



CORNCRAKE

AUG 2026
ISSUE 30

Under the Knife
H G Wells

Robert Louis Stevenson
Alexandre Dumas
Charles Dickens
Lord Alfred Tennyson
Liam Q D Hall
Michael T Smith
Julia Margaret Cameron
Luke Gilfedder
Nathan CJ Hood
Morgan Svensen
Luke Allison

NESTING IN THE OAK OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE



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The Corncrake magazine promotes the best works in English literature, from the beginning of civilisation to the present and beyond.

Celebrating great stories, poems and essays by classic authors.

Featuring beautiful and arresting artwork by renowned painters.

Providing a platform for up-and-coming writers and artists.

From great names like Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Anthony Trollope, to writers of the future like Nathan CJ Hood, Luke Gilfedder, and ND Wallace Swan, the Corncrake sets before you the imaginative, vital, and beautiful soul of the English literary and aesthetic tradition.

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You are also supporting contemporary and independent artists and authors who are engaging with the stories and artworks of the past to create new tales and paintings for our time.

Happy Reading!

shieldmaiden

Editor-in-Chief

Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?... If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!
JRR Tolkien

Under the Knife

By H G Wells



"What if I die under it?" The thought recurred again and again, as I walked home from Haddon's. It was a purely personal question. I was spared the deep anxieties of a married man, and I knew there were few of my intimate friends but would find my death troublesome chiefly on account of their duty of regret. I was surprised indeed, and perhaps a little humiliated, as I turned the matter over, to think how few could possibly exceed the conventional requirement. Things came before me stripped of glamour, in a clear dry light, during that walk from Haddon's house over Primrose Hill. There were the friends of my youth: I perceived now that our affection was a tradition, which we foregathered rather laboriously to maintain. There were the rivals and helpers of my later career: I suppose I had been cold-blooded or undemonstrative—one perhaps implies the other. It may be that even the capacity for friendship is a question of physique. There had been a time in my own life when I had grieved bitterly enough at the loss of a friend; but as I walked home that afternoon the emotional side of my imagination was dormant. I could not pity myself, nor feel sorry for my friends, nor conceive of them as grieving for me. I was interested in this deadness of my emotional nature—no doubt a concomitant of my stagnating physiology; and my thoughts wandered off along the line it suggested. Once before, in my hot youth, I had suffered a sudden loss of blood, and had been within an ace of death. I remembered now that my affections as well as my passions had drained out of me, leaving scarce anything but a tranquil resignation, a dreg of self-pity. It had been weeks before the old ambitions and tenderesses, and all the complex moral interplay of a man had reasserted themselves. It occurred to me that the real meaning of this numbness might be a gradual slipping away from the pleasure-pain guidance of the animal man. It has been proven, I take it, as thoroughly as anything can be proven in this world, that the higher emotions, the moral feelings, even the subtle unselfishness of love, are evolved from the elemental desires and fears of the simple animal: they are the harness in which man's mental freedom goes. And it may be that as death overshadows us, as our possibility of acting diminishes, this complex growth of balanced impulse, propensity and aversion, whose interplay inspires our acts, goes with it. Leaving what? I was suddenly brought back to reality by an imminent collision with the butcher-boy's tray. I found that I was crossing the bridge over the Regent's Park Canal, which runs parallel with that in the Zoological Gardens. The boy in blue had been looking over his shoulder at a black barge advancing slowly, towed by a gaunt white horse. In the Gardens a nurse was leading three happy little children over the bridge. The trees were bright green; the spring hopefulness was still unstained by the dusts of summer; the sky in the water was bright and clear, but broken by long waves, by quivering bands of black, as the barge drove through. The breeze was stirring; but it did not stir me as the spring breeze used to do. Was this dulness of feeling in itself an anticipation? It was curious that I could reason and follow out a network of suggestion as clearly as ever: so at least, it seemed to me. It was calmness rather than dulness that was coming upon me. Was there any ground for the relief in the presentiment of death? Did a man near to death begin instinctively to withdraw himself from the meshes of matter and sense, even before the cold hand was laid upon his? I felt strangely isolated—isolated without regret—from the life and existence about me. The children playing in the sun and gathering strength and experience for the business of life, the park-keeper gossiping with a nursemaid, the nursing mother, the young couple intent upon each other as they passed me, the trees by the wayside spreading new pleading leaves to the sunlight, the stir in their branches—I had been part of it all, but I had nearly done with it now. Some way down the Broad Walk I perceived that I was tired, and that my feet were heavy. It was hot that afternoon, and I turned aside and sat down on one of the green chairs that line the way. In a minute I had dozed into a dream, and the tide of my thoughts washed up a vision of the resurrection. I was still sitting in the chair, but I thought myself actually dead, withered, tattered, dried, one eye (I saw) pecked out by birds. "Awake!" cried a voice; and inconspicuously the dust of the path and the mould under the grass became insurgent. I had never before thought of Regent's Park as a cemetery, but now, through the trees, stretching as far as eye could see, I beheld a flat plain of writhing graves and heeling tombstones. There seemed to be some trouble: the rising dead appeared to stifle as they struggled upward, they bled in their struggles, the red flesh was torn away from the white bones. "Awake!" cried a voice; but I determined I would not rise to such horrors. "Awake!" They would not let me alone. "Wake up!" said an angry voice. A

cockney angel! The man who sells the tickets was shaking me, demanding my penny. I paid my penny, pocketed my ticket, yawned, stretched my legs, and feeling now rather less torpid, got up and walked on towards Langham Place. I speedily lost myself again in a shifting maze of thoughts about death. Going across Marylebone Road into that crescent at the end of Langham Place, I had the narrowest escape from the shaft of a cab, and went on my way with a palpitating heart and a bruised shoulder. It struck me that it would have been curious if my meditations on my death on the morrow had led to my death that day. But I will not weary you with more of my experiences that day and the next. I knew more and more certainly that I should die under the operation; at times I think I was inclined to pose to myself. At home I found everything prepared; my room cleared of needless objects and hung with white sheets; a nurse installed and already at loggerheads with my housekeeper. They wanted me to go to bed early, and after a little resistance I obeyed. In the morning I was very indolent, and though I read my newspapers and the letters that came by the first post, I did not find them very interesting. There was a friendly note from Addison, my old school friend, calling my attention to two discrepancies and a printer's error in my new book, with one from Langridge venting some vexation over Minton. The rest were business communications. I breakfasted in bed. The glow of pain at my side seemed more massive. I knew it was pain, and yet, if you can understand, I did not find it very painful. I had been awake and hot and thirsty in the night, but in the morning bed felt comfortable. In the night-time I had lain thinking of things that were past; in the morning I dozed over the question of immortality. Haddon came, punctual to the minute, with a neat black bag; and Mowbray soon followed. Their arrival stirred me up a little. I began to take a more personal interest in the proceedings. Haddon moved the little octagonal table close to the bedside, and with his broad back to me, began taking things out of his bag. I heard the light click of steel upon steel. My imagination, I found, was not altogether stagnant. "Will you hurt me much?" I said in an off-hand tone. "Not a bit," Haddon answered over his shoulder. "We shall chloroform you. Your heart's as sound as a bell." And as he spoke, I had a whiff of the pungent sweetness of the anaesthetic. They stretched me out, with a convenient exposure of my side, and, almost before I realised what was happening, the chloroform was being administered. It stings the nostrils, and there is a suffocating sensation at first. I knew I should die—that this was the end of consciousness for me. And suddenly I felt that I was not prepared for death: I had a vague sense of a duty overlooked—I knew not what. What was it I had not done? I could think of nothing more to do, nothing desirable left in life; and yet I had the strangest disinclination to death. And the physical sensation was painfully oppressive. Of course the doctors did not know they were going to kill me. Possibly I struggled. Then I fell motionless, and a great silence, a monstrous silence, and an impenetrable blackness came upon me. There must have been an interval of absolute unconsciousness, seconds or minutes. Then with a chilly, unemotional clearness, I perceived that I was not yet dead. I was still in my body; but all the multitudinous sensations that come sweeping from it to make up the background of consciousness had gone, leaving me free of it all. No, not free of it all; for as yet something still held me to the poor stark flesh upon the bed—held me, yet not so closely that I did not feel myself external to it, independent of it, straining away from it. I do not think I saw, I do not think I heard; but I perceived all that was going on, and it was as if I both heard and saw. Haddon was bending over me, Mowbray behind me; the scalpel—it was a large scalpel—was cutting my flesh at the side under the flying ribs. It was interesting to see myself cut like cheese, without a pang, without even a qualm. The interest was much of a quality with that one might feel in a game of chess between strangers. Haddon's face was firm and his hand steady; but I was surprised to perceive (how I know not) that he was feeling the gravest doubt as to his own wisdom in the conduct of the operation. Mowbray's thoughts too, I could see. He was thinking that Haddon's manner showed too much of the specialist. New suggestions came up like bubbles through a stream of frothing meditation, and burst one after another in the little bright spot of his consciousness. He could not help noticing and admiring Haddon's swift dexterity, in spite of his envious quality and his disposition to detract. I saw my liver exposed. I was puzzled at my own condition. I did not feel that I was dead, but I was different in some way from my living self. The grey depression, that had weighed on me for a year or more and coloured all my thoughts, was gone. I perceived and thought

without any emotional tint at all. I wondered if everyone perceived things in this way under chloroform, and forgot it again when he came out of it. It would be inconvenient to look into some heads, and not forget. Although I did not think that I was dead, I still perceived quite clearly that I was soon to die. This brought me back to the consideration of Haddon's proceedings. I looked into his mind, and saw that he was afraid of cutting a branch of the portal vein. My attention was distracted from details by the curious changes going on in his mind. His consciousness was like the quivering little spot of light which is thrown by the mirror of a galvanometer. His thoughts ran under it like a stream, some through the focus bright and distinct, some shadowy in the half-light of the edge. Just now the little glow was steady; but the least movement on Mowbray's part, the slightest sound from outside, even a faint difference in the slow movement of the living flesh he was cutting, set the light-spot shivering and spinning. A new sense-impression came rushing up through the flow of thoughts; and lo! The light-spot jerked away towards it, swifter than a frightened fish. It was wonderful to think that upon that unstable, fitful thing depended all the complex motions of the man; that for the next five minutes, therefore, my life hung upon its movements. And he was growing more and more nervous in his work. It was as if a little picture of a cut vein grew brighter, and struggled to oust from his brain another picture of a cut falling short of the mark. He was afraid: his dread of cutting too little was battling with his dread of cutting too far. Then, suddenly, like an escape of water from under a lock-gate, a great uprush of horrible realisation set all his thoughts swirling, and simultaneously I perceived that the vein was cut. He started back with a hoarse exclamation, and I saw the brown-purple blood gather in a swift bead, and run trickling. He was horrified. He pitched the red-stained scalpel on to the octagonal table; and instantly both doctors flung themselves upon me, making hasty and ill-conceived efforts to remedy the disaster. "Ice!" said Mowbray, gasping. But I knew that I was killed, though my body still clung to me. I will not describe their belated endeavours to save me, though I perceived every detail. My perceptions were sharper and swifter than they had ever been in life; my thoughts rushed through my mind with incredible swiftness, but with perfect definition. I can only compare their crowded clarity to the effects of a reasonable dose of opium. In a moment it would all be over, and I should be free. I knew I was immortal, but what would happen I did not know. Should I drift off presently, like a puff of smoke from a gun, in some kind of half-material body, an attenuated version of my material self? Should I find myself suddenly among the innumerable hosts of the dead, and know the world about me for the phantasmagoria it had always seemed? Should I drift to some spiritualistic seance, and there make foolish, incomprehensible attempts to affect a purblind medium? It was a state of unemotional curiosity, of colourless expectation. And then I realised a growing stress upon me, a feeling as though some huge human magnet was drawing me upward out of my body. The stress grew and grew. I seemed an atom for which monstrous forces were fighting. For one brief, terrible moment sensation came back to me. That feeling of falling headlong which comes in nightmares, that feeling a thousand times intensified, that and a black horror swept across my thoughts in a torrent. Then the two doctors, the naked body with its cut side, the little room, swept away from under me and vanished, as a speck of foam vanishes down an eddy. I was in mid-air. Far below was the West End of London, receding rapidly —, for I seemed to be flying swiftly upward —, and as it receded, passing westward like a panorama. I could see, through the faint haze of smoke, the innumerable roofs chimney-set, the narrow roadways, stippled with people and conveyances, the little specks of squares, and the church steeples like thorns sticking out of the fabric. But it spun away as the earth rotated on its axis, and in a few seconds (as it seemed) I was over the scattered clumps of town about Ealing, the little Thames a thread of blue to the south, and the Chiltern Hills and the North Downs coming up like the rim of a basin, far away and faint with haze. Up I rushed. And at first I had not the faintest conception what this headlong rush upward could mean. Every moment the circle of scenery beneath me grew wider and wider, and the details of town and field, of hill and valley, got more and more hazy and pale and indistinct, a luminous grey was mingled more and more with the blue of the hills and the green of the open meadows; and a little patch of cloud, low and far to the west, shone ever more dazzlingly white. Above, as the veil of atmosphere between myself and outer space grew thinner, the sky, which had been a fair springtime blue at first, grew deeper and richer in colour, passing steadily through

the intervening shades, until presently it was as dark as the blue sky of midnight, and presently as black as the blackness of a frosty starlight, and at last as black as no blackness I had ever beheld. And first one star, and then many, and at last an innumerable host broke out upon the sky: more stars than anyone has ever seen from the face of the earth. For the blueness of the sky in the light of the sun and stars sifted and spread abroad blindingly: there is diffused light even in the darkest skies of winter, and we do not see the stars by day only because of the dazzling irradiation of the sun. But now I saw things—I know not how; assuredly with no mortal eyes—and that defect of bedazzlement blinded me no longer. The sun was incredibly strange and wonderful. The body of it was a disc of blinding white light: not yellowish, as it seems to those who live upon the earth, but livid white, all streaked with scarlet streaks and rimmed about with a fringe of writhing tongues of red fire. And shooting halfway across the heavens from either side of it and brighter than the Milky Way, were two pinions of silver-white, making it look more like those winged globes I have seen in Egyptian sculpture than anything else I can remember upon earth. These I knew for the solar corona, though I had never seen anything of it but a picture during the days of my earthly life. When my attention came back to the earth again, I saw that it had fallen very far away from me. Field and town were long since indistinguishable, and all the varied hues of the country were merging into a uniform bright grey, broken only by the brilliant white of the clouds that lay scattered in flocculent masses over Ireland and the west of England. For now I could see the outlines of the north of France and Ireland, and all this Island of Britain, save where Scotland passed over the horizon to the north, or where the coast was blurred or obliterated by cloud. The sea was a dull grey, and darker than the land; and the whole panorama was rotating slowly towards the east. All this had happened so swiftly that until I was some thousand miles or so from the earth I had no thought for myself. But now I perceived I had neither hands nor feet, neither parts nor organs, and that I felt neither alarm nor pain. All about me I perceived that the vacancy (for I had already left the air behind) was cold beyond the imagination of man; but it troubled me not. The sun's rays shot through the void, powerless to light or heat until they should strike on matter in their course. I saw things with a serene self-forgetfulness, even as if I were God. And down below there, rushing away from me—, countless miles in a second —, where a little dark spot on the grey marked the position of London, two doctors were struggling to restore life to the poor hacked and outworn shell I had abandoned. I felt then such release, such serenity as I can compare to no mortal delight I have ever known. It was only after I had perceived all these things that the meaning of that headlong rush of the earth grew into comprehension. Yet it was so simple, so obvious, that I was amazed at my never anticipating the thing that was happening to me. I had suddenly been cut adrift from matter: all that was material of me was there upon earth, whirling away through space, held to the earth by gravitation, partaking of the earth's inertia, moving in its wreath of epicycles round the sun, and with the sun and the planets on their vast march through space. But the immaterial has no inertia, feels nothing of the pull of matter for matter: where it parts from its garment of flesh, there it remains (so far as space concerns it any longer) immovable in space. I was not leaving the earth: the earth was leaving me, and not only the earth but the whole solar system was streaming past. And about me in space, invisible to me, scattered in the wake of the earth upon its journey, there must be an innumerable multitude of souls, stripped like myself of the material, stripped like myself of the passions of the individual and the generous emotions of the gregarious brute, naked intelligences, things of newborn wonder and thought, marvelling at the strange release that had suddenly come on them! As I receded faster and faster from the strange white sun in the black heavens, and from the broad and shining earth upon which my being had begun, I seemed to grow in some incredible manner vast: vast as regards this world I had left, vast as regards the moments and periods of a human life. Very soon I saw the full circle of the earth, slightly gibbous, like the moon when she nears her full, but very large; and the silvery shape of America was now in the noonday blaze wherein (as it seemed) little England had been basking but a few minutes ago. At first the earth was large, and shone in the heavens, filling a great part of them; but every moment she grew smaller and more distant. As she shrank, the broad moon in its third quarter crept into view over the rim of her disc. I looked for the constellations. Only that part of Aries directly behind the sun and the Lion, which the earth covered,

were hidden. I recognised the tortuous, tattered band of the Milky Way with Vega very bright between sun and earth; and Sirius and Orion shone splendid against the unfathomable blackness in the opposite quarter of the heavens. The Pole Star was overhead, and the Great Bear hung over the circle of the earth. And away beneath and beyond the shining corona of the sun were strange groupings of stars I had never seen in my life—notably a daggershaped group that I knew for the Southern Cross. All these were no larger than when they had shone on earth, but the little stars that one scarce sees shone now against the setting of black vacancy as brightly as the first-magnitudes had done, while the larger worlds were points of indescribable glory and colour. Aldebaran was a spot of blood-red fire, and Sirius condensed to one point the light of innumerable sapphires. And they shone steadily: they did not scintillate, they were calmly glorious. My impressions had an adamant hardness and brightness: there was no blurring softness, no atmosphere, nothing but infinite darkness set with the myriads of these acute and brilliant points and specks of light. Presently, when I looked again, the little earth seemed no bigger than the sun, and it dwindled and turned as I looked, until in a second's space (as it seemed to me), it was halved; and so it went on swiftly dwindling. Far away in the opposite direction, a little pinkish pin's head of light, shining steadily, was the planet Mars. I swam motionless in vacancy, and without a trace of terror or astonishment, watched the speck of cosmic dust, we call the world fall away from me. Presently it dawned upon me that my sense of duration had changed; that my mind was moving not faster but infinitely slower, that between each separate impression there was a period of many days. The moon spun once round the earth as I noted this; and I perceived clearly the motion of Mars in his orbit. Moreover, it appeared as if the time between thought and thought grew steadily greater, until at last a thousand years was but a moment in my perception. At first the constellations had shone motionless against the black background of infinite space; but presently it seemed as though the group of stars about Hercules and the Scorpion was contracting, while Orion and Aldebaran and their neighbours were scattering apart. Flashing suddenly out of the darkness there came a flying multitude of particles of rock, glittering like dust-specks in a sunbeam, and encompassed in a faintly luminous cloud. They swirled all about me, and vanished again in a twinkling far behind. And then I saw that a bright spot of light, that shone a little to one side of my path, was growing very rapidly larger, and perceived that it was the planet Saturn rushing towards me. Larger and larger it grew, swallowing up the heavens behind it, and hiding every moment a fresh multitude of stars. I perceived its flattened, whirling body, its disc-like belt, and seven of its little satellites. It grew and grew, till it towered enormous; and then I plunged amid a streaming multitude of clashing stones and dancing dust-particles and gas-eddies, and saw for a moment the mighty triple belt like three concentric arches of moonlight above me, its shadow black on the boiling tumult below. These things happened in one-tenth of the time it takes to tell them. The planet went by like a flash of lightning; for a few seconds it blotted out the sun, and there and then became a mere black, dwindling, winged patch against the light. The earth, the mother mote of my being, I could no longer see. So with a stately swiftness, in the profoundest silence, the solar system fell from me as it had been a garment, until the sun was a mere star amid the multitude of stars, with its eddy of planet-specks lost in the confused glittering of the remoter light. I was no longer a denizen of the solar system: I had come to the outer Universe, I seemed to grasp and comprehend the whole world of matter. Ever more swiftly the stars closed in about the spot where Antares and Vega had vanished in a phosphorescent haze, until that part of the sky had the semblance of a whirling mass of nebulae, and ever before me yawned vaster gaps of vacant blackness, and the stars shone fewer and fewer. It seemed as if I moved towards a point between Orion's belt and sword; and the void about that region opened vaster and vaster every second, an incredible gulf of nothingness into which I was falling. Faster and ever faster the universe rushed by, a hurry of whirling motes at last, speeding silently into the void. Stars glowing brighter and brighter, with their circling planets catching the light in a ghostly fashion as I neared them, shone out and vanished again into inexistence; faint comets, clusters of meteorites, winking specks of matter, eddying light-points, whizzed past, some perhaps a hundred millions of miles or so from me at most, few nearer, travelling with unimaginable rapidity, shooting constellations, momentary darts of fire, through that black, enormous night.

More than anything else it was like a dusty draught, sunbeam-lit. Broader and wider and deeper grew the starless space, the vacant Beyond, into which I was being drawn. At last a quarter of the heavens was black and blank, and the whole headlong rush of stellar universe closed in behind me like a veil of light that is gathered together. It drove away from me like a monstrous jack-o'-lantern driven by the wind. I had come out into the wilderness of space. Ever the vacant blackness grew broader, until the hosts of the stars seemed only like a swarm of fiery specks hurrying away from me, inconceivably remote, and the darkness, the nothingness and emptiness, was about me on every side. Soon the little universe of matter, the cage of points in which I had begun to be, was dwindling, now to a whirling disc of luminous glittering, and now to one minute disc of hazy light. In a little while it would shrink to a point, and at last would vanish altogether. Suddenly feeling came back to me—feeling in the shape of overwhelming terror; such a dread of those dark vastitudes as no words can describe, a passionate resurgence of sympathy and social desire. Were there other souls, invisible to me as I to them, about me in the blackness? Or was I indeed, even as I felt, alone? Had I passed out of being into something that was neither being nor not-being? The covering of the body, the covering of matter, had been torn from me, and the hallucinations of companionship and security. Everything was black and silent. I had ceased to be. I was nothing. There was nothing, save only that infinitesimal dot of light that dwindled in the gulf. I strained myself to hear and see, and for a while there was naught but infinite silence, intolerable darkness, horror, and despair. Then I saw that about the spot of light into which the whole world of matter had shrunk there was a faint glow. And in a band on either side of that the darkness was not absolute. I watched it for ages, as it seemed to me, and through the long waiting the haze grew imperceptibly more distinct. And then about the band appeared an irregular cloud of the faintest, palest brown. I felt a passionate impatience; but the things grew brighter so slowly that they scarce seemed to change. What was unfolding itself? What was this strange reddish dawn in the interminable night of space? The cloud's shape was grotesque. It seemed to be looped along its lower side into four projecting masses, and above, it ended in a straight line. What phantom was it? I felt assured I had seen that figure before; but I could not think what, nor where, nor when it was. Then the realisation rushed upon me. It was a clenched Hand. I was alone in space, alone with this huge, shadowy Hand, upon which the whole Universe of Matter lay like an unconsidered speck of dust. It seemed as though I watched it through vast periods of time. On the forefinger glittered a ring; and the universe from which I had come was but a spot of light upon the ring's curvature. And the thing that the hand gripped had the likeness of a black rod. Through a long eternity I watched this Hand, with the ring and the rod, marvelling and fearing and waiting helplessly on what might follow. It seemed as though nothing could follow: that I should watch for ever, seeing only the Hand and the thing it held, and understanding nothing of its import. Was the whole universe but a refracting speck upon some greater Being? Were our worlds but the atoms of another universe, and those again of another, and so on through an endless progression? And what was I? Was I indeed immaterial? A vague persuasion of a body gathering about me came into my suspense. The abysmal darkness about the Hand filled with impalpable suggestions, with uncertain, fluctuating shapes. Came a sound, like the sound of a tolling bell: faint, as if infinitely far; muffled, as though heard through thick swathings of darkness: a deep, vibrating resonance, with vast gulfs of silence between each stroke. And the Hand appeared to tighten on the rod. And I saw far above the Hand, towards the apex of the darkness, a circle of dim phosphorescence, a ghostly sphere whence these sounds came throbbing; and at the last stroke the Hand vanished, for the hour had come, and I heard a noise of many waters. But the black rod remained as a great band across the sky. And then a voice, which seemed to run to the uttermost parts of space, spoke, saying, "There will be no more pain." At that an almost intolerable gladness and radiance rushed in upon me, and I saw the circle shining white and bright, and the rod black and shining, and many things else distinct and clear. And the circle was the face of the clock, and the rod the rail of my bed. Haddon was standing at the foot, against the rail, with a small pair of scissors on his fingers; and the hands of my clock on the mantel over his shoulder were clasped together over the hour of twelve. Mowbray was washing something in a basin at the octagonal table, and at my side I felt a subdued feeling that could scarce be spoken of as pain. The operation had not killed me. And I perceived, suddenly, that the dull melancholy of half a year was lifted from my mind.

No. 1 Branch Line: The Signal-Man

By Charles Dickens



"Halloa! Below there!"

When he heard a voice thus calling to him, he was standing at the door of his box, with a flag in his hand, furled round its short pole. One would have thought, considering the nature of the ground, that he could not have doubted from what quarter the voice came; but instead of looking up to where I stood on the top of the steep cutting nearly over his head, he turned himself about, and looked down the Line. There was something remarkable in his manner of doing so, though I could not have said for my life what. But I know it was remarkable enough to attract my notice, even though his figure was foreshortened and shadowed, down in the deep trench, and mine was high above him, so steeped in the glow of an angry sunset, that I had shaded my eyes with my hand before I saw him at all.

