

The Story of Two Drowned Men

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ROLAND B. MOLINEUX.

I never heard so mad a storm as raged that night. It flung itself against the death house walls with fierce abandon, as though the hungry future, to which we were individually consigned, had trod of waiting on the law's delays and had come to take us all together.

It is not cheerful in the death chamber on such a night, even though we were entertaining company. Two of us, Frank Rohl and William Pallister, were soon to go through the little door into eternity, and so the deathwatch animated the scene.

The older man, gaunt and sallow, was clothed in the majesty of a keeper's uniform. The guard was a young fellow, recently appointed, strong and tall, with the country air of death upon his cheeks. The guard had eaten his supper and lighted his pipe. The keeper was restless. Every now and then he would go to the large double doors, unlock and open them and look out.

The emotions which affected him, however, were not akin to ours, although something had gone wrong

with his affairs. Had he not known it from the position of the hands on his watch face, his stomach would have reminded him. To speak plainly, the keeper was hungry. His supper had not come and it was nearly 9 o'clock.

It is strange from what trivial occurrences mighty happenings will spring. Not that the keeper's appetite was a trivial matter. The size of the basket he awaited would have disclosed that, but because the storm had delayed its arrival he was impatient and went out to investigate.

The guard, left alone in charge, locked the doors after his senior. The key was on the inside. Then he started to stroll up and down the corridor. The guard was bored and tired. The storm had got on his nerves. He turned his head sharply at the sound of a slight cough, then went on again—indifferently. He had not noticed the soft signal in reply.

Perhaps it would not have told him anything if he had. There is not much danger in being left alone with 16 men all securely locked in 10 strong cells. Imagination might make one

afraid. Reality would demonstrate the absurdity of the fear.

At the farther end of the death chamber were the two men he must keep his eyes on. Both had been desperate characters. Both were still desperate. Of the two, Frank Rohl was short and stout, thick of neck and heavy of jaw. His arms were like sledge hammers, his hands were enormous. When the doors had closed behind the keeper Rohl had filled his mouth with soap and the juice from a ripe red tomato; he threw himself upon the floor, screaming and frothing at the mouth.

The guard rushed to the cell. He was a new man, a nervous man, a foolish man, a kind man, not at all the sort of man to be left alone in the death chamber, and he was only a guard.

It was absolutely against the rules for a cell in the death chamber to be opened unless two keepers were present—they take no chances there. But Rohl appeared to be dying. His cries were pitiful. There was bloody froth choking him. The guard hesitated no longer. He unlocked the door and entered the cell. He bent over Rohl and raised his head.

In an instant Rohl had him by the throat.

Never before has such a struggle taken place, and amid such strange surroundings. In the same room nine men condemned to death, each locked in a little iron cage, pressed their faces against the bars and listened. They could see nothing. And all the time the thunder and the wind and rain applauded and urged the combat on.

The guard and Rohl grappled fiercely in the cell—Rohl fighting for his liberty, the guard for his life. There could be no help for either. The death chamber is completely separated from the rest of the prison, and the building which has been fashioned so securely to hold the men society wishes to kill would just as securely keep its distance out. True, the keeper would be coming back, but the key was on the inside. Would the guard be able to reach and unlock the double doors?

We could hear their heavy breathing, the sounds of blows and curses. Grappled together, they rolled out into the corridor. Then we saw them as they swayed in front of our cells—primal animals, all the man gone from them in this last fight for existence. The guard was trying to get his revolver out of his pocket, while Rohl was biting and striking him.

The guard was weakening. Slowly but surely we saw that Rohl was forcing him, inch by inch, toward Pallister's cell, where Pallister, with a fearful expression on his face, his long, lean arms, the arms of a gorilla, stretched out through the bars, waiting to grasp the victim. They caught him at last. The hairy hands slipped around the guard's neck and under his chin. They clasped in front of his throat and drew him back against the iron bars and began to garrote him.

