

THORNS.

"The heart that is soonest awake to the flowers... Always the first to be touched by the thorns..."

THREE HOURS OF TERROR.

It was about six years ago. I recall the scene and the circumstances vividly to mind. I can see now the large square room in an old-fashioned rambling hotel...

Within there was warmth and light and luxury. The monumental porcelain stove placed close up in a corner, as if, like a superfluous piece of furniture, to get it out of the way, had unobtrusively diffused a delicious, languorous summer warmth throughout the room.

How sweet it were... With half shut eyes ever to seem falling asleep in a half dream!

were still running through my head. I was full of the spirit of the poem. My old nurse and constant companion sat in the next room, where I could see her through the open door, nodding, nodding so sleepily.

Suddenly I was aroused by the light steps of slipping feet on the stone floor of the hall. They halted, there was a hurried tap at my door, and, before I had time to assume a sitting posture, the door was flung open and there stood a gentleman...

I had been in a year, and had met the intruder, Mr. B., frequently at this sister's house; he had also called upon me, so we were not strangers. He was a man of rather attractive personal appearance, about medium height, slender and graceful, with the manners of an old courier.

Well, in reply to the implied question as to whether he might remain or not, I said that I had been in the land of the lotus eaters, pointing at the same time to the book I had laid upon the table; that the smell of the lotus leaves had almost closed my eyelids, that my old nurse was nodding, and I feared I must ask that the visit be not too brief.

"As brief as you desire, madam," said he; "only there is something I should like to tell you before I go."

He eyed me curiously as I sat down, and I felt a shiver of repugnance go over me. He advanced to the table, took up a volume of Mrs. Browning's, said, after turning over the leaves several times, read:

"As one alone, once not alone... I sit and knock at Nature's door, Heart bare, heart hungry, very poor, Whose desolated days go on."

Closing the book with a sigh, he said, as he began to pace up and down the room: "Did you know that I was once engaged to be married? I never see Mrs. Browning without thinking of my fiancée, and for some time he walked up and fro, apparently oblivious of my presence, quoting from German, French and English authors, and withal delightfully, until one stroke of the clock admonished me that it wanted but a half hour till midnight.

I reminded Mr. B. that a half hour had gone by and he had not yet told me the object of his visit. I suggested that he should tell me in a few words, and I would take the poetry for the introductory.

He flashed a savage glance over toward me. One quick step and he was at my side, saying, in a low tone: "Why does she sit there?" pointing to my old nurse. "Send her away."

I replied, "I shall as soon as you are gone." With a devilish look, that defies description he stooped, took up a book, and said, "Send her away, I tell you." I had heard a short time before that at one time in his life Mr. B. had been insane, but I had doubted it. It was rare to find a more cultivated or elegant man or one who was more punctilious in the observance of all the conventionalities of society.

That moment his face was like the face of a demon, and as I looked into his eyes I doubted if he no longer, and my heart sank like lead within me. What if the old weakness had attacked him again? I asked myself. At that hour I knew that every soul in the hotel would be in bed, and the nurse and myself were virtually alone. Did I dare to call for help? His thoughts, an impulse to protect myself made me rise and move toward the door. Quick as a flash he stepped in front of me, locked the door, held the key up before me for an instant, then dropped it into his pocket. I knew now that I had an insane man to deal with. But how! It would take all the courage I had and self-possession I could muster to do it. There was little time to consider; if I made a false move there was no telling what might be the result.

The nurse still sat nodding in her chair. It was useless to alarm her, for I knew she was too timid to be of any service to me; but I must act. I quietly went to her and told her to go to her room—it adjoined the one in which she sat—but not to go to bed, as I might need her. Then, assuming the coolest manner possible, I crossed the sitting room, opened the stove door and renewed the fire, and while my face was turned from him, said, "The furnace has lasted an hour, Mr. B., and I fail to appreciate it. However, if I still have patience to listen, will you tell me why you are here?" I rose then and resumed my seat on the chaise longue.

He always moved quickly, but stealthily, like a cat; and with some such movement he came behind me and whispered, close, close to my ear: "Are you not afraid of me?" With my blood fairly standing still in my veins I answered: "Not at all. Why should I be? You must be out of your mind."

"That's just it," said he. Then resuming his walk up and down the room, he continued: "Did you never hear that I had once been insane?"