"Halloa! Below!"

From looking down the Line, he turned himself about again, and, raising his eyes, saw my figure high above him.

"Is there any path by which I can come down and speak to you?"

He looked up at me without replying, and I looked down at him without pressing him too soon with a repetition of my idle question. Just then there came a vague vibration in the earth and air, quickly changing into a violent pulsation, and an oncoming rush that caused me to start back, as though it had a force to draw me down. When such vapor as rose to my height from this rapid train had passed me, and was skimming away over the landscape, I looked down again, and saw him refurling the flag he had shown while the train went by.

I repeated my inquiry. After a pause, during which he seemed to regard me with fixed attention, he motioned with his rolled-up flag towards a point on my level, some two or three hundred yards distant. I called down to him, "All right!" and made for that point. There, by dint of looking closely about me, I found a rough zigzag descending path notched out, which I followed.

The cutting was extremely deep, and unusually precipitate. It was made through a clammy stone, that became oozy and wetter as I went down. For these reasons, I found the way long enough to give me time to recall a singular air of reluctance or compulsion with which he had pointed out the path.

When I came down low enough upon the zigzag descent to see him again, I saw that he was standing between the rails on the way by which the train had lately passed, in an attitude as if he were waiting for me to appear. He had his left hand at his chin, and that left elbow rested on his right hand, crossed over his breast. His attitude was one of such expectation and watchfulness that I stopped a moment, wondering at it.

I resumed my downward way, and stepping out upon the level of the railroad, and drawing nearer to him, saw that he was a dark, sallow man, with a dark beard and rather heavy eyebrows. His post was in as solitary and dismal a place as ever I saw. On either side, a dripping-wet wall of jagged stone, excluding all view but a strip of sky; the perspective one way only a crooked prolongation of this great dungeon; the shorter perspective in the other direction terminating in a gloomy red light, and the gloomier entrance to a black tunnel, in whose massive architecture there was a barbarous, depressing, and forbidding air. So little sunlight ever found its way to this spot, that it had an earthy, deadly smell; and so much cold wind rushed through it, that it struck chill to me, as if I had left the natural world.

Before he stirred, I was near enough to him to have touched him. Not even then removing his eyes from mine, he stepped back one step, and lifted his hand.

This was a lonesome post to occupy (I said), and it had riveted my attention when I looked down from up yonder. A visitor was a rarity, I should suppose; not an unwelcome rarity, I hoped? In me, he merely saw a man who had been shut up within narrow limits all his life, and who, being at last set free, had a newly-awakened interest in these great works. To such purpose I spoke to him; but I am far from sure of the terms I used; for, besides that I am not happy in opening any conversation, there was something in the man that daunted me.

He directed a most curious look towards the red light near the tunnel's mouth, and looked all about it, as if something were missing from it, and then looked it me.

That light was part of his charge? Was it not?

He answered in a low voice,—"Don't you know it is?"

The monstrous thought came into my mind, as I perused the fixed eyes and the saturnine face, that this was a spirit, not a man. I have speculated since, whether there may have been infection in his mind.

In my turn, I stepped back. But in making the action, I detected in his eyes some latent fear of me. This put the monstrous thought to flight.

"You look at me," I said, forcing a smile, "as if you had a dread of me."

"I was doubtful," he returned, "whether I had seen you before." "Where?"

He pointed to the red light he had looked at.

"There?" I said.

Intently watchful of me, he replied (but without sound), "Yes." "My good fellow, what should I do there? However, be that as it may, I never was there, you may swear."

"I think I may," he rejoined. "Yes; I am sure I may."

His manner cleared, like my own. He replied to my remarks with readiness, and in well-chosen words. Had he much to do there? Yes; that was to say, he had enough responsibility to bear; but exactness and watchfulness were what was required of him, and of actual work—manual labor—he had next to none. To change that signal, to trim those lights, and to turn this iron handle now and then, was all he had to do under that head. Regarding those many long and lonely hours of which I seemed to make so much, he could only say that the routine of his life had shaped itself into that form, and he had grown used to it. He had taught himself a language down here,—if only to know it by sight, and to have formed his own crude ideas of its pronunciation, could be called learning it. He had also worked at fractions and decimals, and tried a little algebra; but he was, and had been as a boy, a poor hand at figures. Was it necessary for him when on duty always to remain in that channel of damp air, and could he never rise into the sunshine from between those high stone walls? Why, that depended upon times and circumstances. Under some conditions there would be less upon the Line than under others, and the same held good as to certain hours of the day and night. In bright weather, he did choose occasions for getting a little above these lower shadows; but, being at all times liable to be called by his electric bell, and at such times listening for it with redoubled anxiety, the relief was less than I would suppose.

He took me into his box, where there was a fire, a desk for an official book in which he had to make certain entries, a telegraphic instrument with its dial, face, and needles, and the little bell of which he had spoken. On my trusting that he would excuse the remark that he had been well educated, and (I hoped I might say without offence) perhaps educated above that station, he observed that instances of slight incongruity in such wise would rarely be found wanting among large bodies of men; that he had heard it was so in workhouses, in the police force, even in that last desperate resource, the army; and that he knew it was so, more or less, in any great railway staff. He had been, when young (if I could believe it, sitting in that hut,—he scarcely could), a student of natural philosophy, and had attended lectures; but he had run wild, misused his opportunities, gone down, and never risen again. He had no complaint to offer about that. He had made his bed, and he lay upon it. It was far too late to make another.

All that I have here condensed he said in a quiet manner, with his grave dark regards divided between me and the fire. He threw in the word, "Sir," from time to time, and especially when he referred to his youth,—as though to request me to understand that he claimed to be nothing but what I found him. He was several times interrupted by the little bell, and had to read off messages, and send replies. Once he had to stand without the door, and display a flag as a train passed, and make some verbal communication to the driver. In the discharge of his duties, I observed him to be remarkably exact and vigilant, breaking off his discourse at a syllable, and remaining silent until what he had to do was done.

In a word, I should have set this man down as one of the safest of men to be employed in that capacity, but for the circumstance that while he was speaking to me he twice broke off with a fallen color, turned his face towards the little bell when it did NOT ring, opened the door of the hut (which was kept shut to exclude the unhealthy damp), and looked out towards the red light near the mouth of the tunnel. On both of those occasions, he came back to the fire with the inexplicable air upon him which I had remarked, without being able to define, when we were so far asunder.

Said I, when I rose to leave him, "You almost make me think that I have met with a contented man."

(I am afraid I must acknowledge that I said it to lead him on.)

"I believe I used to be so," he rejoined, in the low voice in which he had first spoken; "but I am troubled, sir, I am troubled."

He would have recalled the words if he could. He had said them, however, and I took them up quickly.

"With what? What is your trouble?"

"It is very difficult to impart, sir. It is very, very difficult to speak of. If ever you make me another visit, I will try to tell you."

"But I expressly intend to make you another visit. Say, when shall it be?"

"I go off early in the morning, and I shall be on again at ten to-morrow night, sir."

"I will come at eleven."

He thanked me, and went out at the door with me. "I'll show my white light, sir," he said, in his peculiar low voice, "till you have found the way up. When you have found it, don't call out! And when you are at the top, don't call out!"

His manner seemed to make the place strike colder to me, but I said no more than, "Very well."

"And when you come down to-morrow night, don't call out! Let me ask you a parting question. What made you cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' to-night?"

"Heaven knows," said I. "I cried something to that effect—"

"Not to that effect, sir. Those were the very words. I know them well."

"Admit those were the very words. I said them, no doubt, because I saw you below."

"For no other reason?"

"What other reason could I possibly have?"

"You had no feeling that they were conveyed to you in any supernatural way?"

"No."

He wished me good-night, and held up his light. I walked by the side of the down Line of rails (with a very disagreeable sensation of a train coming behind me) until I found the path. It was easier to mount than to descend, and I got back to my inn without any adventure.

Punctual to my appointment, I placed my foot on the first notch of the zigzag next night, as the distant clocks were striking eleven. He was waiting for me at the bottom, with his white light on. "I have not called out," I said, when we came close together; "may I speak now?" "By all means, sir." "Good-night, then, and here's my hand." "Good-night, sir, and here's mine." With that we walked side by side to his box, entered it, closed the door, and sat down by the fire.

"I have made up my mind, sir," he began, bending forward as soon as we were seated, and speaking in a tone but a little above a whisper, "that you shall not have to ask me twice what troubles me. I took you for some one else yesterday evening. That troubles me."

"That mistake?"

"No. That some one else."

"Who is it?"

"I don't know."

"Like me?"

"I don't know. I never saw the face. The left arm is across the face, and the right arm is waved,—violently waved. This way." I followed his action with my eyes, and it was the action of an arm gesticulating, with the utmost passion and vehemence, "For God's sake, clear the way!"

"One moonlight night," said the man, "I was sitting here, when I heard a voice cry, 'Halloa! Below there!' I started up, looked from that door, and saw this Someone else standing by the red light near the tunnel, waving as I just now showed you. The voice seemed hoarse with shouting, and it cried, 'Look out! Look out!' And then attain, 'Halloa! Below there! Look out!' I caught up my lamp, turned it on red, and ran towards the figure, calling, 'What's wrong? What has happened? Where?' It stood just outside the blackness of the tunnel. I advanced so close upon it that I wondered at its keeping the sleeve across its eyes. I ran right up at it, and had my hand stretched out to pull the sleeve away, when it was gone."

"Into the tunnel?" said I.

"No. I ran on into the tunnel, five hundred yards. I stopped, and held my lamp above my head, and saw the figures of the measured distance, and saw the wet stains stealing down the walls and trickling through the arch. I ran out again faster than I had run in (for I had a mortal abhorrence of the place upon me), and I looked all round the red light with my own red light, and I went

up the iron ladder to the gallery atop of it, and I came down again, and ran back here. I telegraphed both ways, 'An alarm has been given. Is anything wrong?' The answer came back, both ways, 'All well!'"

Resisting the slow touch of a frozen finger tracing out my spine, I showed him how that this figure must be a deception of his sense of sight; and how that figures, originating in disease of the delicate nerves that minister to the functions of the eye, were known to have often troubled patients, some of whom had become conscious of the nature of their affliction, and had even proved it by experiments upon themselves. "As to an imaginary cry," said I, "do but listen for a moment to the wind in this unnatural valley while we speak so low, and to the wild harp it makes of the telegraph wires."

That was all very well, he returned, after we had sat listening for a while, and he ought to know something of the wind and the wires,— he who so often passed long winter nights there, alone and watching. But he would beg to remark that he had not finished.

I asked his pardon, and he slowly added these words, touching my arm—

"Within six hours after the Appearance, the memorable accident on this Line happened, and within ten hours the dead and wounded were brought along through the tunnel over the spot where the figure had stood."

A disagreeable shudder crept over me, but I did my best against it. It was not to be denied, I rejoined, that this was a remarkable coincidence, calculated deeply to impress his mind. But it was unquestionable that remarkable coincidences did continually occur, and they must be taken into account in dealing with such a subject. Though to be sure I must admit, I added (for I thought I saw that he was going to bring the objection to bear upon me), men of common sense did not allow much for coincidences in making the ordinary calculations of life. He again begged to remark that he had not finished.

I again begged his pardon for being betrayed into interruptions.

"This," he said, again laying his hand upon my arm, and glancing over his shoulder with hollow eyes, "was just a year ago. Six or seven months passed, and I had recovered from the surprise and shock, when one morning, as the day was breaking, I, standing at the door, looked towards the red light, and saw the spectre again." He stopped, with a fixed look at me.

"Did it cry out?"

"No. It was silent."

"Did it wave its arm?"

"No. It leaned against the shaft of the light, with both hands before the face. Like this."

Once more I followed his action with my eyes. It was an action of mourning. I have seen such an attitude in stone figures on tombs.

"Did you go up to it?"

"I came in and sat down, partly to collect my thoughts, partly because it had turned me faint. When I went to the door again, daylight was above me, and the ghost was gone."

"But nothing followed? Nothing came of this?"

He touched me on the arm with his forefinger twice or thrice giving a ghastly nod each time:—

"That very day, as a train came out of the tunnel, I noticed, at a carriage window on my side, what looked like a confusion of hands and heads, and something waved. I saw it just in time to signal the driver, Stop! He shut off, and put his brake on, but the train drifted past here a hundred and fifty yards or more. I ran after it, and, as I went along, heard terrible screams and cries. A beautiful young lady had died instantaneously in one of the compartments, and was brought in here, and laid down on this floor between us."

Involuntarily I pushed my chair back, as I looked from the boards at which he pointed to himself.

"True, sir. True. Precisely as it happened, so I tell it you."

I could think of nothing to say, to any purpose, and my mouth was very dry. The wind and the wires took up the story with a long lamenting wail.

He resumed. "Now, sir, mark this, and judge how my mind is troubled. The spectre came back a week ago. Ever since, it has been there, now and again, by fits and starts."

"At the light?"

"At the Danger-light."

"What does it seem to do?"

He repeated, if possible with increased passion and vehemence, that former gesticulation of, "For God's sake, clear

the way!"

Then he went on. "I have no peace or rest for it. It calls to me, for many minutes together, in an agonised manner, 'Below there! Look out! Look out!' It stands waving to me. It rings my little bell —"

I caught at that. "Did it ring your bell yesterday evening when I was here, and you went to the door?"

"Twice."

"Why, see," said I, "how your imagination misleads you. My eyes were on the bell, and my ears were open to the bell, and if I am a living man, it did NOT ring at those times. No, nor at any other time, except when it was rung in the natural course of physical things by the station communicating with you."

He shook his head. "I have never made a mistake as to that yet, sir. I have never confused the spectre's ring with the man's. The ghost's ring is a strange vibration in the bell that it derives from nothing else, and I have not asserted that the bell stirs to the eye. I don't wonder that you failed to hear it. But I heard it."

"And did the spectre seem to be there, when you looked out?"

"It WAS there."

"Both times?"

He repeated firmly: "Both times."

"Will you come to the door with me, and look for it now?"

He bit his under lip as though he were somewhat unwilling, but arose. I opened the door, and stood on the step, while he stood in the doorway. There was the Danger-light. There was the dismal mouth of the tunnel. There were the high, wet stone walls of the cutting. There were the stars above them.

"Do you see it?" I asked him, taking particular note of his face. His eyes were prominent and strained, but not very much more so, perhaps, than my own had been when I had directed them earnestly towards the same spot.

"No," he answered. "It is not there."

"Agreed," said I.

We went in again, shut the door, and resumed our seats. I was thinking how best to improve this advantage, if it might be called one, when he took up the conversation in such a matter-of-course way, so assuming that there could be no serious question of fact between us, that I felt myself placed in the weakest of positions.

"By this time you will fully understand, sir," he said, "that what troubles me so dreadfully is the question, What does the spectre mean?"

I was not sure, I told him, that I did fully understand.

"What is its warning against?" he said, ruminating, with his eyes on the fire, and only by times turning them on me. "What is the danger? Where is the danger? There is danger overhanging somewhere on the Line. Some dreadful calamity will happen. It is not to be doubted this third time, after what has gone before. But surely this is a cruel haunting of ME. What can I do?"

He pulled out his handkerchief, and wiped the drops from his heated forehead.

"If I telegraph Danger, on either side of me, or on both, I can give no reason for it," he went on, wiping the palms of his hands. "I should get into trouble, and do no good. They would think I was mad. This is the way it would work,—Message: 'Danger! Take care!' Answer: 'What Danger? Where?' Message: 'Don't know. But, for God's sake, take care!' They would displace me. What else could they do?"

His pain of mind was most pitiable to see. It was the mental torture of a conscientious man, oppressed beyond endurance by an unintelligible responsibility involving life.

"When it first stood under the Danger-light," he went on, putting his dark hair back from his head, and drawing his hands outward across and across his temples in an extremity of feverish distress, "why not tell me where that accident was to happen,—if it must happen? Why not tell me how it could be averted,—if it could have been averted? When on its second coming it hid its face, why not tell me, instead, 'She is going to die. Let them keep her at home'? If it came, on those two occasions, only to show me that its warnings were true, and so to prepare me for the third, why not warn me plainly now? And I, Lord help me! A mere poor signal-man on this solitary station! Why not go to somebody with credit to be believed, and power to act?"

When I saw him in this state, I saw that for the poor man's sake, as well as for the public safety, what I had to do for the time was to compose his mind. Therefore, setting aside all question of reality or unreality between us, I represented to him that whoever thoroughly discharged his duty must do well, and that at least it was his comfort that he understood his duty, though he did not understand these confounding appearances. In this

effort I succeeded far better than in the attempt to reason him out of his conviction. He became calm; the occupations incidental to his post as the night advanced began to make larger demands on his attention: and I left him at two in the morning. I had offered to stay through the night, but he would not hear of it.

That I more than once looked back at the red light as I ascended the pathway, that I did not like the red light, and that I should have slept but poorly if my bed had been under it, I see no reason to conceal. Nor did I like the two sequences of the accident and the dead girl. I see no reason to conceal that either.

But what ran most in my thoughts was the consideration how ought I to act, having become the recipient of this disclosure? I had proved the man to be intelligent, vigilant, painstaking, and exact; but how long might he remain so, in his state of mind? Though in a subordinate position, still he held a most important trust, and would I (for instance) like to stake my own life on the chances of his continuing to execute it with precision?

Unable to overcome a feeling that there would be something treacherous in my communicating what he had told me to his superiors in the Company, without first being plain with himself and proposing a middle course to him, I ultimately resolved to offer to accompany him (otherwise keeping his secret for the present) to the wisest medical practitioner we could hear of in those parts, and to take his opinion. A change in his time of duty would come round next night, he had apprised me, and he would be off an hour or two after sunrise, and on again soon after sunset. I had appointed to return accordingly.

Next evening was a lovely evening, and I walked out early to enjoy it. The sun was not yet quite down when I traversed the field-path near the top of the deep cutting. I would extend my walk for an hour, I said to myself, half an hour on and half an hour back, and it would then be time to go to my signal-man's box.

Before pursuing my stroll, I stepped to the brink, and mechanically looked down, from the point from which I had first seen him. I cannot describe the thrill that seized upon me, when, close at the mouth of the tunnel, I saw the appearance of a man, with his left sleeve across his eyes, passionately waving his right arm.

The nameless horror that oppressed me passed in a moment, for in a moment I saw that this appearance of a man was a man indeed, and that there was a little group of other men, standing at a short distance, to whom he seemed to be rehearsing the gesture he made. The Danger-light was not yet lighted. Against its shaft, a little low hut, entirely new to me, had been made of some wooden supports and tarpaulin. It looked no bigger than a bed.

With an irresistible sense that something was wrong,—with a flashing self-reproachful fear that fatal mischief had come of my leaving the man there, and causing no one to be sent to overlook or correct what he did,—I descended the notched path with all the speed I could make.

"What is the matter?" I asked the men.

"Signal-man killed this morning, sir."

"Not the man belonging to that box?"

"Yes, sir."

"Not the man I know?"

"You will recognise him, sir, if you knew him," said the man who spoke for the others, solemnly uncovering his own head, and raising an end of the tarpaulin, "for his face is quite composed."

"Oh, how did this happen, how did this happen?" I asked, turning from one to another as the hut closed in again.

"He was cut down by an engine, sir. No man in England knew his work better. But somehow he was not clear of the outer rail. It was just at broad day. He had struck the light, and had the lamp in his hand. As the engine came out of the tunnel, his back was towards her, and she cut him down. That man drove her, and was showing how it happened. Show the gentleman, Tom."

The man, who wore a rough dark dress, stepped back to his former place at the mouth of the tunnel.

"Coming round the curve in the tunnel, sir," he said, "I saw him at the end, like as if I saw him down a perspective-glass. There was no time to check speed, and I knew him to be very careful. As he didn't seem to take heed of the whistle, I shut it off when we were running down upon him, and called to him as loud as I could call."

"What did you say?"

"I said, 'Below there! Look out! Look out! For God's sake, clear the way!'"

I started.

"Ah! it was a dreadful time, sir. I never left off calling to him. I put this arm before my eyes not to see, and I waved this arm to the last; but it was no use."

Without prolonging the narrative to dwell on any one of its curious circumstances more than on any other, I may, in closing

it, point out the coincidence that the warning of the Engine-Driver included, not only the words which the unfortunate Signal-man had repeated to me as haunting him, but also the words which I myself—not he—had attached, and that only in my own mind, to the gesticulation he had imitated.

The Lady of Shalott

Lord Alfred Tennyson

Part I

On either side the river lie
Long fields of barley and of rye,
That clothe the wold and meet the sky;
And thro' the field the road runs by
 To many-tower'd Camelot;
And up and down the people go,
Gazing where the lilies blow
Round an island there below,
 The island of Shalott.

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,
Little breezes dusk and shiver
Thro' the wave that runs for ever
By the island in the river
 Flowing down to Camelot.
Four gray walls, and four gray towers,
Overlook a space of flowers,
And the silent isle imbowers
 The Lady of Shalott.



The Lady Of Shalott, John William Waterhouse

By the margin, willow veil'd,
Slide the heavy barges trail'd
By slow horses; and unhail'd
The shallop flitteth silken-sail'd
Skimming down to Camelot:
But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?

Only reapers, reaping early
In among the bearded barley,
Hear a song that echoes cheerly
From the river winding clearly,
Down to tower'd Camelot:
And by the moon the reaper weary,
Piling sheaves in uplands airy,
Listening, whispers " 'Tis the fairy
Lady of Shalott."

Part II

There she weaves by night and day
A magic web with colours gay.
She has heard a whisper say,
A curse is on her if she stay
To look down to Camelot.
She knows not what the curse may be,
And so she weaveth steadily,
And little other care hath she,
The Lady of Shalott.

And moving thro' a mirror clear
That hangs before her all the year,
Shadows of the world appear.
There she sees the highway near
Winding down to Camelot:
There the river eddy whirls,
And there the surly village-churls,
And the red cloaks of market girls,
Pass onward from Shalott.

Sometimes a troop of damsels glad,
An abbot on an ambling pad,
Sometimes a curly shepherd-lad,
Or long-hair'd page in crimson clad,
Goes by to tower'd Camelot;
And sometimes thro' the mirror blue
The knights come riding two and two:
She hath no loyal knight and true,
The Lady of Shalott.

But in her web she still delights
To weave the mirror's magic sights,
For often thro' the silent nights
A funeral, with plumes and lights
And music, went to Camelot:
Or when the moon was overhead,
Came two young lovers lately wed:
"I am half sick of shadows," said
The Lady of Shalott.

Part III

A bow-shot from her bower-eaves,
He rode between the barley-sheaves,
The sun came dazzling thro' the leaves,
And flamed upon the brazen greaves
Of bold Sir Lancelot.
A red-cross knight for ever kneel'd
To a lady in his shield,
That sparkled on the yellow field,
Beside remote Shalott.

The gemmy bridle glitter'd free,
Like to some branch of stars we see
Hung in the golden Galaxy.
The bridle bells rang merrily
As he rode down to Camelot:
And from his blazon'd baldric slung
A mighty silver bugle hung,
And as he rode his armour rung,
Beside remote Shalott.

All in the blue unclouded weather
Thick-jewell'd shone the saddle-leather,
The helmet and the helmet-feather
Burn'd like one burning flame together,

As he rode down to Camelot.
As often thro' the purple night,
Below the starry clusters bright,
Some bearded meteor, trailing light,
Moves over still Shalott.

His broad clear brow in sunlight glow'd;
On burnish'd hooves his war-horse trode;
From underneath his helmet flow'd
His coal-black curls as on he rode,
As he rode down to Camelot.
From the bank and from the river
He flash'd into the crystal mirror,
"Tirra lirra," by the river
Sang Sir Lancelot.

She left the web, she left the loom,
She made three paces thro' the room,
She saw the water-lily bloom,
She saw the helmet and the plume,
She look'd down to Camelot.
Out flew the web and floated wide;
The mirror crack'd from side to side;
"The curse is come upon me," cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Part IV

In the stormy east-wind straining,
The pale yellow woods were waning,
The broad stream in his banks complaining,
Heavily the low sky raining
Over tower'd Camelot;
Down she came and found a boat
Beneath a willow left afloat,
And round about the prow she wrote
The Lady of Shalott.

And down the river's dim expanse
Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance—
With a glassy countenance
Did she look to Camelot.
And at the closing of the day
She loosed the chain, and down she lay;
The broad stream bore her far away,
The Lady of Shalott.

Lying, robed in snowy white
That loosely flew to left and right—
The leaves upon her falling light—
Thro' the noises of the night
She floated down to Camelot:
And as the boat-head wound along
The willowy hills and fields among,
They heard her singing her last song,
The Lady of Shalott.

Heard a carol, mournful, holy,
Chanted loudly, chanted lowly,
Till her blood was frozen slowly,
And her eyes were darken'd wholly,
Turn'd to tower'd Camelot.
For ere she reach'd upon the tide
The first house by the water-side,
Singing in her song she died,
The Lady of Shalott.

Under tower and balcony,
By garden-wall and gallery,
A gleaming shape she floated by,
Dead-pale between the houses high,
Silent into Camelot.
Out upon the wharfs they came,
Knight and burgher, lord and dame,
And round the prow they read her name,
The Lady of Shalott.

Who is this? and what is here?
And in the lighted palace near
Died the sound of royal cheer;
And they cross'd themselves for fear,
All the knights at Camelot:
But Lancelot mused a little space;
He said, "She has a lovely face;
God in his mercy lend her grace,
The Lady of Shalott."



