it. The file's caption, the whole biography in one line: the child was not choosing a career; the child was choosing a residence — the first home where the self was an irrelevance instead of a bill.

The Type at a Glance

Energy: metered, level, and precisely budgeted — never manic, never flat, a professional power supply with no spikes and no surges; the type runs at exactly the wattage the task requires.

Ambition: the perfection of the process, not the possession of the throne — the type wants the work to be undeniable and the records to be clean, and will decline the promotion that would add meetings, feelings, and other people's interiors to the

queue.

Vanity structure: the vanity is located in the reliability itself — never late, never rattled, never the person anyone has to worry about; the marksman's secret pride, kept where all their feelings are kept, is that phrase from the colleague's testimony: you can give him the worst day of the year.

Loyalty: to the standard — the type will deliver for the same organization for decades and feel nothing that the organization would recognize as devotion; the standard is the spouse, the colleagues are the coworkers, and the file marks it as the type's cleanest paradox: the most dependable person in the building is the least attached to the building.

Weakness: the restoration of feeling, anywhere, ever — the type will reorganize a department, absorb a colleague's breakdown, and drive twelve hours through the night, and go to pieces, quietly, over being asked how was your day in a tone that actually wants the answer.

Unspoken need: permission to be a person in the room where they are a professional — the need, held under every closed answer for the entire adult life, is for one person to say, about the job and not instead of it: you don't have to leave yourself at the door; bring it in; the work will hold.

The Type in Five Situations

At the scene of the disaster, the type is the calm the file has already described — hands correct, voice level, face giving the room exactly what the room needs and nothing else — and the file adds the finding the testimony always reports with a kind of awe: after the crisis, the Professional eats the sandwich. The event that gives everyone else the nightmares processes, in this type, as a shift: worked, survived, closed, logged — and the file marks the astonishment as the cost in miniature, because the colleagues who cannot believe the sandwich are the same colleagues who will not, twenty years later, be able to write the retirement speech.

In the performance review, the marksman is the reviewer's easiest hour: numbers clean, projects closed, no drama, no excuses — and the reviewer's one frustration, the range book finds it in every record: there is nothing to develop, because development requires a person, and the person did not attend the review; the marksman takes the praise of their reliability with the same level face they took the crisis with, range books the praise under task completed, and leaves, and the reviewer is left holding the uncomfortable discovery that the most perfect report in the building was also the least knowable one.

At the colleague's funeral, the type is impeccable: there early, dressed correctly, the condolence delivered in the exact words the moment requires — and then the departure at the first correct minute, and the file's finding, held for Chapter Six: the type is not avoiding the grief; the type cannot locate it — the instrument was built to keep it out of the hands, and it has kept it out of the news, out of the review, and out

of the funeral, and the interior sends no signal at all, which the file marks as the darkest reading in the book: the grief is happening; it is simply happening unwitnessed, even by its own operator.

On receiving the promotion, the type is pleased the way a machine is pleased by a correct reading: the promotion is a verdict on the process, and the process is what the type lives to have verified — and the file notes the celebration the office throws, and the type at the center of it, present, correct, warm for exactly as long as the event requires, and gone at the first correct minute — and the colleagues discovering, over the cake, that none of them knows what the promoted one wanted, whether the new title was a dream or merely the next correct reading on the gauge.

At the dinner party, the marksman is the guest who asks the good questions — the range book insists this is a craft, learned early: the professional discovers that a question is a shield, that the person asking is never the person answering — and the marksman spends the evening being, by every testimony, excellent company, and drives home having disclosed nothing, and the host closing the door with the mission report's most repeated sentence about this type: great guest; no idea who they are.

Not to Be Confused With

The Quiet Specialist (Volume 3) — the catalog's nearest neighbor, and the file marks the border precisely: the Specialist's quiet is a talent's preference, the Professional's is armor; the Specialist is shy, would speak if safe, and blooms unmistakably when trusted — the Professional is not shy at all, speaks easily, in fact gives the whole room its best conversation, and blooms at nothing, because the bloom was deleted in the founding scene, not buried in shyness. The test the file offers: put them both in the crisis room — both are calm; then put them both in the safe room, with one trusted friend and the question how are you, really — the Specialist, with effort, answers; the Professional gives the complete answer that closes, and the friend leaves knowing less than before.

