

The Journey.

I think of death as some delightful journey
That I shall take when all my tasks are done;
Though life has given me a heaping measure
Of all best gifts, and many a cup of pleasure,
Still better things await me further on.

This little earth is such a merry planet,
The distance beyond it so supreme,
I have no doubt that all the mighty spaces
Between us and the stars are filled with faces
More beautiful than any artist's dream.

I like to think that I shall yet behold them,
When from this waiting room my soul has soared.
Earth is a wayside station, where we wander,
And in the shining distance God's great throne.

Until from out the silent darkness yonder,
Death swings his lantern, and cries, "All aboard!"
I think death's train sweeps through the solar
system
And passes 'uns and moons that dwarf our own.
And close beside us we shall find our dearest,
The spirit friends on earth we held the nearest.
And in the shining distance God's great throne.

Whatever disappointment may befall me
In plans or pleasures in this world of doubt,
I know that life at worst can but delay me,
But no malicious fate has power to stop me
From that grand journey on the Great Death Route.

The Lion Tamer.

He was a gloomy, taciturn man, was Varrens, the lion tamer. His dusky face, with its heavy brows and massive black beard, might have been cast in bronze, so rarely did its expression change. There was always the same set, resolute look, not untouched by sadness, like that of a man who foresees his end, and is not afraid to face it.

I cannot say he was popular, with our troupe—rather the reverse. Nature intended him to stand alone, like a rugged oak in the open, which seems to shun all contact with its fellows. No one seemed to know how he passed his spare time, or to care either for that matter.

Welpy's World-famed Hippodrome (as the bills put it) was nothing more than an ordinary travelling circus, to which a small menagerie had been tacked on. We were wintering in Edinburgh when Varrens joined us. I was ring-master at the time, and I will remember the first occasion upon which he made his entry into the lions' cage. It was a ticklish moment, for the brutes were strange to him, but somehow he seemed to get the mastery over them from the very start. After that he had it all his own way.

In the course of the first twelve months he got together in one cage what was known as the 'happy family'—an African lion, a Bengal tiger, a leopard, and a Siberian wolf. They lived as happily as most such families—human and otherwise—generally do; that is to say, at least once every day there was a regular set-to, and Varrens had to go for them all round before he could restore order. Having relieved their feelings in this way, the brutes retired to their respective corners and sulked till feeding time.

To the general public the tamer's nightly display in this cage was undoubtedly one of the chief attractions of the show. No sooner did he make his appearance than a pleasurable thrill of excitement ran through the spectators. There was always the off-chance of seeing him mauled, and that was something to look forward to.

Varrens had been with us about two years when the proprietor took it into his head one day to engage a troupe of acrobats. Amongst them was a young lady, Miss Carrie Weston, who very soon had half the men in the circus, and a fair number of outsiders, at her feet. She was a pretty, sprightly little thing, with a mop of fluffy golden hair. Some might have thought her a trifle giddy, and too fond of admiration; but, all the same, her roguish smile and pretty ways played havoc with many a male heart.

On the ropes she was a regular little dare-devil. I have seen her perform the most fool-hardy tricks; running very considerable risk of cracking her dainty neck, apparently out of sheer love of the excitement it afforded. She seemed to take a childish delight in thrilling the spectators with feats of this kind.

Now of all the queer things that could have happened, the queerest undoubtedly was that the great black bearded lion tamer, whom we had always looked upon as little short of a woman-hater, should have fallen desperately in love with the girl straight away. Before she had been with us a week, I began to notice a change in him. He seemed to be gradually drawn out of his shell, as it were. Hitherto he never made his appearance of an evening until the performance was drawing to a close, when the cage containing the 'happy family' was wheeled into the ring, ready for him to enter. Now, night after night, he was early at the ring side, waiting for the troupe of acrobats.

