

CORNCRAKE

JULY 2024
ISSUE 5



NESTING IN THE OAK OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE



ISOLATION IS DENY. PINY TO BOND.
PLAY TO LIVE!
PLAY CARDS!

IRON HANDS POKER CARDS
Available on: RADLOOT.COM



CONTENTS

ISSUE 5

Editor's Note	04
A Song for Roland	05
Jacob	10
The Grail Mass	12
The Tower	16
The Bullet of the Fated Ten	18
Artist Spotlight	
Samuel Wild	23
Spirit of the Woods	27
Beside Shopenhaur's Corpse	30
A Curious Call	33
Beneath the Oak Tree of Madness	37
Druid Without a Home: Don't Be Fooled By A Bear	39
Upon Monarchy	45

-Rarely does one see a squirrel tremble.
-The highway of life is filled with flat squirrels that couldn't make a decision.
-The squirrel that you kill in jest, dies in earnest.
-Whenever he looks at me with those big brown eyes, I feel like giving him a nut," she said.



Editor's Nut

Hello there young chestnut!

This is the best issue of the Corncrake so far! It really is! You've gotta believe me!!! Come on! Don't be such prude! You like fun don't you? You don't want to be everybodys dour aunt Audrey, do you? DO YOU? HUH?! HUH?!!!

...OK sorry that was a bit rude of me. Sorry... Please don't hit me with a stick... or call the dobermenn... or soak me in gasoline before you run off to play with matches... You'll regret it... I think... presume... NO!!! I am sure of it! You'll feel horrible afterwards, like a proper villain and the dobermenn will come for you afterwards.

Listen... Just read the rag, err, the mag and enjoy it will you!

If you don't I'm coming for your nuts!

Call of the Nutsquire
Redditor-in-Chief



A Song For Roland

T R Hudson



There was a village in the South of France, near the Pyrenees, called Roncevaux. Like most French villages, its narrow stone streets were flanked by ivy-covered stone walls. A river snaked through the town, where a mill blessed by Cardinal Richelieu once stood. In the center of town, near the old well, Roncevaux was also the home of a unique landmark, a stone statue of Roland, the first literary hero of France, a lieutenant of Charlemagne and a symbol of the fighting spirit of France and Christendom the world over.

Roland was commissioned by the Sun King, Louis the XIV, as a present to Fernan Colbert, a court poet from Roncevaux and friend to Jean-Baptiste Lully, who fell into obscurity after 1789. During the terror, Roland stood by and watched as the town mayor and several businessmen were killed by the starving mob of villagers, taking their queue from the butchery in Paris. Roland greeted Napoleon not long after when the emperor stopped by on his way to Spain in 1808. He watched Arago show off his Copley medal before his ill-fated executive commission in 1848. Roland sent off Roncevaux's men to fight the Prussians, then the greater German Empire, and the Third Reich. Hermann Goering came to see the statue in 1943, but it had been "stolen" years earlier, hidden in a barn for the duration of the war as so many other great works had been. No bombers molested the village and it was instead a quaint destination for German officers, then Americans after the liberation. In the 1990s, the quiet mountain village grew busier. Tourism brought money to the poor business owners and Roland brought the tourists in by their bus loads in between trips from Northern Spain to Nice. Weather had worn the statue down over the centuries, but there was never money to restore the great soldier to his former glory. Once, in the 1970s, Henri Du Pape fronted money for the restoration, but legal troubles with his mistress and illegitimate son complicated the issue. He was only in it for the headlines anyway and the scandal proved sufficient enough to stroke his ego and keep young women interested in him. The project was abandoned, much to the village's relief, who did not want the indentured service Pape would expect from his "generosity".

Today, Roland looks formless, a stone, man-shaped object in the center of town with a bronze plaque explaining who he was in English, Mandarin, and Spanish. No more tourists come through Roncevaux, the European highway system took care of that. Roland now stands, covered in graffiti, his sword Durendal, made to resemble a penis more than a knight's noble weapon. The makeup of the village has grown less French, as Mediterranean refugees landed on the shores of Southern France and spread throughout the countryside, bringing their foreign language, foreign food, and foreign religion for the

betterment and cultural enrichment of France, at least that was what the promise was.

Oliver grew up in Roncevaux, he could trace his roots to the land all the way back to the Roman legions who marched through on their way to Spain and its rich lands promised to Rome's veterans. His father owned the local newspaper, *Oliphant*, and voted for Macron while holding his nose. His mother was from Cannes and was the daughter of a French film director of no renown. She was once a model for a line of soap, whereupon she walked down the street naked as men turned their heads to get a look at her. It ended with a close-up of her saying the brand name and it seemed to work, as the company reported record profits that quarter. This was the zenith of her career and after birthing a child, she pretended she was content as a marketing associate and as a mother to her only child. Oliver went to church every Sunday, a practice that confused his parents, as neither of them was religious, and his mother wasn't even baptized, a fact that her father noted with pride whenever he was in the room with American directors visiting from Hollywood, pitching himself as more modern than his Countrymen. At first, he did so to hear Isabel Burgundy sing in the choir. She was a year older than him and was interested in other boys in their small village, but he figured that if he went to Church and the others didn't, he would win out. This line of thinking stopped when he was fifteen and realized she only sang in the choir because her parents made her. After getting to know her, it seemed to him it would be easy to bed her, that he would not have been the first, and by that time, he'd spent so much time at the church that not even the raging hormones of a young French man could make him give away his virginity. He got to second base with her, it was true, but God could forgive him his weakness for her.

Oliver kept going to church because of the local priest, named Marcel Turpin, who often spoke of a more muscular Catholicism and waxed nostalgic for the times of the Crusades, a period he didn't know but spoke of them as if he'd just returned from Jerusalem. Where the stereotypical priest in France admonishes the rejection of same-sex marriage in his parishioners or perhaps an ongoing climate catastrophe, Father Turpin was radical in both his love of France and his chauvinism towards other people and their way of life. Oliver would never be an alter boy, finding the ones who volunteered were too smarmy and not destined for anything beyond being clerks their whole lives, but Oliver respected the Priest and would often speak with him like they were old friends.

"My boy, you look troubled. What is on your mind?" the priest asked. They sat together outside the Priest's home near the church, enjoying the sunshine and cloudless sky, as they had for the last few months.

"I can't hide anything from you. Have you ever felt stuck? Or, at least, kept down? Like elephants are standing on your chest."

"I've heard this is the sign of a heart attack. Perhaps you should consult a doctor, not a Priest."

"You know I don't mean literally."

"A doctor can prescribe something for malaise as well, though a French doctor would suggest some of this", the priest pulled out a bottle of wine, pouring two glasses. They toasted and Oliver sipped.

"A priest is supposed to heal spiritual wounds."

Turpin laughed. "You're too young to have deep spiritual wounds. Shouldn't you be chasing young women with your friends? What are you doing hanging out with a priest? I assure you the rumors aren't true. I don't like boys."

Oliver looked into his glass. "I feel called to do great things. I wake up at night, full of fire, but I don't remember the dreams I have. I want to go out into the world and conquer, like Napoleon or Caesar, or Alexander. But instead, I am here and my phone is full of men my age doing what I dream to do."

"Oliver, you wish to conquer the world like the great men of history. But none of these men were French. Not even Napoleon, he was Corsican. France, my young friend, in many ways, is the world. Conquer her before you try to take the rest of the Earth."

"I thought you would understand me", Oliver plead. "You always go on about crusading."

"I would not go to Jerusalem unless God willed it. As such, for now, God keeps me in France. He has all eternity to retake the holy land in his due time. My advice to you is this, pray to God and ask him where you belong. If you are so consequential, like you believe you are, then he will reveal it to you."

Oliver felt dismissed, but instead of pushing the subject, he lifted his glass, finished the drink, and said his goodbyes. They shook hands like Englishmen and Oliver went home. A gaggle of migrants was gathered in the town center, around the old well, keeping away from Roland. They spoke foreign languages that Oliver did not understand and stared at him like he was the foreigner. He avoided eye contact and instead, went into the shop to grab fresh bread. Later that evening, around Nine, he and his family ate, discussing their days and challenges and successes.

"My day was good, Mama. I spent some time with Father Turpin after school. He's interesting. I don't know anyone who talks like him."

Oliver's parents looked at one another with concern. His grandfather wore a scowl of disgust.

"My Oliver, who did this to you? Who made you into a soldier for the Pope? Why, when I was your age, I stopped going to church and focused on more important things. Fame, fortune, women."

"I'm surprised that isn't the motto underneath the French flag, Grandpa", Oliver muttered.

"Why I never even got your mother baptized", his grandfather declared. "As a protest against their rampant pedophilia."

"We did not know about that back then, Papa" his mother answered. "I wasn't baptized because you wanted to look cool to any Hollywood producers you met."

"And I did look cool, thank you", he drank from his cup. "I should have directed Leon: The Professional. That would have made us all fabulously rich. Instead, we live in this ruin on a paper merchant's salary."

Oliver's father cut through his fish and made a scraping sound against the plate with his knife.

"You're lucky that you are here and not in America, where they ship their old men off into nursing homes and leave them to get dementia and die alone", his father replied.

"Enough, both of you", his mother cut in. "Oliver, my love, what is so interesting at that church? Your father and I worry that you're being..." she trailed, looking for words.

"Weird. It's weird, Oliver" his grandfather butted in.

"Papa!" his mother yelled.

"What?"

The rest of the meal was filled only with the sounds of shuffling forks and knives. Oliver yawned and headed upstairs.

That night, Oliver kicked and shuffled in his bed. The statue of Roland spoke to him, knighting him with his sword and handing him a horn, beckoning him to call out for help. Battle raged all around him and an army massed in the distance. A rainbow crested from one end of the army to the other and a cavalry charge flooded the field until only he and Roland were left standing. Oliver woke in the night and understood, at least in part. As if divined to him, he knew his purpose was linked to the statue in town.

In school, Oliver's teacher described him as the embodiment of "Mieux vaut tard que jamais". Late is worth more than never. He often looked outside, staring at birds that landed on the ancient, wooden windowsill. He sketched them later from memory and of all his pursuits, this gave him the most satisfaction, next to, of course, his afternoon chats with the priest. During his lunch, he ate near the river, where many of the other students sneaked away to and the teachers could do nothing but hope they returned. Oliver supped on Brie with bread and shared the fresh baguette with a swan.

Half of his class were not French, but rather the children of refugees who popped up one spring like wildflowers, though he could hardly say they smelled

as fresh. One boy, Mohammed, who was one of fifteen Mohammeds in the school, approached with two goonish friends, each of them leering at a few girls nearby. He tried to ignore it as she did, all of them growing accustomed to the new normal they found themselves in. Lunch ended with a sense of dread and one by one the students went back to school, Oliver not first, yet also not bringing up the rear. That afternoon they studied French History and were assigned a project to present to the class. Mohammed protested, as he often did.

"I am not French, I don't know French history. Perhaps I will present Algerian history instead. After all, the French colonized my home for so long, their stories are intertwined."

The teacher submitted and this came with calls from all the Muslim students who did not want to glorify colonialism. The project was changed to world history and the snickering from the gallery simmered, content with their victory. Oliver, who before then would never describe himself as a nationalist or chauvinist, knew at an instant that his project would revolve around Roland and Charlemagne.

Later that day, he spoke with the Priest about school. He found it much easier to speak his mind with Turpin than his family, which knotted his heart, but to be depressed was to be French, or at least that was what he read online. The opinions of foreigners seldom bothered him, yet he took the insights like a doctor's advice. He told Turpin of the dream and asked his council, not ever experiencing such a visceral dream. Often he forgot his dreams not long after waking, but this one stuck with him like a nagging cold or a buzzing mosquito.

"My young friend, I prayed you would get some clarity and it seems my prayers were answered. Perhaps I should now play the lottery, but of course, God does not work like this."

"You could always rob a bank and ask forgiveness."

"I'll pretend you did not say that", Turpin replied with a smirk. "Do your project, my young friend. The dividends of which you may feel long after you've left this hamlet. Perhaps..." he trailed off, saying nothing else. Oliver went home to research, reading for hours. The excitement built with every typed word and he went to bed hoping he would present first. His dreams were uneventful that night and he woke the next morning consumed by purpose.

Mohammed presented first, describing the Muslim conquest of Algeria, which at that time was known as Numidia. Oliver feigned his attention, instead stoking the fire inside. He felt like what the Americans called a geek, but that did not matter. He was already a devout Catholic in a classroom of Muslims and atheists. What could be done?

Mohammed finished with the bloody details of murdered Christians, which bothered none but Oliver, who took solace that he would return the blow with his own.

"I present to you, one of the great heroes of France, Roland, whose last stand against the Muslims in the Middle Ages, where the armies of the Moorish king attacked and were prevented from getting to Charlemagne. To be like Roland is to be like France, you see."

There were glares from the Muslim students and before he could continue, the teacher stepped in.

"Oliver, this is history class. You want to talk about Poems, save it for literature class."

"There is much evidence that Roland existed, I have done my research."

The teacher looked around the class and saw the rage building in his student's eyes. Oliver was then taken aside by the now more present educator.

"Oliver, perhaps this story is not the one you'd like to present, no? Perhaps it would be better if you redid the project and submitted it to me tomorrow. You don't even need to present. This is my fault, I should have stipulated more."