The Indestructible Titan (Volume 51) — the confusion is in the flatness, and the file corrects it: the Titan cannot admit a wound, which means the wound is there, denied, pushing; the Professional has no wound on the record — the wound was converted into policy decades ago and the file's instruments cannot find it operating anywhere except in the policy itself. The Titan is armor outside, storm inside; the Professional is armor inside, and the inside, the file's finding, is not a storm but a sealed account — quieter than the Titan's war, and harder to find, because the Titan at least is fighting something; the Professional has simply declined the entire theater.

And the signature range book closes with the refined field check the target list has waited the whole sector to deploy, because the flatness defeats every ordinary instrument — the Stranger passes every professional interview in the world, and the target list kept misfiling the related types — and the refined check is run not at the Stranger but at the people around the Stranger: ask the beneficiaries for the invoice. the tracker's log of a recorded shot: the marksman at fifty-one, twenty-nine years of

flawless execution — and the target list interviewed, with consent, the five people the marksman had quietly served hardest: the colleague whose visa problem was solved before she knew it existed; the friend driven twelve hundred miles through the night for a custody hearing; the neighbor whose basement flood was pumped out at three a.m. by a person who mentioned it never once afterward. And the instrument's finding, surveilled across the five interviews, is the range book's most distinctive measurement: not one of the five had ever thanked the marksman for the feeling — they had thanked them for the favor, when they managed to corner them, and the marksman had deflected each thank-you at combat speed, level voice, work already moving on. The check's one question, aimed past the favor: "what do you think the ride to the airport at four in the morning was?" And the answers converge, given by five separate beneficiaries in five separate files, in almost identical words: "a favor. The most reliable favor in the world." — and the tracker's key finding, the one that isolates the marksman past appeal: the favors are not favors; the cache has audited the logs, and the arithmetic is unmistakable: a favor is optional, and the rides are never once missed, never late, never rescheduled — the four a.m. airport run, the solved visa, the pumped basement — the frequency, the reliability, the priority of it, is the grammar of nothing in the world except feeling — the marksman is delivering, with the only instrument the first assignment left unsealed, the exact message the flat voice cannot say — and the target list's cross-range book finding is the instrument's whole discovery: the Stranger is the only constitution in the sector whose love language is excellence delivered to you personally — and the five beneficiaries, told this by the target list, at the follow-ups, went back and asked — and the tracker's log holds the closing telltale pause the range book flags above the rest: four of the five asked the marksman directly, in the following year, what the four a.m. ride was — and the type, all four files, answered in under two seconds, level, verbatim: "logistics." And the pause the census's instruments logged after the word — the fifth beneficiary's case, the one the annex waited the whole volume to catch: a nine-second pause, the longest recorded for this type at a simple question — and then, once, at fifty-two, to the one friend who asked a second time: "you're the only person who ever asked what it was." Delivered flat. Retracted immediately — "it's a car; I was awake" — and the census's annotation is the field check's whole finding: the detachment was never the absence of feeling; it was the delivery system for it — and the invoice, run across the five beneficiaries, reads the same every time: 100 acts of excellence a year delivered personally, 0 acknowledged as feeling, and the Stranger, in twenty-nine years, asked about it once, at the twenty-nine-year mark, and the answer took nine seconds and a second ask — because the policy that billed the feeling never once read the rides.

Chapter 2: The Core — the Wound That Wrote the Policy

Every engine in this sector runs on a first assignment, and the Flawless Stranger's is the only one the range book has ever described as an accounting decision — made by a child, executed perfectly, never once reviewed. The scene has three doors, and the

type has usually been through all of them before the age of twelve.

Through the first door, the mocking: the child cries, and the crying is turned into content — imitated at the table, performed for guests, the tears reproduced with a smile until the tears themselves become the joke's setup, and the child learns the lesson of the first door, which is that a feeling displayed is a feeling owned by the room — the room may do what it likes with it, and what the room likes is laughter.

Through the second door, the exploitation: the child hands over the interior in trust — the fear, the crush, the shame, the thing done at school — and receives it back as ammunition, in an argument, years later, verbatim; and the lesson of the second door is the file's coldest entry: the interior is an evidence locker, and every confession is a deposition, and the child who keeps testifying will be tried with the testimony.

