

The Good Fortune of Frank Rees.

Well, there it was. He had done it: I had not. He could remain indefinitely here at the Cross, his own boss; my holidays would be over in two days time and back I'd go to my dead-end job in Port Gwynfi. He had been good at Art in school; I had been better. But there it was; he was a commercial artist; I washed motor-cars. I looked over his shoulder at the design on the drawing-board. It was clear, simple, eye-catching, brilliant.

"Like it?" he said, frowning.

"Yes," I said, "it's good."

"It's a cartoon," he said. "I thought just three colours: black, white and green. What do you think?"

"Looks O.K. to me as it is," I said. "Who's it for?"

"West Glamorgan Dairy Farmers' Association," he said.

"What'll it bring?" I asked, and felt a strange thrill as I awaited his reply. "I knew I would feel envious."

"Forty guineas," he said.

"Look," I said, "I used to be keen on Art, as you know, and was P. and Son's on a truck he wouldn't trust me with the job. Here's you pretty useful at it. But if the boss had to put 'Thomas Williams and Son' on a truck he wouldn't trust me with the job. Here's you a successful commercial artist. Was there any single event, any turning-point, I mean any single moment when you thought: 'Well, O.K. this is for me. Now I'm right.'"

He slung his pencil onto the drawing board. His frown deepened.

"No....," he said. "I just drifted on...."

He glanced out of the window.

"I was lucky," he said. "I married the right kind of woman."

He shoved his hands in his pockets, and his gaze became reminiscent, and not without sadness.

"As a matter of fact," he said, half to himself, "you might have said that was the turning-point.... a thing that happened just down on the Cross there...."

"What was that?" I said.

"I'll tell you," he said.

And this was his story.

Anyone who knew Griffith's Cross at all well, could see that Spring was going to come early that year, for no smoke troubled the bright blue sky over Bert Meadow's Tavern, and Bert was outside stretching like a cat that awakes from a long slumber. Old George James was shuffling near the door, and though you felt they were presently be facing each other over the bar, you also knew each was on the verge of suggesting just one side at the other under the horse-chestnut tree. George pointed his pipe, some more, and looked old and wise and tolerant as he sat in his father's cottage in a manner that clearly was a day, and the great flat stones overlooking the river, and the sun shining at last.

It was good to be alive, and fourteen, and free until it would be time to get the tea ready. Her slim body was squeezing between two bars of the school railings in the deserted playground in a joyous short-cut through the back railing, and escaping down through the ivy towards the river, gleaming below. If her mother she would doubtless have cautioned her child against the descent of the steep slope, but Julie ran half of smooth rock like a hurdler who has a mere two-foot obstacle. She passed the remains of the wood fire, her face smiling and expectant.

the calm surface of the pool seemed as her face, but her eyes were serious as if faced with an unfamiliar problem. As her heartbeats subsided, she lifted her head, which led up to the church, and in road, where Tom lived. Tom was head down. He disappeared over the

He went out of sight, wondering

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C. F. of Frank Rees

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He slung his pencil onto the drawing board. His frown deepened. "No....," he said. "I just drifted on ... took it up when I left school and ... just drifted on..."

He gazed out of the window.

"I was lucky," he said. "I married the right kind of woman."

He shoved his hands in his pockets, and his gaze became reminiscent, and not without sadness.

"As a matter of fact," he said, half to himself, "you might have said that was the turning-point... a thing that happened just down on the Cross there... near the church..."

"What was that?" I said.

"I'll tell you," he said.

And this was his story.

.

Anyone who knew Griffith's Cross at all well, could see that Spring was going to come early that year, for no smoke troubled the bright blue sky over Bert Meadow's Tavern, and Bert was outside stretching like a cat that awakes from a long slumber. Old George James was shuffling near the door, and though you felt they would both presently be facing each other over the bar, you also felt that each was on the verge of suggesting just one ale at the table out under the horse-chestnut tree. George pointed his pipe, and shuffled some more, and looked old and wise and tolerant as Julie Reed left her father's cottage in a manner that clearly suggested Saturday, and the great flat stones overlooking the river below the school, and the sun shining at last.