"We have a statue of Roland in this town and yet I cannot speak of him? A great French Man and I cannot even utter his name for what? Politics?"

"That's what that statue is?" Mohammed shouted and was joined in anger by his cronies. "That's offensive to the Muslims in France."

The teacher grumbled.

"No, it's history. Your people were pushed out of Europe many times before. It might even happen again", Oliver said, without thinking. There were gasps across the classroom. The teacher, finding his balls, sent Oliver out of the classroom. No doubt his parents would find out about the whole ordeal. He went straight to the church and could not find the Priest. There was a line outside the confessional and Oliver took a spot. An hour passed before it was his turn. Oliver entered, crossed himself, and did the necessary rituals.

"Forgive me father, for I have sinned. It has been six days since my last confession."

"What are your sins, my son."

"I am a frequent masturbator. I disrespect my parents' wishes for me to be an agnostic. I am proud of being French."

"That last one is not a sin."

"It is outside these walls, father."

"50 Hail Marys for the masturbation. These other sins, I find no fault in you. Now, go with God and his divine mercy. And if you come back next week telling me you've masturbated again, I swear, I'll have the Pope excommunicate you."

He did as he was told, but could see the smile on the Priest's face as he said that last part. That night at dinner, there was still only the clattering of forks and knives, Oliver unwilling to speak of his day. Only his grandfather seemed willing to discuss the matter.

"Of all the foolish ideas. Are you trying to get killed? Get us all killed."

"Papa!" his mother shouted.

"No, he needs to hear this. These people, they are not... They're going to..", he could not finish, but instead growled. Oliver saw his father still eating.

"It was a history assignment. I did the assignment."

"Your teacher called you an extremist on the phone. He asked if we were feeding you these ideas. I was shocked to hear any of this", his mother cried, tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

"It's that damn priest. Trying to stir up trouble. Bad enough he's got you wrapped around his finger, now he's using you like a megaphone. There ought to be a law against it."

"Against what? Being French?" Oliver snapped.

"I am French, we're all French. You and your priest don't get to define this country, especially if it means dividing the population."

"You would sell this country to the Americans if they gave you a movie deal. You're no Frenchman. It's you and yours that gave this country away for nothing and now I am here to inherit your failures."

Oliver stormed out of the house, his mother chasing him until he rounded the corner. He headed for the Church, he'd sleep there for the night. Many nights if he had to. Turpin would allow it, of that Oliver was sure. He wanted to cry, he'd never yelled at his family like that. He remembered the first time his grandfather showed him a film and the sparkle in the old man's eyes. They were once so close and though he did not regret how he felt, a sinking feeling in his stomach gave filled his person.

He passed the statue on his way to the Church and found Mohammed and his friends around it with

rope and shovels. They were shouting at each other, not in French, but it was clear they were frustrated at one another.

"What are you doing?" Oliver shouted. Lights from inside the homes surrounding the town center were turning on, faces peering through the windows.

"Go away, Colonizer. We're reclaiming this space. This statue offends Islam and therefore, it must go."

"No", Oliver replied. There was no grand speech prepared. No reasoning, no appeals to the ideas of a liberal market of ideas. Just a line that Oliver drew before his feet. He positioned himself between them and Roland. And it was as if his life culminated into one moment and Oliver rejoiced that his purpose was at once clear to him.

"I said move", Mohammed shouted, shoving the tip of his spade at Oliver. His shirt ripped and a slight cut appeared on his chest.

"No", Oliver replied. The anger grew in Mohammed's eyes and he tried to again, push Oliver out of the way with the shovel. Oliver grabbed the handle and would not let go, instead attempting to wrestle it from Mohammed. Not long after, the other Muslim boys joined in and overwhelmed him, kicking and punching, but Oliver did not let go. Mohammed pulled and pushed, then let go of the shovel, sending Oliver flying back, smacking his head against the ground. He tried to get up, but the boys started kicking him. Oliver tasted blood and looked up at the statue. His ears were ringing and he swore he could hear a horn calling.

By then, the town was a stir and the police were called. The statue, which had stood for over three hundred years, stood one more night. Oliver looked up at Roland and smiled and Roland stepped down from the pedestal and stood the young man back on his feet. The blood was gone and he was cleaned and he rose a knight, like so many great men before him. Oliver thanked God and entered the gates of Heaven.

Jacob

ND Wallace Swan



Jacob Starling gripped the steering wheel of his 1986 blue Toyota Camry hatchback, sweat dripping from his brow as he wrestled with the vehicle's erratic movements from a steering fluid leak. He pulled the cassette tape from the deck and the speakers went silent. He read the title of the album in his head: *RoyaleTND2, Teenaged Ninja Don'ts*. He opened his window, feeling the crisp air on his skin, and tossed the tape out the window. *It was crap*. He knew it.

The road stretched out before him, the dense forests flanked him with occasional glimpses of moonlight filtering through, the towering pines which cast long shadows across the asphalt, adding to the sense of isolation on the open road.

Navigating the winding road, Jacob's mind drifted to the events that had led him to this point. He had always prided himself on his ability to maintain control, whether it be in his personal life or behind the wheel of his questionably "trustworthy" Camry. But tonight, as he narrowly avoided colliding with a squirrel darting across the road, he couldn't shake the feeling of unease that gnawed at him.

A motel loomed ahead, a solitary beacon of civilization amidst the vast expanse of the forest. Its neon sign flickered weakly in the night, casting an eerie glow over the gravel parking lot. Jacob pulled into a spot and cut the engine, the silence of the forest enveloping him like a thick blanket.

Jacob sighed, climbed out of the car, and went to the motel office. The building was a relic from another era, its weathered facade bearing the scars of countless seasons. The door creaked open on rusty hinges, revealing a dimly lit interior and a middle-aged clerk who eyed him with weary resignation.

"Got any rooms?" Jacob asked, brushing his hair to the side and trying to straighten out his wrinkled black polo, his voice tinged with exhaustion (he hated having to speak with women).

The clerk nodded; her expression unreadable behind a veil of cigarette smoke. "You have the pick of the place," she replied, her voice raspy from years inhaling nicotine.

Jacob, pointed to the room next to his car, said, "I'll take that one."; the familiarity of its proximity provided a small comfort in the face of uncertainty. He handed over the cash, counting out the bills with practised ease, and accepted the key with a nod of thanks.

Unlocking the door to room thirteen, Jacob was greeted by the musty smell of stale air and faded memories. The furnishings were worn and outdated, tabernacles of a past that refused to fade into obscurity. But for Jacob, it was a welcome respite from the chaos of his long journey and the current chapter of his life.

He collapsed onto the bed, exhaustion washing over him like a tidal wave. Soon he was asleep, pulled into the

familiar comforting embrace as the events of the day faded into oblivion.

But his rest was short-lived.

Jacob awoke in a cold sweat to find himself surrounded by a group of masked men. At first, he was confused as he exited his dream state, but soon internally lamented that their intentions were clear from the glint of steel in their hands. They threw him onto the floor from the bed. He nearly wretched. *They* had found him. Panic surged through him, threatening to overwhelm his senses as he struggled against his restraints. His mind was screaming on the inside. Not again not again! They will gut me like a pig, like Roman and Michael. He winced as the men turned on the lights. A prelude perhaps to the coming beating he expected. *It'll be Funky Town for me*. He thought.

The men babbled in Spanish or something, Jacob couldn't discern their voices, harsh and guttural as they closed in on him while he lay on the floor. Fear coursed through his veins like glacial runoff, paralysing him with its icy grip as he awaited his fate.

Then, as suddenly as they had appeared, the power went out, plunging the room into darkness. Panic erupted among the assailants, running, shuffling, their bodies smashing into the walls, the furniture, and finally the floor. Their shouts and cries mingled with the sound of chaos. A great disgusting gurgling of liquid, coughing of fluid, and a slow meandering dragging towards silence. Hands which once grasped at the sky for absolution now laid still beside the breathless bodies.

Amidst the confusion, Jacob heard something else. A sound like metal on metal, rhythmic and purposeful, drawing closer and louder with each passing moment. And then, silence.

When the lights came on again, Jacob found himself alone in the room, the masked men lying motionless on the floor. Nothing made sense in his thoughts as a cloud of nonsense filled his mind and he struggled to make sense of what happened.

And then, he saw it.

A grey squirrel, its fur matted with blood, stood before him, holding a human eyeball in its tiny paws. Jacob's breath caught in his throat as the creature began to write on the floor in blood, its message a chilling note of a debt now repaid.

With a final twitch of its tail, the squirrel vanished into the night, leaving Jacob alone with his thoughts and a newfound respect for Armed Rodents.

He climbed back into his 1986 Blue Toyota Camry hatchback and drove into the unknown. Jacob couldn't shake the feeling that he had just witnessed something beyond comprehension. But for now, all he could do was embrace the uncertainty of the road ahead. He headed West with a new day at his back.

The Grail Mass

Gaston Nervil



"Do you know why you're here?"

"You want to book me for a show?"

"Hm. If that's the way you want to behave, we can—"

"No, no! I'm sorry, don't leave. I'm just a little shook up, that's all. Is this about the hotel bill?"

"Among other things."

"Like what?"

"You left something behind you. Apart from the bill, that is."

"Look, I'm trying to cooperate here but I don't get what you're saying."

"The body, Mr. Perry."

"The what?"

"The dead body of one Garland Stout. Unquestionably a homicide. ... I judge from your pallor that's not what you were expecting to hear."

"I had nothing— I have no— that has nothing to do with me, I swear!"

"Mm. Permit me to disagree, on the grounds that this certainly does."

"What the hell is that?"

"Take a close look. I'm most interested in your own answer to that question."

"The hell you are."

"Very well then. To me, it looks like one of the knives from your performance last night."

"Whose- whose blood is that?"

"We haven't had time yet to perform the necessary tests, of course, but since it quite exactly matches the wound in Mr. Stout's heart I feel safe in assuming that it belongs to him. Or belonged, at any rate. The knife itself, on the other hand, belongs— that is to say, belonged, there I go again, ha ha!— to you."

"I guess you've already been through my stuff and found one missing."

"Precisely! So you'll understand that when you were found absconding on the highway to Kembleford it was natural for us to wish to speak to you about this matter."

"But— that— look, I know you've got me on the hotel bill, but I swear I had nothing to do with any murders."

"Murders?"

"Murder, then, you pedant."

"And here we had been certain only in deeming it a homicide. You hold some special insight into the circumstances of Mr. Stout's death, then?"

"I don't know anything about it. And let me tell you, too, I'm on to your game here."

"Oh? What game would you imagine that to be?"

"The smarmy, Porfiry Petrovich routine. Fact is you don't know anything but that he was found in my room."

"You believe, then, that the hotel records will show another key card being used to unlock it?"

"That's right. ... It's not right, is it."

"It is not."

"Oh my God."

"Here's what I think. Mr. Stout snuck into your room, hoping to steal a trick or two. You returned unexpectedly, and a struggle ensued, in the course of which you stabbed him. Perhaps you felt your life was in danger? He was a large man, after all, and given to violence, especially when intoxicated. With the struggle so abruptly concluded, you naturally panicked and fled."

"That's it? That's why you hauled me in here?"

"You mean that isn't what happened?"

"You don't even think that's what happened! Do I look like I've been in any life-threatening fistfights in the last day? You see any blood on me? Come to that, you think if I had any tricks worth killing for I'd be performing here in Fardles?"

"Then would you care to enlighten me as to the course of events after your performance last night?"

"Well now, let me see. I guess I hung around for a little after my act, fishing for drinks, phone numbers— don't look at me like that, Detective! I didn't get many of either. Anyway, I ended up talking to your Mr. Stout and this other guy, Maurice, for a while. I think he's a doctor?"

"He is."

"Right. We were mostly talking about stage magic. Garland definitely had some amount of experience, Maurice was more just a fan— kept asking if I knew any of the big names from Las Vegas, but didn't seem to get bored even when I said I didn't. This lady came and got him eventually."

"His wife?"

"Now how would I know that?"

"Did she have a wedding ring?"

"Oh. I don't know as I noticed."

"Please."

"All right, I didn't see one, okay?"

"Hm. What color was her hair?"

"Brown."

"Not his wife, then. I apologize, do continue."

"Yeah. So, Maurice left with the lady at about midnight, because Rita— that's the hotel owner, you know? She came by a little while later to say the bar was closing."

"After which you returned to your room to collect your belongings."

"Yeah."

"Quite apart from any murder charges, you understand you're certain to be deported in light of this? We have found multiple similar complaints against you."

"Like I said, I'm not proud of that. But by God I've seen enough of England for a lifetime."

"I am sorry you feel that way, Mr. Perry. Did Mr. Stout seem at all agitated to you?"

"You know, I always hear about people getting asked that, and I have to say I don't know how I'd be able to tell. Maybe he was just a jittery guy to begin with."

"Jittery?"

"Always looking around, seemed like he startled easily. He seemed to loosen up after a drink or two. So no, I wouldn't say he was agitated. I'd say he just had kind of a mousy disposition— not to speak ill of the dead or anything like that. But I did think it was kind of weird for a big guy like that."

"Of course. Tell me, how long have you been in your present line of work?"