Vainly the guard sought to break that hold. Then Rohl, released, took the revolver and the keys from the guard and opened Pallister's cell. Together they bound and gagged the guard with a sheet. While doing this the keeper returned and knocked on the outer door.

Inside the death house it was silence now. Rohl and Pallister crept down the corridor and opened the door. The keeper entered. He carried the large basket containing his delayed supper. They slammed the

door behind him, and while Rohl held the guard's pistol to the keeper's head Pallister locked him and the guard in the cells they had just vacated.

It was 9 o'clock. There would be no relief until 4 in the morning. They had the night before them in which to work.

Chance plays strange tricks—with some men. Rohl had been a convict in Sing Sing shortly before he arrived as a candidate for the honors of the "Frying Pan." As a convict he was put to work. The warden assigns the men to those duties which they are best fitted to perform. Rohl was a bricklayer so they put him to work on the new death chamber then in course of construction. Consequently he knew it from the first brick to the last. He knew of one weak spot. It was between the top of the wall and the roof.

For that weak spot the two outlaws made. They were on top of the cells in a moment. Rohl, lifted on Pallister's shoulders, began to pry the

bricks from the top of the wall, just under the beams which held the ceiling. When the hole was large enough they sat down and ate the keeper's supper. There was enough for two, and with the crusts and apple cores left over they peeted the outraged representatives of the law. Then they wished us all goodby and crawled out to freedom.

Over the roofs of the buildings they went, the blackness of the night and the noise of the storm preventing their discovery. From the warden's health



He bent over Rohl and raised his head

denied many times, but it lives still. Rohl and Pallister had accomplished the impossible. They had "beat" the death chamber. For the honor of the prison they must be caught somehow.

But they had gone. What would the public say—that public which demands and demands that there be only one way of exit from it, and that by the way of the little door? What would those in authority do—those at Albany who looked after the workings of the "pen" for the great and generous public?

The warden sat down in his office and pondered over these things. He was in an unpleasant state of mind. His subordinate had no wish to intrude upon him. The principal keeper, however, had to make his daily report. Very gingerly he entered, mopping his forehead, and laid the prison census before his chief.

So many in the prisons, carefully counted—all correct.

Death chamber—two escaped. The warden swore.

Hospital—one death.

The warden arose and threw his arms about the "P K's" neck and wept for joy upon his bosom.

That night they prepared the man who had died for the part he was to play in the comedy. They shot his back full of holes. They treated his features with a rasp file. Then they threw his body into the river—with a string to it.

They buried a coffin in which the hospital patient should have been. They filled it with the proper weight of rocks. They put his number on the empty coffin, and interred it in the prison graveyard.

But there must be two bodies, and two the warden would have.

That night the warden passed through the hospital wards many times, scanning the patients with unheeded interest. He looked long and anxiously at several of his charges. Now it's all very well to play off ill for the sake of getting out of a few days' work, but when men are needed for river jobs like the one just mentioned it looks like lying in the face of Providence to be ill. Miraculous were the recoveries.

It was all right, though. Another wretch died in time—after being helped a bit—which was considerate of him. He received the same careful treatment and went to join the first in the river, and there was another merry little funeral over an empty coffin.

When the water had done its work they fished them up. I mean they recovered Rohl and Pallister's bodies.

Just to make the identification complete, satisfy reporters and stop the public clamor, the warden sent for Pallister's old mother. She came. The warden asked her if she could identify her son's body. The good old woman had just left her boy alive and well, locked up in a tiny garret under the eaves, but would she lie about it?

The warden barked on the love which never fails, and he was right. He removed his hat as she wept over some other mother's son and then hurried home to her own son.

The State was satisfied. Rohl and Pallister were dead as far as it was concerned.

The warden was satisfied—he kept his job.

And the two drowned men who got away were the most satisfied of all.

London Daily Mail.