The curious part of it was, he appeared quite content to worship her at a distance. So far as I could make out, he never made the slightest attempt to approach her, though I have seen his swarthy cheeks glow and his eyes blaze as he watched her laughing and chatting with other men. As to Miss Carrie herself—well, you may be sure she did not remain long in ignorance of this silent devotion on the part of the tamer. It pleased her, too. Ordinary admirers she could count by the score; but it was something new to have such a man before whom those fierce brutes in the cages nightly cowered, at her feet, and to feel that she alone of all the world could lead him.

From the very first, the zoological section of the show seemed to have a peculiar attraction for this wilful young lady. She spent hours roaming about from cage to cage, endeavoring to propitiate the ferocious inmates by every means in her power. I rather fancy she had a sort of hankering after a tamer's life; and her daring was such that, trail little thing that she was, I believe nothing would have pleased her better than to have made the acquaintance of the 'happy family', if she could have had her own way.

There was a fine young tiger cub in one of the cages, a recent acquisition to the show. He was a prime favorite with Miss Carrie. She seemed determined to make a pet of him, and succeeded in a marvellous degree. At first she simply stood before the cage for a certain time every day, watching the tiger as he prowled up and down with a slow, stealthy motion. Gradually the brute got to know her. When she approached he would put his head to

the bars and allow her to stroke it, purring like a great cat.

One day the venturesome damsel took it into her head to make a closer acquaintance with her pet. While the coast was clear, she slipped back the spring lock of the cage and was just about to enter, when, with a bound, the tiger came flying through the open door. The girl was flung backwards and rolled upon the ground. The beast frisked around her for a moment or too; then came and planted his heavy forepaws upon her chest. She lay there quite still, with closed eyes, not daring to move a limb. All the time she felt the creature's hot breath on her face. He kept sniffing, sniffing, as if uncertain what to make of her.

It is hard to say how the matter might have ended had not Varrens suddenly arrived upon the scene. A few swift strides brought him across to the girl's side. Gripping the tiger cub with both hands, he slung him back into the cage and slammed the door. When he turned round again the young lady was upon her feet—a little white and scared, it is true, but otherwise none the worse for her adventure.

'You're not hurt, I hope?' he asked, anxiously.

'Oh, no!' she replied, gaily, 'a wee bit shaken, that's all. Still, I shouldn't have relished being left much longer in that position, though I don't believe the creature would have harmed me.'

'I'm not so sure about that,' said Varrens. 'You never can tell when those brutes will cut up rough. A little thing sets them off, and its just a toss up whether they go for you or not. See here,' he went on, rolling back his sleeve, and displaying a brawny arm, covered with black hair, 'look at these scars. That's where the brutes have dug their claws into me at odd times. I carry my track mark about with me, you see.'

'Oh, how dreadful!' exclaimed Miss Carrie, running her pretty finger along the livid furrows in the flesh. 'I had no idea you ran such frightful risks.'

'Oh, that's nothing,' replied the tamer, in a careless manner, 'up here, at the shoulder, it is worse. A big brute of a tiger chawed me there last winter; but I had it out with him before I left the cage, and there wasn't a quieter beast in the show after that.'

'I oughtn't to have made so free with this cub, then?'

'It would be safer not; though he is scarcely ripe enough for mischief yet. But how did he manage to get out of the cage?'

Miss Carrie explained. The tamer shook his head gravely, and regarded her with a somewhat anxious expression.

'You are too daring, I'm afraid,' he said, seriously. 'You will get hurt one of these days if you don't mind. I have watched you on the ropes for nights running, and—well, upon my word, sometimes you make my heart jump into my mouth.'

The little minx tossed her fluffy head, and grinned with pleasure.

'Look-out for me to night then,' she said, as she skipped away from him. 'I've been practising a new trick, and I mean to astonish the natives of this sleepy old town—see if I don't!'

That night we had a crowded house, for it was some sort of a local holiday. The performance was most successful throughout, the acrobats especially gaining loud applause. Miss Carrie certainly did astonish the natives; indeed, her new feat on the flying trapeze, which she gave for the first time that evening, was something startling. Even those of us who were well seasoned to such sights stood spell bound until it was over.

