

AN ULM

STANLEY WATERLOO

Table of Contents

<u>AN ULM</u>	1
<u>STANLEY WATERLOO</u>	2

AN ULM

STANLEY WATERLOO

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

"IT is as you say; he is not handsome, certainly not beautiful as flowers and the stars and a woman are but he has another sort of beauty, I think, such a beauty as made Victor Hugo's monster, Gwynplaine, fascinating, or gives a certain sort of charm to a banded rattlesnake. He is not much like the dove-eyed setter over whom we shot woodcock this afternoon, but to me he is the fairest object on the face of the earth, this gaunt brindled Ulm.

"What is there about an Ulm especially attractive? Well, I don't know. About Ulms in the abstract, very little, I imagine. About an Ulm in the concrete, particularly the brute near us a great deal. The Ulm is a morbid development in dog-breeding, anyhow. I remember, as doubtless you do as well, when the animals first made their appearance in this country a few years ago. The big, dirty-white beasts, dappled with dark blotches and with countenances unexplainably threatening, reminded one of hyenas with huge dog forms. Germans brought them over first, and they were affected by saloon-keepers and their class. They called them Siberian blood-hounds then, but the dog-fanciers got hold of them, and they became, with their sinister obtrusiveness, a feature of the shows; the breed was defined more clearly, and now they are known as Great Danes or Ulms, indifferently. How they originated I never cared to learn. I imagine it sometimes. I fancy some jilted, jaundiced descendant of the sea-rovers, retiring to his castle, and endeavouring, by mating some ugly bloodhound with a wild wolf, to produce a quadruped as fierce and cowardly and treacherous as a man or woman may be.

"Never mind about the dog, and tell you why I've been gentleman, farmer, sportsman and half-hermit here for the last five years — leaving everything just as I was getting a grip on reputation in town, leaving a pretty wife, too, after only a year of marriage? I can hardly do that — that is, I can hardly drop the dog, because, you see, he's part of the story. No need for going far back with the legend. You know it all up to the time I was married. You dined with me once or twice later. You remember my wife? Certainly she was a pretty woman, well bred, too, and wise, in a woman's way. I've seen a good deal of the world, but I don't know that I ever saw a more tactful entertainer, or in private a more adorable woman when she chose to be affectionate. I was in that fool's paradise which is so big and holds so many people, sometimes for a year and a half after marriage. Then one day I found myself outside the wall.

"There was a beautiful set to my wife's chin, you may recollect — a trifle strong for a woman; but I used to say to myself that, as students know, the mother most impresses the male offspring, and that my sons would be men of will. There was a fulness to her lips. Well, so there is to mine. There was a delicious, languorous craft in the look of her eyes at times. I care not at all for that. I thought she loved me and knew me. Love of me would give all faithfulness; knowledge of me, even were the inclination to wrong existent, would beget a dread of consequences. My dear boy, we don't know women. Sometimes women don't know men. She did not know me any more than she loved me. She has become better informed.

"What happened? Well, now come in the dog and the man. The dog was given me by a friend who was dog-mad, and who said to me the puppy would develop into a marvel of his kind, so long a pedigree he had. The man came in the form of an accidental new friend, an old friend of my wife, as subsequently developed. I invited him to my house, and he came often. I liked to have him there. I wanted to go to Congress — you know all about that — and wasn't often at home in the evening. He made the evenings less lonely for my wife, and I was glad of it.

"Meanwhile that brute of a puppy in the basement had been developing. He had grown into a great, rangy, long-toothed monster with a leer on his dull face, and the servants were afraid of him. I got interested and made a pet of the uncouth animal. I studied the Ulm character. I learned queer things about him. Despite his size and strength, he was frequently overcome by other dogs when he wandered into the street. He was tame until the shadows began to gather and the sun went down. Then a change came upon him. He ranged about the basement, and none but I dared venture down there. He was, in short, a cur by day, at night a demon. I supposed the early

AN ULM

dogs of this breed had been trained to night slaughter and savageness alone, and that it was a case of atavism, a recurrence of hereditary instinct. It interested me vastly, and I resolved to make him the most perfect of watch-dogs. I trained him to lie couchant, and to spring upon and tear a stuffed figure I would bring into the basement. I noticed he always sprang at the throat. 'Hard lines.' thought I, 'for the burglar who may venture here!'

"It was a little later than this nonsense with the dog, which was a piece of boyishness, a degree of relaxation to the strain of my fight with down-town conditions, that there came in what makes a man think the affairs of this world are not adjusted rightly, and makes recurrent the impulse which was first unfortunate for Abel — no doubt worse for Cain. There is no need for going into details of the story, how I learned, or when. My knowledge was all-sufficient and absolute. My wife and my friend were sinning, riotously and fully, but discreetly — sinning against all laws of right and honour, and against me. The mechanism of it was simple. The grounds back of my house you know, were large, and you may not have forgotten the lane of tall, dipped shrubbery that led up from the rear to a summer-house. His calls in the evening were made early and ended early. The pinkness of all propriety was about them. The servants suspected nothing. But, his call ended, the graceful gentleman, friend of mine and lover of my wife, would walk but a few hundred paces, then turn and enter my grounds at the rear gate I have mentioned, and pass up the arbour to the pretty summer-house. He would find time for pleasant anticipation there as he lolled upon one of the soft divans with which I had furnished the charming place; but his waiting would not be long; she would soon come to him.

When I learned what I have told — after the first awful five minutes — I don't like to think of them, even now — I became the most deliberate man on the face of this earth peopled with sinners. Sometimes, they say, the whole substance of a man's blood may be changed in a second by chemical action. My blood was changed, I think. The poison had transmuted it. There was a leaden sluggishness, but my head was clear.