The ancient custom of "tossing the pancake" was observed yesterday in the great hall of Westminster School. There were the usual ceremonies.

The school cook threw the pancake into the air over the beam, and there was a great struggle by the boys for the coveted prize. I Alinger threw himself on the cake, and when the allotted period expired he was in possession of three-quarters of it. As the winner he received the customary arrest for fraud.

Homespun Philosophy

BY THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH.

The College Girl sank thoughtfully into her cushioned corner. "But is it right, or quite fair to herself, to her own individuality? Should she permit herself to be—why, to be absorbed by other people like that? It is almost like being digested and assimilated by one's friends. One thinks of those horrid sea monsters just leaping up against their prey and positively absorbing them alive! In Miss Muffet fair to her own individuality?"

The Quiet Man shook his head. "That is a question that has nothing to do with the on ewe've been trying to answer. Besides you have turned my roses into sea monsters, thus changing the figure of the speech, which is an unpardonable offence. I'm not prepared to go with you any

and has knowledge of her possibilities. She knows full well that she is not a rose, but she knows that a suitable background is necessary for the showing off of the roses and she wisely becomes that background, for a large number.

I doubt if the roses are conscious of this. But they like to have her impart to the timid a wholesome self-confidence. Her quiet word of comfort near them without going into reasons. Perhaps she, too, is unconscious of it. That does not affect the truth. She is a most effective background. She never attempts to outshine, she never thrusts herself forward, she is never boldly in evidence or obtrusive, but, as has been remarked, she is always there.

father." And he covered his retreat with the silence that had so often been his protection. "I shall continue to believe that Miss Muffet is not fair to herself," the College Girl declared firmly.

"But you know," the Motherly Woman said gently, "why it is that she goes everywhere, why all the people want her, and it is only a question now, whether she would better live for them or for herself. If you should instead of a rose, why, the lesson may turn out to be a bit of background be profitable!"

The Plain Little Woman looked sadly down at her picture. "I suppose," she said patiently, "if one can't be the rose, it is worth something to be quite near the rose."

With a little impatient gesture the college girl threw across the newspaper that she had been reading. "For the life of me I can't see," she said with an odd pucker between her straight slender brows, "how it is that Little Miss Muffet is such a very popular young lady. I have been reading about five receptions and a german and she was at every one of them. She has recently been elected president of her book club, she's only just home from that house party and she has simply loads of flowers, candles and books sent to her."

The Plain Little Woman, who sat before her easel in the west window for the sake of the last bit of daylight, looked up at it, too, have some times wondered at that. She is not pretty.

"No," agreed the College Girl quietly, "nor rich, nor talented, nor gifted in any special way. She is not what people describe as accomplished, she doesn't sing, she never touches a piano, she doesn't recite and she can't even dance. She didn't finish school, she doesn't dress particularly well and her people are—well, they are just barely passable, you know."

The Plain Little Woman sighed. "It is a mystery. One rarely knows a girl who is popular with both men and women," she said with a regretful note in her thin voice.

"And with all classes, too," the Motherly Woman put in, smiling in general fashion. "I saw Miss Muffet calling the other day at one of our pleasant homes, and it was neither a business, nor a charity, nor a church call, but just a friendly, straight across visit. A town full of girls like that would mean something."

The Quiet Man laughed amusedly. "But how is it to be accounted for?" the College Girl insisted. "Think of five receptions! And I dare say she wore the same gown to every one of them. And a ball and all the rest of it. There is a reason for every thing, a cause for every effect." She smiled quickly at the Quiet Man who was gravely contemplating the finished picture over in the west window.

"Those roses are very beautiful," he said irrelevantly. "Who would suppose that all this time they have been shut up in those tight little tubs! Have you noticed how the background harmonizes with each tint and color? It is quite wonderful how it throws out and enhances the peculiar and individual beauty of the rose. He waited while the Plain Little Woman blushed delightedly and the College Girl went over and studied the beautiful drift of roses in the sunset glory of the west window.

