

### **Chapter 3 - The Same Respected Friend In More Aspects Than One**

In sooth, it is Riderhood and no other, or it is the outer husk and shell of Riderhood and no other, that is borne into Miss Abbey's first-floor bedroom. Supple to twist and turn as the Rogue has ever been, he is sufficiently rigid now; and not without much shuffling of attendant feet, and tilting of his bier this way and that way, and peril even of his sliding off it and being tumbled in a heap over the balustrades, can he be got up stairs.

'Fetch a doctor,' quoth Miss Abbey. And then, 'Fetch his daughter.' On both of which errands, quick messengers depart.

The doctor-seeking messenger meets the doctor halfway, coming under convoy of police. Doctor examines the dank carcase, and pronounces, not hopefully, that it is worth while trying to reanimate the same. All the best means are at once in action, and everybody present lends a hand, and a heart and soul. No one has the least regard for the man; with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it IS life, and they are living and must die.

In answer to the doctor's inquiry how did it happen, and was anyone to blame, Tom Tootle gives in his verdict, unavoidable accident and no one to blame but the sufferer. 'He was slinking about in his boat,' says Tom, 'which slinking were, not to speak ill of the dead, the manner of the man, when he come right athwart the steamer's bows and she cut him in two.' Mr Tootle is so far figurative, touching the dismemberment, as that he means the boat, and not the man. For, the man lies whole before them.

Captain Joey, the bottle-nosed regular customer in the glazed hat, is a pupil of the much-respected old school, and (having insinuated himself into the chamber, in the execution of the important service of carrying the drowned man's neck-kerchief) favours the doctor with a sagacious old-scholastic suggestion that the body should be hung up by the heels, 'sim'lar', says Captain Joey, 'to mutton in a butcher's shop,' and should then, as a particularly choice manoeuvre for promoting easy respiration, be rolled upon casks. These scraps of the wisdom of the captain's ancestors are received with such speechless indignation by Miss Abbey, that she instantly seizes the Captain by the collar, and without a single word ejects him, not presuming to remonstrate, from the scene.

There then remain, to assist the doctor and Tom, only those three other regular customers, Bob Glamour, William Williams, and

Jonathan (family name of the latter, if any, unknown to man-kind), who are quite enough. Miss Abbey having looked in to make sure that nothing is wanted, descends to the bar, and there awaits the result, with the gentle Jew and Miss Jenny Wren.

If you are not gone for good, Mr Riderhood, it would be something to know where you are hiding at present. This flabby lump of mortality that we work so hard at with such patient perseverance, yields no sign of you. If you are gone for good, Rogue, it is very solemn, and if you are coming back, it is hardly less so. Nay, in the suspense and mystery of the latter question, involving that of where you may be now, there is a solemnity even added to that of death, making us who are in attendance alike afraid to look on you and to look off you, and making those below start at the least sound of a creaking plank in the floor.

Stay! Did that eyelid tremble? So the doctor, breathing low, and closely watching, asks himself.

No.

Did that nostril twitch?

No.

This artificial respiration ceasing, do I feel any faint flutter under my hand upon the chest?

No.

Over and over again No. No. But try over and over again, nevertheless.

See! A token of life! An indubitable token of life! The spark may smoulder and go out, or it may glow and expand, but see! The four rough fellows, seeing, shed tears. Neither Riderhood in this world, nor Riderhood in the other, could draw tears from them; but a striving human soul between the two can do it easily.

He is struggling to come back. Now, he is almost here, now he is far away again. Now he is struggling harder to get back. And yet - like us all, when we swoon - like us all, every day of our lives when we wake - he is instinctively unwilling to be restored to the consciousness of this existence, and would be left dormant, if he could.

Bob Gliddery returns with Pleasant Riderhood, who was out when sought for, and hard to find. She has a shawl over her head, and her first action, when she takes it off weeping, and curtsies to Miss Abbey, is to wind her hair up.

'Thank you, Miss Abbey, for having father here.'

'I am bound to say, girl, I didn't know who it was,' returns Miss Abbey; 'but I hope it would have been pretty much the same if I had known.'

Poor Pleasant, fortified with a sip of brandy, is ushered into the first-floor chamber. She could not express much sentiment about her father if she were called upon to pronounce his funeral oration, but she has a greater tenderness for him than he ever had for her, and crying bitterly when she sees him stretched unconscious, asks the doctor, with clasped hands: 'Is there no hope, sir? O poor father! Is poor father dead?'

To which the doctor, on one knee beside the body, busy and watchful, only rejoins without looking round: 'Now, my girl, unless you have the self-command to be perfectly quiet, I cannot allow you to remain in the room.'

Pleasant, consequently, wipes her eyes with her back-hair, which is in fresh need of being wound up, and having got it out of the way, watches with terrified interest all that goes on. Her natural woman's aptitude soon renders her able to give a little help. Anticipating the doctor's want of this or that, she quietly has it ready for him, and so by degrees is intrusted with the charge of supporting her father's head upon her arm.

It is something so new to Pleasant to see her father an object of sympathy and interest, to find any one very willing to tolerate his society in this world, not to say pressingly and soothingly entreating him to belong to it, that it gives her a sensation she never experienced before. Some hazy idea that if affairs could remain thus for a long time it would be a respectable change, floats in her mind. Also some vague idea that the old evil is drowned out of him, and that if he should happily come back to resume his occupation of the empty form that lies upon the bed, his spirit will be altered. In which state of mind she kisses the stony lips, and quite believes that the impassive hand she chafes will revive a tender hand, if it revive ever.

