

# An Uncommon View of It

By W. C. Morrow

Mr. Clarke Randolph was stupefied by a discovery which he had just made—his wife had proved unfaithful, and the betrayer was his nearest friend, Henry Stockton. If there had been the least chance for a doubt, the unhappy husband would have seized upon it, but there was none whatever.

Let us try to understand what this meant to such a man as Randolph. He was a high-bred, high-spirited man of thirty, descended from a long line of proud and chivalrous men; educated, refined, sensitive, generous, and brave. His fine talents, his dash, his polished manner, his industry, his integrity, his loftiness of character, had lifted him upon the shoulders of popularity and prosperity; so that, in the city of his home, there was not another man of his age, a member of his profession, the law, who was so well known, so well liked, or wielded such a power.

He had been married four years. His wife was beautiful, winning, and intelligent; and she had always had from him the best devotion that a husband could give his wife. He and Stockton had been friends for many years. Next to his wife, Randolph had loved and trusted him above all others.

Such was the situation. At one stroke he had lost his wife, his home, his best friend, his confidence in human nature, his spirit, his ambition. These—and essentially they were all that made up his life, except the operation of purely animal functions—had gone all at once without a moment's warning.

Well, there was something to be done. A keen sense of the betrayal, a smarting under the gross humiliation, urged him to the natural course of revenge. This, as he sat crouched down in a chair in his locked office, he began systematically to prepare. The first idea—always first in such cases—was to kill. That, in the case of a man of his spirit and temperament, was a matter of course. Fear of the legal consequences found no place within him. Besides, suicide after the killing would settle that exceedingly small part of the difficulty.

So it was first decided that as the result of this discovery three persons had to die,—his wife, his friend, and himself. Very well; that took a load from his mind. An orderly and intelligent arrangement of details now had to be worked out. A plan which would bring the largest results in the satisfaction of a desire for revenge must be chosen. The simple death of those two, the bare stoppage of breath, would be wholly inadequate. First, the manner of taking their lives must have the quality of strength and a force which in itself would have a large element of satisfaction; hence it must be striking, deliberate, brutal if you wish, revolting if you are particular. Second, it must be preceded by exposure, denunciation, publication, scorn, contempt, and terror.

That much was good—what next? There were various available means for taking life. A revolver suggested itself. It makes a dark, red spot; the very sight of the weapon, held steadily and longer than necessary, levelled at the place where the spot is to appear, is terrifying; there is a look of fright; then uplifted arms, an appeal for mercy, a protest of innocence, a cry to God; after that the crash, a white face, a toppling to the floor, eyes rolled upward, bluish lips apart, a dark pool on the carpet—all that was very good. The wretched man felt better now that he was beginning to think so clearly.

But there was poison also—poison in variety: arsenic, which burns and corrodes, causing great pain, often for hours; strychnine, which acts through the nerves, producing convulsions and

sometimes a fixed distortion of the features, which even the relaxation of death cannot remove; corrosive sublimate, prussic acid, cyanide of potassium—too quick and deadly. It must be a poison, if poison at all, which will bring about a sensible progression through perceptible stages of suffering, so that during this time the efficiency of physical pain may be raised by the addition of mental suffering.

Were these all the methods? Yes—enough for this purpose. Then, which should it be—revolver or poison? It was a difficult problem. Let it first be settled that the three should be together, locked in a room, and that the two guilty ones should suffer first, one at a time.

The revolver won.

Randolph was in the act of leaving his office to go and buy the weapon, when he was startled by what he saw in his office-mirror. It required a moment for him to recognize his own reflection. His face was unnaturally white; a discoloration was under his eyes, which had a glassy appearance; his lips were pressed tightly together, the corners of his mouth drawn down, large dark veins standing out on his temples. Fearing that if, while in this condition, he should apply to a gunsmith for a revolver he would be refused, he stood for some time before the mirror trying to restore the natural expression of his face. He kneaded his lips to remove their stiffness, pinched his cheeks to bring back their color, rubbed down the ridged veins, and scraped a little of the white plaster from the wall and with it concealed the dark color under his eyes. Then he went forth with a firm step, bought the revolver without difficulty, tried it, satisfied himself that it was reliable, loaded it, put it into his pocket, and returned to his office.

For there were certain matters of property to be attended to. He had a considerable fortune, all his separate possession; his wife had brought him nothing. He now felt sufficiently clear-minded to dispose of his estate intelligently. He drew his will—a holographic instrument—devising his wealth to various persons and benevolent societies.