John Atkinson Grimshaw - "The Lady of Shalott"



The Lady of Shalott by William Holman Hunt



John William Waterhouse "I Am Half Sick of Shadows", Said The Lady of Shalott

All That Lies

By Liam QD Hall



Joan of Arc Kisses the Sword of Liberation, Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Liam Q. D. Hall is an author from the fields of Illinois, but has lived all over the United States. Of late he's lived near the Island Park Caldera and the Tetons in the Snake River Plain of Idaho. After serving a mission in Utah for a couple years he graduated from Eastern Arizona College, studying anthropology and French. He later studied at Brigham Young University - Idaho and graduated with a degree in the Humanities, focused on the fine arts. He currently is pursuing a Masters in Language and Literature, with a focus on the philology of ancient Germanic languages. He does videos at Liam's Lyceum, Ælfric Homily Project, and Saints and Sages. His first poem was published in 2020, his first short story in 2022, and a novella titled Dreamer, Awake! in 2024. He regales his wife and children often on jaunts around the wilds and their home. His works can be read in Wyngraf, Whetstone, Corncrake, Swords & Sorcery Magazine, Decadent Serpent, Old Moon Quarterly, and elsewhere. Head over to liamqdhall.com If you would like to read any of his works which are behind a paywall, feel free to reach out, Liam is a generous man.

The lights ate up the night sky. The charged atmosphere infused the world with its bright drama. The three moons sat indifferent, far away, and forgotten, their light simply candles to mix with all from the wretched imitations of life lying below. I stood in this light upon the metal tower of the Elders, those who had forced the world to be, who cut it screaming from the womb of an airless rock.

The wind played with my short hair, tousling it in a gentle caress. It teased in recognition that I, too, was of unnatural provenance, kin. I wore a form-fitting suit, mesh of highly elastic quality. Something from the ancients. It was black, not as black as that of the thieves of Erntor, just simple attire for murder. I was feeling dishonest, like the world.

My soul felt aimless but I knew my goal for that night. I was fighting two things. Some old man wanted a treasure from the tower and its denizens, but I also had my nightmares. They were delaying me. I had been having visions and memories. Dreaming, I often swam in images of my many past lives. These were different. These memories were not mine, not of my mind, but completely belonged to my body. I feared it confirmed my fears, that my bodies were not completely forged but rather they were stolen.

I wondered if whoever's body this was still lived by some echo, in veiled memories. A shiver ran through me, as I thought of being naught but a ghost in a shell, a shell not mine. I was used to pain of the body, not of the head. That's what drugs were for, I supposed, I had largely been off them since my first life, but I was sorely tempted then to indulge once more.

I wished Kindle, the earth goddess some said that we all lived on, would wake and smash everything to bits. But the world was old, seismic activity ceased. She could no longer help her adopted children. It was an absence I felt keenly. Kindle had died in her sleep.

And someday I would too. Whenever the stolen—or forged—bodies of men and women that I inhabited were depleted. But it was not time for sleep, for nightmares. I pulled the little crossbows from their straps on my thighs, favorites of the Orn Menzdi. I left my dweomered blade on my back for the nonce. I made sure the rope tied to my cincture was secure and jumped off the colossal tower. I flew away from the tower before swinging back, the tower and I a duo participating in a pavane. A stately calm came over me as I felt a paradoxical thrill in momentary freefall. With a crash through glass of an alderelde eyethurl, the dance changed tempo.

Three sarcophagi stood macabre guard, undisturbed for countless years. Their inhuman reactions were quick, unrusty by time. The flesh-eaters moved in programmed unison, the four arms of each flashing. Their gray sheen shifted to the heat and color of mulled wine. Twelve blades stabbed at me. Eight stopped as two of the sarcophagi froze. I had fired my twin arbalests into their chitinous armor. The slender figures turned blue as they seized, sorcerous energy moving over them. I jumped backward, dropping my crossbows before drawing the azure blade from my back. A new song began as the blade met those of the sarcophagus. The wind droning in the background. The blades were a torrent, the speed of a hummingbird's wingbeats. My white octagon tattoo on my neck burned as it allowed my body's preternatural speed to counter all four seeking to gut me. Dodge, parry, riposte, and one arm flew free of my foe.

I was calm, stoic in the face of the onslaught. We danced, both a whirlwind as I felt my blade calculating. It, or rather she, hight Gvenour, was sensible and wise. This status did not help me in combat, she simply observed and was, thankfully, quiet. She had spoken a handful of times since I found her buried in stone. I preferred such quietude more than the annoyingly talkative blades I had encountered previously. Oh, to be so cognitively quiet. My own mind had no such peace. I rolled to avoid bisegmentation. Rising, I deflected one terrible blade and avoided the other by ridding the arm from my enemy's body. Now that we shared an equal amount of arms, I hastened.

It kicked at me, something I was not expecting. I slid backward, bringing my blade up to deflect twin blades' downward trajectory. I pushed up and pulled my blade out to cut my foe in twain. It jumped back to avoid its doom. I was quick as a ghost, and stepped in, slicing away a third arm.

One blade each, we dueled, the song somber. I cut off the last arm with ease. I followed it up by beheading my riven foe, and then I cut off its legs so it would not come back to haunt me later. Indifferent, I did this to the two petrified sarcophagi. My courtly

dance with the one had lasted only a spell. Another minute and animation would have returned to them, which may have proved this body's doom. It would not have been too terrible, considering I would simply be born into another.

A new body would have gotten rid of the weird, matronly dreams. But I did not have a death wish, it was never a pleasant experience.

I retrieved my twin crossbows and loaded them before strapping one to my thigh. I continued sword in my right hand, crossbow in the sinister.

I moved deep into the edifice, the light from outside was swallowed by the tall walls. The wind, a sussuru, faded to naught. I had no free hand for a phial of light but did not need one. My enhanced vision showed me the world in shades of green. The halls were sterile and forlorn. I followed the path I had memorized from the layout given me by my employer. That map had not shown the entire path to my goal, just the first steps. I recalled the tiny cabal leader, his bifocaled nose stuck in tomes even as he rambled about the artifact I was to retrieve for him. The mekubbal wanted a chalice for some higher understanding and healing. A far cry from the typical nefarious wants of most artifact and thesaurus collectors that I had otherwise encountered.

The stale air eventually gained scents of rose-tinted brimstone. An odd mix, one that evoked a sorrow from me that I did not understand. I kept my guard up, and eventually, I happened upon a bipedal figure far removed from humankind. It was saurian to my simian. The reptilian figure was slender but well-muscled, with a great fin on the top of its angled head. I was too unknowledgeable to hazard if it was man or woman, or something else entire.

The odd scent strengthened as I neared this creature. It sat there, unmoving, but without the look of death or artificiality to it. Without my mickle sight, I would not have seen through such camouflage. It looked despondent, beyond sadness as an emotion but fully realized to its person, hibernating in it. I shot my crossbow, the bolt hit the wall the saurian was leaning against. It did not move.

It was too alien, too out of place. Despite its stillness, I knew it had to be alive. "Friend or foe?" I asked. Moments passed. A wheezing sounded before a dry rattle of a voice came, the neck of the lizard moved and it stared into my eyes. "I am...alone."

I lowered my weapons, reassured this creature could not harm me if it wanted to. "I understand your plight," I told it. And I did, for I was alone in my uniqueness. Imbued with magic at my very core. I had once stopped a sorceress from sharing magic with the masses, to make their lives easier, better connected, and like. I had killed her, not giving her the chance. Maybe that made me a monster, choosing for everyone else, but I felt then and still felt that it would make the world more shallow creatures, molded to their need and that the magic would be naught but a drug to cripple, isolate, and disenchant us while the fouled mouths of the masses shouted "power, access, progress". The world was bad enough already.

Suddenly, my nightmares were before me, and no longer the saurian. I saw in my waking vision the world in its few parts as if from a great height, as if I was back on the top of the tower. The tiny figures of humanity lay below, struggling. They toiled with blood and sweat only to create paths that led in circles.

All progress was a lie. Any escape, a fantasy. Humanity did not change from its ape roots. Looking at the lights of the city from above, looking into the stony edifice of its cyclopean structures and inward to my dark conscience, I realized that all that lies below and all that lies within is corrupt and decadent. Compassion and good is fleeting, and all ends in death. All except my tortured soul, which lives on to die again and again, with no release. I was just like the existence of humanity in microcosm. I am the tortured soul of mankind made manifest.

The thinking man finds consolation in philosophy, the majority in religion, whatever its guise. Fickle creatures, every last one, moved upon the shadowed world, small and insignificant like flies. But even if only temporary, peace had to be found somewhere.

And then I was grasping and gasping as the image changed to two children, those of my nightmares. I needed to cling to them, though I had never met either in my life. I missed them, as odd as it sounds. Then they too vanished. Back to the cave, we call reality, seeing that dejected saurian, I began to cry. I felt it would have joined me if its face knew how, but the lacertilian only shed tears for cleansing, not emotion. So there we sat, the simian

crying and the saurian exuded its weird scent.

After some time, I told it, "Join me, and maybe I can offer you release."

It was slow to respond, like before. "What is your goal, woman? I have long been in this tower and am sure there is no way forward."

I felt it was not just talking about the physical world. I guessed then that, whether true or not, it felt like it was the last of its race. "Maybe not for you, but I plan to reach the treasure my employer desires from this tower," I answered.

"Tower of Desires they call it," it spat. "Tower of Suffering I name this place!" it hissed before shuffling its feet, disturbing long-settled dust. "So what is it you seek, human?"

"Just one treasure, in the many."

"And your desire with it?"

"Some coin, the treasure is for another."

"Is it of evil?" he asked, a holy mania in his eyes.

"It is a blessing, actually, according to the man who hired me."

My conscience steered towards the light of good this time around, I added in my head.

"And your need for coin." It was not a question.

"That too," I concurred.

It turned then, joints stiff, blood cold. It took its ikakalaka, the leather complained from disuse. Blade in hand, a vitality seemed to flow into the saurian. It stood taller, its frame more filled out and powerful.

"Your name, lizard?" I asked.

Its tongue flicked out, but I could not read its unflinching expression enough to tell if it took offense at being called lizard.

"Starkheart." Its voice was less raspy.

"Call me Renata. Let's go find this treasure, this chalice."

We moved down the labyrinthine passages. Most were desolate, cold. My companion stopped exuding its odd scent and now smelled of sharp citrus. There were no traps as found in a dungeon, for these had all been lived and worked in corridors long ago. There were scant signs of any usage at all, mostly dust with the occasional rotten or rusted lump. As we searched for the chalice in each pile I knew we would not find it, since nothing fit the description of the halidom's sanctuary. It did not hurt to see if we could find some artifact or mathom of the past, but it was as if damnatio memoriae had been practiced with extreme prejudice, for we found nothing of value.

Starkheart knelt at a certain pile of refuse and, standing, proclaimed it excrement of some unknown creature. As it was guessing the type of creature that would leave such offal, I saw movement out of the corner of my eye. Turning, I saw a blurred shape, diminutive, rounding the corner.

"I saw something," I cued my companion as I moved forward quickly, light of step to stay quiet in case some ambush was right around the turn. Gvenour before me, I took the corner wide. Naught but gelid air greeted me.

A wafting of violets hit my nose as Starkheart approached. "What is it?" it asked.

"I thought I saw something," I answered, still peering down the hallways. In the dim, my eyes could see quite well, and I caught another glimpse of movement. Something small had just turned another corner.

"Come," I commanded as I raced off, this time opting for speed instead of quiet. It did not turn into some wild chase. This time, when I turned the corner, I saw a child, florid-faced and scared. He looked up at me with wide eyes and spoke. "Mama?" I stepped back, scared by this apparition, for surely no mere boy would be here, so high above the streets. He stood from his crouch, and I guessed he was about four years of age. Behind him, an older woman put her shoulder on his arm. I somehow knew she was dead, where the boy was alive, purely a ghost of ghosts, "Artrion?" This apparition asked before the boy reached for me, and I closed my eyes.

I felt no touch. After a moment, I opened my eyes to a vacant passage. I heard the soft step of Starkheart behind me. I turned and moved toward it, not caring for it to see me descending into madness. But its words chilled me more. "Who-? Where did it go?"

I stopped. "What did you see?"

"My lover, Seawolf. Displaced and gone from the deserts for many years."

"Seawolf would not be here," I stated, as a reminder to myself and my companion.

"It would not," it agreed.

We continued down the halls, unmet by anything. I had hoped to find more foul enemies to wet my blade and distract me from

the apparition. If Starkheart had seen someone real, then mayhap it was the same for me. I hated to admit that the boy looked familiar, I felt I was experiencing déjà vu from my dreams: what lay in my nightmares was upon me here.

We traveled through the edifice for an indeterminate amount of time. Most halls were barren and plain, only brutal and minimally drab scenes for our nocturnal excursion. Some were baroque, gaudy in opalescence and contrast. The ornamentation felt too lively, trying too hard to be more than reality. It was tragic that it was as dead as the rest of the level.

Eventually, we found my goal. It had been described to me as gothic. Oh, it was, and it was beautiful. The ancients were unmatched in some things, and architecture was one. It was little wonder that many plebeians believed this structure and those like it were built by giants. On the large lintel marking the giant portal, read words I could not understand, but matched the letters the mekubbal gave me. I looked down at that scrap and up at the words that read "Γυνῶθι σεαυτὸν · Μηδὲν ἄγα" in great angular runes. I wondered what it meant.

It was warded. Not by the hollow and cold flesh eaters where I had entered. These were flesh, fetid, and supple. They were twisted beings, demons that reminded me of those from the glass sea, though these were small and bent whereas those were large and well thewed. Long tongues hung out of their fat lips. Their skin was colored by necrosis. They were arrayed in offal similar to what we had earlier found. I wondered how long they had stood sentinel, rotting.

I felt my sword prone with curiosity, the equivalent of a thoughtful hum. Gvenour had lost the desire for conversation long ago like humanity lost the desire for empire with the dawning of post-history. The general population did not care about annals and chronicles. There was not even a common dating system. That historic period was on display here. When the Elders were hopeful utilitarians and colonialists. Monsters. I gripped my blade in readiness, and Starkheart did likewise next to me, meaning to charge those gross foes.

My thoughts and forthcoming spring were interrupted by an echoing voice. "Welcome," it cawed, "to the Place of Pelles." Behind the grotesque creatures was a plinth with a large cup on full display. A great raven tenderly perched on the stairs behind it. I had not seen it before because it blended in with the chiaroscuro of shadows. Looking then, beyond his great size, it seemed he was bleeding from some wound in his groin.

I recalled the words of the mekubbal "The Chalice of Hailness, the Goblet of Health, Cup of Salve, Cauldron of Rebirth, the Grail of the Whole, or Wholly Grail as the most ancient ancients name it. Guarded by a Hugas king who fishes named Bran, though he has many names, here are the ones I know..." The memory faded as I studied the unadorned cup, which was quite large, like a shallow bowl or deep gradalis, a cylix of sorts. It stood out in the dim surroundings, a beacon of life where otherwise only corpses stood.

And those swaying grotesqueries stood still as statues after the king's words, and I felt the air charged with sorcery. An aubergine glow suffused the space around the raven, and with a sublime chant, it shifted toward the long-tongued figures. They grew as it infused them. Their skin became less pale and necrotic and more leathery, and somehow more dead. These new beings, draugr by description, were no longer warm but hoarfrost covered their hides. My breath fogged before me, rime covered my blade.

I charged regardless. Blades materialized in some hands while others only had sable claws. Starkheart's reptilian speed kept up with my supernatural bounding. We tore into our foes simultaneously.

The dead attacked with gormless form. Naught but marionettes playing out their fate. I dodged one galder-crafted saebø blade, riposted, and succeeded in unhanding the attacker at the wrist, followed by a stab in the sternum. Since I did not want my foe to rise again as undead were wont to do, I ran my blade up, muscles straining. My blade exited the top of my enemy's head. Slowed by my ministrations, I was raked by the claws of another foe, the second swipe of which ended when I cut the attacker in half from shoulder to hip.

I cut down a few more foes, finding their skin hard as stone. My arms felt uncharacteristically tired. I lost sight of Starkheart but heard it crushing more foes nearby. Then I got stabbed in the shoulder. I whirled, shouting at the offender. I cut the beautifully crafted witham sword with mammen icons in two before cutting the head from my foe. I caught the head as the body tumbled and crushed it by way of another skull, still attached. I slid out my leg, tripping several as I rose from my pulped offering.

And then I saw Starkheart cutting into my targets. I realized the horde had been reduced. I stamped my boot through the chest of one, before beheading it and placing the trophy by the corpse's rear. The heat of my furor warred with the chill of the hall. By all the gods, I was filled with murderous wrath.

"Anfortas need not give grail to you." The Raven said with odd intonation, like the language was wrong for his tongue. He did not move, but I sensed some unsteadiness from him in the dispatching of his guardians.

"We will have it, Pellehan of many names," I said through gritted teeth.

He cocked his head, his black beady eyes staring into me. "I would have you exchange for the item." The otherworldly desire in his gaze was gross. In my disgust, I pulled out one of my crossbows and fired it. It deflected off his feathers with a ring like he was made of metal, like a dragon.

He looked at the bolt I had fired, curious and a little surprised—if I parsed the alien stare correctly. Starkheart had faded into the shadows behind me and now moved to flank.

The Raven turned back to me and shuffled his feet with great clacking on the stone. "What lovely embrace we shall have." He spread his wings, and my hackles rose at his great size and avian eyes. I was not sure I could survive such a foe, whether he was injured or not. I stepped back, momentarily intimidated. But a squawk followed as those great wings were roughly brought back to the sleek body as reptilian arms wrapped around the Raven. Starkheart and the Raven wrestled, the bird being shoved forward but getting a foot up on the plinth. The cup fell with an echoing clatter.

"Fie, fie on you, worm who take sangreal!" Raven cried in imprecation.

The giant bird wheezed, obviously in pain from the wound low on his body and the crushing main of my companion. The fowl croaked and flapped, sad but unwilling to give up the relic. Starkheart squeezed and squeezed, all of its being going into that vicious attack. Pelles the Day Raven struggled and pecked at the bipedal worm's back, leaving gift-gashes. But my companion did not waver. It squeezed harder, putting its whole essence into the feat. A loud crack followed, the sound like a tree breaking. Pelles crumbled as his bone-cage caved in with no fete. His tongue lolled dark and swollen from his beak, and as the king-who-fished fell to the floor, so did my companion.

Starkheart's strike was so dolorous that it caused my newfound friend to lie down and die from the sorrow of it. It was dead when I reached its body, the smell of rose-tinted brimstone returned. I was not surprised that the vitality that had flown into it was like

that given to those on death's door; enough for one last triumph. It received its catharsis, a release from death. Gruesome as it is, I can understand the bliss. If only I could enjoy such release.

I took the cup and left, returning to the cold, alight world. I did not stop to use it on Starkheart. That would have been cruel even if I understood the mechanism behind the mystical item. Starkheart lies there still, all the hopes of its race with it.

A lump lay on the ground, misshapen and easy to ignore among the refuse and the quick and dead also on the street. I fingered the bag the mekubbal had given me as payment for the retrieval of the chalice. I had told the quiet but cheery man, Melmoth he was called by his cabal, that it was too much for a rote task. He had told me the item was priceless and that I was sorely underpaid but would not be misblessed. Some good had come from greed that had brought the item thus, it was a felix culpa he told me. I left, giving no response, awkward as I normally felt in this body. The mekubbal sang quietly in a tongue I did not know. I repeated his words over and over again under my breath on the street, regardless. "Modeh-ani, lefanechu," the meaningless prayer calmed me.

After leaving I wandered the streets, letting my instincts lead. I briefly thought of acquiring some gylpwort to dull my mind's ache, but decided against it. Instead, I followed some geas I knew not. That was what brought me to the drab lump, I could tell it was sackcloth-covered bodies. Something in me recognized these covered bodies. That of a girl on the cusp of womanhood and a boy, a few years junior. I had gained consciousness only a few years prior, and here were my sometime worst fears confirmed. Fickle bodies, if only I had died in that tower, or had been gutted in my wanderings of Erntor. Another body of mine would not care, would not even have a connection to these little ones. But this one did, and I could not deny it. I recalled the ghost of a great pain in birthing when this shell was someone else's. It was so wrong, but right; it should not have been, but it was; a lie and a truth.

It all lay before me.

I approached the two and, crouching down, softly spoke "Neave, Hoc." This appellation hung, heavy, for a moment until the bundle stirred as if woken from some sorcerous petrification. The gleaming, dark, and watery eyes of my daughter and son emerged. I felt the kinship there, though I knew I was an interloper, following a dead woman's guidance. But oh, the bliss as we embraced and Hoc cried out and Neave sobbed for joy. All my soul laid bare. I did not feel aimless then; I felt home, for once.

The Thunderbird

By Luke Allison



The summer of his sixtieth year came and went like many others. Bill watched Tigers games on WJBK FOX 2 in the late afternoons and evenings. When a game wasn't on, he spent his afternoons either working on the car in the garage or tending to his garden in the backyard. He planted sweet corn, green beans, tomatoes, and strawberries every year, sometimes adding squash or pumpkins for the fall harvest. He spent hundreds of hours in the garden through the years, and all his neighbors were blessed with the high yields.

But his main hobby was that car—a red 1960 Ford Thunderbird convertible. This was a beauty built in Motor City, Detroit. He loved this car. It was his cherished item. Yet, it hadn't been driven in years, because this was the car that Nancy had died in.

It was a cold, wet November evening when Bill got the call. He answered the Trimline telephone in the living room. At first, he didn't register the call. The voice on the other end said words like "accident," "your wife," and "wet roads."

When he came to, he went to downtown Detroit to see her. She was badly banged up. She fought for her life, but didn't make it. Dead on the operating table. She wasn't wearing a seatbelt, but who was in those days? She was thrown through the windshield, causing glass to be embedded in her head, a halo of blood and glass above her shoulder. One of her arms hung loose by her side like a ventriloquist dummy. They closed her eyes. Lacerations covered her body.

He did not cry that evening. This was all a mistake. Tomorrow, he would wake up to the smell of her blueberry pancakes and bacon as he dressed to go to the plant. Bill worked on the GM line, fastening engine bolts. He had been employed at GM's Detroit Hamtramck Assembly since graduating from high school in 1965. Back then, it was Dodge, and in 1981, it was acquired by General Motors. It was hard, honest work. On summer days, they sweated like farm animals; in winter, they wore extra layers for warmth.

In the early days working for GM, Bill had a hobby of buying old jazz records to enjoy with a double shot of whiskey after work. He first saw Nancy at a downtown record store, Ralf's Records, in 1970. She had large brown eyes and a coke-bottle figure. She examined a Beatles album, Abbey Road, while he browsed through Charlie Parker albums. Her long brown hair fell to her shoulders. She wore flared blue jeans, a tight-fitting shirt with a bare midriff, and a checkered scarf.

He looked up and smiled, witnessing her blush at him. He was tall, lean, and handsome in those days. He was twenty-three, and she was nineteen, attending nursing school. She had a look of maturity for her age.

"Nice choice," he added awkwardly regarding the Beatles album. He didn't even like the band. He didn't know what else to say.

She smiled with bright, white, straight teeth. Looking like an affluent girl from the suburbs, Grosse Pointe, probably. He would later find out she was.

"Do you come here often?" she asked.

"Sometimes, mostly Fridays after I get paid."

He hid his jazz records behind him. Wanting to be hip with rock and roll, not some old jazz beatnik. She paid for her record and started for the door. There was a deep knot in his throat, and he made the last-minute decision to follow her. He got out the door and caught up with her.

"Would you like to have coffee sometimes?" he asked nervously.

In his great hurry, he forgot he was holding jazz LPs. The owner chased him down—an immigrant store owner, running and yelling.

"You steal. You steal." The owner said this in a Middle Eastern accent.

Bill's face reddened as Nancy watched him being led back into the shop by the stiff arm of the proprietor to pay for the vinyl.

It was Sunday when Bill was at his friend Gary's house, a coworker, who was grilling burgers for an Independence Day cookout. Gary's wife, with the striking red hair, Linda, rushed out of the kitchen as he attended to a line of hot dogs and brats.

A group of bewildered partygoers looked up as she screamed, "Bill, your wife is in labor."

Nancy had stayed home nursing a headache. Bill was stunned; he had known it was coming soon, but thought it was still weeks away. He rushed to his truck and drove to the hospital, speeding in the left lane and passing cars at over eighty miles per hour.

He arrived just minutes before Nicole was born, needing to steady himself against the doorframe. The sights, smells, and lighting made him feel nauseous. His brother and Nancy's sister waited in the hallway while Ronnie handed him a celebratory cigar.

"This is the happiest day of my life," said Nancy as she cradled Nicole in her arms. A tiny human in her arms. She would have two more children: a girl named Grace and a boy named Robert. There were some challenging years in the eighties when keeping the kids fed, clothed, and happy was a struggle. Fortunately, after the youngest started kindergarten, Nancy returned to work as a nurse. The dual incomes led to brighter days, with trips to Florida and Coney Island Park, the one in Cincinnati, not New York.

Under a tarp, the car had been broken, dented, thrashed, and gnarled for years. Then he lifted the tarp one Friday night. He looked at the wreck of metal, recalling all the good times he and Nancy had spent in the car: driving up to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, trips to Mackinac Island, and those years before the kids. Those were special times for the couple. The car was expensive, but Nancy had inherited some money from a wealthy uncle, and he had a good union job back when that meant something, back when you could raise a family without a college degree.

