

TALES OF THE JURY ROOM

THE NINTH JURYMAN'S TALE

CHAPTER II

Another question arose to my mind... I had been conversing with him in reality a supernatural being...

While my thoughts were thus engaged, I gradually felt the effects of the want of rest and mental labor...

I was about to burst forth into reproaches, but he laid one finger on his lips with a warning frown...

"I have at length found an opportunity," he said, "of resuming our conversation. I left thee abruptly, but it would have been dangerous to us both had I tarried an instant longer..."

"It is indeed, magnificent," he said. "And yet the Romans never busied themselves very deeply with the discussion of such subtle matters as thou suffereest to come between thee and thy rest..."

"I pray thee, hold me excused," I replied. "Thou hast already used me very ill, and earned for me at my father's hand, that which I believe thou wouldst not be very willing to suffer in my stead..."

"Nay, go not yet," he said, "eat first, and let it not appear that we part in anger." So saying, he unfolded a napkin and placed it on the grass...

two and thirty, leaving after him a name which will fill all history to the end of time."

"Thou meanest Alexander of Macedonia?" "I am he!" said the stranger. At this, I burst into a fit of laughter...

"My first supposition had been, that the stranger either jested, or was a lunatic, but I now suspected that I had to deal with a disciple of Pythagoras, who held in common with all of his sect, the doctrine of the transmigration of souls."

"And by what name," I asked evading any disputation as to his identity with Alexander the Great, "by what name is it thy fortune to be known at present?"

"Restrain thy curiosity," he answered. "Enough for thee that I desire to serve thee, and have much in my power. I promise thee, if thy mind hold, as I have no doubt it will, thou shalt have the means of seeing Athens. Only meet me to-morrow morning, at the same spot where we met to day, and at the same hour, and I will tell thee more."

"On my recovery, if it could be called a recovery, which left me still maimed and halt for life, I began to entertain serious thoughts of seeking out some eligible mode of passing the remainder of my days in a manner worthy of a rational being."

"Like the Christian monks, they lived in strict seclusion, flying cities and taking up their residence in villages, where their communities subsisted by the exercise of such trades as were useful and innocent in their nature. In those societies they allowed no traffic, no commerce in slaves, no navigation, no trade, no use of money, nor extensive possessions in land. They served each other, and had all their property in common. Each house was open to every member of the sect, their business was labor and the care of the sick. Beholding the evils which so frequently attend on marriage, that the most part renounced that state of life, by their doing so should expose them to the reproach of leading a life useless to the commonwealth, they made the education of youth a part of their employment, bringing up the children of others, and forming them to their own manners, from the tenderest years. Each community had its steward, and in all these was enforced a great respect for age, and a horror of anger, lying or swearing, with the exception of the oath they took on entering the sect, to obey the superior, to distinguish themselves in nothing, if they were afterwards raised to that dignity, to teach nothing but as they learned it, to conceal nothing from those of their own sect, and to reveal nothing of its mysteries to others, even for the preservation of life. Their only study was the morality of the law of Moses, a portion of which was read on Sabbath days in their synagogues by one individual, while another expounded its meaning. Rising early, they prayed until sunrise, no profane discourse being allowed before that period. Then they worked till within an hour of noon, when they bathed, denying themselves the use of oil, no slender mortification in such a climate. They then ate together in a hall where strict silence was observed, their food consisting of bread, and one kind of meat, after which they again worked till evening. They were sober in their habits, and so long lived that a century was the usual limit of their years. In their judgments they were severe—a great transgression was followed by the penalty of expulsion from the community, which was a punishment scarcely less than death itself from the sufferer. But the Bible was their great study. In that they looked for everything. Some even pretended to divine the future from

it, by using certain previous preparations. Others sought in it for medicine, and the properties of roots and minerals—for everything their text book was the Bible.

Besides all this, they were most exact in sending their offerings to the Temple, although they never themselves approached the city, and encouraged themselves in entertaining a contempt for torments and death itself.