He glanced at his office-clock. There would be four long hours yet before the time for going home to dinner. Fortunately for his plans, Stockton was to dine with them that evening, and neither of the guilty ones knew that they had been discovered. How should Randolph employ these weary hours? There was nothing to do, nothing even to think of. He tried to read a newspaper, then a book, and failed; looked out upon the crowds which thronged the street; counted the passing cars awhile; tried other things, failed at everything, and then sat down.

Something was beginning to work in the wretched man. Let us see: his wife, while pretending the warmest affection for him, was receiving the guilty attentions of a traitor in the house; she had betrayed her husband, had wrecked his life, had driven him to his death. Really, therefore, she had swept aside all the obligations which the marriage relation imposed. In essence she was no longer his wife, but a criminal enemy who, with deliberate and abounding malice, had destroyed him. He could go to the grave with a willing heart, but he could not permit her to live and enjoy his downfall and gloat over his destruction.

But would she really do that? And, then,—God!—she was a woman! In spite of all that she had done, she was a woman! A strong man, his strength reinforced by a revolver, employs deception to bring a woman into a room, locks the door, insults, humiliates, and terrifies her, brandishes a revolver, and then kills her like a rat in its hole. Can a brave man, of mature judgment and in possession of his faculties, do such a thing? Why, it would be not only murder, but cowardice as well! No; it could not be done. She was still a woman, with all the weakness, all the frailty which her sex imposed. It could not be done.

After all, it would be far sweeter revenge to let her live, bearing through life a brand of infamy. That would be much better. She would lose her high position and the respect of her friends; the

newspapers would publish her shame to the world, pointing her out by name as the depraved woman who had betrayed her husband and driven him to murder and suicide; they would have her portrait in their columns; her name and crime would be hawked upon the street by loud-crying newsboys; sermons denouncing her would be preached in all the churches; her shame would be discussed everywhere—in homes, shops, hotels, and bar-rooms in many cities.

Not only that, but she would be stripped of all the property which she had enjoyed so much. She would be turned adrift upon the streets, for no one would help her, none have a kind word for her, none give her even the respect which money might command. Being thus turned out upon the world all friendless and alone, and being naturally depraved, she would seek the protection of fast and shady men. Thus started, and soon taking to drink, as such women always do, down she would plunge into a reckless and shameless career, sinking lower and lower, losing her beauty; becoming coarse, loud, and vulgar; then, arriving at that stage when her beauty no longer could be a source of revenue, drifting into vile dens, consorting with the lowest and most brutal blackguards, finding herself dragged often before police-magistrates, first for drunkenness and then for theft, serving short terms in prison with others as low; finally, one night brought shrieking with delirium tremens to the police-station, bundled out to the hospital, strapped firmly to an iron bed, and then dying with foul oaths on her lips—such a life would be infinitely worse than death; such revenge immeasurably vaster than that of the pistol. Then it was finally decided that she must live and suffer.

As to the friend—as to Stockton, the betrayer, the sneak, the coward—*he* should die like a dog. *That* decision could not be reconsidered. He should not be granted the privilege of a duel, for not only was he wholly undeserving of such consideration, but by such means his life might be spared. Undoubtedly she loved him; perhaps he loved her. He living and the husband killed in a duel, their satisfaction would be doubled—having wrecked and humiliated him and driven him to despair, they then killed him. After that they could enjoy each other's society openly, unmolested, and without fear of detection or punishment. Besides, they might marry and both be happy. This was unthinkable. He must be killed, he must die like a dog, and he must go to his death with a foul stain on his name.

These things being settled, the wretched man reread the will. As the woman was to live, she must be mentioned in the document. He tore up the will and wrote another, in which he bequeathed her one dollar, setting forth her shame as the reason for so small a bequest. Then he wrote out a separate statement of the whole affair, sealed it, addressed it to the coroner, and placed it in his pocket. It would be found there after awhile.

Well, why this trembling in every member, this unaccountable nausea, this unconquerable feeling of horror and repugnance as the draft of the picture was contemplated? Did instinct arise and dumbly plead for mercy? What mercy had been shown that mercy could be expected? None whatever. There was not only revenge to be satisfied, but justice also. Still, it was horrible! Admit that she deserved it all, deserved even more, she was a woman! No act of hers could deprive her of her natural claims upon the stronger sex. As a woman she had inalienable rights which even she could not forfeit, which men may not withhold. And then, where could be the benefit of adding physical suffering to mental? One surely would weaken the force of the other. The lower she should fall and the deeper her degradation, the smaller would become the efficiency of her mental agony; and yet mental suffering was the kind which it was desired should fall upon her.