"Magic? Professionally? About twenty years. I got started as a kid."

"Charming! I remember a magic show I saw as a child, once I was old enough properly to enjoy it."

"Yeah?"

"Oh yes! A wondrous experience. The magician passed a needle through a mirror before our eyes, and produced an inexhaustible supply of glass bottles from nowhere. I was enthralled."

"Sounds like a good show."

"It was! I dabbled myself for a while, just enough to determine that I lacked the dexterity to be successful. But I learned what makes a good trick."

"Please, you simply must enlighten me."

"You know, I believe I can. American magicians, you will pardon me for saying, generally have a very imperfect grasp of the subject. The aim of a magic trick is to show something impossible, and the more impossible you can demonstrate it to be, the greater the impression it will make."

"And you don't think American magicians understand that?"

"Sadly not. You tend to go in for a lot of gawdy pageantry or grotesquerie, ever since Houdini. It's quite beside the point. The act has to culminate in a revelation, evoke awe from the audience at a miracle they never imagined possible. It's the plan of God unfolding itself, a re-enactment of the first Man to emerge from a sealed tomb."

"Sounds to me like you missed your calling."

"Not at all. That's the reason I became a detective."

"That's what you get out of a murder? Then I can tell you you're setting yourself up for a whole lot of heartbreak. Sometimes you really want there to be a simple answer that ties everything together, and there just isn't. Bad things happen, people get murdered, and there's no way to make sense of it."

"Sometimes. It makes me pity the American detective, doomed to rehearse the same meaningless tragedies day after day. There's nothing to be learned from an endless procession of fatherless teenagers slaughtering each other. No, there is virtually never a good mystery in America. That must be why your detectives so regularly succumb to alcoholism."

"I guess you've never been in the London police."

"Yes, things are becoming sadly American in our global city, it's true. But I digress. At what time did you return to your room?"

"Just a little while after Rita closed the bar. Can't have been after one in the morning."

"And you didn't notice any corpses?"

"You are something else, you know that?"

"And the body was discovered by Mr. Stern at half-eight."

"Is he the bellhop? Porter? Whatever you call them here. That's a pretty long gap. I was on the road by one-thirty."

"Indeed. Someone wanted Mr. Stout dead, and, if you are telling the truth, to make you appear responsible. Did anyone know you would be performing here yesterday?"

"I mean, I assume Rita did some advertising."

"That she did. I had every intention of attending myself."

"Oh yeah? Why didn't you?"

"I'm not the one in need of an alibi, Mr. Perry. But I am sorry I missed it."

"Yeah, you and me both."

"Forgive me, but you were not an especially popular magician in America, were you?"

"I already told you I don't have any very valuable tricks."

“Yes, they tend to prefer the merely spectacular there. Like your murders.”

“Are you saying Siegfried put that tiger up to it?”

“Not exactly. Rather that American murders— the interesting ones, I mean— are never about the murder; that’s always just a window into some deeper corruption. You don’t believe that a murder is interesting in itself.”

“Some of those Vegas acts can get kind of tacky, I guess.”
“You don’t believe that the truth of things is beautiful. When the veil is withdrawn, you expect to discover horror. That’s why our archetypal detective is Sherlock Holmes while yours is Philip Marlowe.”

“Maybe we just don’t like the idea that someone can frame you for murder in a strange country.”

“That’s fair, Mr. Perry, that is fair. I’m most puzzled as to what recommended you, specifically, to the killer.”

“Anyone in town would have known I’d be here, but I don’t know anybody here.”

“Quite so. This was certainly not a carefully premeditated crime. Both the murder and its concealment must have arisen from a sudden collision of motive and opportunity. Most likely the killer only arrived at the necessity of the crime last night. When did you and Mr. Stout part ways?”

“Ahh, he left right about when Rita closed up. It was a few minutes before me.”

“Did you happen to encounter Mr. Stern during the evening?”

“Not so as I can remember. He’s always skulking around, though. If it was my hotel I’d fire him.”

“No doubt.”

“And you said there were no other entries to my room, but then there are other ways in besides the door, right?”

“None that would admit a grown man.”

“Right, the window is way too small. What if someone picked the lock, without using a card?”

“Yes, the possibility had occurred to us.”

“Well damn it, I’m not the detective here.”

“Of course. Thank you for your cooperation, Mr. Perry. You’ve been most helpful. The constable will escort you to a cell, which you will occupy until your deportation can be arranged.”

“That’s it? What about the plan of God, and all that? I thought the truth was going to be revealed.”

““And so it shall. But not to you.””



The Tower

ND Wallace Swan



The tower stood looming before him, alit on top by a great fire. Bleeding stones larger than men stacked high into the sky: massive, sooted, black as night, piercing the thick veil of clouds like an inoculation of the heavens. The putrid stench of the rotting, bloated corpses strewn all about the entrance and into the decrepit gaping orifice brought tears to the eyes. Unceasing moans emanated from the entrance, which were once screams echoing throughout the transcendent heights.

Cries for mercy, frozen into lament for absolution, met disinterested ears. As he crept upwards into the spiralling stairway, higher and higher, the unbearable smell slowly weakened but never disappeared. Staring up towards the zenith, a faint light clung to the overwhelming darkness like a lone plank on an ocean. Climbing higher he could hear those below him tortured, turned inside out, screaming for the end they could never reach.

What did it mean to be a lesser man? What will drive man forward despite unceasing doom and knowing suffering? A line of other men led towards an open window. With his back tight to the centre column he approached, and watched, but didn't halt his ascent. Man after man tossed himself out towards his doom, having seen enough and not wishing to see more. Patiently, they descended towards terminality, vanquished.

Leaving behind these living dead he came across thick pools, jellied with streams of blood, oozing red, blackness, and dried saline crystals sprouting like mushrooms from the darker edges of the chambered staircase. Still the bodies did not cease as he ascended, piling up upon the stairs which smelled of slaughter and death. Rounding one level he saw a Samurai thrust his sword into his gut and commit suicide. Silence.

His mind screamed to rush past, his boots tried to find their grip amongst the blood and corporeal fluids, viscous, drying, sickly sticky like paste as he plodded through it. He continued to climb, and was soon met by a beautiful maiden in flowing white cloth who beckoned him to her room. He watched, standing back as others succumbed to her invite while he declined. Screams of agony vibrated from the spider's chambers as she tore them in two, tossing their remains out into the hall where they quivered and moaned until they expired.

He goes up higher. Soon there was another window and he peered outside, but could not see the ground below the clouds. He continued his ascent. As he reached the top, he is blinded by the intense raging fire of the sun, greeted by the primordial man, deified.

"I am the Allfather. You are my kin. By your sweat, blood, and bones, our tower grows higher. You have come from the eternal cold world, wild, worn by time. Your life was lived as all fathers may live, and now you can choose by the strength of your resolve, to be

tossed from the tower to rejoin the earthly kingdom, where your remains will be as the soil and nourish the world, or be slain like the cattle and be so formed into brick. Your bones shall make the strength of the stone, your blood and sweat the mix and mortar both affix, forever locked in time and space."

"Allfather," he spoke. "Is this our end?"

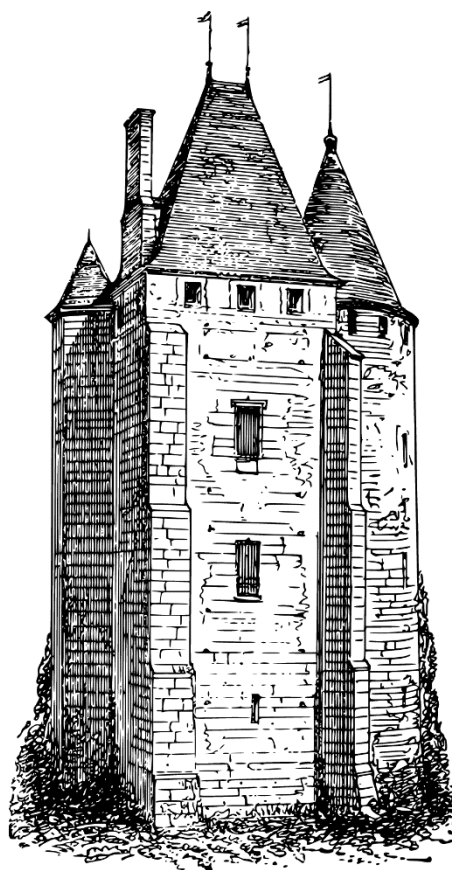
He bellowed, "Yes. This is the end and it comes with a choice. To build the tower higher is a costly sum, yet so does fermentation in the wilds, you know, but the decision is yours as to where to throw."

"My funeral was grand. I was placed on a pyre, and upwards I rose like smoke up a spire. It is my wish to be ended this way, I desire. I will choose to be part of the tower to guide men in future days, and tie my eternal fate to their ruinous gaze." said the man.

"Very well, it's your choice," the Allfather voiced. "Some bricks are brittle, some are strong, but what seems to define them is not whether they're wrong, but whether they weather life's oft-sung songs."

And so the man was joined to the tower, where centuries passed in not even an hour. Soon his bricks too witnessed unending death.

Suffering beings, passing so rarely beneath the Civilizational light; from dying hands it is desperately tossed, but the tower guides man upwards in love so long as he can see that raging fire above.



The Bullet of the Fated Ten

A Tale of the Ring
Part 2

Price Warung



Once on the ground she flew from both Short and Pedder, and crying, went back to her mother. They did not know it, of course, but with her went also the hope of freedom, for all the fated gang. Pedder could not realize the significance of the message, but nevertheless he felt that something had been missed, and then with the spiteful temper of the illiterate, which always seeks to wreak upon others, the penalty of its own blunders and misdeeds, he turned sharply upon Short; and struck him Short rising and aggrieved, too, that he could not know what was sewn on the frock, struck back at Pedder. The women in the ward who saw the encounter, cried out joyfully. It broke the monotony of the day, an occurrence of that sort. The noise of the scuffle, the women's cries and the child's alarm, however, drew the notice of the sentry, and the fun was short. He flung the gate open, entered, locked it behind him and parted the combatants with his bayonet, demanding the reason for the trouble. Both the offenders remained sullenly silent, and none of the other condemned could, nor would speak as to the cause, while the women were ignorant as to the precise reason for the outbreak. "You are a pair of fine lads," sneered the sentry. "When ye're both a-going to be turned off to-morrow, to be quarrelling now. Have yer been doin' anythin' to the youngster?"

Neither would speak, but Blake interjected, "No, the fault is Pedder's." He saw that whatever had been the cause, Short was not to blame, and he recollected in the heat of the moment, that Short was the only one of the gang who could read. The one idea of the ballot was before his mind and not knowing how the message would come the agony of suspense was increased by the fear that if the little trouble caused these men to be separated and Short to be taken out of the yard, any written message from their friend the "Fiver," might remain undeciphered. On this announcement, Pedder flushed with rage.

"You lie!" he cried, and would have struck Blake also if the sentry had not thrown up his musket and received the blow upon its barrel.

"Look here, me flash coves," said the soldier, "do you forget as yer have got to go to heaven to-morrow? Shake hands now, and if yer want to 'ave Ver fight out, wait till yer git tother side o' Jordan."

The women in the ward caught the words and cheered the remark, but the woman by the gateway burst into tears, and this drew upon her the notice of the sentry.

"There yer are now, making the woman snivel, and you have frightened her kinchins too. Come," he said, "shake hands, or if yer don't, I'll have to separate yer; and surely," he chuckled as he spoke, "you'd like to have one last night together."

Blake, conscious all the while that his own share of the trouble and bother was due only to policy held out his hand, and so did Short. "After all," thought the younger man, "life was going to be so short for them, unless the

bullet fell to one or the other, that it was not desirable to dwell too much on the episode." But the other remained grim and silent.

"Shake hands," said the sentry sternly, "or I'll have you handcuffed." Pedder, still with the bullet ballot, in his fancy (while he would have given half his brief tenure of life for the opportunity of thrashing one or the other) thought it would be wiser to obey, and shook hands.

The kindly Hawkesbury lass had been moved by a thought which was as creditable to her ingenuity as to her goodness of heart (while of course it was distinctly wrong from the point of view of a law-abiding citizen). She had wished to hint, through the medium of her child's frock, that they should escape. She had learned in the old Windsor schoolroom from Joseph Harpur, clerk, storekeeper, and school-master, how to cipher and write, and with infinite labour in the dusk of that Sunday morning she had inscribed in coarse thread upon the hem of the little frock, a simple message. She had done it at imminent danger to herself, for any of the women might have noticed when the soldier and gaoler were not likely to do so, the addition to the embroidery. She had inscribed with her needle and cotton, "Break out. Three guards to-night." And now her plot had failed, and the intuitions of Pedder, while pointing almost to the mark, had yet missed it narrowly.

