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the student body.

# Article

# Verse

## And so William Rearden took his life

By Harold Turkel.

### Inside story concerning the suicide of an actor who lived for the stage

Everyone is asking the same question. Why did William Rearden commit suicide? Here was a man, they say, in the very prime of life, who had everything to live for. He had money, friends, and fame. The man had been a great actor and was financially independent.

Why should such a man kill himself? Certainly life should have held enough for him. The tabloids are hinting that a love affair drove him to that act of desperation, but I know better. For many years I knew him intimately. I know why William Rearden killed himself. I can swear to the fact that he was not insane or in love; nor did he kill himself in a fleeting moment of depression. William Rearden knew exactly what he was doing when he took his own life. Perhaps it would be better if I told the story in its entirety.

As I have said, William Rearden had been a great actor. His Hamlet, the critics agreed, took its place with the greatest of all time. His deep, melodious voice and his handsome face made women flock to his performances; countless numbers were turned away at the door. But William Rearden was not a mere matinee idol. He was a great actor, proud of his art.

Besides being his business manager, I was his friend and confidant. I knew William Rearden better than any other man. I was well aware of the fact that the stage was his whole life. He loved the costumes, the footlights, the makeup, the applause more than anything in the world. He had had numerous love affairs and had been married twice, but I knew that he had never given his heart as fully to any of those women as he had to his beloved stage.

Loved to act.

He used to tell me that nothing pleased him quite so much as to hear his own voice ringing out across the theater. It gave him a sense of power, he said, to feel that he could momentarily capture the souls of all those people.

He was always acting; he never stopped whether he was on or off stage. He walked as though he were wearing a crown and royal robes; he talked as though each word was to be preserved for posterity. Everything he did, he did with a flourish. I think he could have swept the streets without losing the least bit of dignity. Oddly enough, he was not a shallow man, nor was he vain. He just liked to act—that was all. His love for the theater was a profound, sincere, undying affection, which was really beautiful to behold. He often told me, "Bob, if I didn't have the theater, I think I should die."

...for himself.

I shall never forget that fateful evening when William and I walked out the stage entrance after the performance into the cold December air. "How was I tonight, Bob, eh? How was I?" he asked eagerly.

"You're getting better with each new play," I replied. "The audience certainly went wild tonight." "The audience," he said in an ironic tone. "I don't act for the audience. I act for myself. I act because it makes me feel good, and not because it entertains the audience. Some men need drink, some men need drugs, and some men need women; all I need is the theater."

He walked up to the car to get in. The running board was icy, and he slipped and fell. He was unconscious, so I rushed him to the hospital. "Concussion of the brain," the doctor said. He assured me, however, that he would pull through.

Then convalescence.

I spent many hours with William during his convalescence. All he talked about was his acting. He couldn't wait, he said, to get back into his play. Perhaps he

would even take it on tour if he did not find a new one that he liked.

The little table at his bedside was covered with manuscripts which he was diligently studying. None of them, however, pleased him. "I've got to find a play," he said, "that will really give me an opportunity to show what I've got. By George, if I just find it, I'll have the critics raving that I've reached new heights of greatness. There's something in me, Bob, that's never come out yet. My best days are ahead of men, and I can't wait to get out of this damned bed to prove it."

...assurances.

"Take it easy, Bill," I said. "It won't be long now."

I was right. It was not long before William was out of that "damned bed." He was out of the hospital and feeling as well as ever, but he was never to act in another play again. As a result of the shock which he had experienced, he could speak only in a quiet, husky voice. No more would his stentorian tones ring out through the theater, and by this ironic fate his career as an actor was terminated.

The moment that he found out that he would never regain his natural voice and would, consequently, never appear in another

play was one time that he did not act. He just sat and brooded. I did a poor job of cheering him up. "Hell, man," I said, "there are other things in life besides the stage. You've got plenty of money. You can travel; you can make love to all the beautiful women. Why, there are all sorts of things you can do."

...despair.

But he was not listening to me. He just sat there, glassy-eyed and miserable. "I've nothing to live for," he muttered in that quiet voice, "nothing. Why, why, you know Bob, I'm not good for anything now. Acting is the only thing I know. They shoot a horse that's broken its leg. Maybe that's what they ought to do with me."

"Don't talk that way, Bill," I said.