Julie felt it was good to be alive, and fourteen, and free until five-o'clock when it would be time to get the tea ready. Her slim young body was soon squeezing between two bars of the school railing, flitting across the deserted playground in a joyous short cut, squeezing through the back railing, and escaping down through the ferns and foxgloves towards the river, gleaming below. If her mother had been alive she would doubtless have cautioned her child about such a reckless descent of the steep slope, but Julie ran out onto the familiar shelf of smooth rock like a hurdler who has been confronted with a mere two-foot obstacle. She passed the remains of last Saturday's wood fire, her face smiling and expectant,...

But he wasn't there...

The light reflected off the calm surface of the pool seemed to carry nervous smiles across her face, but her eyes were serious now, as if she were suddenly faced with an unfamiliar problem. When the noise of her footsteps and heartbeats subsided, she lifted her eyes quickly to the other path, which led up to the church, and round the cemetery to the main road, where Tom lived. Tom was crashing up the overgrown path, head down. He disappeared over the skyline.

She looked at the spot where he went out of sight, wondering why she hadn't called out to him. Her eyes fell waveringly to the gleaming river, to the place where they usually sat. Then she was so hurt that her eyes filled with tears. She went over to the four

familiar objects, lying close together near the edge of the rock. She stooped and picked them up; then with a movement of infinite weariness threw them into the water.

The pencil-sharpener and the eraser, being small and solid sank quickly like her hope, and were lost.

The penny shimmered back and forth as if struggling against its fate, until it too settled in the mud of the river-bed, never to be discovered again.

The small empty bottle stayed afloat, surprisingly, for it was uncorked, and bobbed heroically towards the place where the stream narrowed. She watched it curiously, feeling strangely cruel. It gained speed as the current grew stronger. "Could it," she thought, "could it sail on and on, and... be found some time on a soft bank;... and be used". The bottle swirled boldly into the rapids. There was a tinkle as it struck a rock and broke.

Julie sat. She watched the water for a long time. Then she wept as people weep who would give something and everything but are not allowed to, until long after she saw the bottle no more. She only saw the sun on the water, and Tom disappearing again and again over the skyline. She did not see the fifth object near her.

She would certainly not have seen a source of comfort in it anyway. Grief finds comfort and hope hard to recognise,

Near Julie was a piece of charred wood....

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"Design?" Tom had said a week before, "I don't ~~xxxx~~ want to win any competition in design: I don't know anything about design!"

"But, Tom, you came second in last year's Eisteddfod."

"I didn't deserve to."

"That's only your opinion."

"And I repeat it: I didn't deserve ~~it~~to. My design was no good."

"The adjudicators thought it was good, and so did I. I told Susie James that that high-and-mighty Frank Rees wouldn't win it

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this year - that you'd turn the tables on him."

"Then you'd better tell her you've changed your mind - I'm not entering."

"But why, Tom? Gee, anyone who can do anything really well, should - should try to develop it, and - and... You seem to have lost all interest in art completely."

"I never had any interest in art."

"Oh, Tom, how can you say that?"

"Well, maybe I had a bit of interest. But never much enjoyment in it."

"But you were so good at it. Why didn't you like it?"

"Oh, I dunno... messing about drawing... hopeless subjects, never anything interesting, having to go over and sharpen up at the wastepaper basket just when things were beginning to take shape... trying to rub out with a dirty old rubber..."

"Oh, Tom, here's a clean one, good quality and soft and - "

"I don't want -"

"And a pencil-sharpener, you lazy thing - "

"I tell you I don't want -"

"Now you've got no excuse: you must enter the competition. For me. Is there anything else you need? Have you plenty of pencils?"

"Of course I've got - "

"Paper? Have you got proper paper?"

"Yes, yes, I've got everything I need to - "

"Then you'll do it? For me - "

"Everything I need except ability."

"You've got ability."

"It's strictly limited."

"Far more ability than Frank Rees or anyone else I know. And he's going in for it."

"Uh?"

"Going in for it. Commercial art."

"Huh!"

"Why don't you want to beat him in the Eisteddfod design for me? Huh?" They came to the main road and approached Burton's store.