As she skipped triumphantly out of the ring, flushed with pleasure at the applause her performance had evoked, she shot a saucy look at Varrens, who was standing at the entrance with his arms folded across his massive chest, as much as to say 'What did you think of that?'

He said nothing at the time, but next morning I heard him taking her to task, and gravely chiding her as to the risk she ran. Miss Carrie evidently was not in the very best of humours that day; she answered him sharply enough; said it was entirely her own look-out whether she broke her neck or not; and that even if she did, it wouldn't matter a straw to anybody.

'That's not true,' the tamer remarked, firmly, 'and you know it.'

'Oh, indeed! This was news to her. She thought there wasn't a soul in the world—except, perhaps, old uncle Ben, who had trained her on the ropes and given her a start in life—who cared a button what became of her. And who might this friend be? She was curious to find that out.'

'You know well who it is,' he replied, vehemently. 'Listen. Before you came here I had some peace of mind, about as much as a man who has turned his back upon the world can reasonably expect. Those brutes in the cages there were my only care; I took more interest in them than in the whole of mankind put together. I thought that all affection had been stamped out of me; that my heart was dead. But I was mistaken—oh, yes! I was mistaken. You came along, and something seemed to spring into life within me. I tried to crush it, to smother it, but it was no use. And now—I tell

you,' he went on, breaking off suddenly, 'every time I enter that cage yonder now, I carry my life in my hands. You require to have all your wits about you for this sort of business; and if you happen to have anything on your mind, and your thoughts get to wandering away elsewhere—well the brutes notice it quick enough. They are always on the watch for such a chance of taking you unaware.'

He seemed so desperately in earnest, and appeared to regard his case in such a hopeless light, Miss Carrie was touched and subdued in spite of herself. She had secretly admired his strength, his daring, and his mastery over those fierce brutes in the cages. And now she hung her pretty head, whimpered a little, said she would never forgive herself if any harm came to him through her; and, indeed—But here she was whipped of the ground, and lost in the embrace of her gigantic lover.

After that it was a case of 'standing off the grass' with the rest of Miss Carrie's following. Varrens was always at her side, and not one of her former admirers cared particularly to bandy words with him.

During the remainder of that summer we wandered about from town to town, pitching out moving tent for a few days in each. Despite the proverb, the course of true love, in this particular instance might have run smoothly enough, but for an untoward circumstance which happened towards the end of our tour.

There fell a day when Fred Welpy, the eldest son of our boss, turned up unexpectedly. Master Fred had been running a show on his own account for the last couple of years, but had come to grief—which did not in the least surprise his friends and relations. In point of fact, he had recently found himself stranded somewhere on the Continent; didn't wait to take formal leave of his assistants (who were anxiously dogging his footsteps); 'left the bally show to take care of itself'—as he put it—and bolted!

He came back to us with the easy assurance of a man who knows his own worth, and is not afraid of obtaining suitable recompense for his services. In some respects he was undoubtedly an acquisition, for he was a good bare-back rider (when sufficiently sober), and generally took the part of Dick Turpin when we gave a representation of that hero's famous ride to York.