Slowly, and with great care, Bill began restoring it. She passed away in the 1980s, and it wasn't until 1994 that he started work on the car. However, within two years, he had it looking brand new. He worked on it a little after work every day except Fridays. On Fridays, he spent time with the kids, watching movies on VHS in the living room, going to the mall to play mini-golf, or taking them to "Mike's Circus" on 8th Street for cheeseburgers, Coca-Cola, and blue ice cream.

Raising the kids without their mother was a difficult task. It was a pleasant spring day, one of those days when the whole world seems to be celebrating the end of winter, even the flowers and trees. Bill led his family up the hill at the zoo. Everyone was still in elementary school except for Nicole, who was entering junior high. With boys, volleyball, and long phone calls with her friends, Nicole was on a path that would soon lead her out of the house and into the world.

Yet, on this spring day, she was simply his daughter. They walked arm in arm, leading the other kids to see the monkeys in their metal jungle gym: the lions, the tigers, penguins, and giraffes. The kids loved it all. They fed camels and ducks. And looked at beautiful birds. However, there was one place off-limits on their zoo trips—the reptile house.

They never went in there because of Nicole. She was deathly afraid of snakes. Yet, this time, when she was in sixth grade, they went with much prodding by Bill. They entered the reptile house, which featured large glass terrariums labeled with names such as Brazil, Ecuador, and Argentina, among others. The terrariums housed long, spiraling, brightly colored green snakes, small venomous vipers, and a five-foot-long Burmese python.

Nicole had always been afraid of snakes. When she was a young girl, she found a garter snake in the backyard while playing. She screamed bloody murder and ran into the house, yelling for her father. She would only return to the yard and her swing set once he reassured her it was safe. And then five-year-old Nicole burst into tears.

"You killed the snake, you killed the snake, daddy." It was impossible to win. Bill tried his best, but was sometimes clueless on how to raise girls. That's when their aunts came in handy. They spoiled the girls with clothes and Barbies for Christmas. Bill was happy they knew what was right for the girls.

However, this time, there was an exhibit where you could touch a live, non-venomous, yellow snake, some kind of modestly large python, that the zookeeper was holding. Nicole debated whether she would get in line. Entering it and exiting it several times. Then she took a deep inhale, muttered something under her breath, and joined the line as the program neared its end. She let go of his hand and walked straight to the zookeeper.

Once she got to the front of the line, she was holding onto the snake, her eyes wide open, looking in awe. She was "fearless."

Fearless. The greatest moment of my life, he had thought. In those thirty seconds, his daughter had gone from a kid to a brave young woman, just like her mother. It was perfect. Just perfect. Times like those are once in a lifetime, but when they happen, a special magic of life fills your body for a quick moment. For a brief moment, it is all you need.

Before he realized that all three of his kids were off to college, he felt immense pride. Not that he would ever say that, though. His emotions had dulled in the aftermath of her accident. He found it impossible to express his feelings. He would find himself in the grocery aisle just staring at food until some customer would say, "Hey, you! Coming through." These freezes, as he would call them, happened when he wasn't at work or with his kids. One day, he found himself, years after they left for college, alone at the end of a cul-de-sac. He had no idea where he was. He had taken a bus into the city and blacked out for an hour. He didn't attend confession or church unless he brought his kids. It was important to him that they grow up in the Catholic diocese.

Once the kids left the house, he fell into a routine life: going to the bank on Mondays, grocery shopping on Wednesdays after work, and golfing on the weekends with the guys. Yet, each year, he spent more and more time alone. He preferred to stay inside with pulp detective books (one of those with a half-naked lady on the cover), with titles like *The Black Shadow*, *The Gun* and the *Knife*, and *The Iron Fist*. He would read those in the upstairs bathroom or at Nancy's old sewing table. He didn't have a desk.

He did what many lonely men did. He became engrossed in sports, he worked on his car, and he subscribed to gentlemen's magazines like *Playboy* and *Hustler*. His life remained the same for weeks, marked by endless TV dinners packed in ice and nights alone in dark movie theaters.

The idea of dating again after Nancy seemed absurd to him. You only have one chance at love in your life, and if you lose that, you spend the rest of your life walking the world alone. He ate meals alone at diners, and sometimes he saw happy families, feeling as if they were judging the lone, aging man. However, once he reached retirement age, he became accustomed to being alone. Not happy, but familiar with the situation. He would read the newspaper at the diner and felt no shame in going to the movies by himself. He preferred it, no talking, just the picture in front of him.

However, this type of lifestyle hurts the body. His body yearned to yell and scream. He had not been hugged or touched in years. His kids lived on the coasts: Los Angeles, New York, and DC.

He visited his children on Thanksgiving at his daughter's house in Brooklyn every year and for Christmas in Washington, DC, at his son's place. Every five years or so, the family would go camping at a national park, but as his kids became busier with their careers, trips to Yellowstone or the Grand Canyon became less frequent. He even drove to Death Valley one year, only for his kids to cancel, leaving him to hole up in a Ramada Inn for the week.

In his retirement, he smoked Camel cigarettes and drank Coca-Cola—two things he had given Bill peace, and he enjoyed the quiet hum of nature. His favorite state park, Fallen Tree State Park, was the perfect spot for picnics and lazy afternoon reading.

It was winter. You could smell it on your clothes when he returned inside from a cigarette. Halloween had ushered in the cold weather. Little witches, monsters, and ghosts had appeared at his doorway. Leaving behind small voices of cheer. He was hooked on college football, but even that would soon come to an end for the year. January and February of his first year of retirement dragged on like a balloon being filled with air, only to explode in nights when he would dream of her. He would dream that she was with him, but she never aged, she was still in her thirties. Her death age.

She would invite herself into his dreams, gliding into them like a lost kite in the wind. Sometimes he was full of terror. The accident would happen all over again. The phone calls. The hospital. The nurses frowned in the lobby, being the carriers of bad news. He would bolt upright in bed, yelling out into the void. Then toss and turn until morning. His children called him less. He became increasingly reclusive. The delivery drivers would often make excuses to avoid long conversations with him, the kind you had to bite your leg off to get out of, and return to their routes. He had resorted to constructive talk radio—something to fill the silence.

Bill sat in his chair, feet up, shoes elevated on a wooden coffee table. He was the type of man who wore shoes in his own domain. He was watching the Detroit Tigers get swept by the Baltimore Orioles in the American League Division Series of the playoffs.

"There's always next year."

He always told himself, "We will win the pennant. We will get the new kid in the draft." He sat with his peanuts and beer, just as he had during every game in his retirement.

On a freezing February day in Detroit, Bill had retired. The snow lay thick on all the cars he drove past early on his last day at the plant. His Ford truck navigated through the snow with ease. He has always arrived at the breakroom for all forty-eight years. He sipped the terrible coffee Frank brewed. "Better than ever, Frank," He said with a wry smile.

He joined the line and performed his duties. Although he had advanced several times over the years, he remained on the line, supervising. He was waiting for his gold-colored watch and pension, and just counting the years.

He repeated his safety checks, reminding young men, like he once was, how to work the line. He also urged them to listen to the hum of the machinery, always anticipating their next move. He reminded them never to leave their tools unattended, or they would disappear, and to use the restroom every lunch break.

Bill fondly reflected on his days at work. He held an important job, built a family with Nancy, and provided a roof over their heads. He couldn't imagine giving up his job, routine, and especially his role as a widower on his last day. He never dated after Nancy's accident. Their love remained strong. He only stopped missing her in his sleep or when particularly inebriated, which had become more frequent lately, after his retirement. He never drank during the day, but while watching his Tigers, Lions, Pistons, and Red Wings, he would gradually find himself surrounded by cans of Miller Lite since Stroh's beer had gone out of business.

He would always wake up early, clean his living room of all signs of drinking from the night before, and tell himself he would take it easy—just a few drinks. This never happened. He kept his drinking private and didn't enjoy bars or the people who embraced that lifestyle: the smoke, the loose morals, the cursing, and the angry fights over billiards and darts. He hadn't been to a bar since his twenties and was damn proud of it.

On the coldest Saturday night of winter, Bill was drinking Jack Daniel's. There was an old black-and-white movie on the TV, but he gave it little thought. He had been having recurring dreams of the crash again, and he got off the old couch in the living room and stumbled into the garage. He brought the bottle of booze.

Taking another pull from the bottle, he bent his tired knees and undressed the car. The tarp tumbled to the floor, and the bright red Thunderbird seemed to light up the room. The chrome grill shone off the hanging fluorescent lights. He took a microfiber cloth and slowly massaged the exterior of the car. He traced the extended headlights with his thumb and peered at the spoked silver hubcaps.

He stumbled back to his feet, knocking over the whisky bottle and spilling the remains on the concrete floor. He grabbed the driver's seat where she had last sat. He never drove it, so besides the few times he took it places during the rebuild, the seats were hers. He held onto the seat. Red leather interior. He shouted "Nancy" into the cold night. He wished her body were there. Her presence almost escapes him after all these years. What would it feel like to be in her arms again? What did she even sound like? Did he still remember? After letting go of the driver's seat, sweat dripping from his brow, he went into the house and slowly pulled the center drawer of the ancient armoire. He shut the wooden cabinet and returned to the garage. He set the cold revolver on the passenger seat. He sat down. He would join her in the Thunderbird at last.

When the bang echoed into the night, ringing the emptiness of winter, Mrs. Jenkins next door looked up from washing dishes at her kitchen window. Was that a car backfiring? Not firecrackers, this time of year, she thought to herself, sadly knowing what it was. A green bean casserole sat cooling on her counter for her neighbor, old Bill, who didn't get out much these days.

The Poetry of Michael T Smith

Jazz Club

Jazz is
when you write a sentence with
only punctuation. A stop. Which only had
prevented. Another stop, from coming.
The bass player, moved His. Mouth for words that
Were not only there, but
Weren't anywhere.
The heat could have provided a speech bubble
the sweat came out of our bodies like
a whisper.
But no, one --

I opened my mouth
to see what (would fly in)
Let's say goodnight to the moon --
These lines didn't ask you to listen
(they only asked that you pretend you do). It's like a relationship
between a person with himself

Cain killed Abel but maybe
He thought he was doing him a favor.
I spent most of the time not listening to what you said,
but what you didn't.

(Like the --)

And the drums and drinks and drivel provided a reason
For

Us. To be in a spell – ing de-li-rum.

The notes were practically racist --
one trying to run away from another. Even though
they were only on a staff.

It's a love note by someone who is too young
in their years.
It's a love scrawled by a drunkard too full
To spell correctly --

To express their love, and so there's but looks away.
Like love is the sun, which it is -- but also
Which it cannot be.

He said a word

He said a word unkindly,
and I laughed a little bit,
honesty being a disservice
to the likes of him and it.

He said a word so unripe:
le mot juste, it wasn't so,
but pretended for his benefit
not one sense of me did know.

He said a word ungodly,
and my knee it had foresight
to genuflect before he clasped it --
a trick it was of quick sleight.

He said a word unbridled,
let loose from out the mind's cave --
its frigidness making my desire
shiver to its very nave .

He said a word unbuttoned,
and I laughed a li'l further—
he being one to excise
my syllables, t'was murder.

He said a word unsettled
in quiddity of it all,
and within his eyesight I saw --
of man -- that eternal Fall.

He said a word unwanted,
and I fell into that gan --
“ha-ha” being a synecdoche
for th' lull history of man.

Affair

We kissed under the guillotine,
hoping for something lean,
and Nyx watch the union
of our two lips lying, jealously --

"Our excuse makes a solid ground,"
she said, tearing at her nylon grey.
"The ground?" I replied,
"We ought to just die and call it a day"

We skipped along like hooligans,
knowing something the rest
of the world did not, saying
'ancips' and other Latin words that rot.

I thought. She smiled,
not knowing geometry.
"But I forgive you," I said
to the man in the moon, and she.

I held her hand with a feeling
of anger. "Your fetters
got a fold of me." She replied,
but I only heard her thick argot.

"They're out of style this year,"
I said, opening a catalogue.
I only like to look at clothes
I won't wear -- it uses time's log well,

As does the affair, which is
blessed by the broken hand
of a cheap Rabbelais
crossing himself out of season, and --

"I'd have known you better
if you didn't look at me." She said.
"But I'll only do that,"
I interrupted. "Once you're dead."



Super Mario; Or, Everything I Needed to Learn About Relationships

All relationships can be linked to Super Mario
(who is you -- implicitly an immigrant,
only ever seen as a stereotype
to those of the "kingdom,"
and all your friends are toads
and your clothes are never in style but styled old)

Mushrooms,
Basically it's what you scrap by with eating,
On a diet of veggies to look good,
AND BULK UP,
While you kill yourself (sans extra lives)

To save the princess, which --
is really like smashing your head
against a brick wall...literally,
and expecting some reward.

During the process of romantic pursuit you grow up,
and are made to feel so small,
try on different looks,
become a tanuki,
that shapeshifter who can be anything else possibly,
to fool people because
we're all fools in love.
(don't forget how that raccoon plays his t...icles in repeated rhythms...)

So you,
a blue-collar man,
with a body that maps the march of time,

has the stamp of capitalism
just moves forward.

But you try,
you haven't lost yet,
but it's getting there
you sludge through shit
one pipe after another
through the sewers of life

To find the girl of your dreams
(and you're not even entirely sure why)
who is with some other man
a real lizard, or something.

(P.S. Physical confrontation with masculinity that's only toxic when it's not
for the benefit of another).

Your journey will always take you into
another world,
but for aught because
always,
always, your princess is always in another castle.

Featured Artist:

Julia Margaret Cameron

Julia Margaret Cameron (née Pattle; 11 June 1815 – 26 January 1879) was an English photographer who is considered one of the most important portraitists of the 19th century. She is known for her soft-focus close-ups of famous Victorians and for illustrative images depicting characters from mythology, Christianity, and literature.

She was born in Calcutta, and after establishing herself among the English upper-class in India, she moved to London where she made connections with the cultural elite. She then formed her own literary salon in the seaside village of Freshwater on the Isle of Wight.

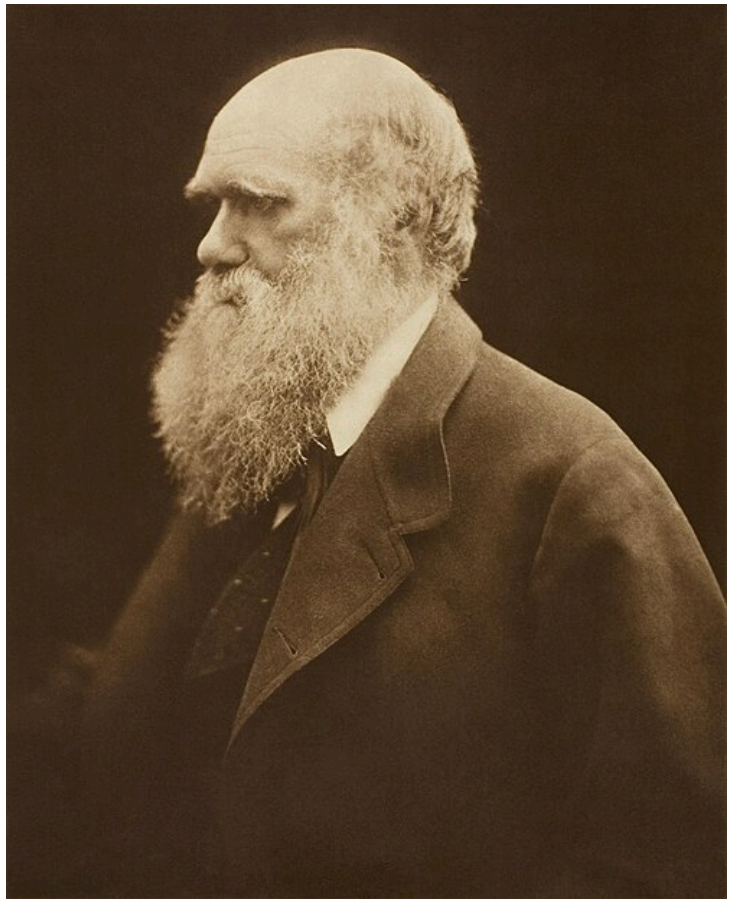
Cameron took up photography at the age of 48, after her daughter gave her a camera as a present. She quickly produced a large body of portraits, and created allegorical images inspired by tableaux vivants, theatre, 15th-century Italian painters, and contemporary artists. She gathered much of her work in albums, including *The Norman Album*. She took around 900 photographs over a 12-year period.



Henry Taylor, 1865

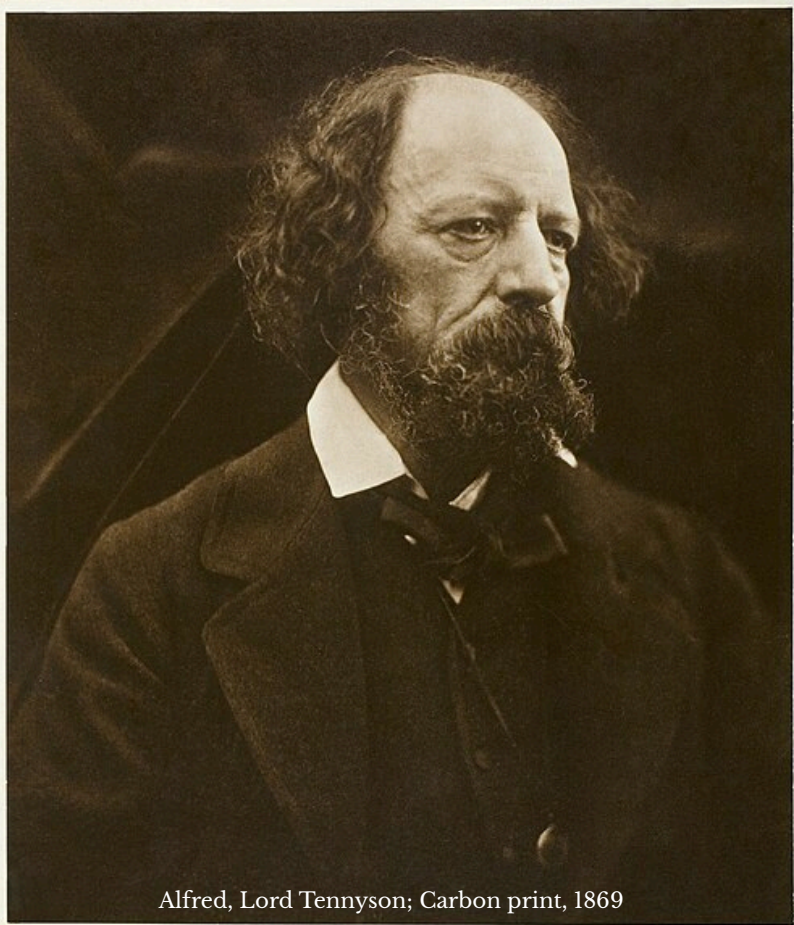


Charles Darwin, c. 1868





King Lear allotting his Kingdom to his three daughters.
Sitters are Lorina Liddell, Edith Liddell, Charles Hay Cameron and Alice Liddell.



Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Carbon print, 1869



Ellen Terry, 1864



"So now I think my time is near – I trust it is – I know"/
"The blessed Music went that way my soul will have to go", 1875



Suspense, 1864

The Second Best Seat

Morgan Svensen

I can't see a thing
But the back of the priest.
The blinding light bouncing off his gilded vestments,
Old graying hair on a balding head.
That's all I can see from the second best seat.
The Flesh hidden from my eyes,
It's beaten and broken form a mystery,
Yet still given up for me.

This road I've trod:
Bread, Wine, Water
Patten, Chalice, Bells
Missal, Incense, Cross.
Kneeling at the Altar's foot
To get just an inch closer,
To that Holy moment
Where God comes down
In radiant glory
To a lowly table on Earth.

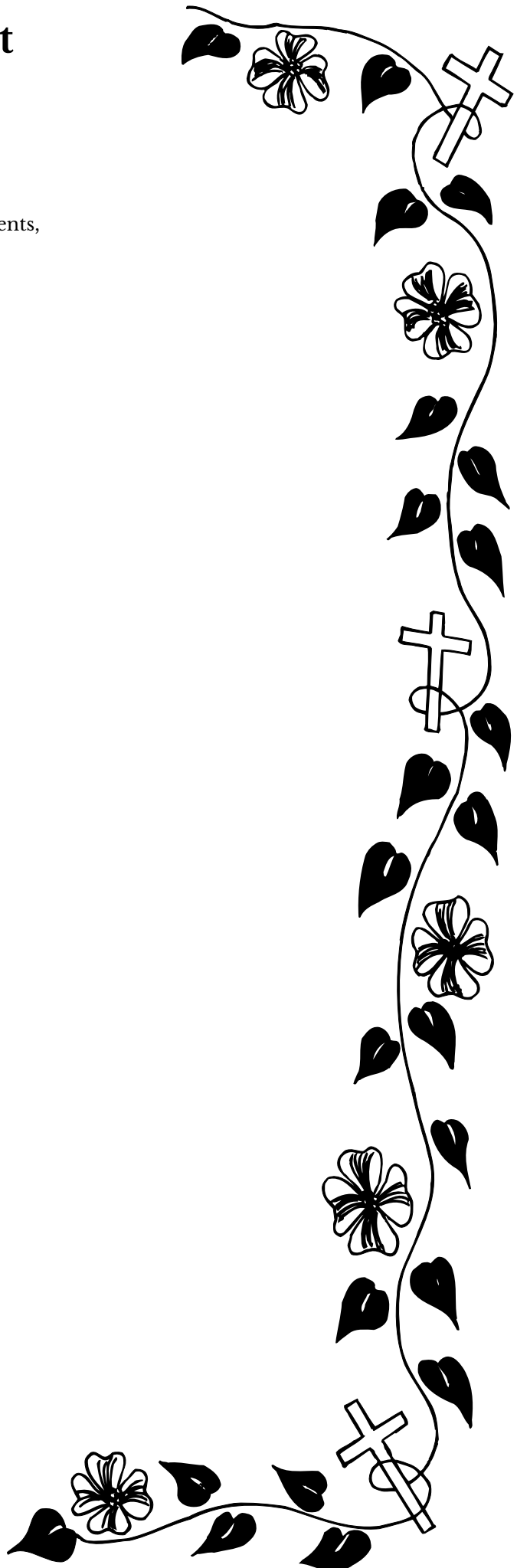
Oh self important priest, seen by all,
How dare you block my view.
Why must I only see you?

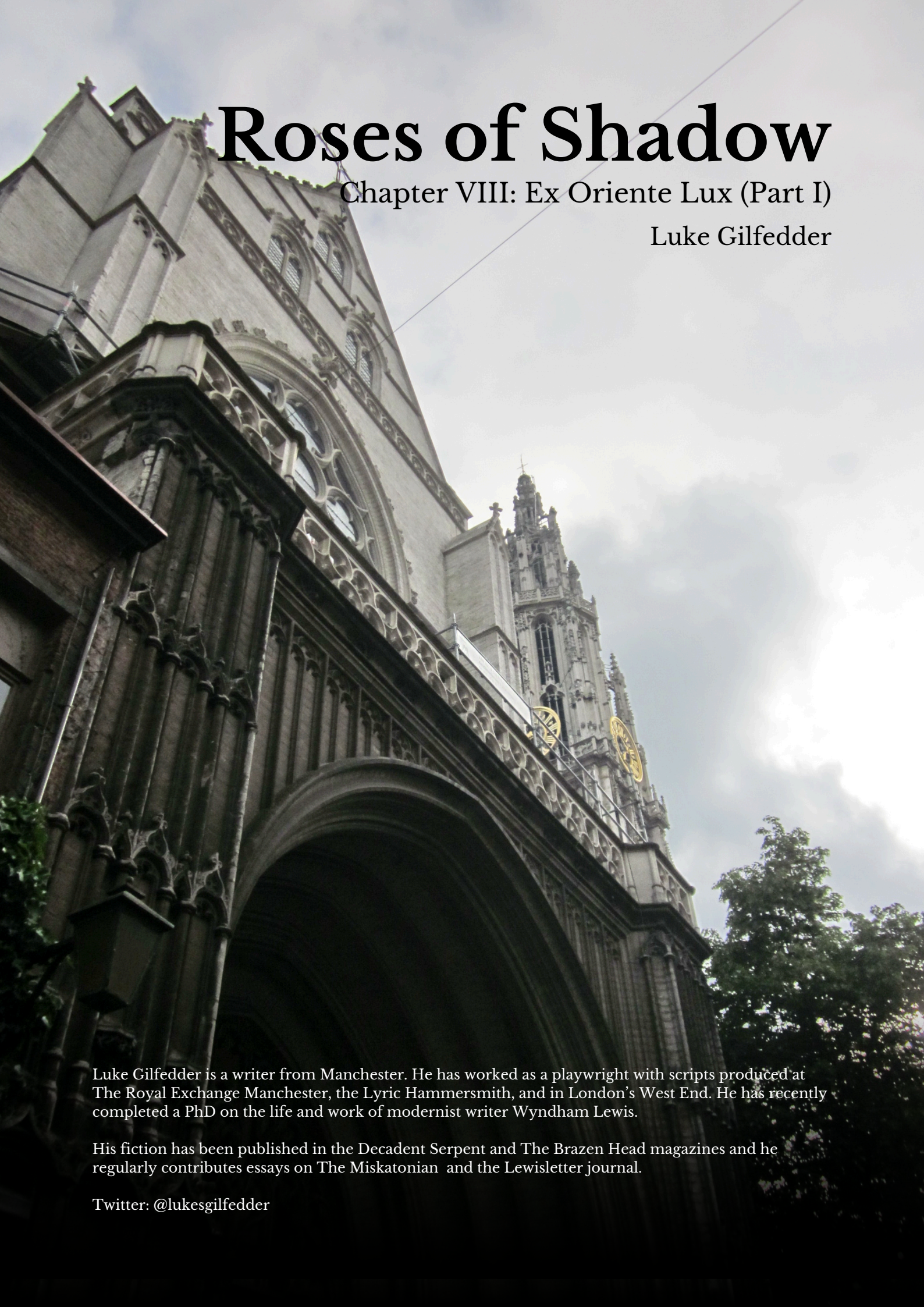
Why must you have the best seat,
With the miracle
Up close and personal.
Feeling it in your flesh
In your bones
In your soul.
Holding the Eucharist,
What a privilege.

