

WHAT THE SHEPHERD SAW

Written by

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Thomas Hardy's eponymous short story

Address
Phone Number

1 EXT. LAMBING CORNER - NIGHT

1

A full moon is shining upon the downs, upon a large flock of sheep which are flocking near some clumps of furze bushes for protection from the cold, but gentle wind.

To one side of the flock is a large, neolithic standing stone: the Devil's Stone.

A shepherd's hut also hides, just within the furze, nearby, and its window surveys the flock.

2 INT. SHEPHERD'S HUT - NIGHT

2

A ten year old shepherd boy, BILL, is standing inside of the mobile shepherd's hut and looking out of the window at the sheep in the nearby enclosure.

The door opens and the old SHEPHERD comes in.

The old shepherd opens and pokes the stove, then stands up.

SHEPHERD

You sleepy?!

BILL

No, Sir.

SHEPHERD

Good, 'cos oi be leaving you to watch the flock. There's none as should want tending, now, and if they should, you can be down at moi 'ouse within ten minutes.

He stands up and adjusts his scarf and the boy watches him.

SHEPHERD (CONT'D)

Oi can't afford ye a candle, but, you can take the odd shut-eye for the odd minute in the chair, from time to time..... Oi mean it, though.... the odd minute, cos these ewes want a watching..... Do 'ee 'ear?!

BILL

Yes Sir!

The shepherd takes his stick and heads for the door.

SHEPHERD

Oils going for me sleep. Oi'll see
ye later!

BILL

Yes, Sir.

The old man strides out.

3 INT. SHEPHERD'S HUT - LATER

3

Bill suddenly wakes up, in the chair. The stove has burnt low,
and there are sounds of footsteps outside of the hut.

The boy goes to look out of the window.

He sees a YOUNG MAN, CAPTAIN OGBOURNE pacing the area around
the sheep hut.

A richly clad, young woman, HARRIET, is suddenly also seen
and she draws forward, meeting the man just under the window,
which is partially obscured by the gorse bushes.

OGBOURNE clasps her in his arms, before she realizes, but she
gently disengages herself.

4 EXT. LAMBING CORNER - NIGHT

4

OGBOURNE

You have come, Harriet. Bless you
for it!

HARRIET

(Irritatedly mystified)
Yes, but not for this. Why on earth
did you write me such a letter,
implying that I might be doing you
a grievous ill by staying away? You
look alright to me!

OGBOURNE

I walked all the way from my
father's!

HARRIET

Oh..... Well, ...um, how have you been
since we last met?

OGBOURNE

I have seen many lands and many
faces since I last walked these
downs, Harriet.

HARRIET

Did you call me out here, at this time of night, just to say this?

OGBOURNE

No, Harriet! I heard that the duke mistreats you and was worried!

HARRIET

Well...

(laughs)

he's a little warm tempered, but he's a good husband.

OGBOURNE

Harriet!... Dearest!... Is it not notorious that your life with him is a sad one?

HARRIET

Captain OGBOURNE, you deserve a punishment for dragging me out at this time of night to say nothing!...I wouldn't have come, only my husband is away and so there was no fetter on my impulsiveness.

OGBOURNE

Ah... I see.... You are not the Harriet you once were. I suppose that a duchess conveniently forgets those who once loved her and still do!

HARRIET

This is silly! You endanger yourself and my good name, as well..... I'm going.

Harriet sets off across the lambing area, around the flock, towards the Devil's Stone.

OGBOURNE pursues her and, as she draws near to the stone, about ten yards off, he catches hold of her hand, draws her near and puts a hand around her waist.

OGBOURNE

When does the duke return?!

HARRIET

Oh!

She struggles a little

HARRIET (CONT'D)
 (irritatedly)
 In a few days...

OGBOURNE
 ...Then meet me here again!

HARRIET
 What's the use?

OGBOURNE
 Own that you DID love me once, and
 that the duke is unkind to you.

HARRIET
 Well...

She struggles some more

HARRIET (CONT'D)
Yes, a bi!..... Look, let me go!

OGBOURNE
 I will, if you promise you'll meet
 me tomorrow..... or, or I'll call and
 have it out with him!

HARRIET
 What?.... No!.... Look! Please, don't
 be silly... Alright, alright!.....
 I'll meet you tomorrow... Now let me
 go!... Now!

Captain Ogbourne releases her and she runs down the hill.