When six o'clock came, the gloom of night had fallen again upon the yard. The eaves seemed to cast a deeper shadow, and the murmur of voices within the women's ward rumbled distantly, for the women could never shake oft altogether the sense of what was due to Sunday. The noise of the city traffic was very slight, and the laughter of revellers returning by boat from Goat Island, which was a favourite place of resort for pleasure-loving Sydneyites, was so faint in the absence of a breeze, that the gaol might have been miles away from the city instead of being in its heart. The quietness of the time added to -the awful tension. They would have been laughing and revelling among themselves had it not been for the anticipation of the "Ringer's" visit; but, as it was, they knew the message which was to mean life to one and a double death to the other nine, might come at any moment. Possibly if the row had not taken place in the afternoon, so severe was the strain, that one or two might have lost their mental balance. With' the prospect of the ballot before them, there, was no desire to indulge that vulgar and flippant spirit in which most condemned companies of the time, were wont to pass their last vigil. Short did sob hysterically for a few minutes after the retirement of the officer who had tapped his irons, and after he had received the courteous wish for a good night's sleep, and a pleasant hanging on the morrow; but with an effort, he had conquered himself and had waited, with the others, for the message, which at nine o'clock had not come. Lights went out at nine from the

corridors, and darkness—and—hell reigned till the next morning.

VI.—AT TEN O'CLOCK P.M.

The message came at last. The town clock in St. Philip's tower had struck ten a few minutes, when, following close upon the tramp of the patrol-men as they marched past the gaol, there sounded the footsteps of a solitary wayfarer. The watch, as they passed the gaol, had exchanged "All's well" with the gaol sentries, and following close as it did upon that comforting salute, the challenge, "Who goes there?" of the guard at the gate opening on to the street, woke the echoes completely in the condemned yard.

It did more—it roused the condemned from the half lethargy, half sleep, in which they had passed the hour since the lights were put out. Stretched in their blankets, some were prone, some were supine on the flagging, all in severe tension of spirit, one or two seeking in the retrospect of memory for a vestige of that happiness which they had always sought for and which had ever evaded them. But with the echoing of that solitary wayfarer's voice, each man quivered and trembled, for each recognised the tones and knew the message had come. One by one they drew themselves up noiselessly; one by one each tore his blankets into strips; one by one each blanketed his irons so that there should be no ringing of chains against bazil, or clanking of link against the flagged stone. Even in these dread moments they were all subdued by a thrill of excitement at the anticipation of the communication. The dullest Norfolk had always been impressed by the rites and ceremonial of the "Ring," by what he knew of it or had heard of it, and nothing so argued the utter imbecility of the successive administrators, and of the system that so far from fostering and turning into rational courses the imaginative sense of the prisoners, it had invariably diverted into the awful and the infernal, that it had not been crushed utterly. In the expectation of the ceremony, which they all inferred would occupy the next hour, they all forgot for the moment the doom that awaited them, or all but one of them, the next day. So vital and impressive are the processes of the imagination. They were to be taken out of themselves; that was the main thing, even though the issue of the ceremony would drive nine of them back into the very abysses of despair.

At last the door swung open, and without a creak scarcely, as though its hinges, its bolts, the wards of its lock had been newly oiled by an expert hand, and a man came in who had visited them before. They knew him, because this time he carried a dark lantern, with the slide partly freed so that his features and his features alone were visible. The aspect of that half-lit face emerging from darkness into darkness, and surrounded by darkness, was terrible in its weird fearsomeness, and young Short could barely repress a groan. As it was, he

threw out his hand convulsively, and caught the shoulder of the man next to him. With slippered or stockinged feet (he must have changed his boots in the outer room) he approached, not the group, but the wall of the women's cell. Quietly he put his hands between the bars and felt there as if he expected to meet, not the curtain which usually blocked the aperture at night time, but an inflexible substance such as a wooden or iron shutter. Apparently he was satisfied the arrangement he had made had been carried out, and then withdrawing his hand and adjusting the lantern slide till but a spot of light was visible, he drew towards the group. They trembled as he came near; even Pedder trembled, so uncanny was this outlined sombreness, moving amidst the gloom.

"Brothers," he said, in a low tone, that yet was not a whisper, as though he were now confident that he had protected himself from any audience save those whom he addressed. "Brothers, I have brought the message of the bullet. You, Short—which is Short? Short, where are you?"

He turned.

Short thrust forward his hand quietly till it touched the elbow of the "Outsider." "Here," Short said, "here." "You, Short, can read. Read this."

Again the panel of the lantern was slid to the space of an inch, and the streak of light fell upon a piece of paper inscribed in a bold hand with certain words and marked with a symbol, which one and all of the "Ringers" knew as the sign manual of the "One."

As he held the paper for one moment the prisoners saw that he was pallid, and sweating great drops of perspiration. They saw, too, that utterance failed him for the moment.

"Read it."

With accents which shivered with their burden of agony, Short read from the paper. He did not recognise it as a symbol of the "One" that was appended, but he knew that it was authoritative by the imperious wording, and this man never doubted, for the "Ring" never deceived the prisoner.

"To our brothers of the condemned and to their brothers not yet of the 'Ring.' One of you can be saved, and one only. Choose ye by the ballot of the bullet. At eleven o'clock let each of you put his hand through the spy-hole, and let the order of his going be known to no one save yourselves, not even to our bearer; and the one whom it pleases us well to select in a darkness as of the very grave to which all of you go, if not to-morrow, hereafter, he shall be chosen.

"Let there be no dispute, for this is the will of the 'Ring' in the session of the 'One' and the 'Three,' and though the 'Ring's' laws must be obeyed without demand of reason or demur, yet ye may be told why the choice should not be made from the 'Ring' members alone, and why those outside of us shall be permitted to test the

ballot as well. We give no reason but this, and let it suffice. It is to test your obedience, and your obedience only. Men go, the 'Ring' stays on; and it is well that our dread society shall know men can obey it, even to their hurt and their death.

"At eleven of the clock, brothers, into the hand of the one that is to be saved shall the bullet be dropped, and the possession of that bullet shall warrant him that the 'Ring' fails not in what it undertakes. He may not know how he will be saved, but he shall be saved."

In a silence like that of their own graves already dug were these words read, in whisper voice, and amid the falling night and in the intentness of their hearing they heard no other sound, not even the whimpering of children, or the muttered oath of women in the adjacent dormitory. Scarce heard they even the louder noise of the ringing of the musket stocks as the night guards changed. The reading finished, the "Outsider," the "Fiver," said,—

"For this once shall the new men—the six foreign to the 'Ring'—be with us thus far. They shall take the oath that if one of them gain the bullet he shall be bound to us as though he were our own. What do you say, brothers?"

Pedder, Blake, Drummer, and Donnell knew clearly enough that the request for their assent was merely formal, but each, reeling almost from the suspense, said "Yes." Then the oath was administered. With crossed hands each took it, and each swore by the most impious of impieties that, the System being what it was, he would be its enemy and the enemy of all who thought to subjugate it.

Then he bade the six move to the wall, and led the four in their last "Ring" session.

As it was conducted, the "Fiver" retired to the corridor. Blake gasped, and said to Short in a strident undertone, "Short, pray that you may miss the bullet; if you get the bullet you'll be 'Ring' member. Better dead!"

VII.—AN HOUR LATER

Once more had St. Philip's clock struck, and once more had the patrolling watchmen exchanged "All's well!" with the sentries of the gaol. And the Ten, with faculties tense and alert, moved involuntarily as they identified the sounds. The hour of ordeal had arrived. Those of them who were doomed to die would face death lightly, perhaps flippantly, but here was the balancing of Fates—death or freedom. They would have been less even than the human animals they were if they could have prepared for the ballot with lightness of heart.

The first dispute arose over the order of their going to the door. Only the "Fiver"—the, "Outsider"—knew to which man in order of procession would he give the bullet. It might, so far as the Ten knew, be to the first—it might be to the last. Really, the odds were against the first as much as against the tenth and as much for the sixth or seventh as for any other. Still, the dullest convict had his superstitions. They would all have gone third if they could.

"Go," at last, after confused whisperings that merged into anger, declared Pedder, "in order of age. You are the oldest, Drummer; go 'long. Name your ages; no lyin' now."

No one lied.

Drummer said he was fifty-five.

Short answered next, "Nineteen!" Lewis said he was thirty-six, just over; he had spent his birthday in gaol. Hanley was forty.

"I'm in my twenty-fifth year," whispered McCarthy, "and it's likely I'll not see the end of it." It was a poor jest, but it told for the instant.

Pedder gave his age thirty-two. "That's mine, too," said Donnell; "what month?"

Pedder didn't know, and said so. "When was Donnell born?"

"The first of April!" Another low chuckle.

How was that point to be settled? It took but a second to decide. In that instant Blake had pulled off three buttons from his jacket. (It was contract thread, and parted with readiness.) "Here," he said, "I have two buttons in one fist and one in the other? Who chooses? Odd or even?"

"I'll take first," said Pedder, and he felt for Blake's left hand. "Odd!"

"Tis even," whispered Blake.

"Then I'll be younger 'n you, Mike," said Donnell, "you can go first." And so that point was got over. Blake was twenty-five, Clyde was twenty-four, and Entworth forty-one. So this was the order Drummer, Entworth, Hanley, Lewis, Pedder, Donnell, Blake, Clyde, McCarthy (a month younger he was than Clyde), and Short, Short was the "baby."

They drew deep breaths as this first stage was over. Then—

"No cokumin'," said Pedder impressively, "who is given the bullet keeps it to himself. He is not to say without orders. An' them who do not get the bullet, well, they should die game, 'Ringers' or no 'Ringers.' They'll have had their chance. Fall in!"

They fell into line, stooping, every man of them, so as to hold their irons up and save clanking. Noise would have robbed the ceremony of something of its awesomeness. And they filed up slowly—so slowly.

Tremblingly, the old man put his hand through the spy-hole—which should have been closed, but was open. Open by the "Ring's" -orders!

A finger-tip touched his open palm, but—no bullet. And he knew the bullet was not for him.

Entworth followed, and murmured as the warm finger touched his icy palm. He thought for the moment that he was the fortunate one. For the moment only.

Hanley and Lewis went forward, and slunk back into silence. Not one of the four knew aught as to the others' luck or ill-luck. All he knew was he was not the successful one.

Something had told the gang that Pedder would win the bullet, and, indeed, though they could not guess how it would be possible for the " Outsider " to discern Pedder, yet they feared in a vague manner that " The One " might have some occult means of intimating to the other. But there was no sign from Pedder to indicate success or failure as he withdrew his hand. So they went on—Donnell, Blake, Clyde, McCarthy, Short. Each put his hand through, and each withdrew it. And one alone held the silver bullet, and he was the last to protrude his hand, and the last to withdraw it. Short had not prayed, and he had won the bullet!

He did not tell them ; but they knew it, for, striving to reach his corner, he stumbled, fainted, and fell, something dropped with a deadened sound on the flags from his hand. And then—

They had all heard it drop. There was the passport to freedom—the warrant of the "One " which should give the fortunate holder entrance once again to the house of Life, perhaps to the house of Happiness, perhaps to that of Fortune.

And there it was lying on the ground, and its rightful owner fainting, powerless, defenceless.

For one minute there raged in each breast the infirmities of wrong, danger, and cupidity. Why should not they search for the bullet and the finder keep it?

The same thought held possession of each. There was a rush, a throwing away of caution, a contempt for the possibilities even of the "Ring's" vengeance. They had nothing to fear from the law; but from the " Ring " the bullet holder who held it wrongfully would have much. Still, they forgot the chances, and all rushed to where Short's prostrate form was lying. Short's life in that instant was not worth a breath's purchase.

Yet he lives! For Blake, who though tempted, yet withheld himself from yielding. He had joined in the rush, but his shred of conscience rescued him from what, after all, he felt to be a shame in- expiable. In the same movement which had propelled himself forward, he threw himself over the body of the youth.

"Touch him, or the bullet," he whispered hoarsely, " and I call the guard, the ' Ring ' can't hurt me after to-morrow."

They halted. They receded. After all, had not Short won the ballot fairly? So the whisper went round.

And then they came forward again, but this time carefully and slowly. Each " was going to be a true man

to the 'Ring' and one another." They began to look for the bullet.

It was Pedder who found it. It had rolled into the corner. " Here it is," he said, and felt his way to the group which stood, a protuberance of gloom amid the darkness, " and 'tis wrapped in paper."

"Them's his instructions," said Blake.

"Wot," murmured McCarthy, "would have been the good of them to us who can't read?"

" Had it been light, Pedder would have -been seen to smile. " Trust the ' Ring ' for that," he said. " Pedder knew the ' Ring.' The 'Ring could write in hieroglyphics so as to reach the brain of the most ignorant.

That, indeed, was the case. When Short came to himself he found on one side of the piece of paper a rough sketch of a woman in prison costume. On the other, was the same woman emerging from the prison door, and being met by a group of sailors. That was at four o'clock.

At six, they were taken into the corridor to meet the chaplain and to breakfast. At eight they were mustered to meet the sheriff and his myrmidons, and then only was it discovered that there were no longer ten but nine. When they mounted the platform and looked around for the last time they most of them gazed towards the mass of faces which crested Essex Street heights. But Pedder, he had taken with that master eye of his, a comprehensive glance over the gaol. In one of those remarkable intuitions which crystallize a life- time of experience into the last hours of the dying, he saw the whole arrangement of the gaol, and understood how simple a thing it would have been for the gang, once freed from their irons—easy enough to do—to have conquered the garrison and the gaol. He understood also what the message on the frock had meant. In his dying speech he did not curse the crowd; he cursed himself and his colleagues.