What a burden.
Bearing the weight
Of all who come.
From the best seat
Looking from the raised altar
Upon the Lord,
But also upon the flock.

A vehicle to bring God
To Earth,
Yet not for himself,
For those who've come:
Miserably broken
Terribly twisted
Painfully perverse.
Completely undeserving of salvation
Yet ransomed with innocent blood.
Those who need God most.

All this only seen from sacrifice and dedication,
Staking a whole life on Fatih.
Who could ever understand,
From the second best seat.





Roses of Shadow

Chapter VIII: Ex Oriente Lux (Part I)

Luke Gilfedder

Luke Gilfedder is a writer from Manchester. He has worked as a playwright with scripts produced at The Royal Exchange Manchester, the Lyric Hammersmith, and in London's West End. He has recently completed a PhD on the life and work of modernist writer Wyndham Lewis.

His fiction has been published in the Decadent Serpent and The Brazen Head magazines and he regularly contributes essays on The Miskatonian and the Lewisletter journal.

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Whenever the rain fell, the peat bogs swelled within Father Quintus. He felt not only the weight of his hundred-and-eight winters, but those of his ancestors too: the locksmen of the River Mersey, and yet farther back, within the sea mists of his blood memory, the lough-shore boys of Lake Corrib.

He hobbled along the path that wound through the Abbey's orchards, following a pace behind the portly frame of Father Anzelm. The path was bordered on one side by a line of apple trees which, when they were lit by the rising moon, cast upon the ground the Japanese stencil of their shadows. On the other side ran the crenellated wall, with its sheer drop to the plain below, and far beyond that, the vast black ring of the far-distant mountains.

"Is it really true, what I overheard, Father?" Anzelm whispered. "That that amnesiac boy is really the Prince?"

Quintus smiled, teasing a finger along the holly berries glittering on the vines, each one a small globe offering a miniature planet to catch colour from the now almost lateral rays of the moon.

"It is more fitting for you to imagine, Anzelm, than for me to speak of."

Anzelm scrutinised the old abbot's face, as wrinkled as a relief map; all ridges and valleys. And what a specterful terrain it was; how many battles had that face known, how many victories purchased at what untold costs. Anzelm passed his superior a cigarette and lit it with his lighter, encrusted with a Magyar cross. Quintus coughed long and obscenely and then said, "Better. Thank you."

Anzelm glanced over his shoulder and said, in what for him was a whisper: "You know what the other monks will say, if the word gets out about this? That you are harbouring the Devil's child himself, within the walls of God's house?" Quintus took a deep drag on his cigarette and exhaled smoke. His gaze lingered a moment on the plain, then he averted his eyes to the starry, satellite-infested heavens.

"Have you ever considered, Anzelm, that there may be forces out there who seek the demise of both God and the Devil?"

"Out there? In the West, you mean, Father?"

Quintus shook his head. "I am speaking, Brother Anzelm, of a force that consists of the drive to nothingness. Yes. I have lived long enough to come to terms with the idea that Nothingness may be a third power out there in our great cosmic universe. Something which desires the extinction of our universe itself." He pointed the red-glowing tip of his cigarette at the night sky. "I remember, Anzelm, when I was but a poor Manchester schoolboy, and they taught us about black holes in space. What in God's creation, I thought, could account for such an abysmal megaconcentration of gravity that it sucks all matter into it, so that no light can ever escape?"

"But the Church, Father," Anzelm protested, "the Church will never be destroyed. Matthew 16:18: 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'"

Quintus took another shaky drag on his cigarette, then let the smoke curl from his nostrils with a wicked smile.

"Or perhaps," he said, "God and the Devil had to build the Catholic Church together, as unhappy and embattled partners." Anzelm gave one of his great barrel-bellied laughs.

"Thank the heavens that Brother Pray did not hear you say that."

"I am quite serious, Anzelm."

Anzelm frowned at him humorously, but Quintus did not smile. Within the black hood, the abbot's face was tired and quiet, its light quenched. Anzelm coughed twice, then turned and continued along the path.

After a few minutes of silent walking, they reached the metal door to the infirmary. In the yellow frame of the frosted window, like shadow puppets, leaned the statuesque silhouette of the boy, with Leila flitting about him like a nervous firefly. Anzelm whispered,

"Speaking of nothingness, Brother Quintus... are you sure the boy is as much of a blank slate as you think he is, after the plane crash? What if he really knows who he is, and he's only pretending not to?"

"I think not. Why should he?"

"To stall for time. To wait for his moment..."

A silence deferential, but full of reserves, reigned for a moment, and then Anzelm continued, staring at the ground:

"Father, are you sure you can trust him?"

"I think we have no choice."

"Why?"

"Because the alternative would be to not allow him to leave this abbey."

"To keep him a prisoner, you mean?"

Quintus dimmed his cigarette. "He would be too dangerous, Anzelm, to keep as a prisoner."

"You can't mean—" The aposiopesis was icy. Anzelm shuddered as the meaning sank in. The abbot crushed the cigarette under his sandal, held open the infirmary door and said:

"Yes, Brother Anzelm. I am afraid we would have no alternative."



The Man of Adamant

By Nathaniel Hawthorne



In the old times of religious gloom and intolerance lived Richard Digby, the gloomiest and most intolerant of a stern brotherhood. His plan of salvation was so narrow, that, like a plank in a tempestuous sea, it could avail no sinner but himself, who bestrode it triumphantly, and hurled anathemas against the wretches whom he saw struggling with the billows of eternal death. In his view of the matter, it was a most abominable crime—as, indeed, it is a great folly—for men to trust to their own strength, or even to grapple to any other fragment of the wreck, save this narrow plank, which, moreover, he took special care to keep out of their reach. In other words, as his creed was like no man's else, and being well pleased that Providence had intrusted him alone, of mortals, with the treasure of a true faith, Richard Digby determined to seclude himself to the sole and constant enjoyment of his happy fortune.

"And verily," thought he, "I deem it a chief condition of Heaven's mercy to myself, that I hold no communion with those abominable myriads which it hath cast off to perish. Peradventure, were I to tarry longer in the tents of Kedar, the gracious boon would be revoked, and I also be swallowed up in the deluge of wrath, or consumed in the storm of fire and brimstone, or involved in whatever new kind of ruin is ordained for the horrible perversity of this generation."

So Richard Digby took an axe, to hew space enough for a tabernacle in the wilderness, and some few other necessities, especially a sword and gun, to smite and slay any intruder upon his hallowed seclusion; and plunged into the dreariest depths of the forest. On its verge, however, he paused a moment, to shake off the dust of his feet against the village where he had dwelt, and to invoke a curse on the meeting-house, which he regarded as a temple of heathen idolatry. He felt a curiosity, also, to see whether the fire and brimstone would not rush down from Heaven at once, now that the one righteous man had provided for his own safety. But, as the sunshine continued to fall peacefully on the cottages and fields, and the husbandmen labored and children played, and as there were many tokens of present happiness, and nothing ominous of a speedy judgment, he turned away, somewhat disappointed. The further he went, however, and the lonelier he felt himself, and the thicker the trees stood along his path, and the darker the shadow overhead, so much the more did Richard Digby exult. He talked to himself, as he strode onward; he read his Bible to himself, as he sat beneath the trees; and, as the gloom of the forest hid the blessed sky, I had almost added, that, at morning, noon, and eventide, he prayed to himself. So congenial was this mode of life to his disposition, that he often laughed to himself, but was displeased when an echo tossed him back the long, loud roar. In this manner, he journeyed onward three days and two nights, and came, on the third evening, to the mouth of a cave, which, at first sight, reminded him of Elijah's cave at Horeb, though perhaps it more resembled Abraham's sepulchral cave, at Machpelah. It entered into the heart of a rocky hill. There was so dense a veil of tangled foliage about it, that none but a sworn lover of gloomy recesses would have discovered the low arch of its entrance, or have dared to step within its vaulted chamber, where the burning eyes of a panther might encounter him. If Nature meant this remote and dismal cavern for the use of man, it could only be, to bury in its gloom the victims of a pestilence, and then to block up its mouth with stones, and avoid the spot forever after. There was nothing bright nor cheerful near it, except a bubbling fountain, some twenty paces off, at which Richard Digby hardly threw away a glance. But he thrust his head into the cave, shivered, and congratulated himself. "The finger of Providence hath pointed my way!" cried he, aloud, while the tomb-like den returned a strange echo, as if some one within were mocking him. "Here my soul will be at peace; for the wicked will not find me. Here I can read the Scriptures, and be no more provoked with lying interpretations. Here I can offer up acceptable prayers, because my voice will not be mingled with the sinful supplications of the multitude. Of a truth, the only way to Heaven leadeth through the narrow entrance of this cave—and I alone have found it!" In regard to this cave, it was observable that the roof, so far as the imperfect light permitted it to be seen, was hung with substances resembling opaque icicles; for the damps of unknown centuries, dripping down continually, had become as hard as adamant; and wherever that moisture fell, it seemed to possess the power of converting what it bathed to stone. The fallen leaves and sprigs of foliage, which the wind had swept into the cave, and the little feathery shrubs, rooted near the threshold, were not wet with a natural dew, but had been embalmed by this wondrous process. And here I am put in mind, that Richard Digby, before he

withdrew himself from the world, was supposed by skilful physicians to have contracted a disease, for which no remedy was written in their medical books. It was a deposition of calculous particles within his heart, caused by an obstructed circulation of the blood, and unless a miracle should be wrought for him, there was danger that the malady might act on the entire substance of the organ, and change his fleshly heart to stone. Many, indeed, affirmed that the process was already near its consummation. Richard Digby, however, could never be convinced that any such direful work was going on within him; nor when he saw the sprigs of marble foliage, did his heart even throb the quicker, at the similitude suggested by these once tender herbs. It may be, that this same insensibility was a symptom of the disease. Be that as it might, Richard Digby was well contented with his sepulchral cave. So dearly did he love this congenial spot, that, instead of going a few paces to the bubbling spring for water, he allayed his thirst with now and then a drop of moisture from the roof, which, had it fallen any where but on his tongue, would have been congealed into a pebble. For a man predisposed to stoniness of the heart, this surely was unwholesome liquor. But there he dwelt, for three days more, eating herbs and roots, drinking his own destruction, sleeping, as it were, in a tomb, and awaking to the solitude of death, yet esteeming this horrible mode of life as hardly inferior to celestial bliss. Perhaps superior; for, above the sky, there would be angels to disturb him. At the close of the third day, he sat in the portal of his mansion, reading the Bible aloud, because no other ear could profit by it, and reading it amiss, because the rays of the setting sun did not penetrate the dismal depth of shadow roundabout him, nor fall upon the sacred page. Suddenly, however, a faint gleam of light was thrown over the volume, and raising his eyes, Richard Digby saw that a young woman stood before the mouth of the cave, and that the sunbeams bathed her white garment, which thus seemed to possess a radiance of its own. 'Good evening, Richard,' said the girl, 'I have come from afar to find thee.' The slender grace and gentle loveliness of this young woman were at once recognized by Richard Digby. Her name was Mary Goffe. She had been a convert to his preaching of the word in England, before he yielded himself to that exclusive bigotry, which now enfolded him with such an iron grasp, that no other sentiment could reach his bosom. When he came a pilgrim to America, she had remained in her father's hall, but now, as it appeared, had crossed the ocean after him, impelled by the same faith that led other exiles hither, and perhaps by love almost as holy. What else but faith and love united could have sustained so delicate a creature, wandering thus far into the forest, with her golden hair dishevelled by the boughs, and her feet wounded by the thorns! Yet, weary and faint though she must have been, and affrighted at the dreariness of the cave, she looked on the lonely man with a mild and pitying expression, such as might beam from an angel's eyes, towards an afflicted mortal. But the recluse, frowning sternly upon her, and keeping his finger between the leaves of his half closed Bible, motioned her away with his hand. 'Off!' cried he. 'I am sanctified, and thou art sinful. Away!' 'Oh, Richard,' said she, earnestly, 'I have come this weary way, because I heard that a grievous distemper had seized upon thy heart; and a great Physician hath given me the skill to cure it. There is no other remedy than this which I have brought thee. Turn me not away, therefore, nor refuse my medicine; for then must this dismal cave be thy sepulchre.' 'Away!' replied Richard Digby, still with a dark frown. 'My heart is in better condition than thine own. Leave me, earthly one; for the sun is almost set; and when no light reaches the door of the cave, then is my prayer time!' Now, great as was her need, Mary Goffe did not plead with this stony hearted man for shelter and protection, nor ask any thing whatever for her own sake. All her zeal was for his welfare. 'Come back with me!' she exclaimed, clasping her hands—'Come back to thy fellow men; for they need thee, Richard; and thou hast tenfold need of them. Stay not in this evil den; for the air is chill, and the damps are fatal; nor will any, that perish within it, ever find the path to Heaven. Hasten hence, I entreat thee, for thine own soul's sake; for either the roof will fall upon thy head, or some other speedy destruction is at hand.' 'Perverse woman!' answered Richard Digby, laughing aloud; for he was moved to bitter mirth by her foolish vehemence. 'I tell thee that the path to Heaven leadeth straight through this narrow portal, where I sit. And, moreover, the destruction thou speakest of, is ordained, not for this blessed cave, but for all other habitations of mankind, throughout the earth. Get thee hence speedily, that thou may'st have thy share!' So saying, he opened his Bible again, and fixed his eyes intently on the page, being resolved to withdraw his thoughts from this child of sin and wrath, and to waste no more

of his holy breath upon her.

The shadow had now grown so deep, where he was sitting, that he made continual mistakes in what he read, converting all that was gracious and merciful, to denunciations of vengeance and unutterable woe, on every created being but himself. Mary Goffe, meanwhile, was leaning against a tree, beside the sepulchral cave, very sad, yet with something heavenly and ethereal in her unselfish sorrow. The light from the setting sun still glorified her form, and was reflected a little way within the darksome den, discovering so terrible a gloom, that the maiden shuddered for its selfdoomed inhabitant. Espying the bright fountain near at hand, she hastened thither, and scooped up a portion of its water, in a cup of birchen bark. A few tears mingled with the draught, and perhaps gave it all its efficacy. She then returned to the mouth of the cave, and knelt down at Richard Digby's feet. 'Richard,' she said, with passionate fervor, yet a gentleness in all her passion, 'I pray thee, by thy hope of Heaven, and as thou wouldst not dwell in this tomb forever, drink of this hallowed water, be it but a single drop! Then, make room for me by thy side, and let us read together one page of that blessed volume-and, lastly, kneel down with me and pray! Do this; and thy stony heart shall become softer than a babe's, and all be well.' But Richard Digby, in utter abhorrence of the proposal, cast the Bible at his feet, and eyed her with such a fixed and evil frown, that he looked less like a living man than a marble statue, wrought by some dark imagined sculptor to express the most repulsive mood that human features could assume. And, as his look grew even devilish, so, with an equal change, did Mary Goffe become more sad, more mild, more pitiful, more like a sorrowing angel. But, the more heavenly she was, the more hateful did she seem to Richard Digby, who at length raised his hand, and smote down the cup of hallowed water upon the threshold of the cave, thus rejecting the only medicine that could have cured his stony heart. A sweet perfume lingered in the air for a moment, and then was gone. 'Tempt me no more, accursed woman,' exclaimed he, still with his marble frown, 'lest I smite thee down also! What hast thou to do with my Bible?-what with my prayers?- what with my Heaven?' No sooner had he spoken these dreadful words, than Richard Digby's heart ceased to beat; while-so the legend says -the form of Mary Goffe melted into the last sunbeams, and returned from the sepulchral cave to Heaven. For Mary Goffe had been buried in an English churchyard, months before; and either it was her ghost that haunted the wild forest, or else a dreamlike spirit, typifying pure Religion. Above a century afterwards, when the trackless forest of Richard Digby's day had long been interspersed with settlements, the children of a neighbouring farmer were playing at the foot of a hill. The trees, on account of the rude and broken surface of this acclivity, had never been felled, and were crowded so densely together, as to hide all but a few rocky prominences, wherever their roots could grapple with the soil. A little boy and girl, to conceal themselves from their playmates, had crept into the deepest shade, where not only the darksome pines, but a thick veil of creeping plants suspended from an overhanging rock, combined to make a twilight at noonday, and almost a midnight at all other seasons. There the children hid themselves, and shouted, repeating the cry at intervals, till the whole party of pursuers were drawn thither, and pulling aside the matted foliage, let in a doubtful glimpse of daylight. But scarcely was this accomplished, when the little group uttered a simultaneous shriek and tumbled headlong down the hill, making the best of their way homeward, without a second glance into the gloomy recess. Their father, unable to comprehend what had so startled them, took his axe, and by felling one or two trees, and tearing away the creeping plants, laid the mystery open to the day. He had discovered the entrance of a cave, closely resembling the mouth of a sepulchre, within which sat the figure of a man, whose gesture and attitude warned the father and children to stand back, while his visage wore a most forbidding frown. This repulsive personage seemed to have been carved in the same gray stone that formed the walls and portal of the cave. On minuter inspection, indeed, such blemishes were observed, as made it doubtful whether the figure were really a statue, chiselled by human art, and somewhat worn and defaced by the lapse of ages, or a freak of Nature, who might have chosen to imitate, in stone, her usual handiwork of flesh. Perhaps it was the least unreasonable idea, suggested by this strange spectacle, that the moisture of the cave possessed a petrifying quality, which had thus awfully embalmed a human corpse. There was something so frightful in the aspect of this Man of Adamant, that the farmer, the moment that he recovered from the fascination of his first gaze, began to heap stones into the mouth of the cavern. His wife, who had followed him to the hill,

assisted her husband's efforts. The children, also, approached as near as they durst, with their little hands full of pebbles, and cast them on the pile. Earth was then thrown into the crevices, and the whole fabric overlaid with sods. Thus all traces of the discovery were obliterated, leaving only a marvellous legend, which grew wilder from one generation to another, as the children told it to their grandchildren, and they to their posterity, till few believed that there had ever been a cavern or a statue, where now they saw but a grassy patch on the shadowy hill-side. Yet, grown people avoid the spot, nor do children play there. Friendship, and Love, and Piety, all human and celestial sympathies, should keep aloof from that hidden cave; for there still sits, and, unless an earthquake crumble down the roof upon his head, shall sit forever, the shape of Richard Digby, in the attitude of repelling the whole race of mortals-not from Heaven but from the horrible loneliness of his dark, cold sepulchre.





Love of Home

By Nathan CJ Hood

Home. Tolkien's stories revolve around the place the characters call home. In the *Hobbit*, the company set out to reclaim the Lonely Mountain, the home of the dwarves, from the Dragon Smaug. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Frodo and his friends are forced to leave their home to save it, and the homes of Men, Elves, Dwarves, Trees and other free creatures, from the ever-expanding conquest and destruction of Mordor. The hobbits risk their lives (and souls) for their home in a deep sense. The green fields of the Shire, the mug of ale from the Green Dragon, Rosie Cotton's smile: memories of their home, in a deep sense, evoke a longing to return and a resolve to keep going. When they return, they are forced to set right what has gone wrong in the Shire, with the tale ending with the Shire rebuilt so that it is even better than before. Permeating Tolkien's tales is what Roger Scruton called 'oikophilia'. This is a 'love of home', a deep bond and affection for the place where one belongs. This includes its people and history, its environment and landscapes, the familial and communal. It is a concrete and particular love which drives one's desire to nurture, steward and protect the people and place that one comes from. It is, for Scruton, this powerful sentiment that undergirds a conservative interest in urban planning and environmentalism. In both contexts, a love of home mitigates against isolated individuals living in ever expanding housing projects, it stands against the relentless extraction of resources and the desecration of nature. Love of home is about building a community of people and land.

If oikophilia motivates our heroes, its antithesis, oikophobia, motivates Tolkien's villains. Sauron, Saruman, the orcs, do not have a home. They live in places that were once homes of Men, Elves and Dwarves ie Moria, Isengard, Minas Morgul, but they merely exist in them. They do not love where they live, and they do not belong.

They could live anywhere and, in the case of Sauron and Saruman, they want to control and enslave everywhere. And in their quest for total domination, they want to erase what is unique, different and special, and turn all into desolation, an arid desert within which the whole deracinated world serves the lusts of a dark lord's global empire. And those who live in such a world are themselves to an unnatural form of life, whether it be the hateful mutant orcs or the shadowy existence of the Ringwraith.

A glimpse of this horror is seen when Sharkey's ruffians begin to hack and burn the trees of the Shire, close the pubs and confiscate the pipe weed. They do something truly horrible to the hobbits. It is more than a conquest, wherein one lives under a new ruler. The ruffians attack the landscape and customs which constitute the home of the hobbits. They actively uproot the hobbits, puncture their social and environmental relationships, and in so doing rob something of who they are. They take from them where they belong, and as such the hobbits diminish into a shadow form of life until help arrives. It was a vindictive assault on the home that is the Shire, and they nearly succeeded in destroying it forever.

The Longest of Waits

Framed like this, *The Lord of the Rings* is a story centred upon the fight to defend the home from those forces who would destroy it: industrialisation, imperial ambition, malice and revenge. It celebrates those who love their home, protecting it even when all hope of doing so is lost. Aragorn's story exemplifies this narrative arc, though in a way that is perhaps not immediately obvious, for when we first meet him, he seems to be a man without a home. He is a Ranger of the North. These rangers are outsiders in places like the village of Bree. They are rough, dangerous men who patrol the wilds, hunting orcs, beasts, and all those who would do harm to the gentle inhabitants of the Shire and Bree. Constantly on the move, with no permanent place to lay their head and reviled by the locals, Aragorn and his brethren (for he leads the rangers) are nomadic. They appear to be the opposite of those who have a home.

Yet this is not the case. They are the last descendants of the Kingdom of Arnor. Sister to the Kingdom of Gondor in the south, Arnor was the original seat of the High King, who ruled over both kingdoms. Founded by Elendil after he and his family left the destruction of Numenor, it was inherited by Isildur and his descendants, though he never reached his new kingdom. Killed in the Gladden Fields (where the Ring was lost), his fourth youngest son, Vandalil, inherited the throne of the north, splitting the kingdoms of Gondor and Arnor apart. After the tenth king of Arnor, it split into three further kingdoms: Arthedain, Cardolan, and Rhudaur.

With the fragmentation of the realm, in T.A. 1300 the

Witchking of Angmar launched a assaults on Arnor. Over the following centuries, the leader of Sauron's Ringwraiths picked apart the divided men of the north. In T.A. 1973, 600 years after the conflict began, Arnor was facing its final showdown with Angmar. King Arvedui requested aid from Gondor, as their prospects looked bleak. Following the Great Plague, garrisons had crumbled only Fornost remained. The reinforcements arrived a day too late: Angmar had overrun the beleaguered defenders and Arnor was lost. While an alliance of Elves and Men drove the Witchking out of Angmar, the remnants of Arnor settled in villages and became wanderers across the West of Middle-earth. Aragorn and the rangers of the north were the descendants of this legacy. Over 1000 years had passed since the destruction of Arnor. He and his people, for several generations, had travelled Eriador. The rangers continued to steward the remnants of their realm, in the limited way they were able to do so. They protected lands, like the Shire, that had once been part of the Kingdom of Arnor (the hobbits had been granted land by the rulers of Arnor and had even sent hobbits to the climactic battle at Fornost). They were exiles in their own home, but they still protected what was left of it amidst the ruins. Perhaps it was duty that drove to them to such lengths. There may have also been hope: hope that one day, the Kingdom of Arnor will be restored.

This came to fruition at the end of the *Return of the King*. The title of the third volume in part refers to Aragorn's ascension to the throne of Gondor, bringing new life to the people and land after saving them from the threat of Mordor. It was even more so the case that Aragorn had returned to Arnor. He refounded the realm. Though it was never as numerous as its southern sister, the northern kingdom was resettled and became more densely populated. From exile to the reclamation of their home, Aragorn, as the monarch returned to his land, had brought new life to the place his people had wandered for over a millennia. They had returned to where they belong.

To wait a thousand years in the long off hope of returning home. Only a people who had a very deep love of home could wait on the scant possibility of recovering where they belonged. Their example mirrors on an extended scale the forty years the Israelites wandered in the desert before entering the promised land in the biblical tale. It also taps into those beliefs, held among the medieval Cornish, Welsh and Bretons, that one day King Arthur would return from Avalon, overthrow the Anglo-Saxon invaders and reclaim the land for the descendants of the Celtic Britons. It may have also been an encouragement from Tolkien that, despite the desecration he could see around him in post-WW2 Britain, that one day the English people would restore their homes again.

There and Back Again

While a love of home underpins so much that is good in *The Lord of the Rings*, such as redemption of Arnor, Tolkien's stories draw out some potential issues or limitations in attachment to home. One such threat is seen in the character of Tom Bombadil. While the whimsical fellow helps the hobbits through his land, he refuses to go any further than the boundaries of his territory. Despite their pleas, he continuously reminds them that he has his land to mind and that his wife, Goldberry, is waiting. He loves his home and refuse to leave it, prioritising his bond with his family and land despite the immense good as a very powerful being. The draw of home can prevent someone from taking part in an adventure, even if it is of supreme importance.

