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THE PHANTOM RICKSHAW.

BY RUDYARD KIPLING.

"But I am in Simla," I kept repeating to myself. "I, Jack Pansy, am in Simla, and there are no ghosts here. It's unreasonable of that woman to pretend there are. Why couldn't Agnes have left me alone? I never did her any harm. It might just as well have been me as Agnes. Only I'd never have come back on purpose to kill her. Why can't I be left alone—left alone and happy?"

It was high noon when I first awoke, and the sun was low in the sky before I slept—slept as the tortured criminal sleeps on his rack, too worn to feel further pain.

Next day I could not leave my bed. Heatherlegh told me in the morning that he had received an answer from Mr. Mantering, and that, thanks to his (Heatherlegh's) friendly offices, the story of my affliction had traveled through the length and breadth of Simla, where I was on all sides much pitied.

"And that's rather more than you deserve," he concluded pleasantly, "though the Lord knows you've been going through a pretty severe mill. Never mind. We'll cure you yet, you perverse phenomenon."

I declined firmly to be cured. "You have been much too good to me already, old man," said I, "but I don't think I need trouble you further."

In my heart I knew that nothing Heatherlegh could do would lighten the burden that had been laid upon me.

With that knowledge came also a sense of hopeless, impotent rebellion against the unreasonableness of it all. There were scores of men no better than I whose punishments had at least been reserved for another world, and I felt that it was bitterly, cruelly unfair that I alone should have been singled out for so hideous a fate. This mood would in time give place to another where it seemed that the rickshaw and I were the only realities in a world of shadows; that Kitty was a ghost; that Mantering, Heatherlegh and all the other men and women I knew were all ghosts, and the great, gray hills themselves but vain shadows devised to torture me. From mood to mood I tossed backward and forward for seven weary days, my body growing daily stronger and stronger until the bedroom looking glass told me that I had returned to everyday life and was as other men once more. Curiously enough, my face showed no signs of the struggle I had gone through. It was pale indeed, but as expressionless and commonplace as ever. I had expected some permanent alteration—visible evidence of the disease that was eating me away. I found nothing.

On the 15th of May I left Heatherlegh's house at 11 o'clock in the morning, and the instinct of the bachelor drove me to the club. There I found that every man knew my story as told by Heatherlegh, and was, in clumsy fashion, abnormally kind and attentive. Nevertheless I recognized that for the



It is a hard matter to find an American home, no matter how humble, in which there is not music of some kind. It may be the music of a piano, an organ, a guitar, a banjo or simply the music of a human voice. There can be no question as to its refining influence. But there is one kind of music that is missing from tens of thousands of homes and without which no home can be thoroughly happy. It is the music of childish laughter.

A baby's prattle is the best music for the home. A baby is the only tie that can finally bind together in absolute happiness, usefulness and confidence a man and a woman. It is a cold and cheerless home that never knows the music of a baby's laughter. There are thousands of homes all over this land that were once cheerful and childless, but are to-day happy and lighted with babyhood's smile, that bless Doctor Pierce's Favorite Prescription. It is the best of all medicines for women who suffer from weakness and disease of the distinctly feminine organs. It acts directly on the delicate and important organs, giving them health and strength, vigor and elasticity. It allays inflammation, heals ulceration, soothes pain, stops debilitating drains and tones the nerves. It fits for wifehood and motherhood. It rids maternity of its perils. It banishes the qualms of the expectant period and makes baby's advent easy and almost painless. It insures the child's health and an ample supply of nourishment. It is the discovery of Dr. R. V. Pierce, an eminent and skillful specialist, for thirty years chief consulting physician to the Invalids' Hotel and Surgical Institute at Buffalo, N. Y. All good druggists sell it.

Miss Edith Cain, of Clinton, Allegheny Co., Pa., writes: "I take pleasure in expressing my faith in your Favorite Prescription. After two years of suffering I began taking Dr. Pierce's medicine and now I am entirely cured. I had been troubled with female weakness for some time and also with a troublesome drain on the system, but now I am happy and well. I will cheerfully recommend Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription to all invalid ladies."

Dr. Pierce's Pellets cure constipation.

rest of my natural life I should be among but not of my fellows, and I envied very bitterly indeed the laughing coolies on the mall below. I lunched at the club and at 4 o'clock wandered aimlessly down the mall in the vague hope of meeting Kitty. Close to the band stand the black and white liveries joined me, and I heard Mrs. Wessington's old appeal at my side. I had been expecting this ever since I came out, and was only surprised at her delay. The phantom rickshaw and I went side by side along the Chota Simla road in silence. Close to the bazaar Kitty and a man on horseback overtook and passed us. For any sign she gave I might have been a dog in the road. She did not even pay me the compliment of quickening her pace, though the rainy afternoon had served for an excuse.

So Kitty and her companion and I and my ghostly light of love crept round Jukko in couples. The road was strewn with water, the pipes dripped like roof pipes on the rocks below and the air was full of rain. Two or three times I found myself saying to myself almost aloud "I'm Jack Pansy on leave at Simla—at Simla—everyday, ordinary Simla. I mustn't forget that—I mustn't forget that." Then I would try to recollect some of the gossip I had heard at the club, the prices of So-and-so's horses—anything, in fact, that related to the workaday Anglo-Indian world. I knew so well. I even repeated the multiplication table rapidly to myself, to make quite sure that I was not taking leave of my senses. It gave me much comfort and must have prevented my hearing Mrs. Wessington for a time.