"Since you are a tailor," said the old Jew, as he concluded, "you are qualified by trade for admission amongst them, and, since you love seclusion, they will supply you with abundance of it in return for your little service you can do them, in the way of your calling."

"I was very much taken with this description given me by the old Jew, and after arranging all affairs, left in confusion by my father's death, I lost no time in visiting the house of the sect, which was in our neighborhood. I found all things in the community, save in the exception of some points of doctrine, and certain feelings of which he had not spoken. I found that while they professed a strict obedience to their own superior, they acknowledged none such outside the precincts of their community, acknowledging only God for their master, and ready to suffer everything rather than obey man; unlike the Christian monks, who, independent of their religious obedience, made it a rule to be models of submission to any government under which they may be placed. But what most of all disgusted me in addition to such empty pride and their never ending purifications, was the absurdity of their belief in destiny, imagining that all things were done, even to their own acts, by necessity, and that there was no such thing as freedom of the will. Accordingly after a trial of some months, not finding myself much wiser and happier, I left the Essenes in their white robes and their ablations, and turned my attention seriously to my long projected journey to Athens."

"In that city of sages," I said, "I shall at least learn something to the purpose. The garden of philosophy, the school of the whole world, must have some fruits as yet unculled, some wisdom still remembered. There I shall learn something satisfactory of man, and of his nature." Thus I went on, figuring to my own mind, a city of silence and of gravity, filled with bearded philosophers, whose eyes for ever betokened abstraction of mind, and whose lips were ever silent, except when they opened to convey instruction. Alas! how quickly on my approach to the city were those sublime visions put to flight.

"I was pacing leisurely along one of the public roads, within a few miles of the city, when I was accosted by a young man, who asked without ceremony on what business I came to Athens? On hearing my reply, he said: 'Then you are fortunate in having met with me, for I am a pupil of the sophist Himerius, by far the most eminent in Athens; he teaches grammar, history, poetry, mathematics, to perfection, and there is not such another astronomer beneath the moon.'"

"He ran on pouring forth such a torrent of eulogy as he walked by my side, that I could not but admire my good fortune in falling in with a disciple of the renowned Himerius. As he continued to speak, a new voice suddenly struck upon my ear. 'Harken not to him, unwary stranger, but follow me, and I will conduct thee to the feet of the sophist Proheresius, to whom this Himerius is no better than a clown.'"

"Other voices now broke in, and we were presently surrounded by a crowd of young men in the habit of students, all vociferating the names of the several sophists under whom they studied, and pulling me one from another, until I thought I should have been torn in pieces between these partisans of the rival teachers of wisdom, and in the midst of a still increasing tumult I was dragged, rather than conducted to the town, where after a dreadful contest in which my own inclinations were no longer consulted, I was borne away in triumph by the strongest party and conveyed to a house, when I thought my troubles were at an end; but this was only the commencement of such a day of persecution as I had never before experienced. It was tedious to detail the whole. First I was exposed in public to a crowd of disputants, who set upon me like so many bounds about to worry an unfortunate hare, one asking what I thought of the metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls? another to what sect I belonged? a fourth, my trade? a fifth, my country? another if I placed happiness in the things without or those within my power? to all which inquiries my grave and serious answers seemed to afford them infinite diversion. When tired of this scene, they conducted me with great ceremony, marching two and two, to the public bath, on reaching which they began shouting and leaping like so many bacchanals or madmen, enjoying the terror I could not avoid manifesting, and knocking at the door as if they would have torn it from the hinges. Fortunately I was not so dismayed but I made my way in as soon as the door was opened, on which I was given to understand that my persecutions were at an end, and that I was now initiated and entitled to all the honors of an Athenian student."

Such were the manners of the young Athenian votaries of wisdom! Such was the city of Minerva, to

which I have travelled so far, and with so sanguine a heart in search of happiness and wisdom. I received some consolation for these annoyances in the progress which I soon began to make in philosophic learning. The sophist with whom I studied was one of the most celebrated masters of eloquence in Greece. So highly were his lectures esteemed, that they were always attended by many notaries, who by means of symbolical figures representing words were enabled to transfer his words to paper as rapidly as they were uttered. These symbols were again transcribed in full by notaries of a second class, so that I was preserved in the exact form in which it had been written. We had students of all sects and nations at this time in Athens, but the greater number were Christians, and many intended for the ecclesiastical state.