It would be well, therefore, to leave her some money—a considerable amount of money—in order that, holding herself above the want which, in her case, would lead to degradation and a

blunting of the sensibilities, she might suffer all the more keenly; in order that the memory of her shame might be forever poignant, forever a cause for the sharpest regrets. This would be better in other ways: her shame published, she could never associate with those fine characters who had been her friends; her lover dead and his memory disgraced, he could not be present to console her; for society she would have only those whom her fortune would attract, and they were not of a kind to satisfy such a woman as she; she would always be within sight of the old life and its pleasures, but just beyond the pale—sufficiently near to see and long for, but too far to reach, and forever kept back by the cold glance of contempt and disdain from the high circle in which she had been reared.

Therefore, it were better to leave her the bulk of his fortune. So he tore up the second will and wrote a third, in which, while naming her as his principal legatee, he incorporated the story of her shame. He felt better now than at any other time since his discovery. He walked about the room, looked out the window, then fell into his chair again.

How strangely alike in many respects are all animals, including man! he thought. There are qualities and passions common to them all,—hate, fear, anger, revenge, love, fondness for offspring. In what is man superior to the others? Manifestly in self-control, a sense of justice, the attribute of mercy, the quality of charity, the power to forgive, the force of benevolence, the operation of gratitude; an appreciation of abstractions; an ability to compare, contrast, and adjust; consciousness of an inherent tendency to higher and better achievements. To the extent that he lacks these does he approach more closely to the lower orders. To the degree that the passions common to all have mastery over him does he lack the finer qualities which distinguish his species. The desire to kill when hurt, angered, or threatened is the stronger the lower we descend in the scale of the orders—the lower we descend even among the members of the same order. The least developed men are the most brutal. Revenge is the malice of anger.

It is strange that his thoughts should have taken such a turn!

And then, the fundamental instinct which guards the perpetuation of the species is common to all, and its manifestations are controlled by a universal law, whose simple variations do not impair its integrity. Love and mating—these are the broad lines upon which the perpetuation of the species starts. What possible abstractions are there in them? Is not their character concrete and visible? Whatever fine sentiments are evolved, we know their source and comprehend their function. There is no mystery here.

What is this jealousy, which all animals may have? It is an instinctive resentment, by one of a mated pair, of something which interferes with a pleasant established system, the basis of which is perpetuation of the species. Higher mankind has the ability to dissect it, analyze it, understand it, and guard against its harmful operation; herein lie distinguishing qualities of superiority. If, when his jealousy is roused, he is unable to act any differently from the lion, the horse, or the dog, then, in that regard, he is not superior to them. Man, being an eater of meat, is a savage animal, like the dog, the tiger, the panther, the lion. His passions are strong, as are theirs; but he has qualities which enable him to hold them in check. If an animal have a strong attachment for his mate, he will fight if she be taken from him; this is the operation of jealousy. If he be a savage animal, he will kill if he can or dare. Few males among the animals will kill their deserting mates; that is left for man, the noblest of the animals. The others are content to kill the seducer. What thankfulness there is for escape from an act, so recently contemplated, which would have placed its perpetrator below the level of the most savage of the brutes! In what, of all that was now proposed to be done, was there any quality to distinguish the acts from those of the

most savage brute, except a more elaborate detail, the work of superior malice and ferocity? Is it a wonder that Randolph shuddered when he thought of it?

The broadest characteristic of all animals, including man, is selfishness. In man it reaches its highest form and becomes vanity, pride, and a ridiculous sense of self-importance. But man alone is conscious of its existence, character, and purpose; he alone encourages its rational development and suppresses the most evil of its abuses. The animal which would fight or kill from jealousy is moved by a selfish motive only. It proceeds to satisfy its anger or gratify its revenge without any regard to the ethics, without any thought of its obligations to nature, without the slightest wish to inquire whether there may not be in the cause of its jealousy a natural purpose which is proceeding upon the very lines that led to its mating. A man, however, can think of these things, weigh them carefully, understand them approximately, and then advance in the light of wisdom. If not, he is no better, in this regard, than the animal which cannot so reason and understand.

This manner of thinking was bringing the unhappy man closer to himself.

Then, having faced the proposition that he had been considering his own case all along, he found the situation to be somewhat like this: He had a certain understanding which should operate to remove him from influences which with men of inferior conceptions would be more powerful; not being a brute, he should rise above impulses which a brute is constrained by its nature to obey. So much was clear. Then what should he do? He pondered this long and seriously.