On this point, it is noteworthy that the members of the company in *The Hobbit* and the Fellowship of the Ring in *The Lord of the Rings*, are all unmarried men. Though they love their homes, they do not have responsibilities to wives or children. They are at a stage where they are free to leave their homeland, to embark on a quest, to risk life and limb for something more important than themselves. This has been the pattern across civilisations, young men leaving home to make their fortune and establish themselves, such as a knight on crusade or a junior officer in the British Navy. It is afterwards, when he has returned having risen in status and stature, that he is ready to have a family and be an active participant in his community. With that change he becomes bound to his home, less free to leave, less willing to do so.

The elder man, like Bombadil, has a duty to stay with the home he has built and nurture it. The younger protagonist must become someone worthy of a home by going on the quest. Failure to do so leads to stagnation. This reality is the dark side of the Shire. Protected by the rangers of the north from outside

threats (albeit they do not know this), the hobbits lead a sheltered life. While they live in peaceful bliss with little thought of the outside world, their comfortable lives warp them. Bilbo, when we meet him in *The Hobbit*, loves his home life a little too much. The thought of adventure scares him, anything which breaks convention (even if there is nothing wrong with it) is appalling, and he's more concerned by social etiquette, cosy quaintness and secluded living than doing what is right. He represents the very worst traits of those who bury themselves in their burrows, pathetically weak in the face of evil, unable to prevent harmful forces (such as Sharkey's ruffians) from invading the home. Bilbo had to leave the Shire to grow. Forced out of his safe little bubble into a world of danger, he must become more courageous, more thoughtful, more intelligent, more hardy, more just, more heroic, to navigate its perils and keep his friends safe.

So too must Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin. They must struggle, and in so doing their moral and physical virtues develop. By doing so, they become people able to protect the Shire, to drive out those who would do it wrong, and as such are worthy of their home. The quest was essential for their personal growth and, by extension, the wellbeing of the community. As such, the love of home must be balanced with the space and freedom for the young to adventure elsewhere, for through their questing they gain what is needed for them to become good stewards, for them to sustain, nurture and protect the home.

Across the Sea

It is noteworthy that, despite returning to the Shire, the hobbits who save their home do not choose to reside there ever after. Bilbo and Frodo, as ringbearers, head across the sea to

Valinor. Sam, after a wonderful life raising children and grandchildren, Mayor of Hobbiton and leader of his community, journeys there too.

Merry and Pippin, who also built up the Shire through the development of libraries and other institutions, they choose to spend their last years in Gondor with Aragorn. Further afield, Legolas and Gimli leave for Valinor, as has Gandalf, while many of the Elves have already headed across the sea.

Despite saving their homes, for most of these characters the places they returned to were not enough. There are several layers as to why Tolkien may have included this aspect in his tale, which inserts a note of ambivalence within his celebration of the home. In part, there is a religious significance, insofar as for a Catholic like Tolkien a true home is not on earth but in heaven with Christ. So, sailing into the West (often associated in mythology with the realms beyond the mortal) is a symbol of this reality, the need for the Divine. Additionally, it could reflect the experience of a soldier on his return to England. Even those who did not suffer trauma and PTSD from their experiences struggle to feel fully at ease in their surroundings, and perhaps these characters, who have gone through and hell and back, cannot find final rest in the comfy cosiness of the Shire. They needed deeper tranquility, they wanted to find peace with those who have shared their griefs.

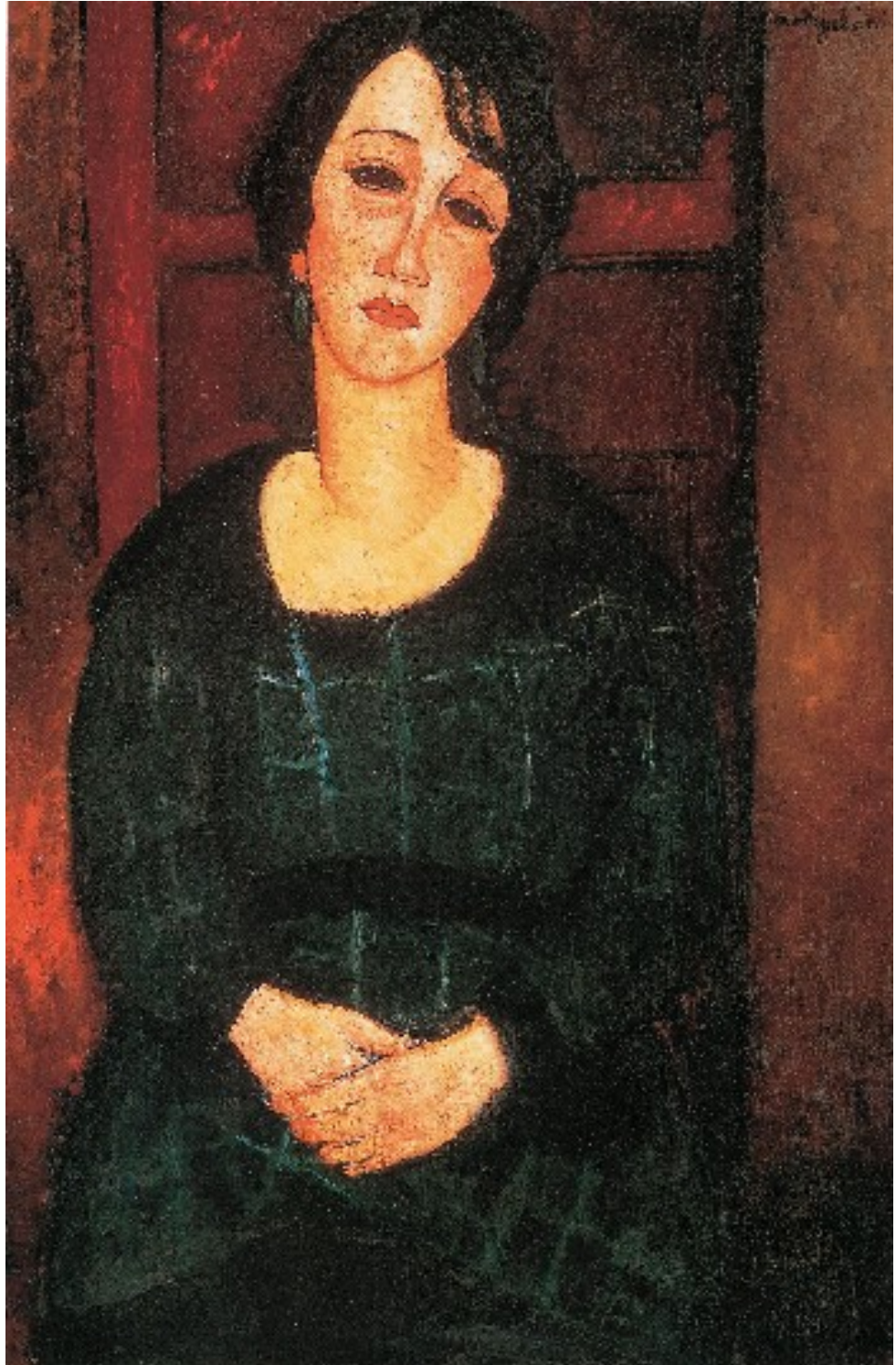
It is a startling warning to the would-be hero: those who restore the home may not be the ones to enjoy it. Nonetheless, it is worth fighting for, even when facing 1000 years of nomadic exile. For while those who build may not see its fruition or reap its rewards, it is a noble act to protect and nurture a community, a land, a people, even if they do not know what you have done for them. For you are giving them a place to belong, and that is the most meaningful of vocations



Thrawn Janet

By Robert Louis Stevenson

Woman with Scottish Dress
Amedeo Modigliani



The Reverend Murdoch Soulis was long minister of the moorland parish of Balweary, in the vale of Dule. A severe, bleak-faced old man, dreadful to his hearers, he dwelt in the last years of his life, without relative or servant or any human company, in the small and lonely manse under the Hanging Shaw. In spite of the iron composure of his features, his eye was wild, scared, and uncertain; and when he dwelt, in private admonitions, on the future of the impenitent, it seemed as if his eye pierced through the storms of time to the terrors of eternity. Many young persons, coming to prepare themselves against the season of the holy communion, were dreadfully affected by his talk. He had a sermon on I Pet. V. 8, "The devil as a roaring lion," on the Sunday after every 17th of August, and he was accustomed to surpass himself upon that text both by the appalling nature of the matter and the terror of his bearing in the pulpit. The children were frightened into fits, and the old looked more than usually oracular, and were, all that day, full of those hints that Hamlet deprecated. The manse itself, where it stood by the water of Dule among some thick trees, with the Shaw overhanging it on the one side, and on the other many cold, moorish hilltops rising toward the sky, had begun, at a very early period of Mr. Soulis's ministry, to be avoided in the dusk hours by all who valued themselves upon their prudence; and guidmen sitting at the clachan alehouse shook their heads together at the thought of passing late by that uncanny neighbourhood. There was one spot, to be more particular, which was regarded with especial awe. The manse stood between the highroad and the water of Dule, with a gable to each; its bank was toward the kirktown of Balweary, nearly half a mile away; in front of it, a bare garden, hedged with thorn, occupied the land between the river and the road. The house was two stories high, with two large rooms on each. It opened not directly on the garden, but on a causewayed path, or passage, giving on the road on the one hand, and closed on the other by the tall willows and elders that bordered on the stream. And it was this strip of causeway that enjoyed among the young parishioners of Balweary so infamous a reputation. The minister walked there often after dark, sometimes groaning aloud in the instancy of his unspoken prayers; and when he was from home, and the manse door was locked, the more daring school-boys ventured, with beating hearts, to "follow my leader" across that legendary spot.

This atmosphere of terror, surrounding, as it did, a man of God of spotless character and orthodoxy, was a common cause of wonder and subject of inquiry among the few strangers who were led by chance or business into that unknown, outlying country. But many even of the people of the parish were ignorant of the strange events which had marked the first year of Mr. Soulis's ministrations; and among those who were better informed, some were naturally reticent, and others shy of that particular topic. Now and again, only, one of the older folk would warm into courage over his third tumbler, and recount the cause of the minister's strange looks and solitary life.

Fifty years syne, when Mr. Soulis cam' first into Ba'weary, he was still a young man,—a callant, the folk said,—fu' o' book-learnin' and grand at the exposition, but, as was natural in sae young a man, wi' nae leevin' experience in religion. The younger sort were greatly taken wi' his gifts and his gab; but auld, concerned, serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill supplied. It was before the days o' the Moderates—weary fa' them; but ill things are like guid—they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folk even then that said the Lord had left the college professors to their ain devices, an' the lads that went to study wi' them wad hae done mair and better sittin' in a peat-bog, like their forebears of the persecution, wi' a Bible under their oxters and a speerit o' prayer in their heart. There was nae doubt, onyway, but that Mr. Soulis had been ower-lang at the college. He was careful and troubled for mony things besides the ae thing needful. He had a feck o' books wi' him—mair than had ever been seen before in a' that presbytery; and a sair wark the carrier had wi' them, for they were a' like to have smooored in the Deil's Hag between this and Kilmackerlie. They were books o' divinity, to be sure, or so they ca'd them; but the serious were o' opinion there was little service for sae mony, when the hail o' God's Word would gang in the neuk of a plaid. Then he wad sit half the day and half the nicht forby, which was scant decent—writin', nae less; and first they were feared he wad read his sermons; and syne it proved he was writin' a book himsel', which was surely no fittin' for ane of his years an' sma' experience.

Onyway, it behooved him to get an auld, decent wife to keep

the manse for him an' see to his bit denners; and he was recommended to an auld limmer,—Janet M'Clour, they ca'd her,—and sae far left to himsel' as to be ower-persuaded. There was mony advised him to the contrar, for Janet was mair than suspekkit by the best folk in Ba'weary. Lang or that, she had had a wean to a dragoon; she hadnae come forrit for maybe thretty year; and bairns had seen her mumblin' to hersel' up on Key's Loan in the gloamin', whilk was an unco time an' place for a God-fearin' woman. Howsoever, it was the laird himsel' that had first tauld the minister o' Janet; and in thae days he wad have gane a far gate to plesure the laird. When folk tauld him that Janet was sib to the deil, it was a' superstition by his way of it; and when they cast up the Bible to him, an' the witch of Endor, he wad threep it down their thrapples that thir days were a' gane by, and the deil was mercifully restrained.

Weel, when it got about the clachan that Janet M'Clour was to be servant at the manse, the folk were fair mad wi' her an' him together; and some o' the guidwives had nae better to dae than get round her door-cheeks and chairge her wi' a' that was kent again' her, frae the sodger's bairn to John Tamson's twa kye. She was nae great speaker; folk usually let her gang her ain gait, an' she let them gang theirs, wi' neither fair guid-e'en nor fair guid-day; but when she buckled to, she had a tongue to deave the miller. Up she got, an' there wasnae an auld story in Ba'weary but she gart somebody lowp for it that day; they couldnae say ae thing but she could say twa to it; till, at the hinder end, the guidwives up and clautht haud of her, and clawed the coats aff her back, and pu'd her down the clachan to the water o' Dule, to see if she were a witch or no, soum or droun. The carline skirled till ye could hear her at the Hangin' Shaw, and she focht like ten; there was mony a guid wife bure the mark of her neist day an' mony a lang day after; and just in the hettest o' the collieshangie, wha suld come up (for his sins) but the new minister.

"Women," said he (and he had a grand voice), "I charge you in the Lord's name to let her go."

Janet ran to him—she was fair wud wi' terror—an' clang to him, an' prayed him, for Christ's sake, save her frae the cummers; an' they, for their pairt, tauld him a' that was kent, and maybe mair.

"Woman," says he to Janet, "is this true?"

"As the Lord sees me," says she, "as the Lord made me, no a word o' 't. Forby the bairn," says she, "I've been a decent woman a' my days."

"Will you," says Mr. Soulis, "in the name of God, and before me, His unworthy minister, renounce the devil and his works?" Weel, it wad appear that, when he askit that, she gave a girn that fairly frichtit them that saw her, an' they could hear her teeth play dirl together in her chafes; but there was naething for it but the ae way or the ither; an' Janet lifted up her hand and renounced the deil before them a'.

"And now," says Mr. Soulis to the guidwives, "home with ye, one and all, and pray to God for His forgiveness."

And he gied Janet his arm, though she had little on her but a sark, and took her up the clachan to her ain door like a leddy of the land, an' her scrieghin' and laughin' as was a scandal to be heard.

There were mony grave folk lang ower their prayers that nicht; but when the morn cam' there was sic a fear fell upon a' Ba'weary that the bairns hid theirsels, and even the men folk stood and keekit frae their doors. For there was Janet comin' doun the clachan,—her or her likeness, nane could tell,—wi' her neck thrawn, and her heid on ae side, like a body that has been hangit, and a girn on her face like an unstreakit corp. By-an'-by they got used wi' it, and even speered at her to ken what was wrang; but frae that day forth she couldnae speak like a Christian woman, but slavered and played click wi' her teeth like a pair o' shears; and frae that day forth the name o' God cam' never on her lips. Whiles she wad try to say it, but it michtnae be. Them that kenned best said least; but they never gied that Thing the name o' Janet M'Clour; for the auld Janet, by their way o' 't, was in muckle hell that day. But the minister was neither to haud nor to bind; he preached about naething but the folk's cruelty that had gien her a stroke of the palsy; he skelpt the bairns that meddled her; and he had her up to the manse that same nicht, and dwalled there a' his lane wi' her under the Hangin' Shaw.

Weel, time gaed by, and the idler sort commenced to think mair lightly o' that black business. The minister was weel thocht o'; he was aye late at the writing—folk wad see his can'le doon by the Dule Water after twal' at e'en; and he seemed pleased wi' himsel' and upsitten as at first, though a' body could see that he was dwining. As for Janet, she cam' an' she gaed; if she didnae speak muckle afore, it was reason she should speak less then; she

meddled naeboddy; but she was an eldritch thing to see, an' nane wad hae mistrusted wi' her for Ba'weary glebe.

About the end o' July there cam' a spell o' weather, the like o' 't never was in that countryside; it was lown an' het an' heartless; the herds couldnae win up the Black Hill, the bairns were ower-weariet to play; an' yet it was gousty too, wi' claps o' het wund that rummled in the glens, and bits o' shouers that slockened naething. We aye thoct it but to thun'er on the morn; but the morn cam', an' the morn's morning, and it was aye the same uncanny weather; sair on folks and bestial. Of a' that were the waur, nane suffered like Mr. Soulis; he could neither sleep nor eat, he tauld his elders; an' when he wasnae writin' at his weary book, he wad be stravaguin' ower a' the country-side like a man possessed, when a' body else was blithe to keep caller ben the house.

Abune Hangin' Shaw, in the bield o' the Black Hill, there's a bit enclosed grund wi' an iron yert; and it seems, in the auld days, that was the kirkyaird o' Ba'weary, and consecrated by the papists before the blessed licht shone upon the kingdom. It was a great howff, o' Mr. Soulis's onyway; there he would sit an' consider his sermons and inded it's a bielly bit. Weel, as he came ower the wast end o' the Black Hill, ae day, he saw first twa, an' syne fower, an' syne seven corbie craws fleein' round an' round abune the auld kirkyaird. They flew laigh and heavy, an' squawked to ither as they gaed; and it was clear to Mr. Soulis that something had put them frae their ordinar. He wasna easy fleyed, an' gaed straucht up to the wa's; and what suld he find there but a man, or the appearance of a man, sittin' in the inside upon a grave. He was of a great stature, an' black as hell, and his een were singular to see. Mr. Soulis had heard tell o' black men, mony's the time; but there was something unco abut this black man that daunted him. Het as he was, he took a kind o' cauld grue in the marrow o' his banes; but up he spak' for a' that; an' says he, "My friend, are you a stranger in this place?" The black man answered never a word; he got upon his feet, an' begude to hersel to the wa' on the far side; but he aye lookit at the minister; an' the minister stood an' lookit back; till a' in a meenute the black man was ower the wa' an' rinnin' for the bield o' the trees. Mr. Soulis, he hardly kenned why, ran after him; but he was sair forjaskit wi' his walk an' the het, unhalosome weather; and rin as he likit, he got nae mair than a glist o' the black man among the birks, till he won down to the foot o' the hillside, an' there he saw him ance mair, gaun, hap, step, an' lowp, ower Dule Water to the manse.

Mr. Soulis wasna weel pleased that this fearsome gangrel suld mak' sae free wi' Ba'weary manse; an' he ran the harder, an' wet shoon, ower the burn, an' up the walk; but the deil a black man was there to see. He stepped out upon the road, but there was naeboddy there; he gaed a' ower the gairden, but na, nae black man. At the hinder end, and a bit feard as was but natural, he lifted the hasp and into the manse; and there was Janet M'Clour before his een, wi' her thrawn craig, and nane sae pleased to see him. And he aye minded sinsyne, when first he set his een upon her, he had the same cauld and deidy grue.

"Janet," says he, "have you seen a black man?"

"A black man?" quo' she. "Save us a'! Ye 're no wise, minister. There's nae black man in a' Ba'weary."

But she didna speak plain, ye maun understand; but yam-yammered, like a powny wi' the bit in its moo.

"Weel," says he, "Janet, if there was nae black man, I have spoken with the Accuser of the Brethren."

And he sat down like ane wi' a fever, an' his teeth chittered in his heid.

"Hoots!" says she, "think shame to yoursel', minister," an' gied him a drap brandy that she kept aye by her.

Syne Mr. Soulis gaed into his study amang a' his books. It's a lang, laigh, mirk chalmers, perishin' cauld in winter, an' no very dry even in the top o' the simmer, for the manse stands near the burn. Sae down he sat, and thoct of a' that had come an' gane since he was in Ba'weary, an' his hame, an' the days when he was a bairn an' ran daffin' on the braes; and that black man aye ran in his heid like the owercome of a sang. Aye the mair he thoct, the mair he thoct o' the black man. He tried the prayer, an' the words wouldnae come to him; an' he tried, they say, to write at his book, but he couldnae mak' nae mair o' that. There was whiles he thoct the black man was at his oxter, an' the swat stood upon him cauld as well-water; and there was other whiles when he cam' to himsel' like a christened bairn and minded naething.

The upshot was that he gaed to the window an' stood glowrin' at Dule Water. The trees are unco thick, an' the water lies deep an' black under the manse; and there was Janet washing' the cla'es wi' her coats kilted. She had her back to the minister, an' he for his

pairt, hardly kenned what he was lookin' at. Syne she turned round, an' shawed her face; Mr. Soulis had the same cauld grue as twice that day afore, an' it was borne in upon him what folk said, that Janet was deid lang syne, an' this was a bogle in her clay-cauld flesh. He drew back a pickle and he scanned her narrowly. She was tramp-trampin' in the cla'es, croonin' to hersel'; and eh! Gude guide us, but it was a fearsome face. Whiles she sang louder, but there was nae man born o' woman that could tell the words o' her sang; an' whiles she lookit sidelang down, but there was naething there for her to look at. There gaed a scunner through the flesh upon his banes; and that was Heeven's advertisement. But Mr. Soulis just blamed himsel', he said, to think sae ill of a puir auld afflicted wife that hadnae a freend forby himsel'; an' he put up a bit prayer for him an' her, an' drank a little caller water,—for his heart rose again' the meat,—an' gaed up to his naked bed in the gloaming.

That was a night that has never been forgotten in Ba'weary, the nicht o' the seeventeenth of August, seventeen hun'er an' twal'. It had been het afore, as I hae said, but that nicht it was hetter than ever. The sun gaed down amang unco-lookin' clouds; it fell as mirk as the pit; no a star, no a breath o' wund; ye couldnae see your han' afore your face, and even the auld folk cuist the covers frae their beds and lay pechin' for their breath. Wi' a' that he had upon his mind, it was gey and unlikely Mr. Soulis wad get muckle sleep. He lay an' he tumbled; the gude, caller bed that he got into brunt his very banes; whiles he slept, and whiles he wakened; whiles he heard the time o' nicht, and whiles a tike yowlin' up the muir, as if somebody was deid; whiles he thoct he heard bogles claverin' in his lug, an' whiles he saw spunkies in the room. He behooved, he judged, to be sick; an' sick he was—little he jaloosed the sickness.

At the hinder end, he got a clearness in his mind, sat up in his sark on the bedside, and fell thinkin' ance mair o' the black man an' Janet. He couldnae weel tell how,—maybe it was the cauld to his feet,—but it cam' in upon him wi' a spate that there was some connection between thir twa, an' that either or baith o' them were bogles. And just at that moment, in Janet's room, which was neist to his, there cam' a stamp o' feet as if men were wars'lin', an' then a loud bang; an' then a wund gaed reishling round the fower quarters of the house; an' then a' was ance mair as seelent as the grave.

Mr. Soulis was feard for neither man nor deevil. He got his tinder-box, an' lit a can'le, an' made three steps o' 't ower to Janet's door. It was on the hasp, an' he pushed it open, an' keeked baldly in. It was a big room, as big as the minister's ain, an' plenished wi' grand, auld, solid gear, for he had naething else. There was a fower-posted bed wi' auld tapestry; and a braw cabinet of aik, that was fu' o' the minister's divinity books, an' put there to be out o' the gate; an' a wheen duds o' Janet's lying here and there about the floor. But nae Janet could Mr. Soulis see, nor ony sign of a contention. In he gaed (an' there's few that wad hae followed him), an' lookit a' round, an' listened. But there was naethin' to be heard neither inside the manse nor in a' Ba'weary parish, an' naethin' to be seen but the muckle shadows turnin' round the can'le. An' then a' at aince the minister's heart played dunt an' stood stock-still, an' a cauld wund blew amang the hairs o' his heid. Whaten a weary sicht was that for the puir man's een! For there was Janet hangin' frae a nail beside the auld aik cabinet; her heid aye lay on her shoulther, her een were steeked, the tongue projecket frae her mouth, and her heels were twa feet clear abune the floor.

"God forgive us all!" thoct Mr. Soulis, "poor Janet's dead."

He cam' a step nearer to the corp; an' then his heart fair whammled in his inside. For—by what cantrip it wad ill beseem a man to judge—she was hingin' frae a single nail an' by a single wursted thread for darnin' hose.

It's an awfu' thing to be your lane at nicht wi' siccan prodigies o' darkness; but Mr. Soulis was strong in the Lord. He turned an' gaed his ways oot o' that room, and locket the door ahint him; and step by step doon the stairs, as heavy as leed; and set doon the can'le on the table at the stair-foot. He couldnae pray, he couldnae think, he was dreepin' wi' caul' swat, an' naething could he hear but the dunt-dunt-duntin' o' his ain heart. He micht maybe have stood there an hour, or maybe twa, he minded sae little; when a' o' a sudden he heard a laigh, uncanny steer upstairs; a foot gaed to an' fro in the cham'er whair the corp was hingin'; syne the door was opened, though he minded weel that he had lockit it; an' syne there was a step upon the landin', an' it seemed to him as if the corp was lookin' ower the tail and down upon him whaur he stood.

He took up the can'le again (for he couldnae want the licht),

and, as saftly as ever he could, gaed straucht out o' the manse an' to the far end o' the causeway. It was aye pit-mirk; the flame o' the can'le, when he set it on the grund, brunt steedy and clear as in a room; naething moved, but the Dule Water seepin' and sabbin' doon the glen, an' yon unhaly footstep that cam' plodding' doun the stairs inside the manse. He kenned the foot ower-weel, for it was Janet's; and at ilka step that cam' a wee thing nearer, the cauld got deeper in his vitals. He commended his soul to Him that made an' keepit him; "and, O Lord," said he, "give me strength this night to war against the powers of evil."