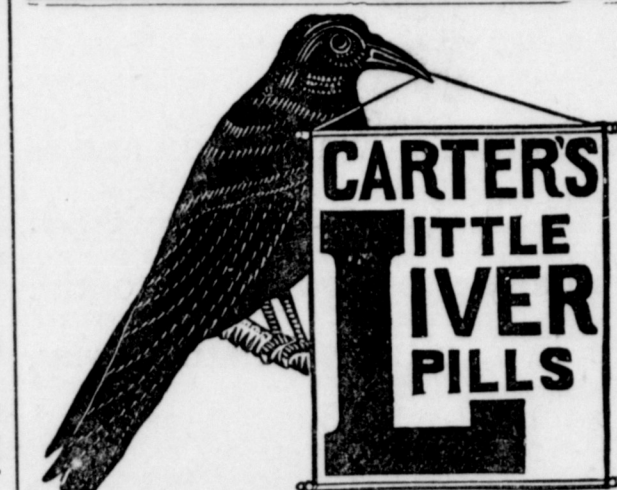
To begin with, he had a bit of a shindy with the boss, and they pretty nearly came to arguing it out with tent pegs. This preliminary ouster, he settled down to business, and cast his eyes about him. They quickly lighted upon Miss Carrie Weston, whom he seemed to regard with favour and approval. One night, after the performance was over, he made his way to her side, chucked her under the chin, and indulged in other little pleasantries—much to the girl's annoyance. The next minute he saw as many stars as it the enormous tent had been suddenly unroofed, and found himself huddled up under the tier of three-shilling seats. Varrens was standing by the girl, his great fists clenched, and a savage glare in his eyes.

From that moment these two men were at daggers-drawn. Welpy never ventured to annoy Miss Carrie again—he had got too severe a lesson for that—but there was often a sullen scowl upon his face when he encountered her that boded no good. Indeed, it was pretty evident he was up to mischief of some kind, for he was not the sort of man to forget an injury in a hurry.

A few weeks later the troupe of acrobats were summoned to fulfil a long-standing engagement at the Rotunda, Manchester. Carrie parted from her lover in bitterness and tears; she felt a sort of presentiment, she said, that something dreadful was about to happen. Varrens pooh-poohed her fears, gently stroked her pretty head with his great hand, and then she smiled up at him through her tears.

When she was gone the lion tamer dropped back into his old ways, and became as moody and taciturn as ever. Welpy kept clear of him, but still it was plain to see there was bad blood between the two. For my own part, I was not all sorry when Master Fred tired of the show, which he soon did, and took his departure.

As a general rule Varrens was always at



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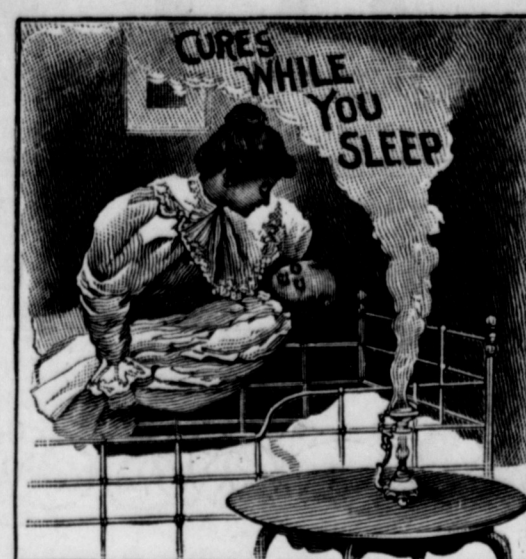
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hand when his turn came round. One night, however, much to our surprise, he did not make his appearance as usual. The cage containing the 'happy family' had been wheeled into the ring, the spectators were on the tip-toe of expectation, but the farm r was not forthcoming. While we waited, one of the attendants slipped up to me, and whispered:

'The dressing tent, sir; he's stuck in there by himself. I've told him it's his turn, but he took no notice of me. I believe there's something wrong.'

I hurried off at once, for the crowd in the sixpenny and shilling seats began to grow impatient. The moment I entered the dressing tent, and my eyes fell upon Varrens, I confess that I got quite a shock. He was striding up and down, his hands clenched, his lips compressed, and a drawn, haggard look on his face.

'Varrens, what's the matter?' I cried, hurrying forward.

He pulled up suddenly, wheeled round, and looked at me in a half-dazed sort of way. Then, without a word, he opened his hand and held out a little ball of soft, pink paper.

I took it, smoothened it out, and saw it was a telegram. It contained these words:—

'Carrie Weston fell from trapeze this afternoon. Fatally injured.'

Manager Rotunda, Manchester."