One day a student told me of a sophist in the city, who, in addition to his mathematical demonstrations, in which they all excelled, was privately addicted to the art of magic. For a time I despised the story, as since I came to Athens my applications to the demonstrative sciences had greatly diminished the curiosity I once entertained respecting those superstitious arts, which I began to regard as altogether visionary. The mention of such appearances brought back to my mind the occurrences of the day on which I had received my lameless, and the unknown individual by whose capricious bounty I was now enabled to pursue a course so much more in accordance with my own inclinations than that from which I had withdrawn.

"You may think that you please," urged the student, "of the reality of the strange appearances which he conjured up, but that such do appear in obedience to his summons, is a fact to which I can myself bear evidence. If you are still in doubt you may to-night have the testimony of your own eyes and ears." After hearing more from him upon the subject, I agreed to be his companion on the ensuing night. My curiosity (if it were mere curiosity) upon the subject of supernatural appearances, and immaterial agency, was once more aroused by what I had been told, and the longer I reflected upon it the more impatiently I longed for the arrival of the appointed time. Such a night! such a scene as it was soon my lot to witness!

CHAPTER III

A dim moonlight conducted us to the temple of Hecate. On entering, my companion laid one finger on his lips, to intimate that we must observe the strictest silence. There was no light in the temple save that of the moon, which entered in many places, revealing the gigantic idol, looking doubly awful in the still gloom by which it was surrounded. My companion and I took our places in a recess, where, concealed behind an idol of lesser size than that of the goddess to whom the temple was dedicated, we prepared to observe all that was about to take place, without the danger of being seen by others.

In a short time we could discern the figure of the hierophant, who entered the building accompanied by a stranger, whose features I could not discern, but his garb seemed that of a student like myself. When he spoke, the first sound of his voice startled me, as if I had heard it before under some strangely interesting circumstances.

"What care I," said he "for squares and circles, for angles and curves, for sines and tangents; what care I to hear that unity is thrice contained in three, or that proportion divides? I am weary of the dry and obvious conclusions of the mathematicians—of magnitudes and their measures—I wish to hear from you something more worthy of interesting an immaterial spirit."

"You shall be gratified," replied the hierophant. "Yet I know not how it is," continued the stranger, "but now that I am about to witness what I have so long desired to see, the thought of it freezes me with terror. The silence of this place, the awful hour of night, and the image of Hecate seen thus dimly in the gloom, are not in themselves sufficient to account for what I feel. The very air I breathe, since we have entered, seems to communicate a degree of terror such as I have never felt before."

"It is the influence of what you are about to behold that already seizes on your spirits," said the hierophant. "Be bold and brief in what thou sayest, and expect but one answer to above all things, beware of using any sign or phrase familiar to thy Christian education, else thou wilt ruin all."

This stranger then was a Christian! This discovery astonished me, for I already knew there was nothing which they held in greater abhorrence than any participation in the magic rites of these hierophants. In the meantime, while the hierophant made his preparations I could not avoid sharing in all the feelings expressed by the stranger. The place seemed to grow hot and suffocating, and I could not withdraw my eyes from the statue, before which the hierophant burned what seemed a small grain of incense, which he had first purified with many ceremonies. While he did so, muttering some verses in a low voice, I could plainly discern a smile arising on the stony features, and the torch which the goddess held in her hand broke gradually into a flame. The scene which it revealed still fills my mind with horror in recalling

it. Before the idol, the light shone full upon the figure of the stranger, who seemed to recoil with an attitude of horror, his features pale and distorted with excess of fear. I had no difficulty in recognizing my Pythagorean friend, the new revival of Alexander the Great, to whose bounty I stood so much indebted! He seemed now oppressed with terror, his limbs shook and his mouth half open, seemed gasping for air and utterance. There was enough to justify his terror, and to make it impossible for me to avoid sharing it to an extent fully equal to his own. Between him and the idol stood or rather floated a shadowy figure of such terrible and hideous aspect, as I cannot even now recall without a shudder. There was visible through the mists that ever floated and wreathed around it, a lurid semblance of eyes and ghastly features, but with an expression from which the beholder recoiled with a feeling of indescribable fear and melancholy.

