

Wicked John:

A Victorian Mystery

Joseph R. Doze

	1
II	14
III	19
IV	36
V	41
VI	49
VII	52
VIII	66
IX	175
X	78
XI	88
XII	96
Epilogue	105

I

Hilliard Purefoy looked up from the ancient tome for the first time in nearly an hour. He stretched his back and cracked his neck before once again starting in on the musty book detailing the Babylonian empire.

The library was always quiet, and the warm, musty smell of archaic books put Hilliard at ease. It was a comfort for the young man, who had just last year graduated from Boston University and had now moved across the Atlantic to pursue a higher education at University College in London.

Hilliard pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to alleviate the headache that had begun to spread. His brow had become heavy, and his stomach growled angrily for sustenance. Undeterred, Purefoy launched again headlong into his studies. It was soon after that he found himself jerking awake, his nose grazing the page of the old volume.

Finally convinced of his exhausted condition, Hilliard gently closed the book and took it gingerly in his arms. He strode back to the shelf from whence it had come and replaced it, taking care to not disturb the other old volumes that surrounded it. He took in one more deep breath, bringing in the musty, friendly smell of the library before heading for the doors.

He was nearly alarmed to find that it was already late dusk. He checked his pocket watch; a quarter of seven. He had entered the library at half ten that morning. He scoffed quietly at himself.

“Good Lord, Hilliard,” he muttered quietly, “you’ll put yourself in an early grave carrying on like that.”

He tut-tutted himself, donned his hat, and headed off, ambling his way toward Mayfair, particularly Grosvenor Square, to see his friend Jasper Merchant, a playboy and self proclaimed poet.

Jasper had proven to be a good friend in the last several months as Hilliard tried to acclimate himself to life in England after arriving from Boston just a short year ago. Jasper had spent some time in New York as a child before his father relocated the family to the ancestral estate near Dorchester, so Purefoy and Merchant had some common ground to discuss.

The two had met by happy accident. Hilliard had been, as he usually could be found, nested in the library of University College, stooped over some great, well-worn volume when Jasper, still then a literature student, happened to plop his collection of books down with an echoing thud.

“This looks like a rather quiet spot,” Jasper stated, not caring at all to consider Hilliard’s position on the matter. He nestled himself in with a cavalcade of grunts, groans, coughs, muttering and so forth.

Hilliard, quite appalled, would have had half a mind to protest the intrusion, had he not been brought up as a “grin-and-bear-it” type by his father. He was never one to rock the boat, if he even set foot on the boat at all. Instead, he gave Jasper sideways glances each time his new studymate made any noise, but Jasper never seemed to get the hint.

After some time, Jasper became rather distracted, and launched into conversation, albeit one-sided at first, with Hilliard. The two took some time to bond, but once Hilliard got beyond the eccentricities of Jasper's personality, it was a fast and true friendship.

It was a brisk walk in the mid March evening, and the cool breeze was a bit nippy, but tolerable. The journey invigorated young Purefoy, and he found that his stomach called out even more for delectables.

At last, Hilliard found himself at the door of Merchant's dormitory. He rapped on the door and clasped his hands behind his back. He had promised to visit Jasper today, and he was hoping that Merchant hadn't forgotten the arrangement. After a moment, Hilliard could hear the lock being slid away and the door swung open.

"I see you took your beezers out of some dusty old book long enough to visit a friend, eh, Purefoy?"

Hilliard tried to hide the grin that spread across his face. Jasper was annoyed, but he played at being more cross than he actually was.

"Come now, Merchant, you don't expect that I should ever forget my wealthy friends? How on earth would I ever eat without you?"

Now it was Jasper's turn to try and hide his grin. The two embraced and Jasper invited Hilliard in. The room was lit by direct current bulbs, which was a sight brighter than the corpuscular atmosphere of the hour. Writing pads and quills, inkwells and crumpled pieces of parchment littered the

dwelling. Jasper withdrew himself to the bedroom, continuing to talk with Hilliard.

"I suppose you haven't eaten yet," Jasper called, in a more rhetorical tone, "so it is, once again, up to your dear friend Merchant to feed you. I swear, Purefoy, you would starve to death hunched over some volume of heathen culture if it wasn't for me."

Jasper reemerged, now dressed in an evening jacket and bowler hat. He was rifling through several banknotes. He stuffed the handful of cash into his lapel pocket and looked up at Hilliard.

"I suppose you are short on money as well?"

Jasper didn't mean to be so snooty with his friend, it was really out of concern for him. What Jasper couldn't understand was being without. His family had always been well-off, and going without was never something that had been a part of young Merchant's life.

