

THE THREE STRANGERS

Written by

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Thomas Hardy's eponymous story

Address
Phone Number

1 INT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/SITTING ROOM AREA - NIGHT 1

Twelve adults are gathered for a small party to celebrate the christening of SHEPHERD FENNEL'S first child which is upstairs, asleep.

They are gathered around a big fire blazing in the hearth and there are six lit candles, in the room.

The women largely sit together and the men, similarly.

MRS FENNEL goes around, replenishing their beer, or cider.

2 INT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/DINING AREA - NIGHT 2

The assembly has moved over towards the kitchen table which has been pushed a little further away from the sitting area.

There is food to which they are helping them selves. It comprises large loaves, cheese, a big roast pork joint, butter and salads. There are also further jugs and glasses.

An OLD SHEPHERD raises his glass

OLD SHEPHERD
To Shepherd Fennel's firstborn,
little Ann. May she grow and
flourish!

The COMPANY raises its glasses

COMPANY
Little Ann!

3 INT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/SITTING ROOM AREA - NIGHT 3

Some of the chairs have been removed and the rug rolled back.

A fiddler and his accordionist start playing.

Shepherdess Fennel puts her hands on her hips and starts to step and hop towards her husband, who moves out of the assembly to join her, and then the others follow, also executing their jigs.

4 EXT. HIGHER CROWSTAIRS HILL/TRACK - NIGHT 4

By the moonlight, can be seen a tall, dark, good-looking man of around forty years old, wearing hob-nailed boots. He is striding out, up the hill.

He looks up, sees Shepherd Fennel's residence and hears the music.

5 EXT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/ENVIRONS - NIGHT 5

As this STRANGER 1 pulls nearly level with the cottage, it suddenly starts raining, hard.

The man grimaces, pulls his hat down, turns his collar up and scowls up at the sky.

He looks around at the shepherd's outbuildings

He then dashes for one of the outbuildings and stands under the eaves of the pigsty.

He listens to the music and laughter from within while looking at the rain.

The stranger stands there a while listening to the music.

He leaves the sty and sets off across the garden area.

6 EXT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/THRESHOLD - NIGHT 6

In the continuing rain, the stranger knocks at the door.

FENNEL (V.O.)

Walk in!

The stranger opens the door.

7 INT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT 7

The stranger enters and stands on the mat.

He smiles and looks around.

The music and jigging stop

STRANGER 1

The rain is so heavy, friends, that I ask leave to come in and rest awhile.

FENNEL

To be sure, stranger, an' yer lucky to be attending the christening party of our little one.

The man moves across the room.

STRANGER 1

Then you have moi best wishes for
more of same, Sir.

Mrs. Fennel smiles and hands him a tankard of beer, but is a little alarmed to see him quaff it in seconds.

He nods his thanks and holds it back out, so she uncomfortably smiles and refills it from her jug, again, a bit reluctantly.

The stranger heads to the fireplace and sits on one of the chairs within it.

STRANGER 1 (CONT'D)

Oi'll just dry off a bit here,
ma'am, with yer consent...?

Mrs. Fennel smiles and nods her consent

The stranger spreads out his legs and sighs, with satisfaction.

FENNEL

Bit late to be traipsing athwart
the coomb this time o' night,
neighbour.

STRANGER 1

It is, but oi started later than oi
intended.

FENNEL

Where be ye bound, then?

STRANGER 1

Oh..... Further up country.

The other guests have been talking with the fiddler and have chosen another song.

They part a little, and the fiddler and his accordionist start the first bars, when there is another knock at the door.

The musicians stop and the whole company looks up, in consternation.

FENNEL

Er, Enter!

The door opens and STRANGER 2 enters, closing the door behind him.

STRANGER 2

I must ask for a few minute's shelter, comrades, or I shall be wetted to my skin before I get to Casterbridge.

FENNEL

(A bit more reluctantly)
Er, well, er, make yourself at home then, Master!

The first stranger hurriedly pokes the fire, concentratedly; not looking up.

The second stranger removes his oilskin, hangs it on a nail, and sits by a side table, in the corner, near to the fire.

STRANGER 2, a man in his late fourties, wears a smart dark suit and has some seals hanging from his watch fob.