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"I haven't got time. I've got no time. I haven't got paper, for a start. Besides, drawing gives me a headache."

"You said you'd got paper, and everything else."

"I meant good paper. You don't waste good paper on planning out. I haven't got any rough planning paper."

"Why, Tom, anything would do for that - why, a penny notebook would do for that!"

"I haven't got a penny".

"Why, here's a penny, Tom! Buy one in Burton's! Now you've got no excuse... Goodbye... See you tomorrow."

She turned off towards home to get tea ready, thinking "Why do I try to make Tom do things, and get myself hurt?" For Tom had slouched straight past Burton's store, homeward, thinking: "Aw - girls."

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"Aw girls," said Tom a few days later. For Julie had overcome her hurt, and was urging him again.

"But why don't you start, Tom? You have the time. Why don't you get started?"

"I dunno. I don't get any ideas. I can't seem to think of anything. I've got a headache."

"You've only got a few days, Tom."

"Aw, I can't think of a design."

"But it's only a matter of arrangement, Tom. Design is only arranging. Shuffling things up into some sort of pattern. All the notes are there waiting for a composer to turn them into beautiful music. The wood and stone are there waiting for the sculptor. You have the brains to do those things, Tom - not like me. I so wish I had your ability to make beautiful things."

"I tell you I've got no ability - at least, no creative ability."

"It's only arrangement!"

"It's training!"

"It's a gift!"

"Gift my foot! It's training - knowledge!"

"What about last year? You came second. "

"I'm not arguing with you. I've got a headache."

"Oh, Tom, here's a bottle of headache pills. Take two -"

"-Aw, I don't need-"

"-Take two every three hours! ... Tom, I dropped in at Susie James' yesterday evening. I saw Frank Rees's design. I didn't think much of it. You can do much better!"

"It was probably very good."

"You can do better."

"Aw, Julie...!"

"You can win it!"

"I tell you for the last time I'm no good at it. I'm not entering."

"But what about last year? You're entry was marvellous!"

"It was no good!"

"Why do you say it was no good?"

"I saw it in a book!"

"Eh?"

"I copied it!"

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Tom sat on the flat stone, watching the river. His hands were in his pockets. He was early.

"Arrangement!" said Tom, disgustedly.

Tom kicked the surface of the pool.

"Girls!" said Tom.

"I wonder why she's late," thought Tom. "She's usually on time. Oh, hell, that's right - she said her father might not let her come today."

Then he said aloud: "Julie!"

He emptied his pockets.

He regarded the sum total of his worldly possessions.

He swilled the last two pills down with a handful of water, and put the empty bottle near the other things - the eraser, the pencil-sharpener

pencil-sharpener, and the penny-piece.

He handled them, listlessly, splashing his foot in the water.

"Arrangement," he said. He placed the eraser on its edge, making it a parallelogram in two colours. He placed the pencil-sharpener on its end, making its silhouette an immediately recognisable outline. His doodling became more purposeful now. The penny and the bottle set on alternate sides of the diagonal eraser completed....

"A design!"

Tom knew it would fit into an ever-repeated square as soon as the arrangement was made - given a smaller bottle perhaps and an exaggerated blade to the sharpener - could see it patterned in his mind all over the rock shelf. Four sticks were not to hand, but there was a piece of charcoal from last Saturday's picnic fire. He outlined the objects in charcoal, duplicated the pattern, triplicated it, then jumped up. He'd have to do it now or never!

"Julie can't come." All right, the next time she saw him he would show her the entry that would win the Eisteddfod Design.

Tom crashed up the overgrown path towards the church, head down, and disappeared over the skyline as Julie Reed came upon his forgotten worldly goods.

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Old George James and I saw Tom Harris plunge out from beside the church that afternoon, and get struck down by Bert Meadow's car. We saw him die two minutes later. We had to make a statement. I've had to piece this story together. You take my word for it, Tom would have won the Eisteddfod design that afternoon, Fate permitting, as sure as my name's Frank Rees. But one fellow's loss is another's gain, I reckon. My wife, Julie, helped me piece the story together, but didn't like to talk about it until the charcoal had been washed off the rocks a long, long time.