Hilliard jingled the coins in his pocket.

"I've got 8 and 6, enough to buy some bread and pork."

Jasper shook his head.

"Mate, what am I to do with you? Come on, then, let's get going. The hour is late, and if we are any later, the young women will have passed us by."

Jasper took Hilliard under his arm and escorted him out. They made their way to the Green Gate Inn, a well kept little tavern and restaurant that

Jasper frequented for the affordable gin and the patrons of the female persuasion.

They took their seats at the back of the tavern so Jasper could survey the place like a hawk on the hunt. He spotted two young women near the hearth, both had been drinking from a bottle of wine, which was nearly empty, a good sign. There were two more young women by the piano near the entrance. They seemed shy and bashful, one kept hiding her giggles behind her fan.

Before Jasper could make a decision, two lovely young ladies plopped right down into the two available chairs at the table. One was tall with sharp features and chestnut hair. The other was dainty and petite, her hair was the color of cornsilk.

"Alright, you two," the brunette announced, "I'll allow you to buy us a drink, but only one. We don't want you to get the impression we are easy."

Jasper, who was used to being the pursuer, was taken off-guard. Being pursued was not his baileywick.

He stammered a bit, trying to find the right response.

"Well," Hilliard interrupted, rescuing Jasper from further embarrassment, "we would love to, but why don't we get your names first, we don't want you two to get the impression that we are easy." Both women laughed. The brunette curled a strand of hair around a finger while the blonde kept looking between Jasper and Hilliard.

"A witty Yank, eh," asked the brunette, still twirling her hair flirtatiously. "I fancy an American accent. So, to ensure that we get our drinks, we might as well offer up our names. I'm Cordelia Truscott." With that, she extended her hand in an overly dainty fashion. Hilliard took her hand.

"Charmed, Ms Truscott." He gave a wry smile, and Cordelia blushed and returned the grin.

"My name is Selma Gayheart," the blonde spoke in a mousy voice.

Jasper raised an eyebrow. "As in Gayheart Manufacturing?"

Selma nodded sheepishly. "Yes."

"So you are an heiress to the Gayheart fortune, and you are going round asking strangers for drinks?"

Hilliard elbowed Jasper in the side. "Please forgive my companion," he began, apologetically, "he seems to have forgotten his manners. Allow me to reciprocate the pleasure; my name is Hilliard Purefoy, and this is Jasper Merchant, and we are delighted to meet you two."

Jasper rubbed his ribs, but gave a courteous nod of the head to the two young women. "Delighted," he said, a bit pointedly.

Hilliard continued, unabashed. "Now, the matter of the drinks still persists. What could we get you two lovely creatures?"

"Gin," Cordelia responded, almost immediately. A wicked grin flashed across her face before disappearing. Hilliard caught it, and thought to

himself that Ms Truscott might be a bit of a firebrand. Nonetheless, he nodded.

Selma clutched at her companion's arm, seemingly unaccustomed to carousing as such. She looked hesitant as she pondered the question before coming to a rather unsure answer.

"Gin, as well- if you don't mind, sir."

Jasper had finally stopped sulking, placated by the prospect of spirits. He smiled warmly at Ms Gayheart, who he began to find most charming.

"Why, not at all my dear."

He waved his hand in the air, beckoning a waiter over.

"Hello, my good man," Jasper hollered, in an overly posh accent, "if you don't mind, we would like a bottle of Beefeater, a bottle of Jameson, four glasses, and a basket of bread and cheese." He produced a £5 note and thrust it into the waiter's face. "And keep whatever is left over, my good man."

The waiter greedily snatched up the banknote and nodded. "Aye, sir." And with that, he was off and back in record time. He served the table with gusto and thanked Jasper several times before dashing off once again, leaving behind the gin and whiskey.

"Well," Selma piped up, a coy smile creeping across her face, "isn't your name Merchant, or is it Mr Pot to my Ms Kettle?"

Jasper looked at her, confused. "Madame, I have no idea what you mean?"

"Throwing banknotes around the way you did," Selma interrupted, "and yet you tut-tut me about my family fortune." Her smile broke out into a toothy grin. The sheepish little thing had got one on the bold Jasper Merchant. Hilliard, despite himself, let go with a hearty guffaw, and Cordelia joined him as Selma sat, looking triumphant. Jasper screwed up his face in an attempt to show contempt, but was really trying to mask the cat-that-ate-the-canary smirk that had begun to sprout.

Letting himself go, even Jasper had to laugh. With that, the first round of drinks were poured and conversation begun. It was the start of a long and wild night.