"Yes," I replied, "I did hear something of the kind; but that was many years ago, I believe; an illness, was it not? However, whatever you were then will hardly excuse you for so wantonly attacking me."

He stopped eyed me curiously for a moment, then crossed the room swiftly to where I sat, and stooping, put his hand about my throat. He clasped it with his long, slender fingers, gently, very gently, as he said: "What a strange, evanescent thing life is; I could crush it out so easily—see!" with a closer pressure "I could kill you with my thumb and finger."

I disengaged the hand, and pointing to a chair near me, I begged him to be seated. He obeyed. I asked: "Do you remember anything of your life in the asylum?" A sad, pained look came over his face; the demon was overcome for the moment at least. I had struck the right chord. He replied: "Yes; I remember everything. Shall I tell it to you?"

Glad of the respite, and hoping to find a way to control him eventually, I settled myself to listen to his story. I give it in his own words as nearly as I can recall them.

From the time I was 16 years of age I was a sort of wanderer. I was educated partly in Germany and finished at Oxford, England. Thence I went to France, where I spent two years, and after that I lived for some time in Australia. I finally landed in India, where I expected to go into business with my brother-in-law. A short time after my arrival there I suffered a sunstroke which almost cost me my life, and utterly dethroned my reason. For six months I was a great care to my sister, but at the end of that time I was entirely restored, both mentally and physically, and we determined to go to St. Petersburg. It had been our childhood home, and shortly after our arrival there we were in the fashionable world, meeting old friends and making new acquaintances. Among the latter was the Countess L., a lovely girl of 19 years.

She had soft dark eyes, full of passion, a complexion like a ripe peach, and a mouth—all I dare not recall her face. It makes me shiver even now, and I am old and gray, and she is dead.

Enough, I loved her, I won her love. The formalities of a betrothal were gone through with, our friends had congratulated us, and within a few months we were to have been married. I was wild with happiness. Alas! why did I not die then! I had unbounded faith in her, my lady love, but I became absurdly jealous. I was haunted by all sorts of fears. It was as if some evil spirit had taken possession of me, which neither my reason nor her devoted affection could exorcise. I would lie awake at night and imagine I heard her calling to me for help; at another time some friend would whisper to me that she had struck me. For three hours, then, I had been locked in that room alone with a madman. The strain was over; my strength was gone; my knees gave way under me; my head swam. I tried to call and then all was oblivion. My nurse told me I was lying against the door stone dead when she found me. I never hear the shuffle of slipping feet that I do not shudder. It always recalls that night of terror.

As soon as I recovered from my fright I was told that about 10 o'clock in the morning the "doctor of the eyes" had come and taken Mr. B. to the asylum.

The above story is true in every detail.—Boston Globe.

A Boy's Periods of Growth. Based upon his measurements and annotations, Malling, Hansen framed the following rule: The weight of a boy ranging from the age of 9 to 15 undergoes three periods annually—a maximum, a medium, and a minimum period. The maximum period lasts four and a half months, commencing in August and ending the middle of December; the medium stage has its beginning in January, from the middle of December to the end of April. The minimum period appears during the remaining three months, from the end of April to the end of July. The increase in weight during the maximum period is three times that of the medium period, and almost all the gain of the medium period is again lost during the minimum period. From the working of this law it follows that in changing the diet at academies, schools and asylums, the season should be considered. A good diet would give less satisfactory results if observed from April to June, than a poorer diet if noted from August until December.—Julius Stinde in Popular Science Monthly.

A Lock of Hair. It is singular that the hair of the human head should always have been held in something sacred, and to be associated with sacred acts. Not to speak of the way in which we cherish the lock shorn from the dead, or the way in which the lover treasures his mistress's curl, the hair has long had place in ceremonial acts of sacrifice. As the strength of Samson, according to the Bible narrative, was in his hair, so it is in the hair that Achilles felt himself still giving of his life and strength when he cut off his yellow locks to cast them on the pyre of Patroclus. Constantine had the hair of his son, Heracles dispatched to the pope as evidence that he begged the pope to become the lad's adopted father. And as late as the Eighteenth century people of rank were in the habit of parting, before cutting the hair of their child for the first time, until the cutting could be done by some individual whom they particularly wished to honor, or whose patronage they desired to secure, the act constituting the individual a sort of spiritual parent.—Harper's Bazar.

