

SOUND AND FURY

O. Henry

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PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

MR. PENNE. An Author
Miss LORE. An Amanuensis

SCENE—Workroom of Mr. Penne's popular novel factory.

MR. PENNE—Good morning, Miss Lore. Glad to see you so prompt. We should finish that June installment for the Epoch to-day. Leverett is crowding me for it. Are you quite ready? We will resume where we left off yesterday. (Dictates.) "Kate, with a sigh, rose from his knees, and——"

Miss LORE—Excuse me; you mean "rose from her knees," instead of "his," don't you?

MR. PENNE—Er—no—"his," if you please. It is the love scene in the garden. (Dictates.) "Rose from his knees where, blushing with youth's bewitching coyness, she had rested for a moment after Cortland had declared his love. The hour was one of supreme and tender joy. When Kate—scene that Cortland never——"

Miss LORE—Excuse me; but wouldn't it be more grammatical to say "when Kate SAW," instead of "seen"?

MR. PENNE—The context will explain. (DICTATES.) "When Kate—scene that Cortland never forgot—came tripping across the lawn it seemed to him the fairest sight that earth had ever offered to his gaze."

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE (dictates)—"Kate had abandoned herself to the joy of her new-found love so completely, that no shadow of her former grief was cast upon it. Cortland, with his arm firmly entwined about her waist, knew nothing of her sighs——"

Miss LORE—Goodness! If he couldn't tell her size with his arm around——

MR. PENNE (frowning)—"Of her sighs and tears of the previous night."

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE (dictates)—"To Cortland the chief charm of this girl was her look of innocence and unworldiness. Never had nun——"

Miss LORE—How about changing that to "never had any?"

MR. PENNE (emphatically)—"Never had nun in cloistered cell a face more sweet and pure."

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE (dictates)—"But now Kate must hasten back to the house lest her absence be discovered. After a fond farewell she turned and sped lightly away. Cortland's gaze followed her. He watched her rise——"

Miss LORE—Excuse me, Mr. Penne; but how could he watch her eyes while her back was turned toward him?

MR. PENNE (with extreme politeness)—Possibly you would gather my meaning more intelligently if you would wait for the conclusion of the sentence. (Dictates.) "Watched her rise as gracefully as a fawn as she mounted the eastern terrace."

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE (dictates)—"And yet Cortland's position was so far above that of this rustic maiden that he dreaded to consider the social upheaval that would ensue should he marry her. In no uncertain tones the traditional voices of his caste and world cried out loudly to him to let her go. What should follow——"

Miss LORE (looking up with a start)—I'm sure I can't say, Mr. Penne. Unless (with a giggle) you would want to add "Gallegher."

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MR. PENNE (coldly)—Pardon me. I was not seeking to impose upon you the task of a collaborator. Kindly consider the question a part of the text.

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE (dictates)—"On one side was love and Kate; on the other side his heritage of social position and family pride. Would love win? Love, that the poets tell us will last forever! (Perceives that Miss Lore looks fatigued, and looks at his watch.) That's a good long stretch. Perhaps we'd better knock off a bit."

(Miss Lore does not reply.)

MR. PENNE—I said, Miss Lore, we've been at it quite a long time— wouldn't you like to knock off for a while?

Miss LORE—Oh! Were you addressing me before? I put what you said down. I thought it belonged in the story. It seemed to fit in all right. Oh, no; I'm not tired.

MR. PENNE—Very well, then, we will continue. (Dictates.) "In spite of these qualms and doubts, Cortland was a happy man. That night at the club he silently toasted Kate's bright eyes in a bumper of the rarest vintage. Afterward he set out for a stroll with, as Kate on——"

Miss LORE—Excuse me, Mr. Penne, for venturing a suggestion; but don't you think you might state that in a less coarse manner?

MR. PENNE (astounded)—Wh—wh—I'm afraid I fail to understand you.

Miss LORE—His condition. Why not say he was "full" or "intoxicated"? It would sound much more elegant than the way you express it.

MR. PENNE (still darkly wandering)—Will you kindly point out, Miss Lore, where I have intimated that Cortland was "full," if you prefer that word?

Miss LORE (calmly consulting her stenographic notes)—It is right here, word for word. (Reads.) "Afterward he set out for a stroll with a skate on."

MR. PENNE (with peculiar emphasis)—Ah! And now will you kindly take down the expurgated phrase? (Dictates.) "Afterward he set out for a stroll with, as Kate on one occasion had fancifully told him, her spirit leaning upon his arm."

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE (dictates)—Chapter thirty-four. Heading—"What Kate Found in the Garden." "That fragrant summer morning brought gracious tasks to all. The bees were at the honeysuckle blossoms on the porch. Kate, singing a little song, was training the riotous branches of her favorite woodbine. The sun, himself, had rows——"

Miss LORE—Shall I say "had risen"?

MR. PENNE (very slowly and with desperate deliberation)—"The—sun—himself—had—rows—of—blushing—pinks—and—bollyhocks—and—hyacinths—waiting—that—he—might—dry—their—dew—drenched—cups."

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE(dictates)—"The earliest trolley, scattering the birds from its pathway like some marauding cat, brought Cortland over from Oldport. He had forgotten his fair——"

Miss LORE—Hm! Wonder how he got the conductor to——

MR. PENNE (very loudly)—"Forgotten his fair and roseate visions of the night in the practical light of the sober morn."

Miss LORE—Oh!

MR. PENNE (dictates)—"He greeted her with his usual smile and manner. 'See the waves,' he cried, pointing to the heaving waters of the sea, 'ever wooing and returning to the rockbound shore.'" "'Ready to break,' Kate said, with——"

Miss LORE—My! One evening he has his arm around her, and the next morning he's ready to break her head! Just like a man!

MR. PENNE (with suspicious calmness)—There are times, Miss Lore, when a man becomes so far exasperated that even a woman—But suppose we finish the sentence. (Dictates.) "'Ready to break,' Kate said, with the thrilling look of a soul-awakened woman, 'into foam and spray, destroying themselves upon the shore they love so well.'"

Miss LORE—Oh!

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MR. PENNE (dictates)—"Cortland, in Kate's presence heard faintly the voice of caution. Thirty years had not cooled his ardor. It was in his power to bestow great gifts upon this girl. He still retained the beliefs that he had at twenty." (To Miss Lore, wearily) I think that will be enough for the present.

Miss LORE (wisely)—Well, if he had the twenty that he believed he had, it might buy her a rather nice one.

MR. PENNE (faintly)—The last sentence was my own. We will discontinue for the day, Miss Lore.

Miss LORE—Shall I come again to-morrow?

MR. PENNE (helpless under the spell)—If you will be so good.

(Exit Miss Lore.)

ASBESTOS CURTAIN