"But it's true. You know it's true. When a man loses whatever genius he may have, it isn't only that bit of genius that dies. Oh no—the man dies too. And as long as his genius is dead, there is nothing anyone can do that can bring him back to life. A man's genius and a man's soul are not two separate flames. They're a single flame, and when that flame burns out, they both die. It's the fellow who has never had any genius who is the lucky one. He's just a clod. He's been dead all the time

and doesn't know it. That doesn't hurt, though. It only hurts when you're dead and you do know it. That's not a dull pain, Bob; it cuts like a knife."

Nothing could be done.

I knew that there was nothing I could say that would do any good; so I kept quiet. He sat there sobbing, with his head in his hands, muttering, "I'm dead, I'm dead. I can talk, I can walk, I can eat, but I'm dead just the same, dead, dead, dead." Just to watch him there like that was enough to jerk your heart out.

William put on a gay front during the months that followed. He gave the biggest and liveliest parties, he was seen with the most beautiful women, he traveled to distant places, and to the undiscerning eye he seemed to be the happiest man alive. He finally told me that it was no use. He was miserable. Life simply did not have any zest for him.

It always struck me as queer that when he 'opped acting on the stage, he stopped acting off the stage. He never did things with a flourish any more. Those white teeth did not flash very often now into that smile which had charmed women in wholesale quantities. He felt that he was the most unfortunate man alive.

I tried to show him that there were countless people who were much worse off, but this did not make the slightest impression upon him. He took what one might almost call a delight in feeling sorry for himself. The idea that he was not good for anything had taken a firm grip upon him. He told me once, "I'm no better than a washed-up prize fighter who spends the rest of his life walking around on his heels. Once he's lost his speed and power, he isn't worth a damn to anyone. Well, that's me—Punch-drunk Willie. I'm walking around on my heels."

Too much strain.

It was not hard to see that he could not continue under that strain much longer. He was bound to snap. I was not surprised, then, when he asked me to straighten out his financial affairs as quickly as possible and to see about the drawing up on his will. Since his forced retirement he had aged years. His face had become lined and haggard, and his eyes had lost that bright, alert look. When I left him that night, I knew that I would never see Willard Rearden again.

The next morning I read in the newspapers that William Rearden was dead. He had fired a bullet through his brain. I knew, however, that he had been dead long before he had pulled the trigger of that gun. He had been dead from that moment he had found out that he would never act again.

The body of William Rearden had now gone to join his soul.

## What Sir William couldn't stand

### A short short story of a man without a hat

By Jon Pruden.

The little hat-check girl in the Topper Club looked at Sir William in surprise. He was a regular customer, good for somewhat over the regular tip every time he came in, and he seldom missed a night. Now he was hurrying past her as if he were trying to avoid her. Thinking what losing that 50 cent tip would do to her fifty thousand dollar bank account, she stepped forward and said in her patronizing way, "Good evening, Sir William." She made a question out of it, meaning, "Where's your hat, you four flusher."

He looked at her, dropped his eyes and blushed. "How do you do," he said, and rushed (if a gentleman like Sir William can rush) into the bar, looking for me.

What I saw.

I had been standing outside the door when Sir William got out of the car. It was a warm night and I had decided to wait there a minute and let the brilliant sparkle of the New York night pour over me. That would get me in the mood for anything new the bartender might find for me to drink. I had tried it before and I knew that if I absorbed enough of that glitter, I could also absorb whatever Louis mixed up.

I stood there a moment, and then, feeling ready to go in, I moved to the door. The Negro doorman swung it open and held it with a broad grin on his face. As I started in, however, I caught sight of the reflection of a car in the chromium plating on the unopened half of the door. It was Sir William's. I saw him get out, and then I stepped back to greet him.

Sir William looked preoccupied and just a little bit wild. He told the chauffeur not to come back, threw up his head, squared his shoulders, and brushed past me and the doorman's teeth without seeing either.

Something wrong.

"What the hell," I thought. "What's the matter with the guy?"

Bill as I called him had always been my ideal of perfection in manners. He could smile in a situation where I would have been fighting mad. And he always kept his poise. But here he had not

even seen me—one of his best friends. And as I stepped inside after him, I saw him passing the hat-check girl like a new Lockheed sizzling by an observation blimp.

Something had happened to change him drastically. It must have been something important. And I decided right there that I would find out what it was. You see, I had read all of Conan Doyle's works, and most of those of the other great murder writers. In an amateur way, I practice detecting myself, and I am an admirer of anyone who can reason out a situation from circumstantial evidence. So, smiling in an ingenuous way, I checked my hat and went after Sir William.

Detecting.