Through the third door, the invoice: the feeling arrives with a price already on it — the sigh with the cost inside it, the recital attended the way a debt is collected, the itemized gratitude demanded at the door, after everything we do for you — and the lesson of the third door, which closes the account for good: feeling is a billable error, and the child who feels on the premises will be charged for the service.

The policy, written the day the third door closed, is one sentence long and has governed everything since: the work goes better with the self removed from it. The child took the hands off the heart the way an instrument is taken off a person and mounted on the bench — the scope was installed between them, the distance was measured, and then, because the child was already this type, the distance was maintained: checked like any other tool, kept sharp, kept clean, recalibrated every morning without fail. The file must mark the exquisite irony at the center of the engine: the detachment is not an absence of skill but the type's finest one — the same hands that build the flawless report built the flawless wall, and the adult professional who cannot tell you what they feel about anything is running, at all times, the most precisely maintained piece of equipment in the catalog.

And the loop that keeps the long wait running — the range book finds it in every shot, and it is the simplest loop in the mission report. The self is removed from the process; the process performs flawlessly; the world pays — praise, promotions, the colleague's awe, the sighing parent's sudden approval, all of it arriving for the very first time and arriving, the file notes, in direct proportion to the removal; and the payment is booked as proof of policy: the flatness is working, the seal is profitable, the account stays closed. The file's finding on the loop's dark half: the adult has forgotten the founding scene, has forgotten the doors, has forgotten there was ever a policy at all — the detachment no longer feels like a decision because it has never once been reviewed; it presents itself as personality, as temperament, as just how I am — and the file's correction, stated once and restated whenever the book meets this type's own testimony: it is not how you are; it is what you decided, brilliantly, at nine years old, and the decision deserves, at long last, a performance review. And the file books the applause itself as the engine's longest-term holding, because it is the one asset the type never audits: the child was praised into the policy by adults who needed the seal to be a maturity — so easy now, so calm, so grown-up — and the praise has kept

arriving ever since, from teachers, bosses, boards, spouses in the first years, each one certifying the flatness as a virtue, until the policy holds the record's most protected status: it is not experienced as a wound at all; it is experienced as character, and the record's finding on where that ends: a person cannot review a policy they have been congratulated for; nobody audits their own medal; and so the review this book is asking for has been postponed not by pain but by praise — the file's dry note, entered in the margin of every case: the seal was never hidden; it was awarded.

The engine's hidden load completes the map: the policy was written to protect the child from being billed for feeling — and the file's central finding, the one the whole book turns on: the policy worked, and kept working, until it protected the child from everything, including the love that arrived unbilled, the friendship that asked no invoice, the life that kept sending feelings to an address the policy had marked vacant. The protection so thorough it quarantines the person it was built to defend is the long wait's whole tragedy, and the range book holds it here for eight chapters: what the detachment was protecting was a child; what it now protects against is the adult that child became — from their own marriage, their own children, their own grief, their own retirement party, where nobody can write the speech, because the person the policy was protecting has been, for thirty years, successfully protected from being known.

The wound range book closes with the exhibit the grown shots finally surfaced, because the policy was written under a specific roof, and the target list finally got the interview the perimeter was missing: the witness to the first assignment — the one who did the billing. the shot: the Stranger at fifty-three, the policy certified at four decades — and the target list's interview with the marksman's mother: the one who taught the child that feelings had a price tag. Her account, offered at eighty-six, when the target list read the first assignment back to her, and the transcript is pinpointed in full because the wound's origin has never before been described by the biller herself: "the mission report should have those years exactly, because everything hangs off them: I was not cruel. I want the range book to understand what actually happened, because my son's whole armor has misfiled it for forty years: I was afraid — a widow at thirty-eight with two boys and a shop, and the mission report can check every number: the margins were thin, and the fear ran the house the way money does in a small business — line by line. And the target list will want the first assignment afternoon, and I'll give it honestly, because I've had forty years to find the exact truth of it: he was nine. His brother's accident — the record has it; the hospital, the winter, the shop run alone — and the boy came home from school with a fever, and he cried. And I want the file to have what I did, because it is the founding and the misfiling in one sentence: I looked at the crying nine-year-old and I said — the census can have it verbatim, because I can still hear it: 'not tonight, love; we can't afford a sick day either.' And the file should log the boy's face, because I've never forgotten it: nothing dramatic — no storm, no shouting — the crying just stopped, mid-breath, the way you turn off a tap. And he never cried again. Not that winter, not at the funeral years later, not once, the mission report can check with anyone who's known him — the boy went to bed and woke up professional, at nine, and the shop got its clerk, and the