He strides off in the other direction

A few seconds, later, an older man in his late forties: THE
 DUKE, in riding boots and a big cape emerges from behind the
 nearby standing stone.

His face, in the moonlight, is glowering and stern.

He, too, marches off, in the direction in which the woman has
 gone.

5 INT. LAMBING CORNER/SHEPHERD'S HUT

5

Bill, watching through the window at this scene, is suddenly
 rudely awakened by the old shepherd poking him in the back
 with his crook.

OLD SHEPHERD

Drat yer eyes, BILL MILLS, now yer let the stove go out, curse ye! One o' them ewes had twinned and there's another like as to go off!... An' did yer call me? No!

BILL

Yer said as 'ow I could go off fer a sleep, loik, fer an ollerday.

The old shepherd unrolls some bedding and starts to lie down.

OLD SHEPHERD

Don't you speak to yer betters loik that, young man!... Now get off wi' ye! But I want ye back up here, by breakfast time.

He turns away on the floor and Bill quietly tiptoes out.

6 EXT. LAMBING CORNER - NIGHT 6

Bill walks across the enclosure and off down the hill in the moonlight.

7 INT. LAMBING CORNER/SHEPHERD'S HUT - NIGHT 7

Bill re-enters the hut on the next night, and the shepherd is getting up from his chair.

The shepherd puts on his scarf and outer coat.

SHEPHERD

Right, Bill! You get at that winder and keep an eye on them ewes. Go out and check 'em every hour and you can have the odd ten minutes shut eye.

BILL

Yes, Sir.

The boy stands at his post and the shepherd goes out.

After ten minutes, the duke appears, stalking across the sheep enclosure, around the flock.

Bill looks frightened and flies to the pile of old rags on the floor at the other end of the hut.

He burrows under them and stays still

The duke inspects the gorse shrubs and finds the hut.

He comes into the hut, has a cursory look around and then stares out of the window.

The duke sees Capt. Ogbourne appear across the lambing area and make his way towards the hut area.

The duke's breathing becomes loud and stertorous and he suddenly bursts from the hut.

Bill sits up and hears

DUKE

You have dishonoured her and you
shall die the death you deserve!

There is the sound of a struggle and Bill runs to the window.

Bill can see nothing, but he hears the sudden sound of a cut-off cry, silence, and then the sound of something hitting the floor, next to the hut.

Suddenly, the duke appears, in the moonlight, dragging a man's body.

The duke drags the body to a small hollow filled with gorse, behind the Devil's Stone, he buries it, under the bushes and with added bracken.

The duke spends the next half hour walking furiously up and down, looking at his pocket watch and waiting for his wife to show up.

The duke then, finally, gives up waiting, and walks off to get his horse.

Bill creeps to the door and hears the duke mount up and then trot away.

Bill grabs his coat, hat and scarf and he leaves the hut, closing the door behind him.

8

INT. DUKE'S HOUSE/HALLWAY - NIGHT

8

The duke comes into the house, removing his gloves, hat and scarf.

A young, pretty woman, his wife, comes out of the drawing room to greet and assist him.

She smiles, says hello, kisses him on the cheek and helps him remove his coat, which she puts on a nearby chair.

The duke sits on a chair and starts to remove his boots, which takes a while.

HARRIET

I'm delighted that you've come a night early, my love. I just wish it had been two nights, though!

DUKE

Why?

HARRIET

Because a couple of nights ago, I was lured out to a meeting with my silly old cousin, Fred, tonight...You remember Captain Ogbourne?

DUKE

A meeting?

HARRIET

Yes. He wrote me a note asking to meet him as his "very happiness" depended on something he had to tell me...I got to worrying about him and so went up there?

DUKE

Where?

HARRIET

The Devil's Stone... you know, where the sheep are, on Marlbury Downs.

DUKE

What happened?

HARRIET

Oh, basically, he had heard reports that I was unhappy and he grasped my hand and made me promise to meet him again, the next night, you know, yesterday. I said yes, so as to escape his hold, and then ran away.

DUKE

Did you not want to go to the promised meeting, then?

HARRIET

What on earth for? Of course, I didn't go.....

(MORE)

HARRIET (CONT'D)
 I AM afraid that he may now come
 here, because I failed to turn up,
 however.

The duke, having removed his recalcitrant boots, stands up
 and stares down at her.

HARRIET (CONT'D)
 You are so silent, my dear!