"I am here!" exclaimed the phantom, "what wouldst thou?" "I would see something," said the stranger, "of the world to which thou belongest. Is it happier or more wretched than our own?" "It is happier and more wretched." "When shall I enter it?" "When thou wilt."

"But apart from my own act or will?" "Beware of Phrygia." "What shall I be called when that day arrives?" "Augustus."

"Shall I succeed in the design which I am meditating at this moment?" "Thou shalt do much, but much shall remain undone." "From whom, then, shall the new system receive its heavenly blow?" "From its professors." "Thou sayest, the world from which thou comest is more happy and more wretched than our own. Which is it to thee?" "Happiness has many names."

"Which of the two is it more advisable to use in the design I meditate?—force or art?" "Art—and force." "I would ask thee more. Why are laws so strong in the physical world, and so feeble in the moral? Why is there order in the heavenly bodies, and little or none on earth?" "The stars have no will."

"What reward do you propose, in case I serve you in the way I meditate?" "A share in our kingdom." "And happiness?" "In our kingdom." "Hast thou companions?" "Beyond the numbering. Dismiss me!" the phantom continued, addressing the hierophant, who stood at a distance, a silent spectator of the scene.

"A moment!" cried the stranger hastily. "I would see thy companions," he added in a lower tone. Scarcely had he uttered the words, when the horrors of the scene, all on the verge of mortal endurance, became multiplied tenfold. Volumes of curling mist ascended in the strong torch light, to the very roof of the temple, through which innumerable shapes were seen, thick as sparks above a furnace, of an appearance so shifting and variable, that it baffles every effort at description, and amid a dull roar of mingled sounds like that of a distant multitude, or the noise of a storm tossed ocean. Some looked like specks in the remotest distance, others appeared to be almost in startling contact with the very person of the beholder. Most bore a hideously distorted resemblance to the form of man or of other animals, but with a capricious alteration of size, either in particular features, or in the whole, or half the figure, which had an effect as whimsical as it was horrible. It is impossible to convey any idea of the scene, for what is singular to say, was the most appalling in its influence on the beholder's mind, would be cold narration be more likely to provoke laughter or contempt. The whole soon came to a termination as abrupt as it was unexpected. Terrified by the phantoms he had himself evoked, the stranger, trembling in every limb, and pale as death, forgetting the warning of the magician, signed himself with the cross in the manner of the Christians, and to my relief and astonishment, the awful sights and sounds were no longer to be heard or seen, and the temple remained silent and lonely as before; the torch extinguished in the hand of the idol, and the dim moonlight shining on the marble features as before.

"Why didst thou disregard my warning?" said the hierophant. "Thou hast ruined all." "I knew not what I did," replied the stranger. "But how was it that the sign I made, had power to terrify those beings, themselves so terrible?" "It was not fear," said the hierophant. "They did it, but to show a horror of your weakness. What thou with such designs in head, thou show thyself a slave to the very folly thou condemnest in so many others. Thou must stealth thy heart in a panoply of steel, if thou wouldst carry into effect the mighty work of which thou dreamest by night, and arguest in thy waking hours."

"It may be as thou sayest," replied the stranger, still pale and trembling in every limb, "and if so, I grieve to have offended those tremendous beings. O shadows of immaterial world, how terrible ye are! How, even in recollection, ye still freeze with supernatural awe, the very current of my blood. And have I indeed beheld them? Have I truly looked upon those, whom I have so

long thirsted to see, and to serve? This strange excitement, so unlike all fear awakened by the sense of natural danger, this chilly creeping of the flesh, and stirring of the hair, and all but desolation of the strong knit frame itself assures me that it is so. But alas! what am I? what has a being such as I the power of accomplishing? without place, without command, without dominion?" "Thou canst watch occasions," said the hierophant, "thou canst hold the weapon poised, and be ready with the blow, when the opportunity shall be afforded thee. No mortal of his own mere force hath any power. The successful are only stronger, because they are more vigilant than others. When conquest makes them careless, they fall in their turn, by affording the occasions which they watched before."