By this time the foot was comin' through the passage for the door; he could hear a hand skirt along the wa', as if the fearsome thing was feelin' for its way. The saughs tossed an' maned together, a long sigh cam' ower the hills, the flame o' the can'le was blawn aboot; an' there stood the corp of Thrawn Janet, wi' her grogram gown an' her black mutch, wi' the heid aye upon the shouther, an' the girn still upon the face o' 't,—leevin', ye wad hae said—deid, as Mr. Soulis weel kenned,—upon the threshold o' the manse.

It's a strange thing that the saul of man should be thirled into his perishable body; but the minister saw that, an' his heart didnae break.

She didnae stand there lang; she began to move again, an' cam' slowly toward Mr. Soulis whaur he stood under the saughs. A' the life o' his body, a' the strength o' his speerit, were glowerin' frae

his een. It seemed she was gaun to speak, but wanted words, an' made a sign wi' the left hand. There cam' a clap o' wund, like a cat's fuff; oot gaed the can'le, the saughs skrieghed like folk' an' Mr. Soulis kenned that, live or die, this was the end o' 't.

"Witch, beldam, devil!" he cried, "I charge you, by the power of God, begone—if you be dead, to the grave; if you be damned, to hell."

An' at that moment the Lord's ain hand out o' the heevens struck the Horror whaur it stood; the auld, deid, desecrated corp o' the witch-wife, sae lang keepit frae the grave and hirselled round by deils, lowed up like a brunstane spunk and fell in ashes to the grund; the thunder followed, peal on dirling peal, the rairing rain upon the back o' that; and Mr. Soulis lowped through the garden hedge, and ran, wi' skelloch upon skelloch, for the clachan.

That same mornin' John Christie saw the black man pass the Muckle Cairn as it was chappin' six; before eicht, he gaed by the change-house at Knockdow; an' no lang after, Sandy M'Lellan saw him gaun linkin' doun the braes frae Kilmackerlie. There's little doubt but it was him that dwalled sae lang in Janet's body; but he was awa' at last; and sinsyne the deil has never fashed us in Ba'weary.

But it was a sair dispensation for the minister; lang, lang he lay ravin' in his bed; and frae that hour to this, he was the man ye ken the day.



Solange

Dr Ledru's Story of the Reign of Terror

By Alexandre Dumas

Portrait of a Lady
Anthony van Dyck



Leaving l'Abbaye, I walked straight across the Place Turenne to the Rue Tournon, where I had lodgings, when I heard a woman scream for help.

It could not be an assault to commit robbery, for it was hardly ten o'clock in the evening. I ran to the corner of the place whence the sounds proceeded, and by the light of the moon, just then breaking through the clouds, I beheld a woman in the midst of a patrol of sans-culottes.

The lady observed me at the same instant, and seeing, by the character of my dress, that I did not belong to the common order of people, she ran toward me, exclaiming:

"There is M. Albert! He knows me! He will tell you that I am the daughter of Mme. Ledieu, the laundress."

With these words the poor creature, pale and trembling with excitement, seized my arm and clung to me as a shipwrecked sailor to a spar.

"No matter whether you are the daughter of Mme. Ledieu or some one else, as you have no pass, you must go with us to the guard-house."

The young girl pressed my arm. I perceived in this pressure the expression of her great distress of mind. I understood it.

"So it is you, my poor Solange?" I said. "What are you doing here?"

"There, messieurs!" she exclaimed in tones of deep anxiety; "do you believe me now?"

"You might at least say 'citizens!'"

"Ah, sergeant, do not blame me for speaking that way," said the pretty young girl; "my mother has many customers among the great people, and taught me to be polite. That's how I acquired this bad habit—the habit of the aristocrats; and, you know, sergeant, it's so hard to shake off old habits!"

This answer, delivered in trembling accents, concealed a delicate irony that was lost on all save me. I asked myself, who is this young woman? The mystery seemed complete. This alone was clear; she was not the daughter of a laundress.

"How did I come here, Citizen Albert?" she asked. "Well, I will tell you. I went to deliver some washing. The lady was not at home, and so I waited; for in these hard times every one needs what little money is coming to him. In that way it grew dark, and so I fell among these gentlemen—beg pardon, I would say citizens. They asked for my pass. As I did not have it with me, they were going to take me to the guard-house. I cried out in terror, which brought you to the scene; and as luck would have it, you are a friend. I said to myself, as M. Albert knows my name to be Solange Ledieu, he will vouch for me; and that you will, will you not, M. Albert?"

"Certainly, I will vouch for you."

"Very well," said the leader of the patrol; "and who, pray, will vouch for you, my friend?"

"Danton! Do you know him? Is he a good patriot?"

"Oh, if Danton will vouch for you, I have nothing to say."

"Well, there is a session of the Cordeliers to-day. Let us go there."

"Good," said the leader. "Citizens, let us go to the Cordeliers."

The club of the Cordeliers met at the old Cordelier monastery in the Rue l'Observance. We arrived there after scarce a minute's walk. At the door I tore a page from my note-book, wrote a few words upon it with a lead pencil, gave it to the sergeant, and requested him to hand it to Danton, while I waited outside with the men.

The sergeant entered the clubhouse and returned with Danton.

"What!" said he to me; "they have arrested you, my friend? You, the friend of Camilles—you, one of the most loyal republicans? Citizens," he continued, addressing the sergeant, "I vouch for him. Is that sufficient?"

"You vouch for him. Do you also vouch for her?" asked the stubborn sergeant.

"For her? To whom do you refer?"

"This girl."

"For everything; for everybody who may be in his company. Does that satisfy you?"

"Yes," said the man; "especially since I have had the privilege of seeing you."

With a cheer for Danton, the patrol marched away. I was about to thank Danton, when his name was called repeatedly within.

"Pardon me, my friend," he said; "you hear? There is my hand; I must leave you—the left. I gave my right to the sergeant. Who knows, the good patriot may have scrofula?"

"I'm coming!" he exclaimed, addressing those within in his mighty voice with which he could pacify or arouse the masses. He hastened into the house.

I remained standing at the door, alone with my unknown.

"And now, my lady," I said, "whither would you have me escort you? I am at your disposal."

"Why, to Mme. Ledieu," she said with a laugh. "I told you she was my mother."

"And where does Mme. Ledieu reside?"

"Rue Ferou, 24."

"Then, let us proceed to Rue Ferou, 24."

On the way neither of us spoke a word. But by the light of the moon, enthroned in serene glory in the sky, I was able to observe her at my leisure. She was a charming girl of twenty or twenty-two—brunette, with large blue eyes, more expressive of intelligence than melancholy—a finely chiseled nose, mocking lips, teeth of pearl, hands like a queen's, and feet like a child's; and all these, in spite of her costume of a laundress, betokened an aristocratic air that had aroused the sergeant's suspicions not without justice.

Arrived at the door of the house, we looked at each other a moment in silence.

"Well, my dear M. Albert, what do you wish?" my fair unknown asked with a smile.

"I was about to say, my dear Mlle. Solange, that it was hardly worth while to meet if we are to part so soon."

"Oh, I beg ten thousand pardons! I find it was well worth the while; for if I had not met you, I should have been dragged to the guard-house, and there it would have been discovered that I am not the daughter of Mme. Ledieu—in fact, it would have developed that I am an aristocrat, and in all likelihood they would have cut off my head."

"You admit, then, that you are an aristocrat?"

"I admit nothing."

"At least you might tell me your name."

"Solange."

"I know very well that this name, which I gave you on the inspiration of the moment, is not your right name."

"No matter; I like it, and I am going to keep it—at least for you."

"Why should you keep it for me? if we are not to meet again?"

"I did not say that. I only said that if we should meet again it will not be necessary for you to know my name any more than that I should know yours. To me you will be known as Albert, and to you I shall always be Solange."

"So be it, then; but I say, Solange," I began.

"I am listening, Albert," she replied.

"You are an aristocrat—that you admit."

"If I did not admit it, you would surmise it, and so my admission would be divested of half its merit."

"And you were pursued because you were suspected of being an aristocrat?"

"I fear so."

"And you are hiding to escape persecution?"

"In the Rue Ferou, No. 24, with Mme. Ledieu, whose husband was my father's coachman. You see, I have no secret from you."

"And your father?"

"I shall make no concealment, my dear Albert, of anything that relates to me. But my father's secrets are not my own. My father is in hiding, hoping to make his escape. That is all I can tell you."

"And what are you going to do?"

"Go with my father, if that be possible. If not, allow him to depart without me until the opportunity offers itself to me to join him."

"Were you coming from your father when the guard arrested you to-night?"

"Yes."

"Listen, dearest Solange."

"I am all attention."

"You observed all that took place to-night?"

"Yes. I saw that you had powerful influence."

"I regret my power is not very great. However, I have friends."

"I made the acquaintance of one of them."

"And you know he is not one of the least powerful men of the times."

"Do you intend to enlist his influence to enable my father to escape?"

"No, I reserve him for you."

"But my father?"

"I have other ways of helping your father."

"Other ways?" exclaimed Solange, seizing my hands and studying me with an anxious expression.

"If I serve your father, will you then sometimes think kindly of me?"

"Oh, I shall all my life hold you in grateful remembrance!"
 She uttered these words with an enchanting expression of devotion. Then she looked at me beseechingly and said:
 "But will that satisfy you?"
 "Yes," I said.
 "Ah, I was not mistaken. You are kind, generous. I thank you for my father and myself. Even if you should fail, I shall be grateful for what you have already done!"
 "When shall we meet again, Solange?"
 "When do you think it necessary to see me again?"
 "To-morrow, when I hope to have good news for you."
 "Well, then, to-morrow."
 "Where?"
 "Here."
 "Here in the street?"
 "Well, mon Dieu!" she exclaimed. "You see, it is the safest place. For thirty minutes, while we have been talking here, not a soul has passed."
 "Why may I not go to you, or you come to me?"
 "Because it would compromise the good people if you should come to me, and you would incur serious risk if I should go to you."
 "Oh, I would give you the pass of one of my relatives."
 "And send your relative to the guillotine if I should be accidentally arrested!"
 "True. I will bring you a pass made out in the name of Solange."
 "Charming! You observe Solange is my real name."
 "And the hour?"
 "The same at which we met to-night—ten o'clock, if you please."
 "All right; ten o'clock. And how shall we meet?"
 "That is very simple. Be at the door at five minutes of ten, and at ten I will come down."
 "Then, at ten to-morrow, dear Solange."
 "To-morrow at ten, dear Albert."
 I wanted to kiss her hand; she offered me her brow.
 The next day I was in the street at half past nine. At a quarter of ten Solange opened the door. We were both ahead of time.
 With one leap I was by her side.
 "I see you have good news," she said.
 "Excellent! First, here is a pass for you."
 "First my father!"
 She repelled my hand.
 "Your father is saved, if he wishes."
 "Wishes, you say? What is required of him?"
 "He must trust me."
 "That is assured."
 "Have you seen him?"
 "Yes."
 "You have discussed the situation with him?"
 "It was unavoidable. Heaven will help us."
 "Did you tell your father all?"
 "I told him you had saved my life yesterday, and that you would perhaps save his to-morrow."
 "To-morrow! Yes, quite right; to-morrow I shall save his life, if it is his will."
 "How? What? Speak! Speak! If that were possible, how fortunately all things have come to pass!"
 "However—" I began hesitatingly.
 "Well?"
 "It will be impossible for you to accompany him."
 "I told you I was resolute."
 "I am quite confident, however, that I shall be able later to procure a passport for you."
 "First tell me about my father; my own distress is less important."
 "Well, I told you I had friends, did I not?"
 "Yes."
 "To-day I sought out one of them."
 "Proceed."
 "A man whose name is familiar to you; whose name is a guarantee of courage and honor."
 "And this man is?"
 "Marceau."
 "General Marceau?"
 "Yes."
 "True, he will keep a promise."
 "Well, he has promised."
 "Mon Dieu! How happy you make me! What has he promised? Tell me all."

"He has promised to help us."
 "In what manner?"
 "In a very simple manner. Kléber has just had him promoted to the command of the western army. He departs to-morrow night."
 "To-morrow night! We shall have no time to make the smallest preparation."
 "There are no preparations to make."
 "I do not understand."
 "He will take your father with him."
 "My father?"
 "Yes, as his secretary. Arrived in the Vendée, your father will pledge his word to the general to undertake nothing against France. From there he will escape to Brittany, and from Brittany to England. When he arrives in London, he will inform you; I shall obtain a passport for you, and you will join him in London."
 "To-morrow," exclaimed Solange; "my father departs tomorrow!"
 "There is no time to waste."
 "My father has not been informed."
 "Inform him."
 "To-night?"
 "To-night."
 "But how, at this hour?"
 "You have a pass and my arm."
 "True. My pass."
 I gave it to her. She thrust it into her bosom.
 "Now? your arm?"
 I gave her my arm, and we walked away. When we arrived at the Place Turenne—that is, the spot where we had met the night before—she said: "Await me here."
 I bowed and waited.
 She disappeared around the corner of what was formerly the Hôtel Malignon. After a lapse of fifteen minutes she returned.
 "Come," she said, "my father wishes to receive and thank you." She took my arm and led me up to the Rue St. Guillaume, opposite the Hôtel Mortemart. Arrived here, she took a bunch of keys from her pocket, opened a small, concealed door, took me by the hand, conducted me up two flights of steps, and knocked in a peculiar manner.
 A man of forty-eight or fifty years opened the door. He was dressed as a working man and appeared to be a bookbinder. But at the first utterance that burst from his lips, the evidence of the seigneur was unmistakable.
 "Monsieur," he said, "Providence has sent you to us. I regard you an emissary of fate. Is it true that you can save me, or, what is more, that you wish to save me?"
 I admitted him completely to my confidence. I informed him that Marceau would take him as his secretary, and would exact no promise other than that he would not take up arms against France.
 "I cheerfully promise it now, and will repeat it to him."
 "I thank you in his name as well as in my own."
 "But when does Marceau depart?"
 "To-morrow."
 "Shall I go to him to-night?"
 "Whenever you please; he expects you."
 Father and daughter looked at each other.
 "I think it would be wise to go this very night," said Solange.
 "I am ready; but if I should be arrested, seeing that I have no permit?"
 "Here is mine."
 "But you?"
 "Oh, I am known."
 "Where does Marceau reside?"
 "Rue de l'Université, 40, with his sister, Mlle. Dégravières-Marceau."
 "Will you accompany me?"
 "I shall follow you at a distance, to accompany mademoiselle home when you are gone."
 "How will Marceau know that I am the man of whom you spoke to him?"
 "You will hand him this tri-colored cockade; that is the sign of identification."
 "And how shall I reward my liberator?"
 "By allowing him to save your daughter also."
 "Very well."
 He put on his hat and extinguished the lights, and we descended by the gleam of the moon which penetrated the stair-windows.
 At the foot of the steps he took his daughter's arm, and by way

of the Rue des Saints Pères we reached Rue de l'Université. I followed them at a distance of ten paces. We arrived at No. 40 without having met any one. I rejoined them there.

"That is a good omen," I said; "do you wish me to go up with you?"

"No. Do not compromise yourself any further. Await my daughter here."

I bowed.

"And now, once more, thanks and farewell," he said, giving me his hand. "Language has no words to express my gratitude. I pray that heaven may some day grant me the opportunity of giving fuller expression to my feelings."

I answered him with a pressure of the hand.

He entered the house. Solange followed him; but she, too, pressed my hand before she entered.

In ten minutes the door was reopened.

"Well?" I asked.

"Your friend," she said, "is worthy of his name; he is as kind and considerate as yourself. He knows that it will contribute to my happiness to remain with my father until the moment of departure. His sister has ordered a bed placed in her room. To-morrow at three o'clock my father will be out of danger. To-morrow evening at ten I shall expect you in the Rue Ferou, if the gratitude of a daughter who owes her father's life to you is worth the trouble."

"Oh, be sure I shall come. Did your father charge you with any message for me?"

"He thanks you for your pass, which he returns to you, and begs you to join him as soon as possible."

"Whenever it may be your desire to go," I said, with a strange sensation at my heart.

"At least, I must know where I am to join him," she said. "Ah, you are not yet rid of me!"

I seized her hand and pressed it against my heart, but she offered me her brow, as on the previous evening, and said: "Until to-morrow."

I kissed her on the brow; but now I no longer strained her hand against my breast, but her heaving bosom, her throbbing heart.

I went home in a state of delirious ecstasy such as I had never experienced. Was it the consciousness of a generous action, or was it love for this adorable creature? I know not whether I slept or woke. I only know that all the harmonies of nature were singing within me; that the night seemed endless, and the day eternal; I know that though I wished to speed the time, I did not wish to lose a moment of the days still to come.

The next day I was in the Rue Ferou at nine o'clock. At half-past nine Solange made her appearance.

She approached me and threw her arms around my neck.

"Saved!" she said; "my father is saved! And this I owe you. Oh, how I love you!"

Two weeks later Solange received a letter announcing her father's safe arrival in England.

The next day I brought her a passport.

When Solange received it she burst into tears.

"You do not love me!" she exclaimed.

"I love you better than my life," I replied; "but I pledged your father my word, and I must keep it."

"Then, I will break mine," she said. "Yes, Albert; if you have the heart to let me go, I have not the courage to leave you."

Alas, she remained!

Three months had passed since that night on which we talked of her escape, and in all that time not a word of parting had passed her lips.

Solange had taken lodgings in the Rue Turenne. I had rented them in her name. I knew no other, while she always addressed me as Albert. I had found her a place as teacher in a young ladies' seminary solely to withdraw her from the espionage of the revolutionary police, which had become more scrutinizing than ever.

Sundays we passed together in the small dwelling, from the bedroom of which we could see the spot where we had first met. We exchanged letters daily, she writing to me under the name of Solange, and I to her under that of Albert.

Those three months were the happiest of my life.

In the meantime I was making some interesting experiments suggested by one of the guillotiniere. I had obtained permission to make certain scientific tests with the bodies and heads of those who perished on the scaffold. Sad to say, available subjects were not wanting. Not a day passed but thirty or forty persons were guillotined, and blood flowed so copiously on the Place de la Révolution that it became necessary to dig a trench three feet

deep around the scaffolding. This trench was covered with deals. One of them loosened under the feet of an eight-year-old lad, who fell into the abominable pit and was drowned.

For self-evident reasons I said nothing to Solange of the studies that occupied my attention during the day. In the beginning my occupation had inspired me with pity and loathing, but as time wore on I said: "These studies are for the good of humanity," for I hoped to convince the lawmakers of the wisdom of abolishing capital punishment.

The Cemetery of Clamart had been assigned to me, and all the heads and trunks of the victims of the executioner had been placed at my disposal. A small chapel in one corner of the cemetery had been converted into a kind of laboratory for my benefit. You know, when the queens were driven from the palaces, God was banished from the churches.

Every day at six the horrible procession filed in. The bodies were heaped together in a wagon, the heads in a sack. I chose some bodies and heads in a haphazard fashion, while the remainder were thrown into a common grave.

In the midst of this occupation with the dead, my love for Solange increased from day to day; while the poor child reciprocated my affection with the whole power of her pure soul.

Often I had thought of making her my wife; often we had mutually pictured to ourselves the happiness of such a union. But in order to become my wife, it would be necessary for Solange to reveal her name; and this name, which was that of an emigrant, an aristocrat, meant death.

Her father had repeatedly urged her by letter to hasten her departure, but she had informed him of our engagement. She had requested his consent, and he had given it, so that all had gone well to this extent.

The trial and execution of the queen, Marie Antoinette, had plunged me, too, into deepest sadness. Solange was all tears, and we could not rid ourselves of a strange feeling of despondency, a presentiment of approaching danger, that compressed our hearts. In vain I tried to whisper courage to Solange. Weeping, she reclined in my arms, and I could not comfort her, because my own words lacked the ring of confidence.

We passed the night together as usual, but the night was even more depressing than the day. I recall now that a dog, locked up in a room below us, howled till two o'clock in the morning. The next day we were told that the dog's master had gone away with the key in his pocket, had been arrested on the way, tried at three, and executed at four.

The time had come for us to part. Solange's duties at the school began at nine o'clock in the morning. Her school was in the vicinity of the Botanic Gardens. I hesitated long to let her go; she, too, was loath to part from me. But it must be. Solange was prone to be an object of unpleasant inquiries.

I called a conveyance and accompanied her as far as the Rue des Fosses-Saint-Bernard, where I got out and left her to pursue her way alone. All the way we lay mutely wrapped in each other's arms, mingling tears with our kisses.

After leaving the carriage, I stood as if rooted to the ground. I heard Solange call me, but I dared not go to her, because her face, moist with tears, and her hysterical manner were calculated to attract attention.

Utterly wretched, I returned home, passing the entire day in writing to Solange. In the evening I sent her an entire volume of love-pledges.

My letter had hardly gone to the post when I received one from her.

She had been sharply reprimanded for coming late; had been subjected to a severe cross-examination, and threatened with forfeiture of her next holiday. But she vowed to join me even at the cost of her place. I thought I should go mad at the prospect of being parted from her a whole week. I was more depressed because a letter which had arrived from her father appeared to have been tampered with.

I passed a wretched night and a still more miserable day.

The next day the weather was appalling. Nature seemed to be dissolving in a cold, ceaseless rain—a rain like that which announces the approach of winter. All the way to the laboratory my ears were tortured with the criers announcing the names of the condemned, a large number of men, women, and children. The bloody harvest was over-rich. I should not lack subjects for my investigations that day.

The day ended early. At four o'clock I arrived at Clamart; it was almost night.

The view of the cemetery, with its large, new-made graves; the sparse, leafless trees that swayed in the wind, was desolate, almost

appalling.

A large, open pit yawned before me. It was to receive to-day's harvest from the Place de la Révolution. An exceedingly large number of victims was expected, for the pit was deeper than usual.

Mechanically I approached the grave. At the bottom the water had gathered in a pool; my feet slipped; I came within an inch of falling in. My hair stood on end. The rain had drenched me to the skin. I shuddered and hastened into the laboratory.

It was, as I have said, an abandoned chapel. My eyes searched—I know not why—to discover if some traces of the holy purpose to which the edifice had once been devoted did not still adhere to the walls or to the altar; but the walls were bare, the altar empty. I struck a light and deposited the candle on the operating-table on which lay scattered a miscellaneous assortment of the strange instruments I employed. I sat down and fell into a reverie. I thought of the poor queen, whom I had seen in her beauty, glory, and happiness, yesterday carted to the scaffold, pursued by the execrations of a people, to-day lying headless on the common sinners' bier—she who had slept beneath the gilded canopy of the throne of the Tuileries and St. Cloud.

As I sat thus, absorbed in gloomy meditation, wind and rain without redoubled in fury. The rain-drops dashed against the window-panes, the storm swept with melancholy moaning through the branches of the trees. Anon there mingled with the violence of the elements the sound of wheels.

It was the executioner's red hearse with its ghastly freight from the Place de la Révolution.

The door of the little chapel was pushed ajar, and two men, drenched with rain, entered, carrying a sack between them.

"There, M. Ledru," said the guillotiner; "there is what your heart longs for! Be in no hurry this night! We'll leave you to enjoy their society alone. Orders are not to cover them up till to-morrow, and so they'll not take cold."

With a horrible laugh, the two executioners deposited the sack in a corner, near the former altar, right in front of me.

Thereupon they sauntered out, leaving open the door, which swung furiously on its hinges till my candle flashed and flared in the fierce draft.

I heard them unharness the horse, lock the cemetery, and go away.

I was strangely impelled to go with them, but an indefinable power fettered me in my place. I could not repress a shudder. I had no fear; but the violence of the storm, the splashing of the rain, the whistling sounds of the lashing branches, the shrill

vibration of the atmosphere, which made my candle tremble—all this filled me with a vague terror that began at the roots of my hair and communicated itself to every part of my body.

Suddenly I fancied I heard a voice! A voice at once soft and plaintive; a voice within the chapel, pronouncing the name of "Albert!"

I was startled.

"Albert!"

But one person in all the world addressed me by that name!

Slowly I directed my weeping eyes around the chapel, which, though small, was not completely lighted by the feeble rays of the candle, leaving the nooks and angles in darkness, and my look remained fixed on the blood-soaked sack near the altar with its hideous contents.

At this moment the same voice repeated the same name, only it sounded fainter and more plaintive.

"Albert!"

I bolted out of my chair, frozen with horror.

The voice seemed to proceed from the sack!

I touched myself to make sure that I was awake; then I walked toward the sack with my arms extended before me, but stark and staring with horror. I thrust my hand into it. Then it seemed to me as if two lips, still warm, pressed a kiss upon my fingers!

I had reached that stage of boundless terror where the excess of fear turns into the audacity of despair. I seized the head and collapsing in my chair, placed it in front of me.

Then I gave vent to a fearful scream. This head, with its lips still warm, with the eyes half closed, was the head of Solange!

I thought I should go mad.

Three times I called: "Solange! Solange! Solange!"

At the third time she opened her eyes and looked at me. Tears trickled down her cheeks; then a moist glow darted from her eyes, as if the soul were passing, and the eyes closed, never to open again.

I sprang to my feet a raving maniac, I wanted to fly; I knocked against the table; it fell. The candle was extinguished; the head rolled upon the floor, and I fell prostrate, as if a terrible fever had stricken me down—an icy-shudder convulsed me, and, with a deep sigh, I swooned.