Mrs. Fennel comes and pours the new man some drink into a tankard, which he quaffs, rapidly, and by which, she is further disconcerted.

He looks up at her

STRANGER 2

I saw your hives, mistress and suspected that there may be some mead in your house... and a very good mead it is, too.

MRS. FENNEL

Thank you, Sir.

She then refills his tankard, but only halfway, and he peers, disappointedly, into the tankard at her niggardliness, so she, reluctantly, has then to pour some more, and he smiles back.

The party has given up trying to dance and has reseated itself, resuming its eating and drinking.

There is the odd tiff as one person accidentally takes and uses another's glass, or sits on another's chair.

Stranger 2 nods his thanks, and spreads his legs out towards the fire and sighs, in relief.

STRANGER 2

I was going to Casterbridge when I was forced to call here.

(MORE)

STRANGER 2 (CONT'D)

I mean to move there and must be
there, tomorrow for my day's work,
het, or wet, snow, or blow.

Fennel nods in interest, then looks at both the strangers

FENNEL

Well, sirs, what be either of yers
trades, then?

STRANGER 1

Anyone may know mine, Master. Oi be
a wheelwright.

Fennel nods

FENNEL

A good trade fer these parts. Aye,
a good un!

He looks over at stranger 2, questioningly.

Stranger 2 shrugs

STRANGER 2

Anyone may know mine.

He smiles, waggles his eyebrows, then starts to sing

STRANGER 2 (CONT'D)

Oh, my trade it is the rarest one
My trade's a sight to see;
For my customers I tie a rope,
thereon,
And waft 'em to a far countree!

CHORUS!

He takes a big breath through open
mouth

Here, the first stranger joins in, in a deep bass voice,
waving around his tankard

STRANGER 1

Waft 'em to a far countree!

STRANGER 2 (CONT'D)

Waft 'em to a far countree!

The company looks horrified to discover they are entertaining
a hangman.

They draw back. The women look a little faint, and the men
shift about and look uneasy.

The old shepherd leans over and speaks to Fennel

OLD SHEPHERD

'e be a cumin' to 'ang that poor
 Timothy Summers for stealing a
 sheep when 'is family were a-
 starving.'E's ta live in that
 cottage under the prison walls, 'e
 is.

Fennel nods his comprehension, slowly.

Stranger 2 starts up his verse two, as there is another knock
 at the door.

STRANGER 2

Well.....

This time, Fennel, who happens to be near the door, opens it
 and another stranger steps forwards onto the mat.

STRANGER 3 is not wet, as the rain has stopped, now.

STRANGER 3

Ah, good evening...Um, could you
 please tell me the way to...

He is interrupted by stranger 2's second verse and stands,
 open-mouthed, listening, in horror.

STRANGER 2

Tomorrow is my working day,
 A working day for me,
 For the lad will swing for the
 sheep, my boys,
 On his soul may God ha' mercy!

STRANGER 1

On his soul may God ha'
 mercy!

STRANGER 2 (CONT'D)

On his soul may God ha'
 mercy!

They clash their tankards together.

Fennel is suddenly distracted by the latch rattling
 violently, and he turns around.

He sees the third stranger looking wild-eyed at the hangman,
 with his mouth opened and his hands shaking so much that the
 latch he has his hand on is rattling.

This third stranger suddenly recalls himself, turns and
 flees, slamming the door behind himself.

The singing stops and the company look up at the door.

They then look back at the hangman, and edge away from him.

The sudden stillness is broken by the sound of a single canon being fired.

The hangman jumps up

HANGMAN

Be jiggered!...A prisoner has escaped
from jail!!

A carpenter points at the door.

CARPENTER

That must 'av been issself!

DAIRYMAN

'Is teeth chattered and the breath
went out of 'is body!

The gun sounds again

The hangman stands up and addresses the company

HANGMAN

Is there a constable here present?!

A man in his fifties stands forward.

HANGMAN (CONT'D)

You are a sworn constable?

CONSTABLE

Oi be, Sir!

HANGMAN

Then, in the Queen's name, I hereby
give ye authority to take these
men, arm yeselves and pursue this
villain who has escaped his fate!