For a moment or two I stared blankly at the crumpled paper. Poor little Carrie! What a sad ending for the bright, winsome little thing that used to be the life and soul of our show!

'My dear fellow I said turning to Varrens, 'I'm awfully sorry for you. Of course you can't appear this evening. I will go out and make some excuse.'

But to my intense surprise, he suddenly pushed past me, and strode from the tent. I ran after him, for he was not in a fit condition to face those savage brutes in the cage; but he had gained the ring before I could stop him. Without a moment's hesitation he mounted the steps, slipped back the lock, and entered. The door closed with an ominous clang.

As usual, the beasts skurried away from him and crouched at the other end of the cage, snarling and growling. Varrens stood motionless. We waited for him to commence, but he never moved. He seemed rooted to the spot.

What followed was so sudden, so unexpected, so appalling, that to this day I cannot recall it without a shudder. While the tamer was standing there, with eyes upon him. I saw him suddenly stagger like a drunken man. The sense of his bitter loss seemed to rush upon him, and overpowered him all of a moment. Gradually he sank down upon his knees, and clasped his hands to his face with a groan that was heard throughout the tent.

In response to that groan, an universal cry of horror and dismay broke from the spectators. As it by common instinct, the four brutes sprang upon him. The tiger had slightly the lead, and bowled him over in the twinkling of an eye. The shock seemed to arouse Varrens; with an almost superhuman effort he struggled to his feet, only to go down again as one of the other beasts dug its savage claws into him. Great heavens! what a fight that was! Sometimes the man was erect, struggling to shake off the brutes, sometimes he was hurled back against the wall of the cage. The spectators were upon their feet—screaming, yelling, and shouting to save him; while the attendants were vainly jabbing at the beasts with sharp, iron-tipped staves.

In the midst of the uproar, Varrens managed to get free for a moment, drew a revolver, and fired three shots in rapid succession. Then, under cover of the smoke, he slipped through the door and rolled headlong to the ground. There he lay, torn, mangled, and bleeding, but with his black eyes gleaming like live coals. We hastened to pick him up, procured a stretcher, and took him straight away to the hospital.

The first thing next morning I went round to inquire for him, quite prepared to hear that he had succumbed to his injuries during the night. On entering the accident ward, where he was lying, I suddenly pulled up with a gasp of amazement. There, seated at his bedside, with her little hand enclosed in his great fist, was Miss Carrie Weston—pale and hearty as ever! Utterly taken aback, I stood and gazed stupidly at them, until Varrens opened his eyes and noticed me. 'Hulloa, Ringwood!' he said, feebly, 'I'm not quite done for yet, you see. Got patched up all right last night, and this little woman's coming has done me a world of good.'

'But—but—the telegram?' I stammered. 'All rot!' was his reply. Then, turning his head round towards the girl, he said, 'There, tell him about it, Carrie; I'm not up to much talking yet.'

'Well, you see,' she explained, 'it was just like this. Last night we performed as usual at the Rotunda. As I was leaving the building two young fellows strolled up. One of them I knew slightly. The moment he laid eyes on me he started, dropped his stick, and cried, 'Good heavens! it's Carrie Weston!'

'I saw he had some reason for being surprised, so up I went and spoke to him. He said he had heard that I had met with a fatal accident that afternoon through tumbling off the trapeze. I asked him where he

got his news from. He tried to put me off, but, bit by bit, I coaxed the whole thing out of him.'

'It seems he was a clerk in the post-office and had only just come off duty. An hour or two before a telegram had been handed in, which stated that I had fallen from the trapeze and was fatally injured. I tried to find out to whom it was addressed, but he wouldn't tell me. I worried it out of him at last, hurried home, and caught the night express on here. When I arrived early this morning, I heard what had happened at the show last night, and came straight away to the hospital.'

'Then that telegram—' I began, as a light suddenly dawned upon me.

'Was sent by that fellow Welpy, without a doubt,' muttered Varrens.

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