DUKE
 I've had a long journey.

The duchess takes his hand and pulls him towards the stairs.

9 INT. DUKE'S HOUSE/STAIRS - NIGHT

9

The duke and his wife walk slowly up the stairs

HARRIET
 I'll ring for some supper and you
 can have it by the fire in your
 bedroom....Perhaps we can go up to
 the downs, tomorrow night, and if
 Fred is there, yet again, you can
 ask him what on earth was worriting
 him so about me.

They start up the stairs

DUKE
 Yes. Perhaps....perhaps.

10 EXT. LAMBING CORNER - NIGHT

10

The duke and the duchess are walking from the direction of a
 copse, off to one side, and into the lambing area, near the
 furze.

DUKE
 I tell you, he has not thought it
 worth his while to come a second
 time, after you didn't turn up!

DUCHESS
 (Laughing, pityingly)
 Well, it would be harsh treatment
 to make him wait all alone, a
 second time, when he thought I
 might come!

DUKE

He probably has some other
engagement.

DUCHESS

Or he could be hiding behind the
Devil's Stone....

She makes a feint, in that direction

DUKE

No! No!...Uh, don't be silly!

HARRIET

I declare that you lag like an
unwilling schoolboy, tonight!.....If I
didn't know you better, I'd think
you were jealous!

She looks up and scrutinises the perimeter of the enclosure
area.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

Oh!..... I see him!

DUKE

(Hoarsely)
You CAN'T!.....WHERE?!

She points

HARRIET

There!..... By the stone!.....
Oh, it's not him!....It's a Boy.

DUKE

So it is...
(Coughs)
Come here, Boy!

Bill approaches them

DUKE (CONT'D)

What are you doing, Boy?

BILL

Keeping sheep, moi Lord Duke.

HARRIET

And what have you seen, these last
few nights?

BILL

Nothin', moi Lady.

The duke's eyes bore holes in to the boy.

Then he speaks too his wife

DUKE

Come on. Let's go. You will get
your death of cold up here!

Harriet smiles and puts her hand on his arm.

HARRIET

Alright, my dear.

They turn and walk off.

Bill, relievedly heads back to his hut.

11 INT. HUT - NIGHT

11

Bill has fallen asleep in his chair, when the duke bursts in,
strides across, grabs the boy's clothes and raises Bill up.

Bill wakes up, terrified and cries out

DUKE

WHAT did you see, two nights
since?!

BILL

Nothing, nothin'!...Oi didn't see
nothin', Moi Lord and what I see,
oi don't bear in mind!

The duke furiously shakes him

DUKE

And WHAT didn't you bear in mind?

BILL

Oi, oi....oi don't remember you
dragging no bodies towards the
stone an' all!

The duke throws the boy back into the chair grabs its arms
and leans down into the boy's face.

DUKE

Would you rather see me do those
things, again..... now..... or keep
a secret your whole life?

Bill cowers back terrified

BILL
Keep a secret, Moi Lord!

DUKE
Do you LIKE being a shepherd?

BILL
No, moi Lord. 'Tis lonely and oi be
tret bad, here.

The duke starts to pace

DUKE
Then, you shall go to boarding
school and your Mother will be
taken care of...But if you tell a
SOUL of your shepherding days,
crash down will come your schooling
and your mother will be turned out
of her cottage....You understand,
boy?!

BILL
Ye... yes, Sir.....Moi Lord!

The duke grabs his hand

DUKE
Now come with me.

He swiftly departs the hut, taking Bill with him.

12

EXT. LAMBING CORNER/DEVIL'S STONE - NIGHT

12

The duke arrives at the stone, dragging poor Bill with him.

He leaves off the boy's hand.

DUKE
This stone is thousands of years
old and once marked a holy place.
An oath sworn here is doubly
powerful.
(brief pause for breath)
Say:" If ever I speak of
shepherding, again, my body will
rot and I will die in agony. So let
it be, Amen".

BILL
If, if I ever speak of shepherding,
again, my body will rot and I will
die in agony. So let it be, Amen.

DUKE
Now kiss the stone

Bill kisses the stone.

DUKE (CONT'D)
Right. You're coming home with me.
We'll write to your mother and tell
her of your intended schooling.

He stalks off, leading the boy by the hand.

13 INT. DUKE'S HOUSE/OFFICE - DAY 13

A young man of around thirty is sitting at his desk holding a pen over a part-written document.

