

Dr. Trelew's Encounter

I'm not sure how to begin this story, because I don't know if people will want to believe it; but I can assure you that it happened to me, Dr. Jonas Trelew, of St. Austell, Cornwall, on the night of 28th January in the year 1891.

It was a cold evening, and I was returning home on my horse, after a long and busy afternoon.

There was an epidemic of whooping cough in the coun-ty at that time, and I had been seeing patients all day long. Alas, three children had died the pre-vious day in the Pengelly family at Treviscoe, and many people were frightened for their young chil-dren.

As I rode along the highway between Roche and Carthew, I was surprised to see a light coming along behind me in the dark. As the moon came out from behind a cloud, I could make out two gallop-ing horsemen, one holding a light in his hand. At first, I imagined that they had been sent out to bring me back to help some other sick person in one of the vil-lages I had just visited.

As the two riders approached, I felt a moment of apprehension. I was on a lonely part of the road across the moorland. I spurred my own horse to a trot, and grabbed the pistol I always carried with me when riding out alone in winter.

I need not have worried; as the men came up to me, they slowed down, and I saw by the light of the lantern that one was my old friend the lawyer, William Trelawney. That surprised me a lit-tle, as I thought he was in Oxford at the time. Had he not told me at Christmas that he would not be returning to Cornwall before the Spring? Yet there was no doubt it was him; we had been friends for four years, and I recognized him instantly.

The other man had a thin face and very heavy eye-brows, and I thought he looked ill. Strangely, I did not recognize him, though I knew most of the faces for miles around Saint Austell. I presumed he must be a friend of William's from Oxford or else-where.

"William!" I said, "What brings you here at this time of night on this road?"

But instead of answering my question, the man lifted his light and shone it in my face. It shone in his face too, and I saw him start, as if with surprise. "I'm sorry Sir," he said, and before I had time to re-act to his strange words, he called to his companion, saying "Come on Walter", and the two rode off into the dark.

This strange encounter left me feeling some-what anxious; and not wanting to have any more bizarre experiences, I made for home as fast as I could.

Within a few days, the incident had gone right out of my mind. Evidently the man I had seen was not William Trelawney, just someone who looked very similar to him, when seen by the light of a lantern on a cold January evening.

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A couple of months later, William Trelawney came down by train from Oxford, for Easter. I first noticed him in church on Good Friday, sitting a couple of rows behind me on the other side, his usual place. But as I looked at him, I felt the blood going cold in my back. There was the man who had passed me on the moor that January night. There was no doubt about it.

. After the service, we met outside the pub among the crowd of people.

"Well," I said, as I shook William's hand. But I couldn't think what to say next.

"Hello Jonas," he replied, "It's good to see you".

I felt more at ease; this was more like William Trelawney, my old friend. We got into conversation, as we had many times before.

Then he said something that made my blood go cold again.

"You know, something very strange happened to me last January; I wish you'd been there to help," he said. "My clerk, Walter Burns, got taken ill all of a sudden one evening. We were returning together at the time from an appointment several miles out of town. He seemed to be in great pain, so we went back to Oxford as fast as we could, to get him to a doctor. On the road, we passed another man on horseback. I was just going to ask him if there was a doctor nearby, when I saw that he looked just like you, Jonas. *Just* like you. I was so surprised, I thought it *was* you. It gave me the fright of my life; words stuck in my throat, and I just murmured an excuse, and we rode on, back to Oxford.

I'm afraid it was too late; Doctor Mercer in Oxford could not tell what Walter was suffering from, and the poor fellow died two days later. I'm sure you could have saved him."

"And what did your clerk Walter look like," I asked?

"Why do you ask?" William replied.

"Out of curiosity."

"Well, he was a tall young man, with very dark eyebrows."

I have never told William about my encounter.

WORDS: whooping cough: a dangerous form of cough - previous day: the day before - rode: past tense of to ride - make out: distinguish, see - make out: just see - apprehension: anxiety - lonely: isolated - moorland: open tree-less hilltops - spur on: make a horse go faster - eyebrows: hair above the eyes - start: react with surprise - make for: go in the direction of - Good Friday - the Friday before Easter Sunday - service: mass - at ease: not anxious - clerk: secretary - got taken ill: became ill - appointment: meeting, rendezvous.