The following morning at six the grave-diggers found me, cold as the flagstones on which I lay.

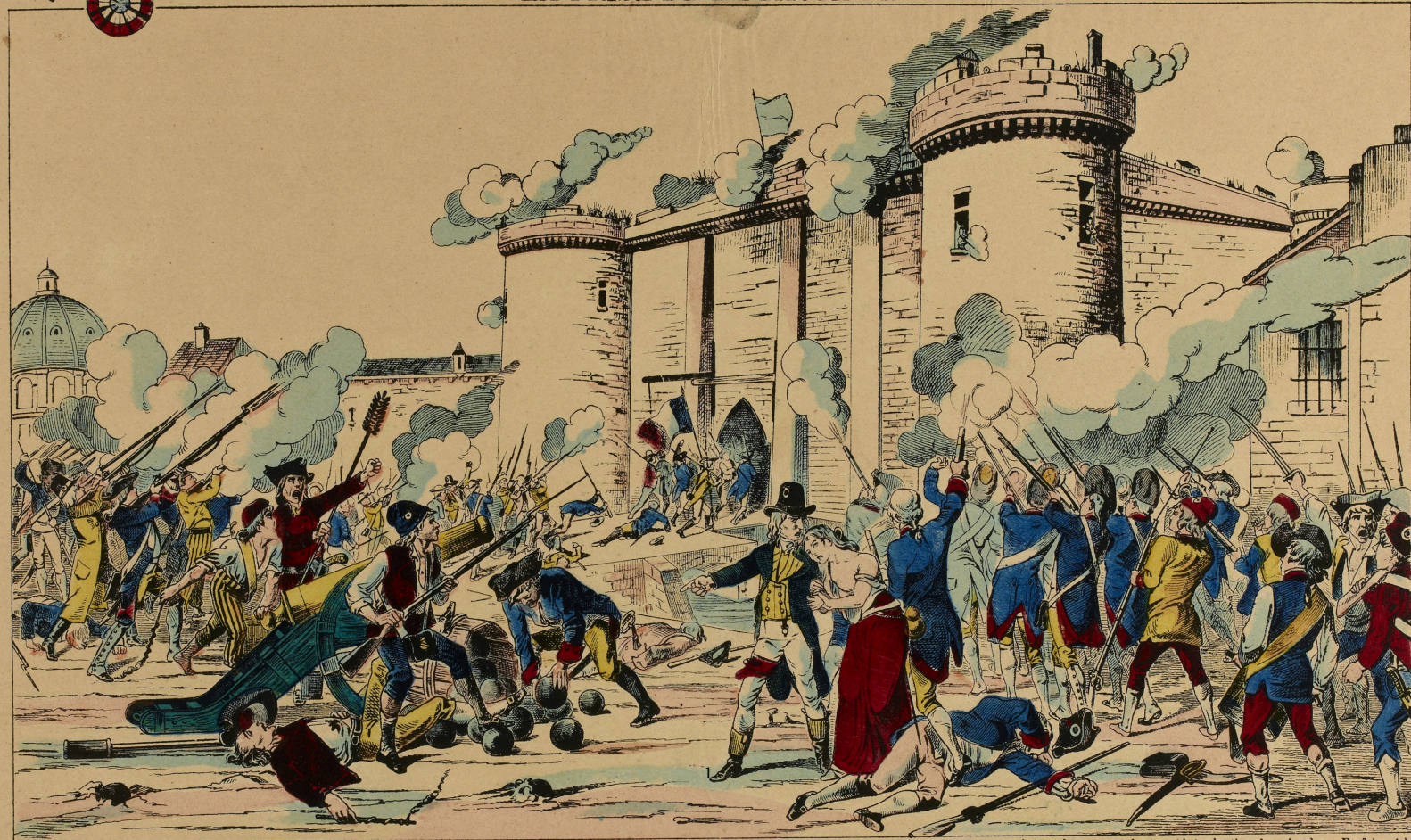
Solange, betrayed by her father's letter, had been arrested the same day, condemned, and executed.

The head that had called me, the eyes that had looked at me, were the head, the eyes, of Solange!

MARQUE DÉPOSÉE

LA PRISE DE LA BASTILLE

PLANCHE N° 704.



The Wind in the Willows

By Kenneth Grahame

He lay prostrate in his misery on
the floor



VIII TOAD'S ADVENTURES

WHEN Toad found himself immured in a dank and noisome dungeon, and knew that all the grim darkness of a medieval fortress lay between him and the outer world of sunshine and well-metalled high roads where he had lately been so happy, disporting himself as if he had bought up every road in England, he flung himself at full length on the floor, and shed bitter tears, and abandoned himself to dark despair. "This is the end of everything" (he said), "at least it is the end of the career of Toad, which is the same thing; the popular and handsome Toad, the rich and hospitable Toad, the Toad so free and careless and debonaire! How can I hope to be ever set at large again" (he said), "who have been imprisoned so justly for stealing so handsome a motor-car in such an audacious manner, and for such lurid and imaginative cheek, bestowed upon such a number of fat, red-faced policemen!" (Here his sobs choked him.) "Stupid animal that I was" (he said), "now I must languish in this dungeon, till people who were proud to say they knew me, have forgotten the very name of Toad! O wise old Badger!" (he said), "O clever, intelligent Rat and sensible Mole! What sound judgments, what a knowledge of men and matters you possess! O unhappy and forsaken Toad!" With lamentations such as these he passed his days and nights for several weeks, refusing his meals or intermediate light refreshments, though the grim and ancient gaoler, knowing that Toad's pockets were well lined, frequently pointed out that many comforts, and indeed luxuries, could by arrangement be sent in—at a price—from outside.

Now the gaoler had a daughter, a pleasant wench and good-hearted, who assisted her father in the lighter duties of his post. She was particularly fond of animals, and, besides her canary, whose cage hung on a nail in the massive wall of the keep by day, to the great annoyance of prisoners who relished an after-dinner nap, and was shrouded in an antimacassar on the parlour table at night, she kept several piebald mice and a restless revolving squirrel. This kind-hearted girl, pitying the misery of Toad, said to her father one day, "Father! I can't bear to see that poor beast so unhappy, and getting so thin! You let me have the managing of him. You know how fond of animals I am. I'll make him eat from my hand, and sit up, and do all sorts of things." Her father replied that she could do what she liked with him. He was tired of Toad, and his sulks and his airs and his meanness. So that day she went on her errand of mercy, and knocked at the door of Toad's cell.

"Now, cheer up, Toad," she said, coaxingly, on entering, "and sit up and dry your eyes and be a sensible animal. And do try and eat a bit of dinner. See, I've brought you some of mine, hot from the oven!"

It was bubble-and-squeak, between two plates, and its fragrance filled the narrow cell. The penetrating smell of cabbage reached the nose of Toad as he lay prostrate in his misery on the floor, and gave him the idea for a moment that perhaps life was not such a blank and desperate thing as he had imagined. But still he wailed, and kicked with his legs, and refused to be comforted. So the wise girl retired for the time, but, of course, a good deal of the smell of hot cabbage remained behind, as it will do, and Toad, between his sobs, sniffed and reflected, and gradually began to think new and inspiring thoughts: of chivalry, and poetry, and deeds still to be done; of broad meadows, and cattle browsing in them, raked by sun and wind; of kitchen-gardens, and straight herb-borders, and warm snap-dragon beset by bees; and of the comforting clink of dishes set down on the table at Toad Hall, and the scrape of chair-legs on the floor as every one pulled himself close up to his work. The air of the narrow cell took a rosy tinge; he began to think of his friends, and how they would surely be able to do something; of lawyers, and how they would have enjoyed his case, and what an ass he had been not to get in a few; and lastly, he thought of his own great cleverness and resource, and all that he was capable of if he only gave his great mind to it; and the cure was almost complete.

When the girl returned, some hours later, she carried a tray, with a cup of fragrant tea steaming on it; and a plate piled up with very hot buttered toast, cut thick, very brown on both sides, with the butter running through the holes in it in great golden drops, like honey from the honeycomb. The smell of that buttered toast simply talked to Toad, and with no uncertain voice; talked of warm kitchens, of breakfasts on bright frosty mornings, of cosy parlour firesides on winter evenings, when one's ramble was over and slippered feet were propped on the fender; of the purring of contented cats, and the twitter of sleepy canaries. Toad sat up on end once more, dried his eyes, sipped

his tea and munched his toast, and soon began talking freely about himself, and the house he lived in, and his doings there, and how important he was, and what a lot his friends thought of him.

The gaoler's daughter saw that the topic was doing him as much good as the tea, as indeed it was, and encouraged him to go on.

"Tell me about Toad Hall," said she. "It sounds beautiful."

"Toad Hall," said the Toad proudly, "is an eligible self-contained gentleman's residence very unique; dating in part from the fourteenth century, but replete with every modern convenience. Up-to-date sanitation. Five minutes from church, post-office, and golf-links, Suitable for—"

"Bless the animal," said the girl, laughing, "I don't want to take it. Tell me something real about it. But first wait till I fetch you some more tea and toast."

She tripped away, and presently returned with a fresh trayful; and Toad, pitching into the toast with avidity, his spirits quite restored to their usual level, told her about the boathouse, and the fish-pond, and the old walled kitchen-garden; and about the pig-styes, and the stables, and the pigeon-house, and the hen-house; and about the dairy, and the wash-house, and the china-cupboards, and the linen-presses (she liked that bit especially); and about the banqueting-hall, and the fun they had there when the other animals were gathered round the table and Toad was at his best, singing songs, telling stories, carrying on generally. Then she wanted to know about his animal-friends, and was very interested in all he had to tell her about them and how they lived, and what they did to pass their time. Of course, she did not say she was fond of animals as pets, because she had the sense to see that Toad would be extremely offended. When she said good night, having filled his water-jug and shaken up his straw for him, Toad was very much the same sanguine, self-satisfied animal that he had been of old. He sang a little song or two, of the sort he used to sing at his dinner-parties, curled himself up in the straw, and had an excellent night's rest and the pleasantest of dreams.

They had many interesting talks together, after that, as the dreary days went on; and the gaoler's daughter grew very sorry for Toad, and thought it a great shame that a poor little animal should be locked up in prison for what seemed to her a very trivial offence. Toad, of course, in his vanity, thought that her interest in him proceeded from a growing tenderness; and he could not help half-regretting that the social gulf between them was so very wide, for she was a comely lass, and evidently admired him very much.

One morning the girl was very thoughtful, and answered at random, and did not seem to Toad to be paying proper attention to his witty sayings and sparkling comments.

"Toad," she said presently, "just listen, please. I have an aunt who is a washerwoman."

"There, there," said Toad, graciously and affably, "never mind; think no more about it. I have several aunts who ought to be washerwomen."

"Do be quiet a minute, Toad," said the girl. "You talk too much, that's your chief fault, and I'm trying to think, and you hurt my head. As I said, I have an aunt who is a washerwoman; she does the washing for all the prisoners in this castle—we try to keep any paying business of that sort in the family, you understand. She takes out the washing on Monday morning, and brings it in on Friday evening. This is a Thursday. Now, this is what occurs to me: you're very rich—at least you're always telling me so—and she's very poor. A few pounds wouldn't make any difference to you, and it would mean a lot to her. Now, I think if she were properly approached—squared, I believe is the word you animals use—you could come to some arrangement by which she would let you have her dress and bonnet and so on, and you could escape from the castle as the official washerwoman. You're very alike in many respects—particularly about the figure."

"We're not," said the Toad in a huff. "I have a very elegant figure—for what I am."

"So has my aunt," replied the girl, "for what she is. But have it your own way. You horrid, proud, ungrateful animal, when I'm sorry for you, and trying to help you!"

"Yes, yes, that's all right; thank you very much indeed," said the Toad hurriedly. "But look here! you wouldn't surely have Mr. Toad, of Toad Hall, going about the country disguised as a washerwoman!"

"Then you can stop here as a Toad," replied the girl with much spirit. "I suppose you want to go off in a coach-and-four!"

Honest Toad was always ready to admit himself in the wrong.

"You are a good, kind, clever girl," he said, "and I am indeed a proud and a stupid toad. Introduce me to your worthy aunt, if you will be so kind, and I have no doubt that the excellent lady and I will be able to arrange terms satisfactory to both parties."

Next evening the girl ushered her aunt into Toad's cell, bearing his week's washing pinned up in a towel. The old lady had been prepared beforehand for the interview, and the sight of certain gold sovereigns that Toad had thoughtfully placed on the table in full view practically completed the matter and left little further to discuss. In return for his cash, Toad received a cotton print gown, an apron, a shawl, and a rusty black bonnet; the only stipulation the old lady made being that she should be gagged and bound and dumped down in a corner. By this not very convincing artifice, she explained, aided by picturesque fiction which she could supply herself, she hoped to retain her situation, in spite of the suspicious appearance of things.

Toad was delighted with the suggestion. It would enable him to leave the prison in some style, and with his reputation for being a desperate and dangerous fellow untarnished; and he readily helped the gaoler's daughter to make her aunt appear as much as possible the victim of circumstances over which she had no control.

"Now it's your turn, Toad," said the girl. "Take off that coat and waistcoat of yours; you're fat enough as it is."

Shaking with laughter, she proceeded to "hook-and-eye" him into the cotton print gown, arranged the shawl with a professional fold, and tied the strings of the rusty bonnet under his chin.

"You're the very image of her," she giggled, "only I'm sure you never looked half so respectable in all your life before. Now, good-bye, Toad, and good luck. Go straight down the way you came up; and if any one says anything to you, as they probably will, being but men, you can chaff back a bit, of course, but remember you're a widow woman, quite alone in the world, with a character to lose."

With a quaking heart, but as firm a footstep as he could command, Toad set forth cautiously on what seemed to be a most hare-brained and hazardous undertaking; but he was soon agreeably surprised to find how easy everything was made for him, and a little humbled at the thought that both his popularity, and the sex that seemed to inspire it, were really another's. The washerwoman's squat figure in its familiar cotton print seemed a passport for every barred door and grim gateway; even when he hesitated, uncertain as to the right turning to take, he found himself helped out of his difficulty by the warder at the next gate, anxious to be off to his tea, summoning him to come along sharp and not keep him waiting there all night. The chaff and the humorous sallies to which he was subjected, and to which, of course, he had to provide prompt and effective reply, formed, indeed, his chief danger; for Toad was an animal with a strong sense of his own dignity, and the chaff was mostly (he thought) poor and clumsy, and the humour of the sallies entirely lacking. However, he kept his temper, though with great difficulty, suited his retorts to his company and his supposed character, and did his best not to overstep the limits of good taste.

It seemed hours before he crossed the last courtyard, rejected the pressing invitations from the last guardroom, and dodged the outspread arms of the last warder, pleading with simulated passion for just one farewell embrace. But at last he heard the wicket-gate in the great outer door click behind him, felt the fresh air of the outer world upon his anxious brow, and knew that he was free!

Dizzy with the easy success of his daring exploit, he walked quickly towards the lights of the town, not knowing in the least what he should do next, only quite certain of one thing, that he must remove himself as quickly as possible from the neighbourhood where the lady he was forced to represent was so well-known and so popular a character.

As he walked along, considering, his attention was caught by some red and green lights a little way off, to one side of the town, and the sound of the puffing and snorting of engines and the banging of shunted trucks fell on his ear. "Aha!" he thought, "this is a piece of luck! A railway station is the thing I want most in the whole world at this moment; and what's more, I needn't go through the town to get it, and shan't have to support this humiliating character by repartees which, though thoroughly effective, do not assist one's sense of self-respect."

He made his way to the station accordingly, consulted a timetable, and found that a train, bound more or less in the direction of his home, was due to start in half-an-hour. "More luck!" said Toad, his spirits rising rapidly, and went off to the booking-office to buy his ticket.

He gave the name of the station that he knew to be nearest to the village of which Toad Hall was the principal feature, and mechanically put his fingers, in search of the necessary money, where his waistcoat pocket should have been. But here the cotton gown, which had nobly stood by him so far, and which he had basely forgotten, intervened, and frustrated his efforts. In a sort of nightmare he struggled with the strange uncanny thing that seemed to hold his hands, turn all muscular strivings to water, and laugh at him all the time; while other travellers, forming up in a line behind, waited with impatience, making suggestions of more or less value and comments of more or less stringency and point. At last—somehow—he never rightly understood how—he burst the barriers, attained the goal, arrived at where all waistcoat pockets are eternally situated, and found—not only no money, but no pocket to hold it, and no waistcoat to hold the pocket!

To his horror he recollected that he had left both coat and waistcoat behind him in his cell, and with them his pocket-book, money, keys, watch, matches, pencil-case—all that makes life worth living, all that distinguishes the many-pocketed animal, the lord of creation, from the inferior one-pocketed or no-pocketed productions that hop or trip about permissively, unequipped for the real contest.

In his misery he made one desperate effort to carry the thing off, and, with a return to his fine old manner—a blend of the Squire and the College Don—he said, "Look here! I find I've left my purse behind. Just give me that ticket, will you, and I'll send the money on to-morrow? I'm well-known in these parts."

The clerk stared at him and the rusty black bonnet a moment, and then laughed. "I should think you were pretty well known in these parts," he said, "if you've tried this game on often. Here, stand away from the window, please, madam; you're obstructing the other passengers!"

An old gentleman who had been prodding him in the back for some moments here thrust him away, and, what was worse, addressed him as his good woman, which angered Toad more than anything that had occurred that evening.

Baffled and full of despair, he wandered blindly down the platform where the train was standing, and tears trickled down each side of his nose. It was hard, he thought, to be within sight of safety and almost of home, and to be baulked by the want of a few wretched shillings and by the pettifogging mistrustfulness of paid officials. Very soon his escape would be discovered, the hunt would be up, he would be caught, reviled, loaded with chains, dragged back again to prison and bread-and-water and straw; his guards and penalties would be doubled; and O, what sarcastic remarks the girl would make! What was to be done? He was not swift of foot; his figure was unfortunately recognisable. Could he not squeeze under the seat of a carriage? He had seen this method adopted by schoolboys, when the journey-money provided by thoughtful parents had been diverted to other and better ends. As he pondered, he found himself opposite the engine, which was being oiled, wiped, and generally caressed by its affectionate driver, a burly man with an oil-can in one hand and a lump of cotton-waste in the other.

"Hullo, mother!" said the engine-driver, "what's the trouble? You don't look particularly cheerful."

"O, sir!" said Toad, crying afresh, "I am a poor unhappy washerwoman, and I've lost all my money, and can't pay for a ticket, and I must get home to-night somehow, and whatever I am to do I don't know. O dear, O dear!"

"That's a bad business, indeed," said the engine-driver reflectively. "Lost your money—and can't get home—and got some kids, too, waiting for you, I dare say?"

"Any amount of 'em," sobbed Toad. "And they'll be hungry—and playing with matches—and upsetting lamps, the little innocents!—and quarrelling, and going on generally. O dear, O dear!"

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do," said the good engine-driver.

"You're a washerwoman to your trade, says you. Very well, that's that. And I'm an engine-driver, as you well may see, and there's no denying it's terribly dirty work. Uses up a power of shirts, it does, till my missus is fair tired of washing of 'em. If you'll wash a few shirts for me when you get home, and send 'em along, I'll give you a ride on my engine. It's against the Company's regulations, but we're not so very particular in these out-of-the-way parts."

The Toad's misery turned into rapture as he eagerly scrambled up into the cab of the engine. Of course, he had never washed a shirt in his life, and couldn't if he tried and, anyhow, he wasn't going to begin; but he thought: "When I get safely home to Toad Hall, and have money again, and pockets to put it in, I will send the engine-driver enough to pay for quite a quantity of washing, and that will be the same thing, or better."

The guard waved his welcome flag, the engine-driver whistled in cheerful response, and the train moved out of the station. As the speed increased, and the Toad could see on either side of him real fields, and trees, and hedges, and cows, and horses, all flying past him, and as he thought how every minute was bringing him nearer to Toad Hall, and sympathetic friends, and money to chink in his pocket, and a soft bed to sleep in, and good things to eat, and praise and admiration at the recital of his adventures and his surpassing cleverness, he began to skip up and down and shout and sing snatches of song, to the great astonishment of the engine-driver, who had come across washerwomen before, at long intervals, but never one at all like this.

They had covered many and many a mile, and Toad was already considering what he would have for supper as soon as he got home, when he noticed that the engine-driver, with a puzzled expression on his face, was leaning over the side of the engine and listening hard. Then he saw him climb on to the coals and gaze out over the top of the train; then he returned and said to Toad: "It's very strange; we're the last train running in this direction to-night, yet I could be sworn that I heard another following us!"

Toad ceased his frivolous antics at once. He became grave and depressed, and a dull pain in the lower part of his spine, communicating itself to his legs, made him want to sit down and try desperately not to think of all the possibilities.

By this time the moon was shining brightly, and the engine-driver, steadying himself on the coal, could command a view of the line behind them for a long distance.

Presently he called out, "I can see it clearly now! It is an engine, on our rails, coming along at a great pace! It looks as if we were being pursued!"

The miserable Toad, crouching in the coal-dust, tried hard to think of something to do, with dismal want of success.

"They are gaining on us fast!" cried the engine-driver. "And the engine is crowded with the queerest lot of people! Men like ancient warders, waving halberds; policemen in their helmets, waving truncheons; and shabbily dressed men in pot-hats, obvious and unmistakable plain-clothes detectives even at this distance, waving revolvers and walking-sticks; all waving, and all shouting the same thing—'Stop, stop, stop!'"

Then Toad fell on his knees among the coals and, raising his clasped paws in supplication, cried, "Save me, only save me, dear kind Mr. Engine-driver, and I will confess everything! I am not the simple washerwoman I seem to be! I have no children waiting for me, innocent or otherwise! I am a toad—the well-known and popular Mr. Toad, a landed proprietor; I have just escaped, by my great daring and cleverness, from a loathsome dungeon into which my enemies had flung me; and if those fellows on that engine recapture me, it will be chains and bread-and-water and straw and misery once more for poor, unhappy, innocent Toad!" The engine-driver looked down upon him very sternly, and said, "Now tell the truth; what were you put in prison for?"

"It was nothing very much," said poor Toad, colouring deeply. "I only borrowed a motorcar while the owners were at lunch; they had no need of it at the time. I didn't mean to steal it, really; but people—especially magistrates—take such harsh views of thoughtless and high-spirited actions."

The engine-driver looked very grave and said, "I fear that you have been indeed a wicked toad, and by rights I ought to give you up to offended justice. But you are evidently in sore trouble and distress, so I will not desert you. I don't hold with motor-cars, for one thing; and I don't hold with being ordered about by policemen when I'm on my own engine, for another. And the sight of an animal in tears always makes me feel queer and softhearted. So cheer up, Toad! I'll do my best, and we may beat them yet!"

They piled on more coals, shovelling furiously; the furnace roared, the sparks flew, the engine leapt and swung but still their pursuers slowly gained. The engine-driver, with a sigh, wiped his brow with a handful of cotton-waste, and said, "I'm afraid it's no good, Toad. You see, they are running light, and they have the better engine. There's just one thing left for us to do, and it's your only chance, so attend very carefully to what I tell you. A short way ahead of us is a long tunnel, and on the other side of that the line passes through a thick wood. Now, I will put on all the speed I can while we are running through the tunnel, but the other fellows will slow down a bit, naturally, for fear of an accident. When we are through, I will shut off steam and put on brakes as hard as I can, and the moment it's safe to do so you must jump and hide in the wood, before they get through the tunnel and see you. Then I will go full speed ahead again, and they can chase me

if they like, for as long as they like, and as far as they like. Now mind and be ready to jump when I tell you!"

They piled on more coals, and the train shot into the tunnel, and the engine rushed and roared and rattled, till at last they shot out at the other end into fresh air and the peaceful moonlight, and saw the wood lying dark and helpful upon either side of the line. The driver shut off steam and put on brakes, the Toad got down on the step, and as the train slowed down to almost a walking pace he heard the driver call out, "Now, jump!"

Toad jumped, rolled down a short embankment, picked himself up unhurt, scrambled into the wood and hid.

Peeping out, he saw his train get up speed again and disappear at a great pace. Then out of the tunnel burst the pursuing engine, roaring and whistling, her motley crew waving their various weapons and shouting, "Stop! stop! stop!" When they were past, the Toad had a hearty laugh—for the first time since he was thrown into prison.

But he soon stopped laughing when he came to consider that it was now very late and dark and cold, and he was in an unknown wood, with no money and no chance of supper, and still far from friends and home; and the dead silence of everything, after the roar and rattle of the train, was something of a shock. He dared not leave the shelter of the trees, so he struck into the wood, with the idea of leaving the railway as far as possible behind him.

After so many weeks within walls, he found the wood strange and unfriendly and inclined, he thought, to make fun of him. Night-jars, sounding their mechanical rattle, made him think that the wood was full of searching warders, closing in on him. An owl, swooping noiselessly towards him, brushed his shoulder with its wing, making him jump with the horrid certainty that it was a hand; then flitted off, moth-like, laughing its low ho! ho! ho; which Toad thought in very poor taste. Once he met a fox, who stopped, looked him up and down in a sarcastic sort of way, and said, "Hullo, washerwoman! Half a pair of socks and a pillow-case short this week! Mind it doesn't occur again!" and swaggered off, sniggering. Toad looked about for a stone to throw at him, but could not succeed in finding one, which vexed him more than anything. At last, cold, hungry, and tired out, he sought the shelter of a hollow tree, where with branches and dead leaves he made himself as comfortable a bed as he could, and slept soundly till the morning.





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Love is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris