

The Quaker and the Robber

Many years ago, when Philadelphia was a bustling young city, in a neat little cottage in one of the retired streets, dwelt Obadiah Simpson, an honest Quaker, moderately blessed with this world's goods, but rich in the possession of a treasure which gladdened his heart as the heart is never gladdened by wealth. This treasure was none other than his daughter Mary, a maiden of seventeen, whose surpassing beauty was but the outward expression of that inner loveliness of which it was the visible type.

Obadiah had lost his wife more than a year prior to the date at which our story commences. Admonished of the likelihood of such an event, and wishing by every means to perpetuate the memory of one so dear, he employed a young artist of the city to execute a portrait of the invalid. It was while thus engaged that Edward Weresford became acquainted with Mary; and the effect of her charms, heightened by an expression of pensive sadness, which increased with the decline of her mother's health, was not lost on one who was a devoted worshiper of true spiritual beauty.

After their bereavement, it was with no feigned feeling of sympathy that Edward visited and condoled with the Quaker and his daughter; nor need we stop to recount the gradations by which, as the violence of her grief subsided, Mary came to reciprocate an attachment of which she had already long been the object.

Obadiah saw no reason to oppose the inclinations of the lovers. Edward was the son of a gentleman reputed to possess considerable wealth, who had come, no one knew whence, several years before, to reside in the city, where he had since dwelt in strict retirement, forming few if any acquaintances, and giving rise to many surmises on the part of those lovers of knowledge deprecatingly styled by those of a less inquiring turn, the *curious*. But whatever speculations were indulged in touching the mysterious stranger's antecedents or present status, none ever hinted a doubt of his respectability.

He exercised no apparent control over the acts of his son, whom he seemingly left complete master of his conduct; belonging, perhaps, to that accommodating class of egotists who, so long as others refrain from interference with them, have no disposition to interfere with others.

Edward was free, therefore, to pay his addresses to the beautiful Quakeress, quite sure his father, if he did not approve, would at least interpose no obstacles to the consummation of his wishes.

Obadiah only deferred the appointment of the day which was to crown the happiness of the youthful pair, till he could collect a sum of money due from a party in a distant town, which he had destined to meet the expenses of the approaching ceremony and supply his daughter's dowry.

This necessitated a journey on horseback, which Obadiah [lost] no time in undertaking; and having received the expected sum, on his return he was overtaken by night when yet many miles from home. Suddenly his progress was intercepted by a horseman, whose face was covered with

a black mask, and who presented a pistol to the head of the astonished Quaker, accompanying the act by a demand of his purse.

Obadiah was not deficient in personal courage; but peaceful in character, inoffensive by religion, and, above all, unarmed and defenseless, he wasted no words in useless remonstrance, but quietly drawing from his pocket a purse containing ten dollars he handed it over in compliance with the stranger's request.

The robber took it and suffered his victim to depart, who, believing himself finally quit of his persecutor, jogged along at a merry trot, congratulating himself at having come so cheaply off. But the highwayman, suspecting from the alacrity with which his demand had been complied with, that further booty remained behind, set spurs to his horse and soon overtook the Quaker, across whose path he once more presented himself, exclaiming as the pistol again gleamed in the moonlight:

"Your watch."

Obadiah, with the same coolness as before, produced the required article, and, after observing the hour, placed it in the hand extended to receive it, calmly adding:

"Suffer me now, I beseech thee, to depart in peace, for my daughter will be disturbed at my absence."

"One moment," replied the masked cavalier, more and more emboldened by the other's pliability; "swear you have no more money."

"I never swear," answered the Quaker.

"Affirm, then, that you have no more, and by the faith of an honest robber, incapable of offering violence to a man who yields with so good a grace, I will permit you to go unmolested."

Obadiah reflected a moment and shook his head.

"Whoever thou art," he said gravely, "thou hast divined that I am of that sect whose religion forbids departure from the truth under any circumstances. I acknowledge that concealed in my saddle cloth there are banknotes to the amount of five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred dollars!" cried the highwayman, whose eyes glittered through his mask.

"But if thou hast any generosity," continued the Quaker, "thou wilt leave me this money. My daughter is on the eve of marriage, and this sum is necessary to her outfit. The dear child's affections are deeply engaged, and it would be very cruel to retard her happiness."

"What concern is that of mine? I have no time to waste on love tales. Come! more dispatch and fewer words!"

Obadiah, with a sigh, submitted to this fresh spoliation, and having replaced his saddle, was about to resume his journey.

“Stay, friend,” commanded he of the mask; “you will doubtless hasten to inform the magistrates. It is important I should have a good start. My horse is no match for yours, and, besides, is greatly fatigued. Come, dismount; a fair exchange is no robbery.”

It was now too late to think of resistance; but as Obadiah mounted the miserable animal lately bestridden by the robber, he could not help feeling chagrined as he reflected how easily he might have effected his escape, if he had sooner known the disparity between his own and his assailant’s steed. In the meantime the stranger, with a polite acknowledgement of Obadiah’s complaisance, put his new charger to the top of his speed, and was quickly out of sight.

Before reaching the city, the Quaker had ample time to reflect on his misfortune, and of the disappointment in store for his daughter and her lover. The sum of which he had been robbed was irrecoverably lost, as well as all traces of the audacious robber.

At length, as if struck by a sudden thought, he exclaimed:

“There *is* a method by which I may discover this man;” and then, apparently consoled by some newly inspired hope, he continued his way, and reached his home without further adventure. With a cheerful countenance he embraced his daughter, whom he found waiting his arrival, and retiring to bed, slept quietly till morning.