The bottles of gin and whiskey were polished off quickly, and another bottle of each ordered promptly. The foursome of merry carousers made fast friends. The waiter, urged on by Jasper's generous roll of banknotes, continued to serve well into the small hours of the night and early morning. It was almost a quarter of two in the morning before the group finally stumbled out of Green Gate Inn and into the early morning streets of Londontown.

Cordelia and Hilliard composed themselves rather well, despite the copious amounts of alcohol they both imbibed. They both giggled and stumbled a bit, but were rather well off. Jasper and Selma, on the other

hand, were both rather loose. Jasper preferred this state of being, as an aspiring author and poet, he found that liquor helped improve his literary standing, and Selma was not akin to the type of consumption that nature.

After a brisk walk, the group stopped to rest along the treeline that separated Birdcage Walk from St James's Park. Plopping down under the trees, the group collected themselves.

"Well, then," giggled Cordelia, her words a bit slurred, "that was a proper night out, eh?" She nudged Hilliard, who blushed and smiled back. "What do you say there, friend," she continued, in a rather weak, but endearing, American accent, "how was a night out on old Londontown?"

Hilliard laughed giddily at Cordelia's attempt at his native tongue, and put a hand on her shoulder. "Well, my dear," he answered, in his best received pronunciation, "I had quite the extraordinary night, most indubitably."

They both had a good laugh at their japes, each taking it in stride. As the laughs quieted down, they both sensed a bit of electricity in the air. There was an awkward moment of silence between the two as they simply smiled uncomfortably at each other and waited for the other to break the quiet.

It was Hilliard who finally spoke, nodding at Jasper and Selma who had both sat against an elm tree just off a little way from their comrades.

"It looks like those two are knackered, yes?"

Indeed, they were. Selma had fallen asleep, her head slumped on Jasper's shoulder, while Jasper had, in turn, also dozed off, his head on top of Selma's. Both were breathing peacefully, in the complete and utter bliss of an inebriated slumber.

Cordelia giggled. "I say, what an unseemly condition those two are in." She tisk-tisked and wagged her finger sarcastically at the two unconscious friends.

"We never actually had a formal conversation tonight, Hilliard," Cordelia said, turning to face him. "What brought you across the pond to merry old England?"

Hilliard was a bit more pensive and kept himself angled a bit away from Cordelia, mostly out of lack of confidence. He wasn't accustomed to this type of situation. "Well," he answered, stroking his chin, "I graduated from Boston University with a degree in ancient religions, and it has always been a family tradition to go to university in England. My great grandfather had emigrated from Suffolk to Boston after attending Cambridge. He encouraged my grandfather who in turn encouraged my father which leads us to me."

"I see." Cordelia mulled the information around in her mind before launching into her next line of questioning. "And what does one do with a degree in ancient religions from University College, eh?"

Hilliard opened his mouth to speak before closing it again. He had always been interested in the primitive, heathen religions that predated Abrahamic sects, but he had never really thought about what he would do once he finished university. Life had always been studying and exams. It was comfortable and safe that way. He wasn't quite sure he was ready for life outside of that.

"I'm- I'm not quite sure, actually." Hilliard gave a half-hearted chuckle as he pondered the question.

"Oh, dear, please don't be upset," Cordelia interjected, "I didn't mean to make you feel upset! Oh, drat my forwardness!"

Hilliard took Cordelia's hand gingerly, patting it ever so gently. "No, no, it's quite alright. I had never thought about it before. I had become accustomed to life as a student; quietness, rigid schedule, people telling me where to be and why." He suddenly noticed that he was holding Cordelia's hand. In a somewhat awkward motion, he dropped her hand and tried to smooth back his hair, but only succeeded in bashing his hand against the tree they were sitting against.

"Well," Cordelia started, trying to make the moment less awkward, "I'm sure that a young man as bright as you could find any sort of work after university. A lecturer perhaps, or a professor of ancient religions. Maybe even assisting on archeological hunts in Arabia? They discover all types of wickedly interesting artifacts."

"Well, let's turn the tables! What about you, Cordelia Truscott? What occupation do you hold?"

Cordelia beamed with pride. "Why, sir, I am an actress!" She made a large flourish with her hands and bowed from the waist. They both laughed like schoolchildren. "I am with the Lyric Players Guild, formerly with the Exeter Dramatic Society."

"Well, that is interesting. Have you performed anything that I may have seen?"

"We mostly do melodramas. We just closed on 'The Magistrate' last week. We have two weeks hiatus before we begin our next show."

