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### PHANTOM RICKSHAW.

RUDYARD KIPLING.

#### [CONTINUED.]

"Has it gone, child?" I gasped

Kitty only wept more bitterly "Has what gone, Jack, dear? What does it all mean? There must be a mistake somewhere, Jack-a hideous mistake!" Her last words brought me to my feet-mad-raving for the time be-

"Yes, there is a mistake somewhere," I repeated, "a hideous mistake. Come and look at it."

I have an indistinct idea that I dragged Kitty by the wrist along the road up to where it stood and implored her for pity's sake to speak to it-to tell it that we were betrothed; that neither death nor hell could break the tie between us, and Kitty only knows how much more to the same effect. Now and again I appealed passionately to the terror in the rickshaw to bear witness perverse phenomenon." to all I had said and to release me from a torture that was killing me. As talked I suppose I must have told Kitty of my old relations with Mrs. Wessington, for I saw her listen intently with white face and blazing eyes.

"Thank you, Mr. Pansay," she said.

"That's quite enough. Syce ghora lao." The syces, impassive as orientals always are, had come up with the recaptured horses, and as Kitty sprang into her saddle I caught hold of the bridle. entreating her to hear me out and forgive. My answer was the cut of her riding whip across my face from mouth to eye and a word or two of farewell that even now I cannot write down. So I judged, and judged rightly, that Kitty knew all, and I staggered back to the gide of the rickshaw. My face was cut and bleeding, and the blow of the riding whip had raised a livid blue wheal on it. I had no self respect. Just then Heatherlegh, who must have been following Kitty and me at a distance, cantered up.

"Doctor," I said, pointing to my face, "here's Miss Mannering's signature to my order of dismissal and-I'll thank you for that lac as soon as convenient.

Heatherlegh's face, even in my ab ject misery, moved me to laughter. "I'll stake my professional reputa-

tion"— he began. "Don't be a fool," I whispered "I've lost my life's happiness, and you'd better take me home.

As I spoke the rickshaw was gone. Then I lost all knowledge of what was passing. The crest of Jakko seemed to heave and roll like the crest of a cloud

and fall in upon me Seven days later (on the 7th of May, that is to say) I was aware that I was lying in Heatherlegh's room as weak as a little child. Heatherlegh was watching me intently from behind the papers on his writing table. His first words were not encouraging, but I was too far spent to be much moved by them.

"Here's Miss Kitty has sent back your letters. You corresponded a good deal, you young people. Here's a packet that looks like a ring and a cheerful sort of a note from Mannering papa which I've taken the liberty of reading and burning. The old gentleman's not pleased with you. "And Kitty?" I asked dully.

"Rather more drawn than her father from what she says. By the same token you must have been letting out any number of queer reminiscences just before I met you. Says that a man who would have behaved to a woman as you did to Mrs. Wessington ought to kill himself out of sheer pity for his kind. She's a hot headed little virago, your mash. Will have it, too, that you were suffering from D. T. when that row on the Jakko road turned up. Says she'll die before she ever speaks to you again.'

other side. "Now you've got your choice, my friend. This engagement has to be broken off, and the Mannerings don't want to be too hard on you. Was it broken through D. T. or epileptic fits? Sorry I can't offer you a better exchange unless you'd prefer hereditary insanity. Say the word, and I'll tell 'em it's fits. All Simla knows about that scene on the Ladies' mile. Come! I'll give you five minutes to think over

During those five minutes I believe that I explored thoroughly the lowest circles of the inferno which it is permitted man to tread on earth. And at the same time I myself was watching myself faltering through the dark laby. rinths of doubt, misery and utter despair I wondered, as Heatherlegh in his chair might have wondered, which dreadful alternative I should adopt Presently I heard myself answering in a voice that I hardly recognized

"They're confoundedly particular about morality in these parts. Give 'em fits, Heatherlegh, and my love Now let me sleep a bit longer. Then my two selves joined, and was only I (half crazed, devil driven I)

that tossed in my bed. tracing step by step the history of the past month. "But I am in Simla." I kept repeating to myself. "I, Jack Pansay, 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 fur ther pain

Next day I could not leave my bed Heatherlegh told me in the morning that he had received an answer from Mr. Mannering, 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

"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

I declined firmly to be cured. "You have been much too good to me already. cld 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 Mannering. 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 eat-

ing 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 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 phantem 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 after noon had served for an excuse.

So Kitty and her companion and I and my ghostly light o' love crept round Jakko in couples. The road was streaming with water, the pines dripped like roof pipes on the rocks below and the air was full of fine, driving rain Two or three times I found my I groaned and turned over on the self saying to myself almost aloud "I'm Jack Pansay on leave at Simlaat 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 horsesanything, 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 tell 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

"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 madly overleaped the bounds of all human be-

lief, I should apologize to you now. As I know that no one-no, 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 chimera." 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 roada 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 Cost While They Last. 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 jhampanies; 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 ricskhaw 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-

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 successor3-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 hound 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

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 grave grows more and more powerful. 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

Nature is the good fairy, human nature the bad. Nature made the world for all: human nature has made it for the few.-London Truth.

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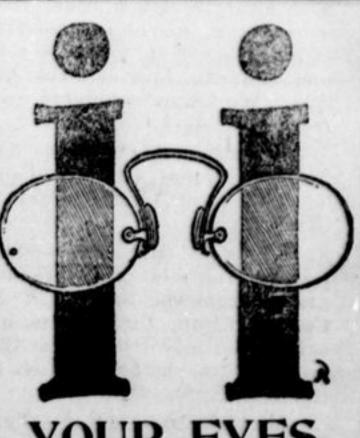
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