He does not write, looks around, uneasily and sighs.

He eventually throws down the pen and sits back, heavily into his chair.

The young man looks worriedly out of the window, and then sighs, again.

He suddenly gets up, and leaves the room.

We hear his foot steps receding, on the wooden floor.

14 INT. DUKE'S HOUSE/LIBRARY - DAY 14

The duke, now twenty years older and quite white-haired, sits reading near the empty fire grate.

There is a knock at the door.

DUKE
Come!

The young man comes in.

DUKE (CONT'D)
Ah! Mills! What is it?

BILL
It's not work, as such, your Grace,
but just that.... that... old times
have come back to life, due to
something waking them.

DUKE
Which "old times" are these?

BILL

Oh, just, just about that Christmas when Milady's cousin asked her to meet hi...

DUKE

(Cuts in and roars)

Old times be damned!.....What about your oath?

BILL

It's not I, your Grace, but that I have heard something about my former employer, the old shepherd.

The duke gets up, suddenly and starts pacing.

DUKE

Well?..... Get ON with it!

BILL

Well, I've heard that he wished to see the vicar, as, because he is dying, he wished to relieve his breast of, of past misdeeds.

DUKE

What about?

BILL

About the fact that he was near the Devil's stone that night, on Marlbury Downs and he saw what happened....I, I didn't know he was there, my Lord!..... I didn't!

The duke stops pacing and stares at Bill.

Eventually, he says.

DUKE

You go home to bed, Mills! I'll stop the vicar's tongue! I've got another few decades to go, yet!.... I'll not have this escape!

15

EXT. PARKLAND - NIGHT

15

Bill walks across the park to a small cottage near the perimeter.

It is a lonely cottage.

- 16 INT. BILL'S COTTAGE/KITCHEN - NIGHT 16
Bill comes in, and throws off his coat and hat.
He sits down and sighs, while reflecting.
Then Bill gets up and starts tidying things up, desultorily.
The clock strikes midnight and Bill opens the front door and steps out.
- 17 EXT. BILL'S COTTAGE/GARDEN - NIGHT 17
Bill looks at the sky and then suddenly makes a decision.
He steps back inside, grabs his scarf, hat and coat and re-emerges with them, closing the door behind him.
He sets off back down the garden path, whilst hurriedly putting his exterior clothes on.
- 18 EXT. MARLBURY DOWNS/MILD HILL SLOPE - NIGHT 18
Bill follows the track up a mild hill, in the moonlight.
- 19 EXT. LAMBING CORNER - NIGHT 19
Bill approaches the lambing corner, looks over any the gorse bush area where the old hut used to be and he smiles.
Bill then walks over to one side of the Devil's Stone and looks at it, musingly.
Bill hears a noise and quickly withdraws slightly around the stone, but so that he can see who it is.
Bill sees an old man approach, barefooted, in a white, ornate, nightshirt. It is the duke, sleepwalking.
The duke goes around, behind the stone, to the area of gorse, in the hollow, behind and he kneels down.
He sighs and then starts to dig with his hands, scrabbling, like a badger.
After a while, when his hands are sore, he kneels back and sighs, again.
The duke then gets up, in a zombified stupor, and heads back the way he came.

Bill, worriedly, follows him, at a distance to see him safely home.

20 EXT. DUKE'S HOUSE - MORNING 20

Bill turns up for work, the next day, and uses the knocker.

He notices that the blinds are still down.

The door opens and the butler answers him, sombrely.

BUTLER

I am sorry, Sir, but the duke is dead. He fell down the stairs in the night, Sir, and broke his neck. Her Grace will send for you with instructions, in due course. The vicar is here.

Bill stands back, a little, overawed.

BILL

Yes. Yes, of course. I'm, I'm so sorry to hear this. Please convey my condolences to the duchess.

The butler nods, solemnly

BUTLER.

Indeed, sir. She and the vicar think that milord was wandering around, outside, sleepwalking, but they don't know where..... We're sure he is resting peacefully, now, however. His life was full and he had no regrets.

Bill nods.

BILL

No regrets!

21 EXT. LAMBING CORNER/DEVIL'S STONE - NIGHT 21

The duke, now, is a pale spectre.

He is clad in his nightshirt and is walking, dazedly towards the stone.

The duke is then seen kneeling, and scrabbling, desperately, and pre-occupiedly, in the soil, in the hollow behind the stone.