For Consistency's Sake. For the sake of being consistent a man just started enough to be consistent; but he does and do and say the same fool things he has done and said before. The fool cannot catch himself. He is a slave to his own habit. He is a slave to his own habit. He is a slave to his own habit.

meaning fancies would return and the old experiences were lived through once more. In this way almost ten years of my life passed away. In all that time I had never voluntarily swallowed a morsel of food.

At length my physical condition was such that my sister determined to bring me to South Germany, where there was a celebrated insane expert. I remember distinctly the first time he came into my room. I was conscious of no physical presence, I only saw a pair of enormous, persuasive, compelling eyes, which were following me about the room and enforcing obedience. I was their captive, their slave. A cup of bread and milk was placed upon the table. The eyes bade me eat of it. I tried to lift the cup but could not. The eyes came toward me, I felt the touch of the spoon upon my lips, the taste of food in my mouth, and I swallowed it. You cannot guess the joy I felt. No, no, I cannot guess it. I felt that I was no longer a slave, but a free man. So for days and weeks these watchful eyes, which seemed to burn into my very soul, came to conquer me, and I grew strong and restful. I could think, I could reason. I knew some mighty change was taking place in me.

One day the eyes came as usual, and stopped just opposite me, where a floor of light freestone was laid out to night upon them. Suddenly there appeared round about them a luminous mass, which, as I gazed, formed itself slowly into first a forehead, then a chin and cheeks. Oh, heavens! it was a man's face! I was too fascinated to move. Gradually I saw the shoulders forming, then the arms and body, and finally the feet, which were waving in the air. The face said: "Come, Mr. B., will you not have some breakfast?" I was utterly submissive, and we sat upon the edge of the bed while he fed me the contents of a bowl he held in his hand. From that day I knew only his will, and as my health improved my reason was gradually restored. I slept, ate and lived like any other man.

One day in June, ten years from the time I was first locked up, I was invited to take tea with the doctor's family. You can imagine my sensations when I was received by the doctor's wife in the family room. I knew that I had been insane and that I was cured, and hereafter I was to be free. I resumed my relations with my family before a great while, and was permitted to go home, where I lived a wretched life ever since, but, strangely enough, never daring to stay away for any length of time from my dear doctor of the eyes. There have been times during the past ten years when a very devil would seem to enter my body, but a couple of weeks under the doctor's care would always rid me of it.

I am, at this moment not entirely sane. Have you not seen it? My abrupt entrance into your parlor to-night and my threatening to kill you should have alarmed you. Why did you not call assistance? Why, even now, with the slightest pressure upon your throat, I could stop your breath.

I was quite alone. The fire had died down and my teeth were chattering with the cold. The lamp had almost burned out; the whole house, the village, even, was wrapped in slumber. With a superhuman effort I rose to my feet and said, coolly and distinctly: "Your story was most interesting. If it is not all told let us have it continued," and smilingly I stepped to the door and took the knob in one hand, while I held out the other one for the key. He handed it to me, and I unlocked the door, never taking my eyes from his for an instant. I opened the door; he bent over, and, like a courier of the olden time, lifted my finger to his lips, and with the remark, "You are a brave woman," passed out into the hall. I closed the door, locked it and drew the bolt. I glanced at the clock. It was about twelve. For three hours, then, I had been locked in that room alone with a madman. The strain was over; my strength was gone; my knees gave way under me; my head swam. I tried to call and then all was oblivion. My nurse told me I was lying against the door stone dead when she found me. I never hear the shuffle of slipping feet that I do not shudder. It always recalls that night of terror.

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A Change of Text Books. My oldest child is just 18, and my youngest has recently passed the fourth anniversary of his birth. It is reasonably certain that no radical changes have taken place in the earth's surface during the fourteen years which span the eight natal episodes already referred to. But I think that in that interval every child I possess has needed a new geography during the continuance of each scholastic year. And I am sadly convinced that each geography is an "improvement" upon its discarded predecessor. The domestic pile of text books seems to accumulate, and yet they are apparently useless. I am presented at the beginning of each school year with the same formidable list of books, and that are imperatively needed in this constantly advancing science of geography.

I am naturally a meek and uncomplaining man, and I have no doubt that I should excite in my own offspring a feeling of pitying contempt if I attempted to "bound" the state after the exploded methods of the "old school," but I sometimes wonder in my ardent Japanese fashion, what it is that whenever the fields Mississippi river changes its mind, or Mr. Stanley discovers a new rivulet in Central Africa, it is necessary to issue a new seventy-five cent atlas to accommodate the fact.—John Snyder in Globe-Democrat.

