

## THE SILENT WITNESS.

Did you ever hear of Pawpaw village?  
Probably not.

It was certainly too inconsiderable when the events here narrated took place, to be worthy of the notice of any compiler of geographies.

The belle of Pawpaw was Rose Unwin.

She was the daughter of the richest man in the place, and the prettiest girl by far for miles around.

She counted her beaux by twenties, and could have married any one of them if she would, but girlhood was too attractive to her.

She said "No" to everyone who proposed to her, but she said it in such a way that she angered none of them.

Some of these lovers had given up the chase in despair and had fallen in love with other girls and married them.

Some still bided their time; among them Warren Lawrence the miller's son.

The miller was an old man, who had made money—a friend of Rose Unwin's father.

Warren was his only son.

He was handsome and graceful, and, what was more highly valued in that part of the world, he was very strong and very large—six feet two in his stockings, and a cloth-yard broad from shoulder to shoulder.

It was said that Warren had sworn that no one save himself should marry Rose Unwin, that the life of any man who should "cut him out" would not be safe for an hour, and many believed it.

Rose only laughed at the tale.

Even if it were true, she scarcely liked Warren less for being so much in earnest.

"None of them," she had said to herself so often that she believed it, "none of them will ever call me wife. I will be my own mistress, my father's pet, my happy self for ever. Love is something a woman does not experience. I, at least, shall never feel it for anyone."

But one day the clergyman's nephew came to visit her, and she said this no more.

Charles Dorset was not handsomer than many of the men who wooed her; he was by no means so large.

He was a scholarly man, prematurely bald, and with a mild, quiet, gentlemanly face.

But she had never seen anyone like him before, and he fascinated her.

His admiration pleased her.

She respected him, and her coquetry deserted her in his presence.

No woman ever flirts with a man whom she either respects or loves.

She ceased to think solely of herself and her power over hearts.

She thought a great deal of him.

At last she knew the truth—she loved him.

Long before this he had known that he loved her.

No one else suspected the truth.

The men saw nothing dangerous in Charles Dorset; the women were not penetrating enough to discern, in the absence of all those high arts of flirtation in which Rose was such an adept, the fact that she felt, for once in her life, a veritable passion.

As for the old father, it never entered his mind that a girl, who could stand out against Warren Lawrence's six odd feet of burly, florid, young manhood, would succumb to a plain, almost middle-aged man, not much taller than she was herself. But it was so.

Rose no longer said that no man could win her heart.

She knew that one had won it.

Still she flirted, rode, boated, danced with all save that one; still she had glances that set men's hearts beating, and smiles that thrilled them through, for all save him.

But when he sat beside her, her eyes sought the ground, her cheek flushed, her tongue was silent.

One evening, when the moon was high, the old farmer took his evening nap on the lounge, and Rose and Charles Dorset were alone upon the broad veranda.

Neither had spoken for a long while.

What had been said by Charles before this silence had fallen upon them had set Rose's heart beating wildly.

He had spoken of leaving the place, of going away,

Now he leaned towards her and looked intently into her face.

She knew that his eyes were upon her, but she did not lift hers.

As they sat thus, some one came unheard along the path that led from the other side of the house, and stood motionless in the shadow of the trees, watching them.

It was Warren Lawrence.

"The outrageous flirt!" he said to himself; "how she leads that parson fellow on. It would be fun to hear him get his dismissal, and see how he'd take it. Does he think he has a chance with her?"

Just then the "parson fellow" put his hand on the girl's arm.

"Rose," he said softly.

Warren chuckled softly to himself.

"Rose, when I go hence, will you go with me? I love you very dearly. I will do all I can to make you happy. Do you love me enough to let me, Rose?"

Warren Lawrence heard no answer, but in a moment more, he saw Rose's head lying on Charles Dorset's shoulder.

He could not believe his senses.

He stared in silence.

He saw the man shower kisses on the fair young face.

He heard words of endearment pass between them, and still fancied himself in a dream.

At last he stole away, his rage overpowering his surprise as time passed on, and he felt that the girl he had sworn to win had given herself to another.

He sat down on a fallen tree not far from the farm-house, and tried to think

He had been out shooting that day, and his errand at the Unwins' had been to offer them the contents of his game bag.

It lay at his feet, his rifle leant against the great oak behind him.

He held his head between his hands, pressing the temples tight between his palms, and tried to think, but thought deserted him.

Reason fled.

Blind jealousy, led by blind passion, took possession of his soul; for the time being he was a maniac.

For a long while he sat thus, grinding his teeth, and muttering threats between them.

He had no definite purpose in remaining; he only felt that he could not meet anyone, kinsman, friend, or stranger, until he felt calmer.