I found him at a table in the corner, gulping down a whiskey. He was strangely pale, and the corners of his mouth were twitching. He looked like one who has just lost a sweetheart or a mother or something. His fingers on the whiskey glass were so tight that they were white, and he was muttering to himself. The poor guy didn't even notice me as I stepped up to the table. And I heard him say, "It won't work. It won't! I can't do it."

"Can't do what," I said. I believe in taking my quarry by surprise. He started, dropped the empty glass, and mumbled something like, "Hello, how are you, sit down." And then he relapsed into silence, fumbled the glass upright and poured himself another whiskey.

I had thought maybe he would tell me what was the matter right then. I hoped he wouldn't because they never do in the best stories. But it would be a good test of surprise as an element in making a criminal confess. Not that Sir William was a criminal, of course, but it would be a test just the same. Well, you see, it didn't work. He just sat there gulping the liquor, and trying to act as if nothing was wrong.

Idle conversation.

"Clumsy of me," he said finally, tapping his glass.

"Yes," I answered. And I started to talk about the races, and where I had been, and what I was going to do. Then I asked him what he

had been doing. And he answered in monosyllables never looking at me.

"Did you lose in that poker game last night?"

"No."

That stopped me again. So I ordered a straight whiskey. I was out of the mood now for anything new. This business was too serious for me to be distracted by Louis' concoctions. I told the waiter to bring me a newspaper, too. I thought I could read a little while I was waiting for Sir William to loosen up and tell me what was troubling him.

"Did you win much, then?" I asked, just to get him started talking.

"Not much."

I swallowed part of my whiskey, picked up the paper, and glanced at it here and there. One of those long silences that seem to be unbreakable hung over the table. I opened the paper with an ostentatious flip that was meant to convey the idea that I thought he was a hell of a person not to talk to me. But he didn't seem to notice.

And then, a little line in the section of lost and found notices attracted my attention. It said that a top-hat had been found up on Fifth Avenue—a top-hat without an owner. I read the thing over several times. In some peculiar way it held my attention. Sir William had come in without a hat. But if he had lost his he would have bought a new one. Still, it was something to talk about. So I said, "Here's an interesting line in the 'Lost and Found.'"

"It doesn't look very important at first sight. It just says that somebody abandoned a top-hat in the middle of the sidewalk. But think what that must mean. No one in New York would do a thing like that, because anyone who has money enough to wear a 'topper' is the café society type. And among us who do wear top-hats their importance has been so imbued that we consider them indispensable. The loss of a hat is a major calamity. One can lose money, jewels, anything but one's hat. I can imagine a person losing his hair before he loses his hat—and lots of us do. Why, even this club is named for a top-hat."

"I think I'll call the police, and offer my services in clearing up what's going to be the 'Famous Hat Mystery.' I'll make them realize that there's something wrong," I said, taking a wild shot, and hoping that he would respond.

Bill twisted around in his chair, tapped the table with his fingers and swallowed two more whiskeys in rapid succession. Then he leaned across the table and caught my hand in his clammy cold one. He blurted out, "For God's sake, don't go to the police."

"But—"

"Promise me you won't go to the police or tell anyone about this."

Great drops of sweat were rolling down off his forehead. So I smiled my reassuring smile—the one I keep for occasions when people are about to confide in me, and said, "All right, I won't do anything. But what's this all about?"

He looked furtively around, hitched his chair nearer, and whispered, "That couldn't have been my hat."

There was another long silence. And after a while I shut my mouth. He took another gulp of whiskey and explained.

"It couldn't have been, because I left mine down by the waterfront last night when no one was around." And then he broke down completely. "I can't justify the act. I have always loved my hat. More than my overcoat, even. And it was a splendid one. It fit perfectly."

He wiped away the tears and continued, "Everywhere I go I have to check the damn thing. I can't wear it in, can I? Well, the other day I checked up, and in checking my hat—you get what I mean—I have spent \$500 dollars in the last year. I've got good blood in my veins, but I'm not rich. And I can't afford a \$500 hat. So I took it off and left it there in the middle of the walk."

I was amazed at my own astuteness. I was a great detective after all. But I said, "I'll not tell anyone, if you are sure you don't want it."

He almost screamed, "Don't ever tell the police. They would bring it back to me. They always bring things back. I have a wife and two children to support. I can't afford a hat."

And then he sighed and leaned back. "I thought it would work, but it won't. I can't ever come here again. The look that hat-check girl gave me curdled my blood. I can't come here without a hat, and I can't afford one. My God, it won't work."