

Uhlan Larrie

## The Death of the Innocent

“Mother, mother! Where are you going?” asked a young four-year old girl lying on the hard, hay-filled mattress of an English hospital bed.

The girl’s mother turned around to face the young imploring, eyes of her daughter. She smiled, a hint of sadness in her eyes, and said, “I already told you, sweetie. I’m going to speak with Dr. Turner. I will only be gone for a few minutes.” She grabbed the brass knob of the door and said, “It’s okay. Lie back down.” With that the mother left the room, the door slamming shut behind her causing the silver plaque, with the numbers 277, printed on it, to jiggle.

The young girl sighed and fell back onto the pillow of the bed staring up at the slowly rotating fan on the ceiling wondering why she couldn’t go home to see her dear father. “He must be so lonely with me and mother here,” she thought. “Why can’t I go see him? Is there something wrong...” She stopped thinking and suddenly closed her eyes, squeezing them tightly, trying to get the thought out of her head. “Mother told me never to think of that stuff. It’s bad.”

She slowly opened her eyes again, the thought already fading. She sat up and observed her surroundings, the same four whitewashed walls that she had seen for the last week. Bored, she looked out the window and counted all of the huge, plumes of smoke that rose into the gray, dreary sky over London, England. “Hm...there are more today,” she said to herself.

In the past she had asked her mother what those were, but she had only received the answer of, “Bad things little girls shouldn’t think about. “But the plumes of smoke intrigued her little mind and she promised herself that once she left this tiny room, that she would visit them.

She jumped as she heard an unearthly wail followed by the sharp sobs of her mother. The little girl, suddenly afraid for her mother, awkwardly hopped out of bed and scurried to the giant gray door and tried to reach the high, brass knob above her.

Unfortunately she couldn't reach it and, therefore, had to settle with listening to the commotion going on outside the giant wall of a door.

Through the door she could only hear bits and pieces of what was being said. "...not many survive...Black Plague...Notify the father...little chance...girl's....survival....Sorry Miss---"

The little girl suddenly broke into a coughing fit that racked her entire body. The giant gate of a door suddenly flew open and she was immediately scooped up by her mother and placed on the bed. The coughing subsided and the girl noticed a little bit of blood on her white linen blouse.

This was of little consequence to her, but instead began crying for her mother. "I...heard you...crying and...I wanted to ....know i-f you were ...o-okay!" she sobbed, her voice muffled in the dress of her mother.

She felt mother's comforting hands rub her back trying to calm her down. "It's okay honey. It's okay. I'm fine." However, one look into the mother's red, puffy eyes told her otherwise.

After a few moments of their sentimental embrace, the girl calmed down gathered up the courage to ask her mother "the question". "Mother, when will we go see father? I think he's lonely and I just want to..." A stern gaze from her mother stopped her mid-sentence.

The young girl looked down ashamed for asking such a question. Suddenly, her mother was by her side apologizing. "I'm sorry. I don't mean to be cross with you. It's just...I miss him and worry about him too. It pains me just to think about it and I would rather not think about it." The girl looked up at her mother with a new light.

Her mother brushed a lock of auburn hair out of her daughter's face and said, "I promise you we will see him again. Just get some rest. He won't be happy if he knows that I let you worry about him."

The girl laid back satisfied and began to nod off to sleep suddenly tired. The last sight she saw of her mother, before she fell asleep, was a tear rolling down her cheek as she kissed her to sleep.

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Suddenly, the girl sat up startled, not really sure why she woke up. But, as she looked around her she was surprised and afraid. It wasn't the fact that it was morning that scared her, but the fact that her mother was no longer with her.

She jumped out of bed and ran to through the open door into the hallway full of doctors and patients running through the hallways. In vain, she tried to stop one of them and ask about the whereabouts of her mother, but none of them would pay her any mind.

She almost gave up all hope when suddenly, a comforting hand landed on her shoulder. "Moth-!" she began, but was suddenly surprised to find a tall, handsome man wearing a white pinstriped suit and matching white pants which matched his shockingly white, white hair. The girl didn't back away in fear because the man had a strange welcoming presence around him.

The man smiled and his orange-golden eyes seemed to sparkle. "Are you looking for your mother?" After the girl nodded several times vigorously the man reached out his hand and said, "Here, grab my hand and I will take you to her."

And so they walked, her small hand encompassed by the long thin fingers of his hand, down the drab, hospital corridor, full of bustling people, out into the cobblestone streets of London.

The girl loved London but as they were walking she looked around and saw, not the normal faces of the everyday Londoners she was used to, but some of the ugliest people she had ever seen. Their features were twisted to look like monsters and seemed to have perpetual scowls. There were young children like her who looked normal but most of the people looked horrific.

Her grip tightened in the man's hand which caused him to look down. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"There are monsters ever-verywhere!" The girl huddled closed to the man who seemed to find the girl's statement funny.

He chuckled a little bit to himself and said, "Those aren't monsters. Why, those are human beings!"

The girl, still clinging to him asked, "Then why do they look so horrific?!"

No longer smiling, the strange man replied, "This is what the hearts of men look like. Sin twists the hearts and souls of men and makes them look like how they appear to you now."

Still confused, the girl asked, "But why do they look like that now? Why didn't I see this before?"

Suddenly the man stopped walking and a surprised look came onto his face. After a few moments, realization seemed to dawn on him as a glowing smile came across his face. "Because we see the inside of man while man only sees the outside."

"But...aren't I-?" she stuttered.

The man squatted down, a smile still spread across his handsome features, and looked the young girl in her crystal green eyes, "No, you aren't. Not anymore. You're dead."

Suddenly scared, she began crying. "But what about mother! If I'm dead how am I going to see her? And...and..."

The man brushed her tears away and said, "It's okay. Don't worry for your mother is right there."

The young girl turned and looked to where the man pointed and sure enough, there stood her mother, her arms outstretched toward her daughter and a smile spread across her face. She looked more beautiful than ever and seemed to glow with a golden light.

Suddenly, the girl broke from the man's hands and sprinted towards her mother.

The girl didn't notice the scene change around her to giant gates full of jewels or notice the fact that the man had grown wings. Nor did she notice the fact that she was no longer crying tears of sadness but tears of joy.

The only thing she noticed was her mother scoop her up into her loving arms and pull her into a strong embrace.

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Night had fallen over the plague-infested city of London, England, and Dr. Turner found himself alone, staring out of his office window at the hospital, the cries of the sick and dying keeping him solemn company.

Dr. Turner stared out of his window in his office, counting the plumes of smoke rising from the burning mass graves of the dead.

"Hmmm...I guess there are more today," he said to himself.

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the rickety-creaking of a wagon down the cobblestone streets followed by the cry of the men pulling the cursed wagon. "Bring out yer dead! Bring out yer dead!"

The doctor ran out of his hospital stopping the two men. "Bless you gentlemen. I have two dead from the plague in room 277 on the Second floor."

Two men nodded and proceeded up the stairs carrying a giant sheet leaving one man guarding the cart.

Dr. Turner muttered to himself, "Why does God always take the innocent."

Suddenly, the man by the cart said, "Why it's simple sir. God takes the innocent to leave time for the condemned to repent."

The doctor was so taken aback by the man's comment that he didn't notice the other two men leave the hospital with the bodies in the sheet and load them in the cart.

It was only until the cart began moving again and the men began yelling their cursed cry that he recovered and went back into the hospital, the echo of what the man said still ringing in his mind.