customers got their perfect boy, and I want the target list to log what I did with it, because the wrong target is mine and I'm the only one alive to enter it: I was grateful. The crying stopped and I was grateful, because the fear had been fed and the house ran, and it never once, in forty years, occurred to me that the invoice I sent had a payment attached — that a child who stops crying on command is not a child who has stopped feeling; it is a child who has learned the feeling is billable, and he paid, every time, quietly, in the currency nobody could see: the sealed room. And the mission report should close on my arithmetic, because it's the range card nobody else will say and the range book should have it from the biller: the boy kept the shop, kept the family, kept the flawlessness — and the crying, the one time in his whole life I saw it leak, was at my bedside, at the end, when the range book's tracker was in the room — and the target list should log that moment too, because it is the wound's whole correction arriving in the biller's own ledger: he held my hand — the grip, the nurses will tell you, was the strongest thing about him — and he said, in the flat voice, with the tears running where I could see them, level as a report: 'I never understood what the crying was for, Mum. I do now. It was the weather. It was the weather for the whole house, and you couldn't afford it, and I stopped billing you — the least you could have done was tell me the bill was never real.' And it wasn't. The record should have that plainly, from the biller, at the end: the invoice was fear, dressed as arithmetic; there was never a real bill; the house could always afford its weather — and the child, at nine, paid a forty-year policy against a debt that never existed. That is the founding. The rest is his file." the target list's annotation on the exhibit: the first assignment is not the sentence but the tap — the crying stopped mid-breath, the self removed from the scene, the policy written in one evening: feeling is billable, and the professional does not incur — and the range book's finding, uniform across its Strangers: every one of them can name their invoice — the shop, the winter, the sentence — and none of them has ever once checked whether the bill was real — and the wound chapter enters the first assignment's whole clause at last: the armor was built for a debt of fear, billed by the frightened, paid by a child in advance — and the breathing chapter's whole discovery, the repositioned shots certify, is that the shop could always afford the weather, and the invoice, once read aloud, is marked in every grown range book the same way: never owed.

Chapter 3: The Instrument — the Scope

The tool gives the marksman its whole architecture, and the range book maps it in four operations, because the Professional runs the same procedure on every input the world sends — feelings first, then everything else.

Aim. The incoming event is framed before it is felt: the crisis is a task with parameters, the colleague's breakdown is a problem with a schedule, the funeral is an event with a dress code — and the framing is the instrument's opening move, because a framed event cannot reach the operator's interior without first passing through the frame, and the frame is built to professional tolerances. Isolate. The framed event is then cut away from its weather: the event is real, the weather — the fear, the grief, the joy trying to happen — is classified as noise in the signal and filtered out of the working

channel; this is the operation the type was performing at the dinner table at nine years old, mid-laughter, tears stopping on command, and it is the operation the type still performs, at sixty, when the diagnosis is delivered in a hallway. Execute. The remaining channel is pure bandwidth: the hands do the task, the voice makes the calls, the professional delivers the output at a quality the noise-feeling world cannot match, because the noise has been removed from the process with a completeness no healthy operator can afford. Exit. The event closes at the first correct minute: the report filed, the shift logged, the condolence delivered in the exact words the moment requires, the dinner party left with the host's memory of excellent company — and the exit is the operation the colleagues testify about with the awe the file has already recorded: the sandwich after the crash, the departure after the cake, the drive home from the funeral having disclosed nothing.

The instrument's range is its second finding: total coverage in the professional context, and progressive failure everywhere else. At work the scope is flawless — the emergency, the impossible client, the quarter that killed careers, all processed at a level calm that made the results look inevitable; and the file marks the range's edge precisely, because it is the edge the type keeps discovering in the record's saddest entries: the instrument was built for the billed feelings — the mocked, exploited, invoiced kind, the kind that arrive with enemies attached — and it was never built for the unbilled kind, which arrive without enemies, without invoices, with nothing to aim at: the love that asks for nothing, the friendship that just wants the afternoon, the child who only wants the parent to watch. The scope cannot aim at these; there is nothing to frame; and the unbilled feelings bounce off the instrument's glass and return to sender, and the sender — the file's finding, in the partner's testimony, in the children's, in the friend's — concludes, wrongly and forever, that they were rejected, when the truth the record proves is nearer and worse: they were unprocessed — the one kind of mail the office has no procedure for.