At an early hour, Obadiah led forth the horse on which he had completed last night’s journey, and turning him loose, closely observed his motions. For a long time he wandered about from right to left without any apparent design, stopping occasionally, and then starting in the opposite direction, till Obadiah at length began to despair.

“The robber,” he said to himself, “it is evident, must dwell in some distant part of the country, and I have lost valuable time in not making immediate complaint to the authorities.

He was interrupted in his reflections by the horse setting off at a brisk trot. Obadiah closely followed, earnestly entreating those who, from time to time, thought to do him a service by stopping the object of his pursuit, to desist from their attempts, till at length the animal suddenly halted at a gate leading to a stately mansion in the suburbs.

The Quaker was petrified with astonishment. The house he knew to be the residence of the father of Edward Weresford, his intended son-in-law!

He almost fancied himself the sport of a dream, and was on the point of returning home; but remembering having read of numerous instances of men of consideration being allied to lawless bands, and reflecting on the mystery in which Weresford’s life was enshrouded, he resolved to probe the affair to the bottom.

To the servant who answered his summons, Obadiah made known his desire for an immediate interview with the master of the house. He was answered that Mr. Weresford was still in bed, and advised to call again. But the Quaker was persistent, declaring his business of too urgent a character to admit delay, and insisting on being at once conducted into the presence of the gentleman whom it nearly concerned.

The servant, with some hesitation, yielded, and soon Obadiah found himself in the bed-chamber of the respectable recluse, who appeared in no small degree surprised at a liberty to which he was evidently unaccustomed.

“To whom am I indebted, may I ask, for this visit, and what is its object?” haughtily inquired Weresford.

The voice in which these words were uttered dispelled all doubt in the mind of Obadiah; and quietly drawing a chair near the bed, he seated himself without removing his hat, a circumstance which seemed to attract the other’s attention, and for which the visitor promptly apologized.

“I am a Quaker, and thou art aware of our custom.”

At the word Quaker, Weresford suddenly raised himself in the bed, and scanning the features of the stranger, grew pale and trembled as he recognized his victim of the preceding night.

“Pray what is the—the—business,” he stammered, “which has led to this intru—interview, I mean?”

“I ask thy pardon,” returned Obadiah, “for calling at what may seem an unseasonable hour; but among *friends*, ceremony may be dispensed with. I have come to ask the return of the watch which thou borrowedst of me yester evening.”

“The watch!”

“I set great store by it; it belonged to my poor wife, and I would be loath to part with it for any considerable time.”

Seeming not to notice the agitation which his words had produced, Obadiah continued:

“Thou wilt also do me the favor to return the ten dollars which I lent thee at the same time. However, if the hast need of it, I can spare it for the present, if thou wilt give me a proper receipt”

The coolness of the Quaker so disconcerted his listener, that he could offer no reply, and Obadiah proceeded:

“I have already taken occasion to inform thee of the approaching nuptials of my daughter Mary. I had set apart the sum of five hundred dollars to defray the expenses of the occasion, and to furnish her dowry; but an unfortunate accident has happened. Last night, on my way home, I was

robbed of the money; and I have come to request that thou wilt bestow on thy son the same amount, which I would otherwise not have required.”

“My son?”

“Yes; dost thou not know that he and Mary are betrothed?”

“What! Edward!”

“Edward Weresford,” calmly replied the Quaker; “but let us see if something cannot be done to prevent the disappointment of the poor children. I am very desirous that they should know nothing of the occurrence of last night; but if thou shouldst fail to advance the sum which I have so unfortunately lost, I fear I shall be obliged to enter into explanations.

Weresford sprang from the couch, and produced from a cabinet a casket triple-locked, which he hastily opened, and then, in succession, delivered to Obidiah his purse, his watch, and his packet of bank-notes.

“Very good!” said the Quaker. “I perceive I have not counted on thee in vain.”

“Do you wish anything further?” demanded Weresford, in an impatient tone.

“Yes; one thing more.”

“Go on.”

“That thou wilt disinherit thy son.”

“Disinherit my son?”

“Such were my words; I would not that any one should say my daughter speculated on thy fortune.”

“No.” murmured the Quaker as he crossed the threshold; “children are not accountable for the sins of their parents. Mary shall marry this man’s son; but touch his ill-gotten wealth—never!”

“But hold!” cried Obadiah; “I had almost forgotten one thing;” and looking up and seeing Weresford at the window:

“I am sorry, friend,” he said, “to give thee further trouble; but I have brought thee back thy horse, and would be exceeding thankful if thou wouldst give orders for the return of mine.”

Obadiah was soon mounted on his own steed, whose loss had grieved him not a little, and set out for home at a trot brisker than that which he had followed an hour before.

“I have just paid a visit to thy father,” he said to Edward, whom he found on his return, “and I believe we are quite agreed.”

The same evening Weresford called on the Quaker, and taking him aside:

“Worthy man,” he exclaimed, “your generous conduct has deeply touched me. It was in your power to disgrace me and dishonor my son. You have acted as a man of discretion and feeling, and I am desirous, as far as lies in my power, of gaining your esteem. Examine these papers at your leisure. Adieu; you shall never see me more.”

When alone, the Quaker opened the packet. It contained a number of drafts on banks in the country. There was a long list of names, and opposite each money was indicated. On a paper Obadiah read the following addressed to himself:

“These names are those of persons who have been robbed. The figures opposite indicate the amount which should be restored to each. Draw the money called for by the accompanying drafts, and effect restitution with all possible dispatch and secrecy. What I still retain is my legitimate fortune, which your daughter may one day accept without dishonor.”

The next day Weresford set sail for France, announcing his intent to spend some years abroad; the marriage of Edward and Mary speedily followed; Obadiah promptly and discreetly executed the commission with which he had been entrusted; and, in short, our story is finished.

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