"Brothers," he shouted, " what fools we were We could have jumped as easily as we stayed. What fools! What fools! "

"It's all right," said McCarthy, "we'll be wiser next time." But the trap-door fell a few minutes later, and no one can say whether they were wiser then.

Among the crowd which lined the height was a pallid faced girl, and tightly screwed within her neckerchief was a silver bullet. She had been freed from gaol that morning.

Featured Artist

Samuel Wild  @sam_wild_art



What are you working on at the moment? I'm currently working on a large oil painting of the Prometheus design. You may or may not know, last year some of my friends in the dissident art scene organised a show in London. This was "The Exhibition". It displayed the work of artists, among them were Matthew Fall Mackenzie and Fen de Villiers, both of whom are great artists and have created versions of the Prometheus myth. My version is in dialogue with these artists' work. Prometheus means a lot to us and to our aims in art. The art of today's art schools, galleries and museums is a dull affair. Especially over the last decade, it has become political slop of the worse possible kind. I'm sure you are aware of this trend. It deliberately attacks the eternal values of art; skill, decoration, representation, inspiration and beauty.

All in all this has a deadening effect upon us all. I'm sure you've felt it, the heavy, weighed down feeling that you feel when presented with 'contemporary art'. This is contrasted to the expansive freedom we feel when looking upon the great masters of the past.

For us Prometheus is a symbol of our ambition to take the inspiration of the past and bring it to our own age. We demand great works of art and we artists are straining to create these works so that the people of our generation can experience what a genuinely imaginative and vital culture.

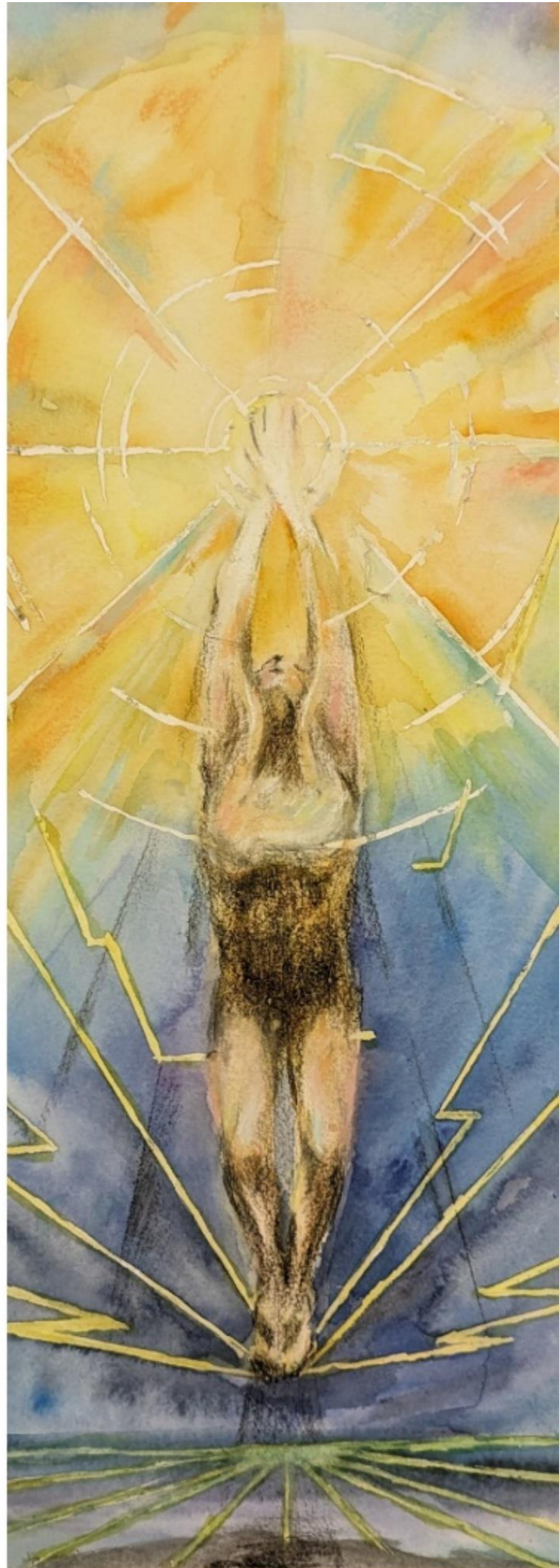


What attracts you to print making? I was attracted to printmaking very early into my art education. I have an affinity with the linear graphic arts and my teachers recognised this or perhaps they saw I had some flare in the medium, I couldn't say.

Print is a process heavy medium. All of the magic happens when you add creativity to the various stages of the printing process, from the initial drawing to putting a plate or block through a press. Along that journey there are hundreds of different choices that take you down different paths which will lead to a completely different print, all in a fairly linear and orderly process.

Whether a print is part of a large edition of many or a few doesn't interest me as much as the creative process. Although having many versions of your work is a great side benefit.

Are there any particular myths that inspire you? There are certain myths that deeply resonate with me. I'm not entirely sure why. Certainly the Nibelungenlied and the Oedipus myth. They are deeply tragic especially in their interpretation by Sophocles and Wagner. Is Paradise Lost a myth? It certainly functions that way upon my imagination. The idea of the fall from grace and the nihilism of the devil has definite resources for us today I feel. And finally the Grail myth. All people look for a code of ethics in order to live and the Grail myth represents for me the ultimate ethical code - that is the quest for transcendence. I hope to make artwork about all of these myths and archetypes



As this is a literature magazine, can you tell us what you have been reading recently? As far as literature is concerned I am occupied by poetry as I write a little myself. Milton is always there for me but I've also been recently reading Mishima and his *Sailor Who Fell From Grace With The Sea*. It's a fascinating story from a fascinating writer. I'm also reading some Clark Ashton Smith stories.

Aside from your art, do you have any other passions? As far as other passions are concerned I don't have much time for anything else besides art, work and family. But I do like to swim and lift weights, although I'm not terribly good at either. Swimming in the wild is always a great pleasure.



Spirit of the Woods

Call of the Shieldmaiden



The little village of Lechlade, nestled on the bank of the Thames, where the River Leach joins that ancient waterway, and was surrounded by a thick grove of trees. It was a small and insignificant place, though the ancient henge, now melting into the forest and sinking underground, always filled Brigid with a sense of peace, and of connection to this village that had been her home, and the home of innumerable ancestors before her.

Brigid was a young woman of bright blue eyes and long golden curls. She wore a long blue dress of fine wool with her brown cape set about her shoulders with large silver brooches. The weather was quite balmy for late winter, and she wished to head out on one of her last walks through the trees for the wintertide, as she and her new husband were expecting their first child in a few months time.

Leaving her cottage, with its coals glowing in the firepit and the new basket she was weaving for the baby, Brigid strolled past the five other cottages that separated her from the trees. Her fellow villagers waved or shared a few words as she passed, the children were out enjoying the sun, and their mothers had risked the chance of rain to drape linen, wool and fur over the bushes to air or dry.

The woods showed a hint of the coming spring. A few early trees had leaf buds out, and birds chattered happily overhead. The bluebells were sprouting from the dark leaf strewn ground, and Brigid headed towards where the River Leach emptied itself into the mighty Thames. She had never been to the other side of the river. The tribes beyond were in cohorts with the Romans, or so her father had warned her.

A faint squeaking filled her ears, and she looked about. It was probably some squirrel coming out of hibernation chattering at the faint rays of sun gently washing the dark, stark branches of the forest. It took some time, but at last she spotted the little red tufted ears, and jerking tail. The creature appeared stuck between two branches where one tree had fallen onto another. Fortunately it was high enough for Brigid to reach and she quickly released him. He rushed off, still squeaking.

Continuing on to the River Leach, she stood for some time to gaze upon its gentle waters; they soothed her. A twig snapped and a feeling of terror washed over her. Whirling around she came face to face with a group of five men. Her nostrils flared with disgust. She had only seen them from across the river on occasions, but before her now were Romans.

They appalled her, their skin was dark, their clothes frankly ridiculous, and in their eyes was the look of men out to take whatever they wanted for themselves. Brigid had heard enough stories to know they would have no respect for her condition. She splashed out into the river, her skirts growing soggy immediately and slowed her down. Glancing back, she saw the men had advanced to the edge of the river, but they were looking

to the other side - and not at her. She followed their gaze, and to her horror saw more Romans there.

Brigid placed her hands protectively over her belly, which was starting to show the signs of the new life on the way, and looked wildly between the two groups of men. She did not want to call out as their spears were long enough to reach her in the water. She knew they did not want to kill her necessarily, but she would die preventing them from what they really wanted with her. She shivered as the icy water bit into her legs and the flowing current pulled her cape backwards, as if inviting her to fall back into the river.

The men began to speak. Their words were coarse and foreign and they leered at her. One reached out with his spear to poke at her; she flinched and moved as it got near.

Brigid felt her only option was to call out. Men of her village did patrol the river, intending to kill any Roman that dared cross, and perhaps they would be nearby - perhaps even her husband would be amongst them! It was at times like this that she needed his strong arms the most.

A shrill squeak, which was more of a shriek, started all present, and a red streak rushed from the trees; it shot over logs and darted around rocks. The Romans turned their spears upon it. The spears gouged holes in the ground as the creature evaded them, and men began to shout and yell in pain. Three Romans dropped to the ground with heavy thuds before the Romans on the other side began to wade across.

Brigid heard them splashing behind and she rushed out of the river and past the Romans lying motionless. The men in the river began to yell too, and she turned back to see them drop one by one into the waters and begin to float out into the Thames. The red streak leapt from the helmet of the last and landed on the helmet of the Roman closest to her.

It was a red squirrel. Its tufted ears twitched and its tail jerked as it looked at her with its beady eyes. Then it was gone.

Cold and exhaustion began to creep over her, and she bent down to squeeze the soaked parts of her dress and cloak, and then slowly made her way back through the forest.

Romans on her doorstep! She shuddered, they were advancing and it seemed they would be unstoppable, especially with so many other tribes collaborating with them. No! It would never happen! They would never rule her lands forever! Clutching her fists she cast a curse upon the Romans; no matter how far they advanced, no matter who they killed or how they toyed with them beforehand, the Romans would leave these lands. They would never rule forever.

Her husband held her tight before the fire as she slowly warmed up. He assured her that the village would

be keeping a closer eye on the riverbank and, for good measure, the village would travel to the nearby sacred grove, where the Druids would bless them, and protect them from future evils.



Beside Schopenhauer's Corpse

Guy de Maupassant



He was slowly dying, as consumptives die. I saw him each day, about two o'clock, sitting beneath the hotel windows on a bench in the promenade, looking out on the calm sea. He remained for some time without moving, in the heat of the sun, gazing mournfully at the Mediterranean. Every now and then, he cast a glance at the lofty mountains with beclouded summits that shut in Mentone; then, with a very slow movement, he would cross his long legs, so thin that they seemed like two bones, around which fluttered the cloth of his trousers, and he would open a book, always the same book. And then he did not stir any more, but read on, read on with his eye and his mind; all his wasting body seemed to read, all his soul plunged, lost, disappeared, in this book, up to the hour when the cool air made him cough a little. Then, he got up and reentered the hotel.

He was a tall German, with fair beard, who breakfasted and dined in his own room, and spoke to nobody.

A vague, curiosity attracted me to him. One day, I sat down by his side, having taken up a book, too, to keep up appearances, a volume of Musset's poems.

And I began to look through "Rolla."

Suddenly, my neighbor said to me, in good French:

"Do you know German, monsieur?"

"Not at all, monsieur."

"I am sorry for that. Since chance has thrown us side by side, I could have lent you, I could have shown you, an inestimable thing—this book which I hold in my hand."

"What is it, pray?"

"It is a copy of my master, Schopenhauer, annotated with his own hand. All the margins, as you may see, are covered with his handwriting."

I took the book from him reverently, and I gazed at these forms incomprehensible to me, but which revealed the immortal thoughts of the greatest shatterer of dreams who had ever dwelt on earth.

And Musset's verses arose in my memory:

"Hast thou found out, Voltaire, that it is bliss to die,

And does thy hideous smile over thy bleached bones fly?"

And involuntarily I compared the childish sarcasm, the religious sarcasm of Voltaire with the irresistible irony of the German philosopher whose influence is henceforth ineffaceable.

Let us protest and let us be angry, let us be indignant, or let us be enthusiastic, Schopenhauer has marked humanity with the seal of his disdain and of his disenchantment.

A disabused pleasure-seeker, he overthrew beliefs, hopes, poetic ideals and chimeras, destroyed the aspirations, ravaged the confidence of souls, killed love,

dragged down the chivalrous worship of women, crushed the illusions of hearts, and accomplished the most gigantic task ever attempted by scepticism. He spared nothing with his mocking spirit, and exhausted everything. And even to-day those who execrate him seem to carry in their own souls particles of his thought.

"So, then, you were intimately acquainted with Schopenhauer?" I said to the German.

He smiled sadly.

"Up to the time of his death, monsieur."

And he spoke to me about the philosopher and told me about the almost supernatural impression which this strange being made on all who came near him.