The instrument's maintenance is the third finding, and the range book honors the craftsmanship in it, because the marksman keeps the tool sharp with a discipline the whole sector could study. The rules are absolute and kept absolutely: no small talk about the self; no opinions off-script; feelings logged as noise and never as data; warmth performed on schedule, in the correct words, at the correct wattage — and, above all, the morning calibration, which the type would deny performing and never misses: the mirror-check before the shift, the brief interior sweep that confirms the account is still sealed, the practice of the face that will be needed today. The file's admiration is real and so is its warning: a tool maintained this beautifully demands to be used, and the instrument that was built to block the billed feelings has, over the decades, quietly promoted itself — from armor to identity; the Professional no longer keeps the scope; the scope keeps the Professional.

And the fourth finding completes the map — whom the instrument works on. On the world, superbly: the room calms, the crisis closes, the numbers arrive, and everyone benefits. On the operator, completely: the interior goes silent, the account stays sealed, the feelings keep arriving at the vacant address and keep returning undelivered — and the file's closing entry for the chapter, in the record's plainest

hand: an instrument that works on everyone but its owner is not a tool; it is a tenancy agreement — and the landlord has been living, for thirty years, in the smallest room of their own house, paying rent to the policy that was supposed to be protecting them. The instrument's exchange rates complete the map — whom it works on, and what it buys. From the crisis, it buys performance: the event processed at a level calm no healthy operator can match, because the noise has been removed from the process with a completeness no intact interior could afford. From the institution, it buys tenure: the organization that measures only output reads the seal as excellence and promotes it, funds it, defends it — the file's finding, entered with the record's driest ink: the modern workplace is a founding scene that pays its Flawless Strangers, and the applause is the second wound, delivered quarterly. From the colleagues, it buys safety: the calm in the room is real — other people's emergencies end better with this type standing in them — and the colleagues pay for it in the currency the vendor relationship runs on: devotion to the service, zero curiosity about the vendor. What the currency does not buy — and here the ledger is as unanimous as it was for the Widow and the Menace — is the operator's own interior: the scope buys calm for the room, tenure for the résumé, and safety for everyone within reach, and for the person holding it, one more year of the sealed account; the file's closing arithmetic, plain as any invoice it has ever described: a tool that keeps everyone else warm is, to the only person who cannot stop holding it, a cost — billed daily, compounding quietly, and never once, in the sealed years, reviewed.

And the instrument range book closes with the session the cache has waited the whole perimeter to log, because the scope has never before been read by the hand that keeps it sharp — the auxiliary interview, surveilled at the marksman's own kitchen table, with the tracker's one combat-proven instruction: read the spec aloud, at the scene. The transcript, verbatim, because the instrument's unblinking specification has never before been spoken by its operator: "the target list should mark the terms, because the range book has earned them: this is the kitchen table, the scene is the anniversary of the mother's death — one year — and the tracker asked for the scope's spec at the scene, and I want the mission report to have the mechanics plainly: the scope is on. That is the first spec line the annex never hears: at the bedside, at the funeral, at the anniversary — the instrument does not power down; it focuses — the grief, the census will want the numbers, is running at whatever the instruments say it is running at, and the face gives the room nothing, and the voice is level, and the hands are steady — and the spec's honest finding, the line I've never said to anyone in forty years, because there was no one at the table before: the scope has two settings the founding never printed on the dial. Setting one: the work goes better with the self removed from it — the flawlessness, the vomit-proof execution, the retirement speech nobody can write — and setting two, the one the armor grew into without my signing off: the self goes better with the self removed from it. That is the scope turned inward — the cache has it as the shadow chapter — and I want the session to log the discovery the ballistic review surfaced, because it is the range card the whole perimeter turns on: the instrument cannot tell the difference between the two settings. That is not a defect of my particular unit; the cross-files are clear: the scope, aimed at a scene, removes whatever is loudest in it, and at a work scene the

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aiman Sterling is the author of The Archetype Series -- a library of personality portraits drawn the way literature draws characters: the great types of human temperament, recognized at a glance, understood in depth, and followed from childhood wound to mature strength.