Hilliard nodded. He hadn't yet noticed, although Cordelia did, that he was ever so slowly leaning closer and closer to Cordelia. There was a tense moment as he inched ever closer. Both hearts began to leap. Hilliard was soon aware of what he was doing, but it was almost too late to stop, and he decided that it was worth the chance. The moment was right, Cordelia did not protest. It was now.

He laid a hand upon hers, the other he placed gently on her shoulder. She smiled, brushing back her hair. She blushed, as did he. He continued to move closer, in slow motion, and began to draw her near. There was a moment as their noses touched, an electric spark shot between the both of them.

"What's 'is 'en?"

Cordelia and Hilliard both jumped at the intrusion. They looked up to find a constable looming over them. They quickly scampered to their feet.

"Evening, constable," Cordelia cooed.

"Evenin' ain't right, is it? It's four in 'a mornin', love. Wot are you four doing out 'ere?" As he asked his question, he pointed between Cordelia and Hilliard, who were now blushing at the thought of what they had almost done as well as the line of questions from the bobby, and Jasper and Selma, who were both still sound asleep. "A bit 'ard on the bottle t'night?"

"Those two perhaps," answered Hilliard, thrusting a thumb back towards the slumbering duo, "but we are right as rain."

"Right," the bobby said, stroking his chin. "A'right, get on 'ome 'en. Collect your chums and get goin'. You never know wot might be prowlin' about at night, do ya?"

II

Red Jenny was what she called herself. Her Christian name was Harriet Pickering. She had always hated the way that sounded coming off the tongue, and in her line of work, the tongue was very important.

All the lecherous men of Spitalfields knew of Red Jenny. She was the prize prostitute in the area. She could bed several men a night with time to spare, and always went home with several pounds lining her garters.

It was a particularly lonesome night tonight. Jenny had been strolling Market Street, ambling her way towards Bishops Square. It was rare to not have been solicited by any man yet. It was well past midnight, and on any normal night, Jenny would have been with at least three men by now. She shrugged off the thought and chalked it up to just a rare, bad night.

Jenny stopped in front of the old Charnel House. The stone building had been a part of London since the time of the Roman Empire, and it had always given Jenny an ill feeling. Anytime she had to pass by it, she held her breath for fear that there was some malignant entity that might possess her lest she even sniff the air around the structure.

“Fancy a roll, love?”

The voice seemed to come from nowhere and gave Jenny a terrible start. She flinched, turning away from the Charnel House and casting her eyes on the tall, dark man that stood before her.

He was a towering fellow with a bit of a stoop at the shoulders. He wore a bowler hat and waistcoat and a blue silk puff tie. He was much more fashionable than Jenny's regular clients. Her thoughts quickly turned to money, as she calculated what she could make from this one. Jenny flashed the man a smile.

"If you have the money, I've got the time, deary."

The man reached into his lapel and produced a massive roll of banknotes. He waved the notes in front of Jenny, who had now all but forgotten about her aversion to the Charnel House and thought only of her inclination of money.

"I assume this will suffice?"

The man gave Jenny a toothy smile. There was something unsettling about the way he grinned at her, but she was used to men seeing her as nothing but a possession, so she paid it no mind.

"Of course, sir. Do you have a place in mind?"

He pocketed the wad of money and held out his arm, indicating a direction across the street.

"I have a place yonder. After you madam. I am a gentleman, after all."

Jenny smiled, a lusty, greedy smile. She nodded slightly and proceeded to start towards the direction the man gestured to. As she walked she thought of the money he had waved about. She began to imagine just how much was in the roll, and how much she could pry from his pockets.

She also began to wonder about the devious acts that this man must want performed. The rich ones were usually the more "creative" in their sexual desires.

A sharp pain suddenly radiated from the back of her head, causing Jenny's vision to blur. She stumbled forward, going down to one knee. She reached her hand back to touch the back of her head. It was wet and sticky.

"Has no one condemned you?"

Jenny was woozy and bewildered. She couldn't understand what the man was talking about. In her dazed state, she managed to rise to her feet and turn round to face him. His face was no longer smiling. He now wore an expression of cold, unfeeling apathy.

"Sir?" Jenny was able to manage a whispered query to the man's question.

"Then I shall condemn you."

With that, the man stooped down slowly, methodically, and picked up a good sized rock. Jenny looked at the man in abject horror. The man, with no change in expression, threw the rock at Jenny, connecting with her forehead with a wet, sickening thud. Jenny's vision went white, stars blinked in her eyes as she stumbled backwards and fell flat on her back, her head bouncing off the cobblestone street.

Jenny's head was swimming, the pain was searing and unbearable. She writhed around on the street, groaning, trying desperately to cry out for

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