All of the men stand up, look uneasily at each other, and then follow the constable out of the door.

FENNEL

Come in the shed, lads, I've some
hurdle staves i' there and some
more lanterns.

The men are walking along, uphill, in a single file, in the dark, either holding lanterns, or tying scarves round themselves, or shrugging on jackets.

9 INT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

9

The remaining six women all look at each, both, pityingly, for the escapee, and in futility at their inability to help.

The baby, upstairs, suddenly starts crying, and all of the women, headed by Mrs. Fennel, pour, with one idea, out of the room.

10 INT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

10

Stranger 1 peeps around the door, sees it is empty, and re-enters the living room.

He goes up to a sliced seed cake, on the food table against the wall, and takes a piece.

He picks up his tankard, swills some liquid, and then starts, ravenously, to devour the cake.

The hangman re-enters the room and sees stranger 1

HANGMAN

You here?...Thought you'd gone to help i' the chase.

STRANGER 1

Oh, oi thought there were enough wi'out me.

HANGMAN

Well, these shepherd folk are used to it-simple-minded souls.... Stirred up to anything, in a moment!... They'll have him ready for me, in the morning...

Stranger 1 leans, conspiratorially, towards the hangman, who is finishing off his tankard, with relish

STRANGER 1

.....and we shall 'ave saved us selves all the labour I' the matter!

The hangman finishes his drink, sighs in satisfaction, and bangs down his tankard

HANGMAN

True! True!....Well I'm off to Casterbridge..... You going that way?

STRANGER 1
 No, I'm for up country, t'other
 way.

The hangman nods and holds out his hand

HANGMAN
 Then bid ye good night, Sir!

Stranger 1 nods, puts down his tankard, and shakes the
 hangman's hand.

STRANGER 1
 Good night!

The hangman goes out, and, after cramming in the remainder of
 his seed cake, Stranger 1 eventually follows.

11 EXT. CROWSTAIRS HILL/RIDGE TRACK - NIGHT 11

The hunting party trudge resolutely forward, pointing out
 ahead, generally, in the dark, in single file across the
 ridge of the hill.

They nod agreement with each other's pointings.

12 EXT. CROWSTAIRS HILL/DESCENDING PATH - NIGHT 12

One of the party feels sure that he heard something, and
 beckons the others in this direction, descending the hill
 down the descending track.

The others nod assent and follow him.

Shepherd Fennel, looks uneasy and calls to them as they
 plunge on down, ahead of him, but it is too late and he
 sighs, in frustration.

13 EXT. CROWSTAIRS HILL/SCREE SLOPE - NIGHT 13

Various members of the party realize that this is not really
 a proper path, only too late and peer ahead as the path has
 petered out onto a scree slope.

The different men try desperately to keep themselves upright,
 while wildly floundering on the scree as they effect
 undignified descents, or, in one, or two cases, fall on their
 backsides and end up finishing the descent on their behinds,
 with various looks of terror.

A couple of them lose their lanthorns and have to retrieve them, while the others pick themselves up and dust themselves down, ruefully.

Shepherd Fennel remonstrates with them about their unguided precipitation, lines them up, and leads them, chastened, in a single file, through an upper valley.

14 EXT. CROWSTAIRS HILL/STREAM BANK- - NIGHT

14

The men are walking, still in single file, along a stream bank when they see a man, ahead, standing near to a tree.

The constable points and shouts

CONSTABLE

You!.... Your money, or your life!

The other men crowd around the constable for safety

His neighbour, Mr. Pitcher, tugs on his sleeve.

MR.PITCHER

No! No! Tain't OUR side ought to say that!...WE be on the sides of the law!

CARPENTER

The law!

The carpenter brandishes his stave

CONSTABLE

Oi MUST say some'at, mustn't oi!...Um, er...Prisoner at the bar, surrender...

CARPENTER

Surrender!!

More brandishing

The constable looks at the carpenter, in annoyance

CONSTANCE

...in the name of the Father, the S...

Mr. Pitcher digs him in the ribs with his elbow

CONS TABLE

.....er, er, the Crown, oi mean.

Stranger 3 strolls towards them

STRANGER 3
Did I hear ye speak to me?