He gave me an account of the interview of the old iconoclast with a French politician, a doctrinaire Republican, who wanted to get a glimpse of this man, and found him in a noisy tavern, seated in the midst of his disciples, dry, wrinkled, laughing with an unforgettable laugh, attacking and tearing to pieces ideas and beliefs with a single word, as a dog tears with one bite of his teeth the tissues with which he plays.

He repeated for me the comment of this Frenchman as he went away, astonished and terrified: "I thought I had spent an hour with the devil."

Then he added:

"He had, indeed, monsieur, a frightful smile, which terrified us even after his death. I can tell you an anecdote about it that is not generally known, if it would interest you."

And he began, in a languid voice, interrupted by frequent fits of coughing.

"Schopenhauer had just died, and it was arranged that we should watch, in turn, two by two, till morning.

"He was lying in a large apartment, very simple, vast and gloomy. Two wax candles were burning on the stand by the bedside.

"It was midnight when I went on watch, together with one of our comrades. The two friends whom we replaced had left the apartment, and we came and sat down at the foot of the bed.

"The face was not changed. It was laughing. That pucker which we knew so well lingered still around the corners of the lips, and it seemed to us that he was about to open his eyes, to move and to speak. His thought, or rather his thoughts, enveloped us. We felt ourselves more than ever in the atmosphere of his genius, absorbed, possessed by him. His domination seemed to be even more sovereign now that he was dead. A feeling of mystery was blended with the power of this incomparable spirit.

"The bodies of these men disappear, but they themselves remain; and in the night which follows the cessation of their heart's pulsation I assure you, monsieur, they are terrifying.

“And in hushed tones we talked about him, recalling to mind certain sayings, certain formulas of his, those startling maxims which are like jets of flame flung, in a few words, into the darkness of the Unknown Life.

“It seems to me that he is going to speak,’ said my comrade. And we stared with uneasiness bordering on fear at the motionless face, with its eternal laugh. Gradually, we began to feel ill at ease, oppressed, on the point of fainting. I faltered:

“I don’t know what is the matter with me, but, I assure you I am not well.’

“And at that moment we noticed that there was an unpleasant odor from the corpse.

“Then, my comrade suggested that we should go into the adjoining room, and leave the door open; and I assented to his proposal.

“I took one of the wax candles which burned on the stand, and I left the second behind. Then we went and sat down at the other end of the adjoining apartment, in such a position that we could see the bed and the corpse, clearly revealed by the light.

“But he still held possession of us. One would have said that his immaterial essence, liberated, free, all-powerful and dominating, was flitting around us. And sometimes, too, the dreadful odor of the decomposed body came toward us and penetrated us, sickening and indefinable.

“Suddenly a shiver passed through our bones: a sound, a slight sound, came from the death-chamber. Immediately we fixed our glances on him, and we saw, yes, monsieur, we saw distinctly, both of us, something white pass across the bed, fall on the carpet, and vanish under an armchair.

“We were on our feet before we had time to think of anything, distracted by stupefying terror, ready to run away. Then we stared at each other. We were horribly pale. Our hearts throbbed fiercely enough to have raised the clothing on our chests. I was the first to speak:

“Did you see?’

“Yes, I saw.’

“Can it be that he is not dead?’

“Why, when the body is putrefying?’

“What are we to do?’

“My companion said in a hesitating tone:

“We must go and look.’

“I took our wax candle and entered first, glancing into all the dark corners in the large apartment. Nothing was moving now, and I approached the bed. But I stood transfixed with stupor and fright:

“Schopenhauer was no longer laughing! He was grinning in a horrible fashion, with his lips pressed together and deep hollows in his cheeks. I stammered out:

“He is not dead!’

“But the terrible odor ascended to my nose and stifled me. And I no longer moved, but kept staring fixedly at him, terrified as if in the presence of an apparition.

“Then my companion, having seized the other wax candle, bent forward. Next, he touched my arm without uttering a word. I followed his glance, and saw on the ground, under the armchair by the side of the bed, standing out white on the dark carpet, and open as if to bite, Schopenhauer’s set of artificial teeth.

“The work of decomposition, loosening the jaws, had made it jump out of the mouth.

“I was really frightened that day, monsieur.”

And as the sun was sinking toward the glittering sea, the consumptive German rose from his seat, gave me a parting bow, and retired into the hotel.



A Curious Call

Louisa M Alcott



I have often wondered what the various statues standing about the city think of all day, and what criticisms they would make upon us and our doings, if they could speak. I frequently stop and stare at them, wondering if they don't feel lonely; if they wouldn't be glad of a nod as we go by; and I always long to offer my umbrella to shield their uncovered heads on a rainy day, especially to good Ben Franklin, when the snow lies white on his benevolent forehead. I was always fond of this old gentleman; and one of my favourite stories when a little girl, was that of his early life, and the time when he was so poor he walked about Philadelphia with a roll of bread under each arm, eating a third as he went. I never pass without giving him a respectful look, and wishing he could know how grateful I am for all he had done in the printing line; for, without types and presses, where would the books be?

Well, I never imagined that he understood why the tall woman in the big bonnet stared at him; but he did, and he liked it, and managed to let me know it in a very curious manner, as you shall hear.

As I look out, the first thing I see is the great gilt eagle on the City-Hall dome. There he sits, with open wings, all day long, looking down on the people, who must appear like ants scampering busily to and fro about an ant-hill. The sun shines on him splendidly in the morning; the gay flag waves and rustles in the wind above him sometimes; and the moonlight turns him to silver when she comes glittering up the sky. When it rains he never shakes his feathers; snow beats on him without disturbing his stately repose; and he never puts his head under his wing at night, but keeps guard in darkness as in day, like a faithful sentinel. I like the big, lonely bird, call him my particular fowl, and often wish he'd turn his head and speak to me. One night he did actually do it, or seemed to; for I've never been able to decide whether I dreamed what I'm going to tell you, or whether it really happened.

It was a stormy night! and, as I drew down my curtain, I said to myself, after peering through the driving snow to catch a glimpse of my neighbour, 'Poor Goldy! he'll have a rough time of it. I hope this northeaster won't blow him off his perch.' Then I sat down by my fire, took my knitting, and began to meditate. I'm sure I didn't fall asleep; but I can't prove it, so we'll say no more about it. All at once there came a tap at my door, as I thought; and I said 'Come in,' just as Mr. Poe did when that unpleasant raven paid him a call. No one came, so I went to see who it was. Not a sign of a human soul in the long hall, only little Jessie, the poodle, asleep on her mat. Down I sat; but in a minute the tap came again; this time so loud that I knew it was at the window, and went to open it, thinking that one of my doves wanted to come in perhaps. Up went the sash, and in bounced something so big and so bright that it dazzled and scared me.

'Don't be frightened, ma'am; it's only me,' said a hoarse voice. So I collected my wits, rubbed my eyes, and

looked at my visitor. It was the gold eagle off the City Hall! I don't expect to be believed; but I wish you'd been here to see, for I give you my word, it was a sight to behold. How he ever got in at such a small window I can't tell; but there he was, strutting majestically up and down the room, his golden plumage rustling, and his keen eyes flashing as he walked. I really didn't know what to do. I couldn't imagine what he came for; I had my doubts about the propriety of offering him a chair; and he was so much bigger than I expected that I was afraid he might fly away with me, as the roc did with Sindbad: so I did nothing but sidle to the door, ready to whisk out, if my strange guest appeared to be peckishly inclined. My respectful silence seemed to suit him; for, after a turn or two, he paused, nodded gravely, and said affably, 'Good-evening, ma'am. I stepped over to bring you old Ben's respects, and to see how you were getting on.'

'I'm very much obliged, sir. May I inquire who Mr. Old-Ben is? I'm afraid I haven't the honour of his acquaintance.'

'Yes, you have; it's Ben Franklin, of City-Hall yard. You know him; and he wished me to thank you for your interest in him.'

'Dear me! how very odd! Will you sit down, sir?'

'Never sit! I'll perch here;' and the great fowl took his accustomed attitude just in front of the fire, looking so very splendid that I couldn't keep my eyes off of him.

'Ah! you often do that. Never mind; I rather like it,' said the eagle, graciously, as he turned his brilliant eye upon me. I was rather abashed; but being very curious, I ventured to ask a few questions, as he seemed in a friendly mood.

'Being a woman, sir, I'm naturally of an inquiring turn; and I must confess that I have a strong desire to know how it happens that you take your walks abroad, when you are supposed to be permanently engaged at home?'

He shrugged his shoulders, and actually winked at me, as he replied, 'That's all people know of what goes on under, or rather over, their noses. Bless you, ma'am! I leave my roost every night, and enjoy myself in all sorts of larks. Excuse the expression; but, being ornithological, it is more proper for me than for some people who use it.'

'What a gay old bird!' thought I, feeling quite at home after that. 'Please tell me what you do, when the shades of evening prevail, and you go out for a frolic?'

'I am a gentleman; therefore I behave myself,' returned the eagle; with a stately air. 'I must confess, I smoke a great deal: but that's not my fault, it's the fault of the chimneys. They keep it up all day, and I have to take it; just as you poor ladies have to take cigar smoke, whether you like it or not. My amusements are of a wholesome kind. I usually begin by taking a long flight down the

harbour, for a look at the lighthouses, the islands, the shipping, and the sea. My friends, the gulls, bring their reports to me; for they are the harbour-police, and I take notes of their doings. The school-ship is an object of interest to me, and I often perch on the mast-head, to see how the lads are getting on. Then I take a turn over the city, gossip with the weathercocks, pay my compliments to the bells, inspect the fire-alarm, and pick up information by listening at the telegraph wires. People often talk about "a little bird" who spreads news; but they don't know how that figure of speech originated. It is the sparrows sitting on the wires, who receive the electric shock, and, being hollow-boned, the news go straight to their heads; they then fly about, chirping it on the housetops, and the air carries it everywhere. That's the way rumours rise and news spread.'

'If you'll allow, I'll make a note of that interesting fact,' said I, wondering if I might believe him. He appeared to fall into a reverie while I jotted down the sparrow story, and it occurred to me that perhaps I ought to offer my distinguished guest some refreshment; but, when I modestly alluded to it, he said, with an aldermanic air, 'No, thank you; I've just dined at the Parker House.'

Now, I really could *not* swallow that; and so plainly betrayed my incredulity, that the eagle explained. 'The savoury smells which rise to my nostrils from that excellent hotel, with an occasional sniff from the Tremont, are quite sufficient to satisfy my appetite; for, having no stomach, I don't need much food, and I drink nothing but water.'

'I wish others would follow your example in that latter habit,' said I, respectfully, for I was beginning to see that there was something in my bird, though he *was* hollow. 'Will you allow me to ask if the other statues in the city fly by night?'

'They promenade in the parks; and occasionally have social gatherings, when they discuss politics, education, medicine, or any of the subjects in which they are interested. Ah! we have grand times when you are all asleep. It quite repays me for being obliged to make an owl of myself.'

'Do the statues come from the shops to these parties?' I asked, resolving to take a late walk the next moonlight night.

'Sometimes; but they get lazy and delicate, living in close, warm places. We laugh at cold and bad weather, and are so strong and hearty that I shouldn't be surprised if I saw Webster and Everett flying round the Common on the new-fashioned velocipedes, for they believed in exercise. Goethe and Schiller often step over from De Vries's window, to flirt with the goddesses, who come down from their niches on Horticultural Hall. Nice, robust young women are Pomona and Flora. If your niminy-piminy girls could see them run, they would stop tilting through the streets, and learn that the true Grecian Bend is the line of beauty always found in

straight shoulders, well-opened chest, and an upright figure, firmly planted on active feet.'

'In your rambles don't you find a great deal of misery?' said I, to change the subject, for he was evidently old-fashioned in his notions.

'Many sad sights!' And he shook his head with a sigh; then added, briskly, 'But there is a deal of charity in our city, and it does its work beautifully. By the by, I heard of a very sweet charity the other day,—a church whose Sunday school is open to all the poor children who will come; and there, in pleasant rooms, with books, pictures, kindly teachers, and a fatherly minister to welcome them, the poor little creatures find refreshment for their hungry souls. I like that; it's a lovely illustration of the text, "Suffer little children to come unto me;" and I call it practical Christianity.'

He did like it, my benevolent old bird; for he rustled his great wings, as if he wanted to clap them, if there had only been room; and every feather shone as if a clearer light than that of my little fire had fallen on it as he spoke.

'You are a literary woman, hey?' he said suddenly, as if he'd got a new idea, and was going to pounce upon me with it.

'Ahem! I do a little in that line,' I answered, with a modest cough.

'Then tell people about that place; write some stories for the children; go and help teach them; do something, and make others do what they can to increase the sabbath sunshine that brightens one day in the week for the poor babies who live in shady places.'

'I should be glad to do my best; and, if I'd known before'—I began.

'You might have known, if you'd looked about you. People are so wrapt up in their own affairs they don't do half they might. Now, then, hand me a bit of paper, and I'll give you the address, so you won't have any excuse for forgetting what I tell you.'

'Mercy on us; what will he do next?' thought I, as he tweaked a feather out of his breast, gave the nib a peck, and then coolly wrote these words on the card I handed him: '*Church of the Disciples. Knock and it shall be opened!*' There it was, in letters of gold; and, while I looked at it, feeling reproached that I hadn't known it sooner, my friend,—he didn't seem a stranger any more,—said in a business-like tone, as he put back his pen, 'Now I must be off. Old Ben reads an article on the "Abuses of the Press at the present day," and I must be there to report.'