"Thou heardest," said the stranger, "the phantom evaded my inquiry as to the issue of my design."

"And is it by doubting of the issue that thou canst ever hope to be successful?" "O Evemarus," exclaimed the stranger, "is it not like the madness of one, who with outspread hands would attempt to arrest the rushing of the broad north wind? This all-powerful illusion, which I have half hated all my life, and wholly so within the last few years, spreads irresistible as a pestilence throughout the world. All yield, all fall before it—thrones, kingdoms, land and sea, island and continent, the city and the desert, wherever it breathes, with still and penetrating influence, it subdues and changes all. To thee, Evemarus, I disclose my thoughts in confidence. There are times, when I think of abandoning all for peace."

"You let it trouble your mind too much," said the hierophant. "All must be done with quietude and perseverance. Be not solicitous, nor deavour your own mind with useless anxieties."

"Are they devils or gods, whom I have spoken with?" exclaimed the stranger, with a sudden burst of impatience.

"If thou waverst thus," said the hierophant, in a sedate tone, "I were better all should come to an end at once. I am sorry that I brought thee hither. I ever doubted of thy resolution, and now thou givest me cause. Why didst thou press me? Did I not tell thee, few were capable of preserving the reason cool in mysteries, such as these? But thou wert so assured, so confident—nothing could move thee—the Acropolis itself was not more firm. Thou wouldst be gratified, thou wouldst behold, and speak with them. But yesterday, who was so eloquent and bold? Who mourned in more musical terms over the deserted temple—the neglected sacrifice? And yet now, the first occasion has revealed thy weakness. I tell thee once again—proceed no further. Have ought to do with that which thou wouldst take in hand. If I urged thee differently, but now it was but to put thee fully to the test. Thou wilt either miserably fail, or the protracted and soul-wearing effort. It is the work of a giant to which thou puttest thy hand. Thou art not fit for it—be content, and return to the lectures of Ecabolus, and think of it no more. The veil that hangs at the door of his grammar school hides no mysteries that can place thy wits in danger."

"Thou hast a taunting tongue, African," said the stranger, "but I suffer thy reproaches," but I suffer the remotest strength of mind," continued the hierophant, "to stake all upon a hazardous cast, and then bear the suspense of years, or perhaps half a life before the issue can be known? Hast thou vigor of body to endure the watchings, the labors, the ceaseless tension of the mind and frame, that such an enterprise demands? If, as thou sayest, it is indeed the spirit of the son of Ammon that animates them, I tell thee that the work of which thou speakest with so free a lip, is one to which the conquest of ten Dariuses were sport for virgins."

"Sharply, but surely," said the stranger, "thou hast recalled me to myself. For the present, let all be covered with the deepest silence. Thou only, Evemarus, knowest as yet my secret. For some time longer, I must continue to play the hypocrite, and seem to honor that which in my soul I hate. Hence then ye idle fears, remorse of childhood, offspring of custom, and of prejudice, I renounce your empire? And thou, dread Hecate!" he continued stretching his arms towards the idol, "and yet more awful Jove, forgive me if I seem still to doubt, in order that I may serve you the more surely."

"During the entire of this scene, it would be vain to attempt giving any idea of the feelings which it excited in my mind, or of the thousand heart-piercing circumstances that gave it an interest while it passed, which an interest being transferred into a cold narration of the past, cannot even be recalled in memory, with anything approaching the same distinctness. I have not made an effort to convey a notion of the tones, the gestures which accompanied the words of the several speakers, now penetrating the mind of the hearer with a certain wild and preternatural melancholy, which it is impossible for those who have not felt it to conceive; and now disturbing, and as if were shaking it to its very foundation, with a strange and unaccountable terror, making the spectator feel, as if he stood in the presence, and in the power of capricious beings, of a tremendous strength, whose force it was impossible for him to avoid, and whose nature he knew not how to propitiate. I shared the first terror, but