The constable blusters and puffs himself up

CONSTABLE
Yes!....

He looks around to see that he is safely amongst the other members of his party

CONSTABLE (CONT'D)
Uh... we, er...we arrest ye on the charge of not boidin' in Casterbridge jail, in a decent manner, to be hung tomorra!

STRANGER 3
Would YOU stay there?

CONSTABLE
Well..... no...

PARTY (VARIOUSLY)
(Muttering)
No/Not really/wellllll/I wouldn't!

Mr. Pitcher grimaces at the constable and digs him in the ribs, again

CONSTABLE
.....but, but YES! Yes!...Neighbours do yer duty and take him!

The men surround Stranger 3.

15 EXT. CROWSTAIRS HILL/DESCENDING PATH 15

The party walks off with the stranger in their midst, down the path.

They can eventually see the shepherd's cottage's window light twinkling in the mid distance.

16 EXT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/FRONT PATH - NIGHT 16

The men walk up the front path, with Shepherd Fennel leading the.

They hear the sound of voices from within and look at each other, in confusion.

They go into the cottage.

17 INT. SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

17

There are three new men standing there, who look up at the new arrivals, together with Mrs. Fennel who is fussing around, pouring beer for them.

The magistrate, in his late fifties, looks smart in his dark clothes and oilskin greatcoat.

The other two younger men are jail officers.

The magistrate comes forward

MAGISTRATE

Which is the constable?

The constable pushes through the men

CONSTABLE

Oi be 'ere, Zur! An' oi 'ave
happened the said crinimal
(sic)

!..Men, bring forard your captive!

The men push forward Stranger 3.

JAILER 1

Who's this?

CONSTABLE

The man!

JAILER 1

Certainly not!

JAILER 2

Nah!

The constable pushes back his cap and scratches his head

CONSTABLE

Well, it must be, cos 'e were
shakin', and were roight
frightened by your singing
hinstrument of justice.

JAILER 1

All I know is that he isn't the condemned man. Our man is tall, dark, quite good-looking, and has a bass voice.

The men all burst out, variously

MEN

Oh!/That were he!/In the corner/That tall man/The first stranger!

The magistrate comes forward to the constable

MAGISTRATE

(Irritatedly)

So you haven't caught the man, after all?

CONSTABLE

Well, 'e were the man we were in search of, yet 't'were not he, so as to speak, acos 'e were actually the man in the corner, if you will excuse my everyday way, Zur!

There is a pause as everyone considers this and then light dawns for a couple of them.

The magistrate scowls

MAGISTRATE

A pretty kettle of fish!

The prisoner suddenly speaks out

STRANGER 3

Sir, the condemned man is my brother. I set out this morning to tramp to Casterbridge jail to take my leave of him....You can guess my shock when I saw him in this cottage. I naturally left in a hurry.

MAGISTRATE

And do you know where he is, now?

STRANGER 3

I have not seen him since, Sir.

The magistrate sighs and turns to the constable

MAGISTRATE

Well, there's no point in holding
this poor man..... You men can go
home, now, and then raise a party
for another search, in the morning.

He beckons to the jailers and addresses the company

MAGISTRATE (CONT'D)

Good evening, Gentlemen. Thank you
for your, er, attempt in this
matter.

He goes out, followed by the jailers and stranger 3.

The party goes all sigh, and then shake Fennel's hands and
leave the cottage.

Fennel and his wife wave to them as they go down the path.

The couple close the door.

FENNEL

They'll never find him, now. 'E'll
be long gone, by the mornin'!

MRS. FENNEL

'An so 'e ought!..... 'Anging!.....
Fer a sheep fer his starvin;
family!.....The law's an ass!

Mrs. Fennel tidies a few things on the table and Fennel damps
down the fire.

He stands up

FENNEL

I'll bet yer regrets 'avin this
party, now.

MRS. FENNEL

Oh, no!

She smiles

MRS. FENNEL (CONT'D)

No..... 'Twill give people some'at to
talk about in this parish, fer
years to come!...No regrets!.....
No!..... No regrets!

She smiles at him, gives him a kiss on his cheek, and heads
for the stairs

The shepherd fondly pats her bottom as he follows her towards the stairs.