The moon still rode through the sky, but now she scudded through black clouds which were gathering rapidly.

Now her bright rim peeped from behind the dark masses; now she lay in a little sea of clear dark blue; now she was gone again, and anon he saw her burst brighter than ever from her imprisonment.

Low mutterings arose.

The wind began to play pranks with the scattered leaves, and to toss the branches about overhead.

A sudden thunder-shower was about to break over Pawpaw.

Warren Lawrence understood the signs of the weather as well as any man living, but he did not stir.

What was the tempest to him, in whose heart a wilder tempest was raging?

Soon the thunder rattled overhead.

The moon was blotted out, and only the bright lightning flashes lit the scene.

Prudent people had made the best of their way home, and some belated pedestrian was hurrying along past the place where the young man sat.

He came with a quick, light step, and whistled as he ran.

Instinct told Warren Lawrence who it was.

It was Charles Dorset going home to the parsonage.

He saw the slender form, a mere black shadow in the greyer darkness; and remembering how he had seen Rose's head upon its shoulder, he grew mad with fury.

He seized his rifle and stood up.

The broad tree boughs stretched over him, and the dark trunk stood behind him like a wall.

Not even his outline could have been seen by anyone who looked that way, as it might upon the road.

He lifted the rifle to his shoulder, took aim and fired.

At that moment a flash of lightning such as he had never seen before, illuminated the sky.

The road, the wood beyond, the distant church and parsonage, were all distinctly visible.

The light was more intense than that of broad day.

It was as though all the objects within sight had been plunged into a great fiery furnace.

The figure on the road had turned, clasped its hand to its heart, and fallen on its face, and Warren Lawrence had been flung forward upon the ground insensible.

Horrible peals of thunder rattled through the sky.

A sound as though great balls of incalculable weight had been rolled over the earth, was prolonged for several minutes.

Then the rain poured down with a fury impossible to describe.

It brought Warren Lawrence to his senses, and enabled him, after awhile, to stagger home.

But, at dawn, some farmer, early on the road, found Charles lying dead, shot through the back of the head in a most horrible manner.

He had not an enemy upon earth, as far as was known.

No one guessed that he had been a suitor of Rose Unwin, or that she had favoured him.

Suspicion could not rest upon Warren Lawrence—upon anyone.

It was decided that someone bent on plunder had attacked the young man on his way home.

There had been tramps in the woods that day, unknown fellows of unpleasant looks.

The crime was laid to their charge, and search was made for any trace of them in vain.

Those to whom Charles Dorset was dear bore their grief as best they could.

His betrothed suffered in silence.

Only one man knew her grief—the man who caused it.

Weeks passed—months glided by him.

The sod grew green above the murdered man's grave, and his murderer was wooing the woman who had loved him with all the power that in him lay.

She was changed and saddened, but she was a woman still and young.

By degrees she yielded to his entreaties, and at last promised to be his wife.

Before Charles came she had liked him better than anyone else.

She liked him still.

She could love no one, she said.

Her one love was past; but she could be a good wife and true, and be proud of this great, blooming, beautiful animal who was so fond of her.

But, when she had pledged herself, she was more sorrowful than before.

A love like this was but a mockery of that sweet feeling she had once experienced, and she sobbed herself asleep that night thinking of Charles Dorset.

It was but natural that she should dream of him.

She thought he came to her bedside and knelt down there; that he took her hand and held it in his own, and, though she knew he was no living man, but a spirit, that she had no fear of him.

"I have come to warn you," he said. "Do you remember the storm that night—the night I died? Do you remember the last flash of lightning?"

Then every particular of the storm seemed to return to her memory.

"Go, look at the oak," he said, "the old oak at the head of the long road. Look at that before you marry Warren Lawrence."

Then he was gone.

She started, wide awake, cold, trembling, horror-stricken. But all was calm.

The stars shone in through the small window panes.

There was not a sound to be heard.

"Only a dream," she said; "and a troubled mind gives birth to dreams."

And she prayed, and strove to sleep again.

With sleep the dream returned, and thrice before the day-dawn the self-same words were whispered in her ear—

"Before you marry Warren Lawrence, look at the oak tree at the head of the long road."

Look at the oak tree.

Within sight of it her lover had been shot dead.

The oak tree itself had been smitten.

Was there some proof by which the murderer could be traced lingering about that tree?

Was the dream merely the folly of disturbed slumber, or was it a warning not to be slighted?

In any case, she would have been more than woman could she have refrained from obeying the mandate which had been uttered; for, though natural good sense taught her that only in dreamland had she met her lost lover, still the impression that his lips had uttered the words which she had heard was too strong to be cast aside.