not the subsequent admiration of the stranger, nor would I for millions of worlds have been willing again to look upon such sights, or hear such sounds. The shifts of the hierophant were not me so satisfactory as they seemed to the philosophic stranger. I was not altogether without experience of the arts of such impostors. I had been present more than once at the scenes of 'meritment,' which took place among the populace when the adyti, or sacred recesses of some half ruined temple were disclosed, and all their oracular machinery brought to light, but this was never sufficient to satisfy me that all was the mere result of human craft, or that a delusion so universal could be so long sustained, if there really was nothing in it, beyond what the resources of cunning man could furnish. Candor seemed to demand a more open and honest course of dealing, and from all I had heard and read of events in my time—and more especially in the past, I could not deny that the oracles had given answers in many instances which must have proceeded from a more than human understanding."

"Whether the scene I have detailed to thee, Chrysanthus, was an imposition or a reality judge for thyself. The state of my own feelings were to me, I confess, a no less powerful evidence of its truth than that of my senses."

But what most of all excited my curiosity was the part which the unknown stranger had taken in the dialogue. Who could he be? A Christian, it appeared, and one on the verge of forsaking his religion in order to return to that which all the world were abandoning. But who was he? and what stupendous design was this of which he spoke in terms so mystical? Conjecture could tell me nothing, and my companion to whom I referred, could afford me no information. All he knew was, that the hierophant was an African named Evemarus, (as I had heard the stranger term him) notorious for his skill in magic. All my endeavors to obtain a sight of the stranger after we had left the temple were in vain, and both my curiosity and my gratitude were compelled to remain unsatisfied."

I returned to my studies. It was often to me a source of amusement to observe the various minds and dispositions of the students who at this time crowded the schools, where they afforded me the opportunity. Some of them were fellows wholly devoted to demonstrative reasoning, with minds as dry as chips of wood or marble, incapable of being interested in anything less susceptible of demonstration than a mathematical problem, and would discourse of morals and religion in precisely the same spirit as they would of angels and parallels, or not at all, and listen to nothing which was not capable of being proved to a metaphysical certainty. Others with imagination like flax, ready to catch fire at every spark, believed anything upon trust that happened for an instant to dazzle their minds with even so faint a resemblance of truth. Others again would hear nothing which one did not lay before them in some regular dialectic form, while they would, without hesitation admit any extravagance you pleased, provided it were dressed out with a suitable major, minor and conclusion, or were to be found lagging at the far end of a respectable sorities."

According, however, as I advanced in such acquirements as the sophists taught, I began to discover how very improbable it was the sanguine hopes I had formed on entering Athens could ever be fulfilled. I felt like one ascending a hill in order to ascertain how much of his journey remains yet unfinished, and is disappointed to find that the higher he ascends the longer the way appears which he has yet to travel. These reflections brought on a mood of indolence which contributed nothing to restore my cheerfulness. The following lines written, at this time, on one of the walls of my sleeping chamber, may furnish some idea of the state of mind under which I labored:

O Indolence! curst worm That cankerest in mid bloom fair virtue's form, That when with heaviest pain We breathe the fumes from Passion's hateful reign, Creep'st with thy noisome blight Into the heart, and killest its promise quite, Were it not better even again to be The world's unthinking slave, than pine in gloom with thee?

To thy unheeded brain Fame sounds her spirit rousing trump in vain! To thy dull, sluggish ear Vain hoars the sweet whisper or the shriek of fear, Nor loud ambition's call Can wake the palsied soul thou hold'st in thrall, Nor craving avarice, nor hate, nor love, Nor aught on earth beneath nor aught in Heav'n above.

Yet triumphs thou thou hast— Witness full many a dawning hope o'ercast— Witness from day to day Full many a ruin'd friendship's slow decay, Full many a joy effaced And lovely flower of genius run to waste, And golden hour of happiness unprized, And scheme of good forgot, and heavenly aid despised.