Was it possible to wipe out the past with exposure, humiliation, shame, and blood? He had been proud of her; he had loved her; he had been very, very happy with her. She had been his inspiration; a part of his hopes, ambition, life. True, she had undone all this, but the memory of it remained. Until this recent act of shame, she had been kind, unselfish, gentle, and faithful. Who knows why she fell? Who could sound the depths of this strange mystery; who measure the capacity of her resistance; who judge her frailty with a righteous mind; who say that at that very moment she was not suffering unspeakable things? And then, was there any one so noble of character, with integrity so unflinching and so far beyond temptation, that he might say he was better than she? Her weakness—should we presume to call it depravity when we cannot know, and might we with intelligent knowledge of our own conduct lay the whole responsibility upon her, and none upon that which made her? If we are human, let us seek wherein we may convince ourselves that we are not brutes. Compassion is an attribute of a noble character. The test of manhood is the exercise of manly qualities.

What good would come from this revenge of humiliation and exposure? It would not mend the wrong; it would not save life; it would be only proof of the vanity, the sense of self-importance, of the injured one. Would it be possible to spare her? Yes. That finally was settled. She should live; she should have the property; she should be left to enjoy life as best she could without the shadow of a stain upon her name. That were the nobler part, the test of manhood. And then, the past could not be forgotten!

Randolph felt so much better after arriving at this decision that he marvelled at himself. He walked about the room feeling strong and elastic. He tore up the will because it charged her crime upon her; tore up the letter to the coroner; collected all the scraps of paper and carefully burned them. Then he drew a new will, free from stain, leaving all his property to his wife. He did not only that, but he wrote her a letter—formal, of course—merely saying that he had found his life a mistake; this he sealed, addressed, and placed in his pocket.

Stockton—the false friend, the betrayer and destroyer—he should die, he should die like a dog. But not with a stain on his name—that were impossible, because it would reflect upon *her*.

Here was a new situation. The two men would be found dead, likely in the same room—the friend and the husband. What would people think? A duel? For what reason? Murder and suicide? Who had handled the weapon, and for what possible cause? The road which suspicion would travel was too short and wide. The fair name of the wife was to be guarded—that had been decided upon, and now it was the first consideration.

There were other matters to be thought of. Suppose that Stockton had been the husband and Randolph the friend. God! let us think. Have brutes, frenzied with rage and jealousy, the power to hold nature's mirror before the heart, to feel compassion, to exercise charity, to weigh with a steady hand the weaknesses and frailties of their kind, to feel humility, to bow the head before the inscrutable ways of nature? Have they not? No? Well, then, have men? If they have not, they are no better in that regard than brutes. Besides, would it punish Stockton to kill him? There can be no punishment in death; it can be only in dying; but even dying is not unpleasant, and death is the absence of suffering. There was no way under heaven to give him adequate punishment.

Nor was that all. *She* loved him—that must be so. What would be the benefit of removing him from her life? It would be merely revenge—revenge upon both of them; and where lies the nobility of such revenge? If they both should live, both go unexposed, they might be happy together.

After all, whom would that disturb, with whose pleasure interfere? Surely no sound of their happiness could penetrate the grave; violence would be done to none of nature's laws. Why should they not be happy? If they could, why should they not? Was there any reason under the sun that wisdom, charity, compassion, and a high manhood could give why they should not be happy?

But suppose that she should suspect the cause of her husband's suicide; this would likely poison her life, for the consciousness of guilt would give substance to suspicion. The result would be an abhorrence of self, a detestation of the participant in her sin, a belief that the blood of her husband was upon her head, and a long train of evils which would seriously impair, if not wholly destroy, the desired serenity of her life. Was there any way to prevent the birth of such a suspicion?

Yes; there was a way. As soon as Randolph had worked it out he felt as if an enormous load had been removed from him. His eyes shone brightly, his cheeks were flushed, and a look of pride and triumph lighted up his face.

He returned to his chair, removed the revolver from his pocket, and laid it on the table; wrote his wife an affectionate letter, in which he told her that he had just become aware of an incurable ailment which he had not the courage to face through months or years of suffering, and begged her to look to Stockton for friendship and advice; wrote to Stockton, charging him with her protection; burned the last will that he had made and drew a new one, in which he left them the property jointly, on condition that they marry within two years. Then, with a perfectly clear head, he laid down his pen and sighed, but his face was bright and tranquil. He picked up the revolver, cocked it, placed the muzzle against his temple, and without the tremor of a nerve he pressed the trigger.