

Flying Away on a Broomstick
by Judge Clark

“I tell thee, daughter, thou must cease to hold converse with this young stranger; these are no times to make free with every chance comer.”

The speaker was Jethro Ware, a leading man of the town of Salem, in the colony of Massachusetts Bay, in the never-to-be-forgotten time when his evil highness, in his accustomed tour up and down the earth, paid an especial visit to that goodly New England borough, and witches, wizards, and warlocks held high carnival in honor of his coming.

“But I have not made free with Edward Trent,” Rachel answered, coloring at her father’s words; “nor hath there been any converse between us unseemly for a maiden’s ears. Surely none can say aught against him, and his daily walk hath been in all things commendable.”

“It is not for thee, girl, to pass judgment in such matters. True, he is a well-favored and fair-spoken youth; but in these times, when the emissaries of Satan are abroad, one cannot be too circumspect.”

A smile flitted over Rachel’s features. It is probable she saw something ludicrous in coupling Edward Trent with Satan’s emissaries.

“There is another matter, Rachel, of which I may as well speak at this as at a future time,” resumed Jethro Ware, with a look so grave that the smile at once vanished from Rachel’s face. “Pekahiah Craft hath today asked my consent that he take thee to wife.”

For an instant the flush on Rachel’s cheek deepened; then it was replaced by a deathly pallor.

“And what was thy response?” she inquired, scarce audibly.

“That I thought well of the offer, but would give it prayerful consideration before answering.”

Poor Rachel’s head drooped. She detested Pekahiah Craft to a degree scarcely consistent with the requirements of Christian charity. But she knew how absolute were her father’s views on the subject of filial obedience.

Not many days after, all Salem was in an uproar. Edward Trent made some small purchases from Pekahiah Craft, who was of the mercantile persuasion, and when he dropped in Pekahiah’s hand the coin required in payment, the latter fell into a fit, from which he did not recover till Dominie Bangbill, who was instantly summoned, pronounced the words, “*Vade retro, Sathane!*” Now, it is not likely, had the Dominie said “Go back, Satan,” in plain English, that the party addressed would have paid the slightest heed, but when the same thing was spoken in Latin, the effect, as Artemus Ward used to say, was “far different.” The evil spirit, who had no taste for classics, at

once gave up possession, but into what other swine he entered history sayeth not.

As soon as he “came to” Pekahiah accused Edward Trent of having bewitched him by paying him in Satan’s coin instead of lawful money. There was no disputing the facts; they had occurred, so to speak, in market overt, and were attested by a cloud of witnesses. Of course, Edward Trent was forthwith taken into custody.

Justice, (and sometimes the reverse of it,) was speedily administered in those days. Within a week after his arrest Edward Trent was placed on trial. The fact that Pekahiah Craft had been stricken down the instant the diabolical half-crown touched his palm was proved beyond a cavil. True, Pekahiah admitted, on cross-examination, that he had afterwards picked up the money with impunity, and subsequently paid it out without compunction; but he added that on [diverse] occasions the prisoner had entered his chamber through the key-hole, and thrust him as full of pins as a pincushion. No doubt was entertained of the culprit’s guilt. He was convicted of sorcery, and sentenced to be hanged.

The night before the day fixed for the execution there was such a thunder-storm in Salem as had never before been witnessed. Like that on which Tam O’Shanter took the road, it was “sic’ a night,” that

“—————a child might understand
The de’il had business on his hand.”

Next morning, when the high sheriff, in cocked hat and bag wig, called on Jonathan Gyve, the jailer, and made formal demand of the prisoner’s body, to the end that the law might take its course thereon, Jonathan took the keys from under his pillow, where he kept them every night, and conducted his superior to the condemned cell. On opening it all stood aghast. Though not a lock or bolt had been disturbed, the cell was untenanted! The fetters which had confined the convict’s wrists and ankles lay on the floor, still fastened, but empty, while a strong odor of sulphur pervaded the air.

“I have it!” cried Jonathan Gyve, much in the tone in which we may imagine the Greek philosopher shouted his famous “*Eureka!*” “Pekahiah Craft, you remember, testified to the prisoner’s having entered his chamber through the keyhole. Is it not plain that he has escaped in the same manner?”

The explanation was too obvious not to be accepted, and Jonathan was at once acquitted of all neglect of duty.

But wonders did not cease here. Rachel Ware, too, was missing. But that mystery was soon cleared up. Sam Brimful, who had been caught in the storm while going home at a late hour from the “Salem Rest,” remembered seeing, by the light of a flash of lightning, two human forms, one close behind the other, flitting rapidly across the sky. At the time, he thought they were

fantastically shaped clouds; but now he was convinced it was Edward Trent and Rachel Ware flying away on a broomstick.

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In time Salem was relieved of its epidemic of sorcery and witchcraft. Jethro Ware had become mayor of the borough, and would have been a happy man had his daughter still remained to be mistress of his house. But since that eventful stormy night there had been no news of her or Edward Trent.

One day his worship received notice that Lord and Lady Penryn, who had just arrived from England, were coming to visit Salem. Of course it was the mayor's place to entertain them. They came at the time appointed. Jethro Ware, supported by his fellow dignitaries, stood on the steps of his mansion to receive his noble guests. As Lord Penryn stepped from the carriage, his wife, closely veiled, leaning on his arm, the worthy mayor started back. "*Vade retro*" was on the tip of his tongue, for, in the handsome nobleman, whom should he recognize but Edward Trent? At the same time the lady, casting aside her veil, revealed the features of the long-lost Rachel.

"You must forgive us, father," she cried, flinging her arms about her parent's neck. "Dear Edward is not a wizard, but the best husband in the world. He had been compelled to flee his country for political reasons, but everything has been set right at last. For his liberation from Salem jail, I have to thank honest Jonathan Gyve, who let him out to oblige me, carefully replacing the bolts and bars afterwards, and fumigating the place with brimstone, that the blame might be laid on one who couldn't clear himself by bringing evidence of good character."

Though Jethro Ware looked on ranks and titles as so many vanities, he soon became reconciled to the "particular vanity" of having a lord for a son-in-law.

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