Sweet delusion for Pleasant Riderhood. But they minister to him with such extraordinary interest, their anxiety is so keen, their vigilance is so great, their excited joy grows so intense as the signs of life strengthen, that how can she resist it, poor thing! And now he begins to breathe naturally, and he stirs, and the doctor declares him to have come back from that inexplicable journey where he stopped on the dark road, and to be here.

Tom Tootle, who is nearest to the doctor when he says this, grasps the doctor fervently by the hand. Bob Glamour, William Williams, and

Jonathan of the no surname, all shake hands with one another round, and with the doctor too. Bob Glamour blows his nose, and Jonathan of the no surname is moved to do likewise, but lacking a pocket handkerchief abandons that outlet for his emotion. Pleasant sheds tears deserving her own name, and her sweet delusion is at its height.

There is intelligence in his eyes. He wants to ask a question. He wonders where he is. Tell him.

'Father, you were run down on the river, and are at Miss Abbey Potterson's.'

He stares at his daughter, stares all around him, closes his eyes, and lies slumbering on her arm.

The short-lived delusion begins to fade. The low, bad, unimpressible face is coming up from the depths of the river, or what other depths, to the surface again. As he grows warm, the doctor and the four men cool. As his lineaments soften with life, their faces and their hearts harden to him.

'He will do now,' says the doctor, washing his hands, and looking at the patient with growing disfavour.

'Many a better man,' moralizes Tom Tootle with a gloomy shake of the head, 'ain't had his luck.'

'It's to be hoped he'll make a better use of his life,' says Bob Glamour, 'than I expect he will.'

'Or than he done afore,' adds William Williams.

'But no, not he!' says Jonathan of the no surname, clinching the quartette.

They speak in a low tone because of his daughter, but she sees that they have all drawn off, and that they stand in a group at the other end of the room, shunning him. It would be too much to suspect them of being sorry that he didn't die when he had done so much towards it, but they clearly wish that they had had a better subject to bestow their pains on. Intelligence is conveyed to Miss Abbey in the bar, who reappears on the scene, and contemplates from a distance, holding whispered discourse with the doctor. The spark of life was deeply interesting while it was in abeyance, but now that it has got established in Mr Riderhood, there appears to be a general desire that circumstances had admitted of its being developed in anybody else, rather than that gentleman.

'However,' says Miss Abbey, cheering them up, 'you have done your duty like good and true men, and you had better come down and take something at the expense of the Porters.'

This they all do, leaving the daughter watching the father. To whom, in their absence, Bob Gliddery presents himself.

'His gills looks rum; don't they?' says Bob, after inspecting the patient.

Pleasant faintly nods.

'His gills'll look rummer when he wakes; won't they?' says Bob.

Pleasant hopes not. Why?

'When he finds himself here, you know,' Bob explains. 'Cause Miss Abbey forbid him the house and ordered him out of it. But what you may call the Fates ordered him into it again. Which is rumness; ain't it?'

'He wouldn't have come here of his own accord,' returns poor Pleasant, with an effort at a little pride.

'No,' retorts Bob. 'Nor he wouldn't have been let in, if he had.'

The short delusion is quite dispelled now. As plainly as she sees on her arm the old father, unimproved, Pleasant sees that everybody there will cut him when he recovers consciousness. 'I'll take him away ever so soon as I can,' thinks Pleasant with a sigh; 'he's best at home.'

Presently they all return, and wait for him to become conscious that they will all be glad to get rid of him. Some clothes are got together for him to wear, his own being saturated with water, and his present dress being composed of blankets.

Becoming more and more uncomfortable, as though the prevalent dislike were finding him out somewhere in his sleep and expressing itself to him, the patient at last opens his eyes wide, and is assisted by his daughter to sit up in bed.

'Well, Riderhood,' says the doctor, 'how do you feel?'

He replies gruffly, 'Nothing to boast on.' Having, in fact, returned to life in an uncommonly sulky state.

'I don't mean to preach; but I hope,' says the doctor, gravely shaking his head, 'that this escape may have a good effect upon you, Riderhood.'

The patient's discontented growl of a reply is not intelligible; his daughter, however, could interpret, if she would, that what he says is, he 'don't want no Poll-Parroting'.

Mr Riderhood next demands his shirt; and draws it on over his head (with his daughter's help) exactly as if he had just had a Fight.

'Warn't it a steamer?' he pauses to ask her.

'Yes, father.'

'I'll have the law on her, bust her! and make her pay for it.'

He then buttons his linen very moodily, twice or thrice stopping to examine his arms and hands, as if to see what punishment he has received in the Fight. He then doggedly demands his other garments, and slowly gets them on, with an appearance of great malevolence towards his late opponent and all the spectators. He has an impression that his nose is bleeding, and several times draws the back of his hand across it, and looks for the result, in a pugilistic manner, greatly strengthening that incongruous resemblance.

'Where's my fur cap?' he asks in a surly voice, when he has shuffled his clothes on.

'In the river,' somebody rejoins.

'And warn't there no honest man to pick it up? O' course there was though, and to cut off with it arterwards. You are a rare lot, all on you!'

Thus, Mr Riderhood: taking from the hands of his daughter, with special ill-will, a lent cap, and grumbling as he pulls it down over his ears. Then, getting on his unsteady legs, leaning heavily upon her, and growling, 'Hold still, can't you? What! You must be a staggering next, must you?' he takes his departure out of the ring in which he has had that little turn-up with Death.