Ann Ideas Concerning Spirits. Although the Ann ideas of a future existence are very hazy, yet they consider that the spirits of men are well disposed toward the living, and may be relied upon to bring good fortune to the village and the inhabitants thereof; hence they have no fear of the spirits of men; but it is very different with those of old women. They are considered to be very malignant—witches, in fact—who are seeking some means of working more deeply rooted than at present, and in order to prevent the spirits of old women bewitching the place and the people, their houses were burned down as soon as ever the corpse was taken away for burial. This was done in order that the spirit might have no abiding place, and while engaged in hunting for its home, would be diverted from its malicious plans. This notion corresponds with the superstitions of barbarous nations in other parts of the world.—J. K. Goodrich in Popular Science Monthly.

Employment for the Blind. Some physicians have warmly indorsed the suggestion that "massage" is an employment, particularly suited to the capabilities of the blind, in whom the tactile sense is so strongly developed. Indeed, in Japan massage has, for a long period of time, been practiced by blind men, who go about the streets with a dog, and draw attention to themselves and their occupation. It is thought that superintendents of blind asylums will find this a profitable employment for their charges.

Fondness for Dress. I noticed four exceedingly handsome, but rather unstriking tailor suits for young ladies all in Lincoln green. The jackets have long pocket flaps, with enormous black buttons, and the fronts are braided elaborately with thick, round cord. Green felt hats with high rolling rims and black cock's feathers go with them, and gantlet gloves of yellow suede. I asked the tailor what these were, and he said he had not the slightest idea what they had been ordered for. Four young ladies of the highest families, but he thought they were just for a sensation, as these young ladies rather enjoy being stared at. I shall watch for the advent of those young ladies from my front window, for they will surely pass, and I am anxious to know whether they will carry cross bows like the robber forester or only Buffalo Bill guns with game bags to carry their furs. I think they will with them.

Some of those very persons, who, from their social position, ought to set a better example toward their less fortunate sisters, seem to study up means of creating sensations. It does not matter to them what other people out of their own set think of them if they can only do something to astonish the natives. It is not a fair thing to do, either, for it brings odium upon all the young girls of this country in the eyes of strangers, and it is not doing right toward themselves nor their parents, but it appears that the young folks of the present generation have got the best of their parents and do just what their foolish heads fancy. I imagine, now, these four girls in Lincoln green, hunting dresses at a party, walking abreast with all the swagger they can assume along our thoroughfares, crowded with people of all countries and all parts of this country. They are all well known and their names will pass from one to another, and they will have gained the worthy reputation of appearing upon the streets in those dresses. I had my way I would put an extinguisher upon those girls, for they need it.—Fashion Letter.

In a Cigarette Factory. The work of the packers is very entertaining to the looker on. There are also about 400 girls in this division. They are seated and surrounded with materials in the same manner as the rollers. In place of tobacco, paste and paper, they have cigarettes, pictures and boxes or wrappers. Those who pack them in boxes receive 5 cents and those who put them in the tin foil wrappers 8 cents per thousand. These girls are remarkable in the rapidity of their work, and they are also quite wonderful mathematicians, since they carry their arithmetic in their finger ends. With unerring accuracy they pick up ten or twenty cigarettes, as the case may be, and with almost electric speed they put them in the boxes, with a ticket and card picture accompanying each box.

Standing near a pretty girl, I attracted her attention by my queries, and was amused to see her get up two or three cigarettes, and as soon as she closed her fingers upon them, without the aid of her eyes, she discovered her mistake, and immediately discarded the two not needed. Joking my fair companion about her mistake, she banteringly offered to wager me her day's pay if I found one box in all the hundreds she had packed that contained less or more than ten cigarettes. I mentioned several of these girls, and found most of them pleased with their work and employers. As visitors are seldom permitted to go through the building my appearance created quite a sensation. During my stay they became noisy and inattentive. Anticipated hearing some of them too severely reprimanded, and was on the alert for any harsh treatment of these poor girls. Much to my relief I heard nothing of the kind; the only reprimand given, which seemed to be all needed, was the tap of a bell. This bell was suspended from the ceiling, and was pulled by the manager of the department. As soon as the stroke was heard it became orderly and quiet.—Richard (Va.) Cor. Chicago Times.

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