"Now the casual observer," went on the Quiet Man, "would hardly think of or notice the neutral tints of the sombre background, and yet much depends upon it. You will notice how it changes slightly for each rose. A little darker here, for the proper outlining of that exquisite Bride, paling against that splendid 'Jack.' But all through its many changes there is perfect harmony is a satisfactory background. Now that is precisely what Miss Muffet is. She is a background. She is not pretty, nor clever, nor any of those things, but she is—adaptable."

"Now her adaptability may be a natural gift or an acquired grace. That makes little difference, she has it. She understands her limitations

"A girl like that, you see, is a splendid foil against which beauties shine. There is no rivalry. She takes the least conspicuous places everywhere—good-humoredly, and does pleasantly what nobody else wants to do. She doesn't mind being the old woman in a play, or having for her partner the most undesirable man at a dinner party. She talks smilingly to people that nobody else will be bothered with. Since many of these must always be invited by every hostess, Miss Muffet is simply invaluable. She must be invited also. She can never be safely overlooked."

"It is true that she has never learned to dance, but she knows how to keep the wallflowers fresh and sweet; she can smooth the ruffled plumage of a dethroned belle and make an antiquated beau forget that his day is passed. Therefore every entertainer smiles sweetly upon her and heads every list with her name."

"She has quick perceptions, a sense of humor, tact and a kind heart. And she knows what to say. Possibly there may be a trace of flattery in word or voice or manner. The flavor of that spice mingled in the cup of life, shall linger even to the dregs, and still be tasted with a welcome. But if her words are not always bluntly sincere, nor her motive purely unselfish, she rubs people the right way, and as we all know, 'off times to the slug-gard and the dull, flattery hath done good service, quickening the mind to emulation, and encouraging the heart that failed.' Praise is precious to a man, though uttered by a parrot! Miss Muffet never irritates. She is never cringing, else would she, indeed, be left soon quite alone. She makes people respect her and their leave off thinking about her. She puts you in a good humor with yourself. Indeed she takes pains to find the good that is in us and keeps us thinking of that."

"If you will notice, Miss Muffet never complains. She has hosts of intimate friends, but she never forgets that confidences are sacred. She never tells skeleton-in-the-closet stories. I have noticed that she has a very beautiful way of overlooking things that people would like to keep hidden. She absolutely doesn't see them."

"It was just here that the College Girl stirred uneasily. "She never seems to know when people are out of humor, you know. I have two or three times seen her walk serenely right into a heated quarrel as if everything was perfectly pleasant, and I remember how that pretty soon it was!" she said frankly.

"And yet you spoke of her as having no special gift or talent!" the Motherly Woman laughed.

"Have you noticed," the Quiet Man went on, "how people like to talk about themselves and the things that interest them personally?" Well, Miss Muffet found that out in the nursery. I should say, for she is past mistress of the art of getting people to talk. But she can draw out a man who isn't positively deaf and dumb and make him happy in the discovery that he is a brilliant conversationalist.

"As I said in the beginning, she is a foil or background for more brilliant girls. She helps them to make the most of their attainments and mendacity has strengthened many a timid or nervous girl."

"I heard a man say of her: 'She doesn't expect a fellow to say silly things to her. It's a comfort to know a plain girl who doesn't want to be considered pretty.' And I happened to know that Miss Muffet had been able to help that country boy into good society. If I were a woman I'd rather have tact for my dowry than beauty. Miss Muffet has it. She understands intuitively the weaknesses of the people that she knows. Now we are all egotists, more or less."

"A weak and timid little man likes to feel noble and brave. He feels so when he's with Miss Muffet. She never talks to new people about ancestry, nor to a self-made man about heredity. One feels instinctively that she is not going to uncover the mendacious places, everybody trusts her, everybody needs her and she goes everywhere."



The hairy hands slipped around the guard's neck and under his chin.