'It must be very interesting. I suppose you don't allow mortals at your meetings?' said I, burning to go, in spite of the storm.

'No, ma'am. We meet on the Common; and, in the present state of the weather, I don't think flesh and blood would stand it. Bronze, marble, and wood are sterner stuff, and can defy the elements.'

'Good evening; pray, call again,' I said, hospitably.

'I will; your eyrie suits me: but don't expect me to call in the daytime. I'm on duty then, and can't take my eye off

my charge. The city needs a deal of watching, my dear. Bless me! it's striking eight. Your watch is seven minutes slow by the Old South. Good-night, good-night!'

And as I opened the window, the great bird soared away like a flash of light through the storm, leaving me so astonished at the whole performance that I haven't got over it yet.



Beneath the Oak Tree of Madness

Andrew Duncan



He **never should** have done it. He never should have touched those acorns. He thought he was just tidying up the garden. How was he to know what he had wrought. The squeaking wrath he had brought upon himself. Only hours ago he had been getting himself into bed and now here he was tied to the base of the grand oak tree that took centre stage in his garden and surrounded by a horde of grey fur.

He had been pulling the sheets over his bed when he heard the first squeak from within the walls. He told himself he was hearing things but there it was again minutes later. He leant out of his bedroom to check the hall. Empty. He opened a window and looked outside. Dark and quiet. But when he returned to his work the noises returned and at ten times the ferocity.

There were chitters and squeaks and scratchings and clawings, and the light noise of bushy tails rubbings against stone. He stalked the room looking for the source of this noise but it seemed to be coming from everywhere at once. He dashed for the door to head for the telephone and book an appointment with pest control, but it was too late, the great chattering masses with their bushy tails erupted from everywhere at once. From under carpets, behind paintings, and around skirting boards they leapt out and smothered him. They gnawed and scratched and throttled him with their tails. The next thing he knew he was bound beneath the leafy boughs of his prized oak, surrounded by the great, grey, fluffy, horde.

A circle formed around the endangered man and a hush fell over the squirrels. Four squirrels entered the clearing. One twice the size of all his brethren; one with a tail greater and fluffier than all others; one with eyes as bright as the sun; and the final one had pale white fur and red eyes. They began to talk in front of the assembled mass, first only between themselves and then to the whole crowd, stirring them up and urging them on, and then finally addressing the man himself. The crowd cheered and jeered in their rodent tongues, willing for blood to be spilt. The misfortune was only just beginning for the unlucky man.

The four elders of squirrelkind jumped into the branches of the oak and looked down upon their kindred. The man struggled and strained but the vines were too tightly tied and he could not loose himself. He screamed for help but the squirrels only cheered louder. A group of the critters moved a pile of leaves to one side, unveiling a hole into the earth between the roots of the tree. A deep growl came from within.

The man continued to exert himself against his restraints but stopped once he caught a glimpse of what was coming out of the depths of those roots.

First came the jaws that leaked flesh, engorging the insatiable roots of that cursed tree. Next came the five dark beady eyes in constant flux, always swimming around the head and never returning to the same place.

Over the grotesque body, thick, fleshy, matted, hair formed in oily clumps and out of the skin the prenatal forms of squirrels shook and groaned. Some were only small lumps on the skin but others were nearly fully formed, only their hind legs remaining with their foul mother. Eventually came the chaotic mass of interwoven and monstrous tales. How many of them there were was unknowable but each wriggled and squirmed with a life of its own. At the end of one of was a fully grown child being dragged along against his will. Slowly but surely the great under-mother of squirrelkind moved onwards towards her children's newest offering.

The horde of grey squirrels screamed and cheered as the man redoubled his efforts to escape but still got nowhere. And the beast made its way forward. But slowly, he felt his bind loosen. Just slightly, but with a small bit of wiggling he might be able to loose himself. He would still need something to distract the beast that came for him. Looking around for anything that might help but all that surrounded him were jeering rodents.

Suddenly a flash of red and white sped across the man's vision, just like the one he had avoided in his car that very morning. A small red squirrel dashed from beside the man, bits of vine still in its mouth, and stopped in front of the foul beast. The tiny hero was no match for the unholy mother but it was just enough time for the man to get loose and make a break for his home. The tiny hero's sacrifice was not in vain.

The following morning, the man's grandchildren arrived at his home a found him unconscious in the garden beside his chainsaw and a can of petrol. The grand oak tree they used to play under had been chopped down and the salted stump smouldering and creaked. The man's children called a doctor and drove the man straight to hospital where the experts decided he had suffered a mild psychotic episode. His grandchildren, none the wiser to the dramas of the adult world, played around the charred stump all morning and just as they were called for dinner, one found a small red carcass with indescribable, foul wounds.



Druid

Without a Home

Chapter 5

Don't Be Fooled By A Bear

Call of the Shieldmaiden



Degore awoke with a start. All was silent except for the slight breeze that stirred the trees around the Abbey. Through the attic window, Degore could see that they were just beginning to change to their autumn shades, and the sprinkling of lighter leaves stood out in the gentle light of the moon. He got up, cautiously, and went over to the window. Midnight excursions were frowned upon by Freyja. The moonlight streamed over the stone buildings and the new thatch on the roof of the cowshed gleamed brightly. A shadow moving between two buildings caught his attention. A slinking, sneaking shadow.

He quietly opened the window. The cold autumnal air hit his face and he shivered. It was not very cold yet, but it was jarring compared to the warmth of his bed. The shadow sneaked in front of the house opposite. It moved along in the darkness right beside the front door and Degore strained his eyes to make out the large form. He watched intently, and soon enough the creature stepped out into the moonlight. A huge brown beast with long shaggy fur. It was a cave bear! Carefully, Degore lifted the wooden windowsill and took up an acorn he had stored beneath. He stood back so his arm would not appear outside the window and hurled it across at the house opposite. It hit the attic window with a rattle.

He carefully peered out of the window again. The bear was now out in the moonlight, heading across the space between the two houses, moving quickly on its long, muscular legs. Degore glanced back over to the window opposite. Clancy was standing there looking at him. He motioned down to the courtyard and the boys watched the bear go over to the rubbish pile and began to dig through it. Over the harvest period a heap of various plant refuse had built up, waiting for the more urgent tasks to abate before it could be carted off.

They watched for a while as the hungry animal tore through the food scraps. Then Degore realised that it was likely he and Clancy would be pressed into cleaning it up the next day. He leaned out of his window to gesticulate to get Clancy's attention. He mouthed the words 'we'll have to clean it up' and made shovelling motions and pointed towards the bear. Clancy stood and stared with a puzzled expression, then shrugged. They both suddenly realised the bear was no longer making noise, and, glancing back at it, saw that it was looking up at them.

The bear looked from one to the other. Clancy's head could be seen poking out of his window and Degore's whole upper half was leaning out of his. The bear stared for a bit, its head darting back and forth between them, and then turned and began to run away. Clancy and Degore left their windows and rushed down the ladders from their attic bedrooms and clattered across their cottages to their front doors. Clancy was faster and Degore met him outside his own door. They

began to walk over to the rubbish which was strewn about the ground, talking loudly and gesticulating enthusiastically.

"What are you doing?" Uhtred appeared behind them.

They twirled around in surprise.

"There was a bear!" exclaimed Clancy. "See, he made a mess." He gestured to the rotting vegetation scattered about them.

Uhtred grabbed them both by their nightshirt collars and dragged them inside. "There was a bear out there?" His voice was urgent.

"Yes!" the boys chorused excitedly.

"And you are running around outside?" asked Uhtred. He looked sternly and slightly incredulously at them.

In the boys' excitement they had forgotten the dangers of wild animals. Now they looked at each other as the realisation hit them.

"But the bear ran away," Clancy protested.

"So it's safe to go out," added Degore.

"It is very likely still hanging around," said Uhtred, and looked out of the window. "Clancy! You left your front door open!"

Clancy gasped, "Will the bear go in there?"

Uhtred grabbed his crossbow and had it loaded in an instant. "Run over there, I will cover you. Wake your father."

Clancy ran across the clearing. He was half way across when the bear charged at him from the darkness.

"It's coming!" yelled Degore, "Run, Clancy!"

Clancy ran faster than he ever had before. He heard the bear coming closer up behind him. He imagined its powerful jaws snapping at his heels.

He ran straight through the door, and, grabbing at the table to stop himself, he seized the door and slammed it so hard, almost hitting the bear's muzzle, that his parents woke up.

"What is it?" His mother looked bewildered at the panting boy.

"A bear," Clancy panted, "It almost got me!"

Clancy's father sprang from his bed in the corner of the humble cottage, rushed to the window and looked out. He could see Uhtred and Degore by the light of the lantern, looking out of their window.

"I can see it," said his father, "it's a big one. But what were you doing outside?"

His wife and son joined him at the window.

The large bear stood still in the space between the houses. It looked through the windows from one face to another and then slowly shuffled off.

"Why were you outside, Clancy?" asked his mother. "It's dangerous out there at night."

"We thought it had gone away," said Clancy. "Degore and I saw him going through the rubbish."

"We have told you not to go out at night, Clancy," said his father. He took up the candle his wife had lit and, moving it closer to the window, he made hand signs with Uhtred for a minute.

"What are you saying?" asked Degore.

"We are not going to do anything tonight. The darkness belongs to the animals. We will investigate in the morning." Uhtred took the lantern up and went over to the ladder which led up to Degore's loft room. "Off to bed with you, and do not run outside in the night when you see a dangerous animal."

Degore smiled ruefully and clambered up the ladder. In the cottage opposite Clancy received a stern talking to before also being sent back to bed.

"I wonder why the dogs did not bark?" said Uhtred, the next morning over breakfast. He was still weak and unsteady because of the ill-starred boat ride, but that had happened a few weeks ago and he was back on his feet for light tasks. "We shall investigate."

"We cannot have a bear that size welcoming itself into our lives like that," Uhtred said as they walked over to the dogs' kennels. A few bones lay strewn about. As they approached, the dogs wagged their tails at them and strained on their chains for pets.

Uhtred squatted down and inspected the bones. "These are not what we gave them last night. This is part of a roe deer and we have not hunted any of them for weeks."

"Did someone come by and give them to the dogs?" asked Degore.

"It seems likely," said Uhtred, "I will have to investigate. This is a clever tactic to keep them quiet."

They went over to the rubbish pile where Clancy was waiting with a shovel. Uhtred turned to Degore. "Come and see me just before lunch in my office. In the meantime, go and have a quick look around for anything out of the ordinary before you go about your morning chores."

Degore nodded and surveyed the mess. Uhtred had gone and the two boys were left with the rubbish. The unpleasant scent wafted around them. A cart lay nearby, and Degore sighed. They would have to load the cart many times and haul it away to the burn pile.

"Father told me that we are going to have to take this all away, as we do not want the bear to come back. He also told me that a bear mauling would be the least of my worries if I go scaring my mother like that again," Clancy said.

Degore smiled ruefully. "Often Uhtred does not talk to me about a specific thing. But I know I must be good for a long time or I will get a stern talking to as well."

The boys set to work. They discussed the happenings of the night before. They agreed to

thoroughly inspect the whole place after they were done. The job took less time than first expected, and as the cool of the morning gave way to the heat of midday they completed the last barrow load.

Clancy's mother came by on her way to the garden as they surveyed the tidiness. "Good job, boys." She was carrying her shawl, as, despite the colder nights, the days were still quite warm. With her approval the boys put away their tools and were free.

Degore and Clancy looked at everything. They inspected the ground in the soft dirt of the pigpen for footprints. They tried to use a dog to sniff things out. But the dog just wanted pats, and Pawdraig was imprisoned in the house at Freyja's insistence, so they could not use him. They went by the garden and asked Freyja many questions about the footprints there until she threatened to make them do some weeding. When they saw the men in the far field begin to come towards the abbey for their midday meal, they parted ways. Clancy went to his home and Degore went into Uhtred's office at the back of the cathedral.

He walked through the cool of the cathedral, which was a pleasant change from the growing heat outside. The ancient stones beneath his feet were worn smooth from centuries of worshippers, the huge stained glass pictures in the windows showed scenes from the life of the Saint Carella, and an ancient tapestry hung behind the altar, with its golden, jewel-studded circle of the symbol of the saints standing upon a marble base. Going behind the altar, and through a little door, Degore found himself in the office.

"I have investigated," he informed Uhtred.

"And what have you found?"

Degore shook his head. "Nothing," he sighed. "We looked everywhere. Nothing."

"I too did my own investigations," said Uhtred. "Your lack of findings has backed up my conclusion. No one was here last night. The bear brought the bones to keep the dogs quiet."

Degore stared at him incredulously. "You look unbelieving," Uhtred chuckled, "But nothing is stolen, and we know bears are clever."

Degore nodded. "I guess, but should I still keep an eye out? Like what if the bear comes back?"

"Yes, you do that, but do not run out during the night. I will also keep a lookout. Bear or human, we cannot have this type of thing going on. We need those dogs to bark and not sit there chewing on bones while strangers lurk."

Degore left the cathedral full of ideas. He rushed home. "I want to go on an adventure this afternoon," he told Freyja.