In the bright dawn of the early June day which followed this dream-filled night, Rose Unwin took her way to the spot indicated by the vision.

Ever since that fatal night, ten months before, she had avoided this road.

Now, for the first time, she trod it.

Slowly, and with an aching heart, she passed the pretty, scattered cottages, and came to the head of the long road.

On one side arose a green hill, on the other a bit of beautiful woodland; at its head like a gigantic sentinel, towered the mighty oak tree under which Warren Lawrence had cast himself down after seeing Rose in the arms of Charles Dorset, in the shelter of which he had taken aim at the unhappy man.

Green and fresh as ever stood this oak on one side.

The other was dead, seared.

That horrible flash of lightning had splintered it and cut away a long, smooth slab on one side of the trunk.

The night that had left its mark on her heart had also left its mark on this great tree.

It stood a monument of that awful hour, when with his love-kiss fresh upon her lips, Charles Dorset breathed his last, the victim of mad jealousy.

"But why am I sent here?" asked Rose of herself. "What can I gain by this sight—I, who have never forgotten—who will never forget?"

As she spoke she approached the tree and placed her hands upon it.

Her eyes rested on the side of the tree over which the lightning had passed.

It was bereft of bark, and comparatively flat and smooth.

Had someone been drawing upon it?

What was this?

Her heart gave one wild bound, and then she stood still; a cold moisture bedewed her forehead, and for a moment she was dumb and motionless.

For this is what she saw upon the tree.

A photograph of Warren Lawrence, with his rifle lifted to his shoulder.

His profile delicately defined, as though drawn by the most careful artist, expressed, in his bent brows and set teeth, the passions of hate and revenge.

Gazing upon it, any ordinarily intelligent observer would have said—

"The man is about to commit a murder."

As her eyes told her this, Rose knew, as well as though she had been a witness of the awful deed, that Warren Lawrence had killed Charles Dorset.

An hour after she stood ghost-like and pallid beside him, and bade him follow her.

She led him wondering to the great oak, and pointed, with her trembling finger, to that which she had seen upon it—The Silent Witness.

"You knew of our love. You laid in wait for him. You slew him," she said. "I am a woman, and I do not thirst for your blood, but we cannot breathe the same air. I give you twenty-four hours before I make your crime known. After that I arouse the place. Ah, I have too much mercy on the man who murdered him, against whom Heaven's hand has written an accusation."

And the man who listened only looked wildly at the strange memorial of his awful deed, and with a horror of he knew not what upon him, fled from the fearful sight, and left the place for ever.

The flash of lightning which had illuminated his deed had turned witness against the murderer by photographing him upon the tree; so said one of the two scientific men in Pawpaw.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

It was night; there was no sun; but there was the figure—so good a likeness, too, that no one could fail to perceive it now that it had been discovered.

The majority of the villagers viewed the thing in a supernatural light, and the head of the long road rejoiced in a ghastly reputation for many months.

At last, however, the photograph faded.

By close observation, one could make out marks that might be resolved into the figure of a sportsman taking aim at something, just as cracks in old whitewash or the embers of a fire may be by any imaginative person.

And the wise men of Pawpaw are inclined to think that Rose saw no more, but that the intuition common to women led her by degrees to the truth and to her denunciation of young Lawrence.

As for the women, they have taken the artistic ghost to their heart, and refuse to part from The Silent Witness.

## NEW FASHION IN FURNISHING.

Drawing room suites of furniture, writes a Paris correspondent, are quite out of date; no one with any pretension to taste admit them within a house. A fashionable drawing-room now is furnished with cushions, nick-nacks, and tapestries—nothing else. Enter the drawing-room of a lady of fashion, you will not see two chairs alike; you will, indeed, scarcely see a chair at all. What you will see, however, are immense Japanese vases forming flower boxes, and from which emerge large palm trees. Here and there, between these trees in Japanese vases, are placed marble statues and busts. In one corner of the room—and partly surrounded by trees and flowers—is a piano in ebony or polisher case. The chairs, or rather their substitutes, are made so far as to form two cushions, one for the seat and one for the back. Each chair is different. Each is soft and comfortable, like an ottoman. On such a chair every one feels at ease, everyone looks well; and being at ease and looking well, everyone becomes amiable and witty. An ebony Louis XV. table, *cis led* at the corners, may be said to be the only "piece" of furniture in the room. "Whatnots" are of course scattered about, though not in profusion, and nick-nacks of every description fill the corners of the room and the tables. An enamel of the lady of the house is the only picture that is allowed to grace the walls of a drawing-room.