Once more I wearily climbed the convent slope and entered the level road. Here Kitty and the man started off at a canter, and I was left alone with Mrs. Wessington. "Agnes," said I, "will you put back your hood and take me what it all means?" The hood dropped noiselessly, and I was face to face with my dead and buried mistress. She was wearing the dress in which I had last seen her alive; carried the same tiny handkerchief in her right hand and the same cardcase in her left. A woman eight months dead with a cardcase! I had to pin myself down to the multiplication table and to set both hands on the stone parapet of the road to assure myself that that at least was real.

"Agnes," I repeated, "for pity's sake tell me what it all means." Mrs. Wessington leaned forward, with that odd quick turn of the head I used to know so well, and spoke.

If my story had not already so rudely overleaped the bounds of all human belief, I should apologize to you now. As I know that no one—not even Kitty, for whom it is written as some sort of justification of my conduct—will believe me, I will go on. Mrs. Wessington spoke, and I walked with her from the Sanjowlie road to the turning below the commander in chief's house as I might walk by the side of any living woman's rickshaw, deep in conversation. The second and most tormenting of my moods of sickness had suddenly laid hold upon me, and, like the prince in Tennyson's poem, "I seemed to move amid a world of ghosts." There had been a garden party at the commander in chief's, and we two joined the crowd of homeward bound folk. As I saw them then it seemed that they were the shadows—impalpable fantastic shadows—that divided for Mrs. Wessington's rickshaw to pass through. What we said during the course of that weird interview I cannot—indeed I dare not—tell. Heatherlegh's comment would have been a short laugh and a remark that I had been "mashing a brain, eye and stomach chimeria." It was a ghastly and yet in some indefinable way a marvelously dear experience. Could it be possible, I wondered, that I was in this life to woo a second time the woman I had killed by my own neglect and cruelty?

I met Kitty on the homeward road—a shadow among shadows.

If I were to describe all the incidents of the next fortnight in their order, my story would never come to an end and your patience would be exhausted. Morning after morning and evening after evening the ghostly rickshaw and I used to wander through Simla together. Wherever I went there the four black and white liveries followed me and bore me company to and from my hotel. At the theater I found them amid the crowd of yelling Jaupanics; outside the club veranda after a long evening of whist; at the birthday ball waiting patiently for my appearance, and in broad daylight when I went calling. Save that it cast no shadow, the rickshaw was in every respect as real to look upon as one of wood and iron. More than once indeed I have had to

check myself from warning some hard riding friend against cantering over it. More than once I have walked down the mall deep in conversation with Mrs. Wessington to the unspeakable amazement of the passersby.

Before I had been out and about a week I learned that the "fit" theory had been discarded in favor of insanity. However, I made no change in my mode of life. I called, rode and dined out as freely as ever. I had a passion for the society of my kind which I had never felt before. I hungered to be among the realities of life, and at the same time I felt vaguely unhappy when I had been separated too long from my ghostly companion. It would be almost impossible to describe my varying moods from the 15th of May up to to-day.

The presence of the rickshaw filled me by turns with horror, blind fear, a dim sort of pleasure and utter despair. I dared not leave Simla, and I knew that my stay there was killing me. I knew, moreover, that it was my destiny to die slowly and a little every day. My only anxiety was to get the penance over as quietly as might be. Alternately I hungered for a sight of Kitty and watched her outrageous flirtations with my successor—to speak more accurately, my successors—with amused interest. She was as much out of my life as I was out of hers. By day I wandered with Mrs. Wessington, almost content. By night I implored heaven to let me return to the world as I used to know it. Above all these varying moods lay the sensation of dull, numbing wonder that the seen and the unseen should mingle so strangely on this earth to bound one poor soul to its grave.

Aug. 27.—Heatherlegh has been indefatigable in his attendance on me, and only yesterday told me that I ought to send in an application for sick leave. An application to escape the company of a phantom! A request that the government would graciously permit me to get rid of five ghosts and an airy rickshaw by going to England! Heatherlegh's proposition moved me to almost hysterical laughter. I told him that I should await the end quietly at Simla, and I am sure that the end is not far off. Believe me that I dread its advent more than any word can say, and I torture myself nightly with a thousand speculations as to the manner of my death.

Shall I die in my bed decently and as an English gentleman should die, or in one last walk on the mall will my soul be wrenched from me to take its place forever and ever by the side of that ghastly phantasm? Shall I return to my old lost allegiance in the next world or shall I meet Agnes loathing her and bound to her side through all eternity? Shall we two hover over the scene of our lives till the end of time? As the day of my death draws nearer the intense horror that all living flesh feels toward escaped spirits from beyond the grave grows more and more powerful. It is an awful thing to go down quick among the dead with scarcely one-half of your life completed. It is a thousand times more awful to wait as I do in your midst for I know not what unimaginable terror. Pity me at least on the score of my "delusion," for I know you will never believe what I have written here. Yet as surely as ever a man was done to death by the powers of darkness I am that man.

In justice, too, pity her. For as surely as ever woman was killed by man I killed Mrs. Wessington. And the last portion of my punishment is even now upon me.

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