"I had odd fancies. I remember I thought of a nobleman who had another torn slowly apart by horses for proving false to him at the siege of Calais. His cruelty had been a youthful horror to me, Now I had a tremendous appreciation of the man. 'Good fellow, good fellow!' I went about muttering to myself in a foolish, involuntary way. I wondered how my wife's lover could endure the strain of four strong Clydesdales, each started at the same moment, one north, one south, one east, one west. His charming personal appearance recurred to me, and I thought of his fine neck. Women like a fine-throated man, and he was one. I wondered if my wife's fancy tended the same way. It was well this idea came to me, for it gave me an inspiration. I thought of the dog.

"There is no harm, is there, in training a dog to pull down a stuffed figure? There is no harm, either, if the stuffed figure be given the simulated habiliments of some friend of yours. And what harm can there be in training the dog in a garden-arbour instead of in a basement? I dropped into the way of being at home a little more. I told my wife she should have alternate nights at least, and she was grateful and delighted. And on the nights when I was at home I would spend half an hour in the grounds with the dog, saying I was training him in new things, and no one paid attention. I taught him to crouch in the little lane dose to the summer-house, and to rush down and leap upon the manikin when I displayed it at the other end. Ye gods! how he learned to tear it down and tear its imitation throat! The training over, I would lock him in the basement as usual. But one night I had a dispatch come to me summoning me to another city. The other man was to call that evening, and he came. I left before nine o'clock, but just before going I released the dog. He darted for the post in the garden, and with gleaming eyes crouched, as he had been accustomed to do, watching the entrance of the arbour.

"I can always sleep well on a train. I suppose the regular sequence of sounds, the rhythmic throb of the motion, has something to do with it. I slept well and awoke refreshed when I reached my destination. I was driven to a hotel; I took a bath; I did what I rarely do, I drank a cocktail before breakfast. I sat down at the table; I gave my order, and then lazily opened the morning paper. One of the dispatches deeply interested me.

"'Inexplicable Tragedy' was the headline. By the way, 'Inexplicable Tragedy' contains just about the number of letters to fill a line neatly in the style of heading now the fashion. I don't know about such things, but it seems to me compact and neat and most effective. The lines which followed gave a skeleton of the story:

"'A WELL-KNOWN GENTLEMAN KILLED BY A DOG.

"'Theory of the Case which appears the only one possible under the Circumstances.'

"I read the dispatch at length. A man is naturally interested in the news from his own city. It told how a popular club man had been found in the early morning lying dead in the grounds of a friend, his throat torn open by a huge dog, an Ulm, belonging to that friend, which had somehow escaped from the basement of the house,

AN ULM

where it was usually confined. The gentleman had been a caller at the residence the same evening, and had left at a comparatively early hour. Some time later the mistress of the place had gone out to a summer-house in the grounds to see that the servants had brought in certain things used at a luncheon there during the day, but had seen nothing save the dog, which snarled at her, when she had gone into the house again. In the morning the gardener found the body of Mr. — lying about midway of an arbour leading from a gateway to the summer-house. It was supposed that the unfortunate gentleman had forgotten something, a message or something of that sort, and upon its recurrence to him had taken the shorter cut to reach the house again, as he might do naturally, being an intimate friend of the family.

"Oddly enough, I received no telegram from my wife, but under the circumstances I could do nothing else than return to my home at once. I sought my wife, to whom I expressed my horror and my sorrow, but she said very little. The dog I found in the basement, and he seemed very glad to see me. It has always been a source of regret to me that dogs cannot talk. I see that some one has learned that monkeys have a language, and that he can converse with them, after a fashion. If we could but talk with dogs!

"I saw the body, of course. I asked a famous surgeon once which would kill a man the quicker: severance of carotid artery or the jugular vein? I forget what his answer was, but in this case it really cut no figure. The dog had torn both open. It was on the left side. From this I infer that the dog sprang from the right, and that it was that big fang in his left upper jaw that did the work. Come here, you brute, and let me open your mouth! There, you see, as I turn his lips back, what a beauty of a tooth it is! I've thought of having that particular fang pulled, and of having it mounted and wearing it as a charm on my watch chain, but the dog is likely to die long before I do, and I've concluded to wait till then. But it's a beautiful tooth!

"I've mentioned, I believe, that my wife was a woman of keen perception. You will understand that after the unfortunate affair in my garden our relations were somewhat — I don't know just what word to use, but we'll say 'quaint.' It's a pretty little word, and sounds grotesque in this conversation. One day I provided an allowance for her, a good one, and came away here alone to play farmer and shoot and fish for four or five years. Somehow I lost interest in things, and knew I needed a rest. As for her, she left the house very soon and went to her own home. Oddly enough, she is in love with me now — in earnest this time. But we shall not live together again. I could never eat a peach off which the street vendors had rubbed the bloom. I never bought goods sold after a fire, even though externally untouched. I don't believe much in salvage as applied to the relations of men and women. I've seen in the early morning, the unfortunates who eat choice bits from the garbage barrels. But I couldn't do it, you know. Odd, isn't it, what little things will disturb the tenor of a man's existence and interfere with all his plans?

"I came here and brought the dog with me. I'm fond of him despite the failings in his character. Notwithstanding his currishness and the cowardly ferocity which comes out with the night, there is something definite about him. You know what to expect and what to rely upon. He does something. That is why I like Ulm.

"What am I going to do? Why, come back to town next year and pick up the threads. My nerves, which seemed a little out of the way, are better than they were when I came here. There's nothing to equal country air. I must have that whirl in my district yet. I don't think the boys have quite forgotten me. Have you noticed the drift at all? I could only judge from the papers. How are things in the Ninth Ward?"