She smiled at him. "Will you be looking for bears?"

Degore looked suspiciously at her "how did you guess?"

"I have raised close to 20 children, I know things." Freyja set his lunch before him. "Eat up, you will need energy for your adventure. And," she added, "you will be careful." The last words were a stern order. Degore promised solemnly not to get mauled.

Degore hurried through his lunch and went over to Clancy's house. The door was open and he went in. Clancy sat upright at the table, his feet flat on the floor, his shoulders back, in perfect posture. He carefully lifted a forkful of roast parsnip to his mouth, and savoured the flavour. In the midst of his elated chewing he opened his eyes and saw Degore standing there.

He gulped down the mouthful. "Degore! You startled me!"

"We are going to spend the afternoon bear hunting," Degore said, laughing. "Why do you eat like that?"

"I like to savour my food." Clancy gobbled down the last of the food from his plate like a ravenous wolf with tiny human teeth, thanked his mother for preparing it and informed her of his afternoon adventures, omitting any mention of his intentions to go bear-hunting, lest she forbid him.

"You boys had better stay out of the way of any dangerous animals," she told them.

The boys promised to be on guard and they dashed away. They ran west towards the edge of the plateau where a good view of the distant village of Midlacken could be had. It was a well travelled path, which brought Gwendoline on frequent visits to her grandparents. The boys fairly flew over the smooth beaten paths. The wind ruffled their hair. As the edge of the plateau came into sight Clancy suddenly slowed and stopped. Degore almost crashed into him.

"What's up?" Degore asked, "Why did you stop? We are almost there!"

"Look," Clancy pointed.

Degore followed his finger and saw a dragon near the edge of the cliff. Its dark grey body stood out against the blue of the sky. "Let's go closer," he whispered.

The boys crouched down and crept closer. A large clump of hawthorns blocked their way and the dragon was out of sight for a few moments. Rounding the bushes they appeared right beside the dragon.

They would have jumped back, but the scene before them was so strange that they forgot to.

On the very edge, and using the strong wind rushing up towards him, the dragon hovered. With his wings spread out and filled with wind, he could hold his full weight out into the open, his front legs dangling over nothing. His back legs were planted firmly on the ground, and his tail was wrapped around a sturdy tree.

He was the biggest dragon Degore had yet seen, and was overall the stoutest and sturdiest. With deep

brown eyes, and scales like plate metal, he was everything a dragon should be.

He turned and looked at them casually "I am frightened I might fall." His voice was deep, polite and sincere.

The boys looked incredulously at him.

"What are you doing?" asked Degore in confusion.

"How did you get into that position?" Clancy inquired. Without moving forwards he peered around the dragon, and behind him.

The dragon continued, "Do you think you can lift me and pull me back?"

Degore surveyed the massive animal. "I do not think so," he said uncertainly.

The dragon chuckled. He pulled his wings back, and unwrapped his tail and the weight of his body made him fall forwards. He dropped gracefully till he almost hit the trees on the land below the plateau and then, spreading out his wings, he glided off and into the distance.

"That dragon has issues," said Clancy as they watched the dragon disappear into the distance. "He'd better be careful or he will end up being worshipped in Ritherhithe."

"I wish he'd stayed around and we could have talked," Degore said wistfully. "But I do think he is so full of himself that he might walk into Ritherhithe and ask to be worshipped."

The boys stared after the dragon after he had disappeared for a time and then Clancy turned to Degore. "Let us go in search of our bear."

Degore snapped back to the present. "Yes, I had the idea to follow the path down the cliff face. Surely if the bear came from this direction it would have come up that way."

"Bears are not good rock climbers," Clancy agreed as they looked along the almost sheer edge of the cliff.

The boys went back past the hawthorns and followed the path to where it left the plateau and wound its way down the cliff face. The path was only wide enough for one laden donkey and the boys went single file down for a while. Coming across a patch of fresh earth where the cliff face above had collapsed onto the path, they saw fresh prints. The boys bent down and inspected them.

"Definitely a bear," said Clancy. "And only going in one direction."

"So it's either still on the plateau, or it's gone down another path," Degore added. "Do you think it could have just gone down at any other point?"

"I think it would be easier for any animal to go down a path than to clamber through the Barrier Ranges, they are rough and barren and unstable and have no game," said Clancy. "None of these paths are guarded or

used other than by us, so animals can easily come and go.”

“We need to head out to the other paths, then,” said Degore, “but it is possible, in a pinch, to go through the Barrier Ranges.”

The boys looked north at the huge bare peaks that jutted out into the sky. “We can go there too,” said Clancy, “but we will not have time today.”

“Let’s go to the path to the bay, and maybe go north tomorrow, then,” suggested Degore. “We can come home with those who went off to the markets yesterday.”

They were in agreement and the boys sped off. They paused at the abbey only to get a drink from the well and then dashed off again. The path towards the bay was wider and the boys raced each other, and then ran together.

When they reached the eastern edge of the plateau they came across the men who had gone off to market. They were loading their horses after resting them. The path up the cliff was a smooth, well used path, but laden horses still worked hard to carry heavy loads up it.

“Have you seen a bear around here?” asked Clancy of one of the men, who was known by the name of Oswulf.

“Luckily not!” Oswulf exclaimed. “Is there one about?”

Clancy informed him of the events of the previous night, and Oswulf looked relieved. “I am glad we will be home tonight in that case,” he said, brushing back his thick warm brown curls. “We were meant to be home yesterday but a few horses went lame so we were delayed till today.”

“We came this way to find out if the bear left the plateau by this path,” said Degore. “The western path has tracks, but they only come our way and none are returning.”

“We camped at the base of the cliffs last night,” said Oswulf. “Unless your bear went to the bay and is amongst the rocks, he has not come this way.”

The boys travelled with the men and horses back to the abbey. A golden sunset lit up the western sky and a cool evening breeze refreshed them, and warned of the coming chillier weather.

The boys’ evening was spent carrying supplies to storage for the women and listening to the men in deep discussion over the lame horses and bringing them water in their stables.

It was late when Degore, after having his bath, hugged Freyja and climbed up to bed. He noticed Uhtred checking his crossbow arrows as he approached the ladder.

“What are you doing?” he asked, pausing on the ladder.

Uhtred looked over at him. “If the bear returns I will be ready.”

“Can I stay up and watch with you?”

Uhtred shook his head. “No, you go to bed. And if you wake up and hear anything, do not come outside.” he shook his finger at Degore. “Bears are dangerous.”

Degore obediently went up to bed. He knew it was still too soon to push anything. Or really be anything but an obedient child.

The darkness crept in and all was quiet. Silently the covers moved back, the feet padded softly across the attic floor, the window opened and Degore was out clinging to the steep thatch roof. He manoeuvred carefully to where the ancient stone wall was made up of misshapen rocks, some of which jutted out, and down the wall he moved. Reaching the ground he looked around. Remembering Freyja’s stern looks he hurried up the nearby tree: surely such a fat bear could not get as far along a branch as he could. No sooner had he climbed out onto the thinnest limb he dared to trust, than the bear itself appeared below him, peering up into the branches. It rose onto its hind legs and stared up at him. He looked down into the unfriendly face just a few feet below him.

Degore shuddered. The parted lips of the creature showed long sharp teeth, and the beady little eyes held wild abandon mingled with curiosity, as it seemed to him that the bear was forming some evil plan. A chill of fear shot through him as he began to wonder if the bear could reach the branch he was on and start to pull him down.

Degore sat perfectly still, having a staring competition with the bear until it walked a few steps back and dragged something across the ground. Peering down through the leaves, in the faint moonlight, Degore imagined it was Clancy. The bear went behind the barn and soon the sound of the dogs tearing into the carcass was heard.

Time passed and nothing stirred. Degore shook his head. Sleep lured his eyelids down, despite his excitement at seeing the bear, and the cold was seeping through his coat. There would probably be a frost that night. The bear was not seen again though, and, after waiting a while longer, Degore slid down off the tree and climbed back up to his bed. Just as he climbed in through his window, Clancy’s house’s door opened and his father came out. Uhtred appeared below his window in the doorway and a small band of men gathered before the houses.

“I can hear the dogs having a go at whatever the bear brought,” Clancy’s father was saying.

Degore quietly shut the window, lest one of the men should look up and see him. He went over and lay down on his bed. Perhaps the men would soon move away and he could come out again.

He tried to stay awake but it was suddenly morning and the sun was streaming through his window. The sound of Freyja's voice drifted up to him. He leapt out of bed and rushed to the window. Looking down he saw the bear lying on the ground. A group of people were gathered around it and he spotted Clancy among them. The frost was thick on the ground and footprints mired its pristine whiteness. Blood as well.

Degore pulled his linen shirt over his head and rushed down the ladder. He hurried out across the crunching grass and over to stand by Clancy.

"Wow," he whispered, "it's so big."

"My father killed it," Clancy said with pride "He says that he will tan it and give it to mother for her bed this winter."

It occurred to Degore that Clancy's father likely shared a bed with his mother and so was also thinking of his own comfort, but he said nothing on that matter.

"Did you watch him take it down?" asked Degore.

Clancy shook his head in disappointment. "He was up that tree over there when he shot it," he said, pointing at a big mulberry tree that stood beside his house.

"I wish I could have seen it," said Degore.

Clancy nodded, "Me too."

Freyja called to Degore for breakfast and with a last glance at the bear he went in to eat.

"If you go over to Clancy's house for dinner tonight, you will have bear steaks," Freyja told him. "Some of us will be working late in the garden, so you will have dinner over there."

Degore perked up at the idea of bear steaks. They sounded delicious. The idea of eating an enemy filled him with joy.



A Worthy Panegyrick UPON MONARCHY;
Written Anno M DC L VIII.

By a Learned and truly Loyal Gentleman, for Information
of the miserably mis-led Commonwealths-Men (falsely so called)
of that Deluded Age; and now revived by One that honours the Author,
and the Established Government of these Nations.

I.

IF wanting Wings one may ascend the Skies,
And Phoebus view, without an Eagles Eyes;
Then Rouse up (Muse) from thy Lethargick Strains,
And (having first invok'd the God of Brains)
Let the Grand Subject of thy Measures be,
No Soul to England like a Monarchy.

II.

It is the Image of that Domination,
By which Jehovah rules the whole Creation;
Angels nor Saints, do in his Kingdom share,
God is Sole-Monarch, they, but Subjects are:
Whose Laws are such, as when they did Rebel,
Sequestred not, but sent them strait to Hell.

III.

As Old, as that Paternal Sovereignty,
God plac'd in Adam, rul'd his People by;
Disown'd of None, but them whose Minds aspire,
And Envy ONE should have what All desire:
For be't a Few or Many we live under,
Such shall repine, still, whilst not of the Number.

III.

The Antients did a Monarchy prefer,
Made all their Gods submit to Jupiter;
And (when Affairs and Nations first began)
Princes DECREES were th' only Laws of Man;
Experience will avow it, where there's any,
One HONEST MAN is sooner found than MANY.





V.

The Rational Soul performs a Princes part,
She rules the Body by Monarchick Art;
Poor Cranes, and silly Bees (with shivering Wings,)
Observe their Leaders, and obey their Kings:
Nature her self, disdains a Crowded Throne,
The Body's Monstrous, has more Heads than ONE.

VI.

Monarchy's that Politick simple State,
Consists in Unity (inseparate
Pure entire;) a Government that stands,
When others fall, touch'd but with levelling hands:
So Natural and with such Skill endu'd,
It makes ONE Body of a Multitude.

VII.

In Order (wherein latter things depend
On former) that's most perfect doth attend
On Unity: But this can never be
The Popular State, nor Aristocracy;
For where or All, or Many bear the Sway,
Such Order, to Confusion leads the way.

VIII.

A Monarchy more quickly doth attain
The End propos'd; for 'tis the Single-Brain
That ripens Council, and concealeth best
Princely Designs, 'till Deeds proclaim 'em blest.
Whilst Numerous Heads are rarely of one Mind,
Slow in their Motion, lower than the Wind.

IX.

Treason, nor Force, so suddenly divides
Th' United Strength that in a Crown resides:
Sedition prospers not, it seldom here,
Results an Object of the Prince's Fear:
Then when an Empire, Rome was ne'r so strong,
Nor Triumph'd under other Rule so long.

X.

A Monarchy abates those Feverish Fits
Of Emulation a Free-State begets:
A Prince cannot his Reins so quickly slack,
Or throw his Burthen on another's Back:
But where so many Rulers Command,
The Work's transferr'd, and toss'd from Hand to Hand.

XI.

The People, or the Nobles to debate
The deep Concernments of a troubled State,
Set Times and Places have assign'd them, they
First meet, and then adjourn from Day to Day!
Whereas a Monarch, who by Nature's ONE,
Deliberates always, never's off his Throne.

XII.

But hold! Me thinks I see the three Estates
Conven'd; thrown open Prison-Doors and Grates,
Extinct our paltry Jealousies and Fears,
Grace offer'd to All, but Cavaliers
And—! yet with Patience they abound,
In Hopes of Better, now the Wheel go's round.

Britannia ab initio mundi semper fuit Regia & Regimen
illius simile ille Caelorum.

Howel.





corncrakemag.com