

The Fall

The thin sunlight shone down, falling lightly upon her face. Tiny white flowers in her hair glittered, bathed in the newness of the spring light. To Edward, the rays of sun that fell on the wedding scene were undone next to the light in Cordelia's eyes. He slipped the ring, a priceless Armitage family heirloom, onto her delicate finger as they stood on Armitage Bridge and said their vows.

Edward's family had lived at Armitage Bridge in West Yorkshire for so long that the bridge's name became their name. The estate on the banks of the river was an Armitage family legacy as old as time itself. Seasons changed, waters ebbed and flowed, and the players on this stage lived their lives, generation to generation. Like a golden thread weaving through the ages, the heartbeat of Armitage Bridge was as constant as the crashing of the rushing water. So too was Edward's love. Three decades had passed since they met, and his love only burned the brighter. Hours could pass as he stared at the ring, lost... as the memories of Cordelia washed over him. Her memory warmed him like summertime.

However, over time, the ring itself became increasingly important to Edward. Any moment that he was separated at all from the ring, his mind was sent suddenly surging down into darkest despair. His final memory of Cordelia replayed, lapping relentlessly over his broken heart. She ran from him, playfully laughing. Then... the fall. Her voice pierced the air as she slipped on the icy winter bridge. Her eyes grew wild as she flailed and floundered trying to break her fall. Edward arrived in time to grasp her cold bony hand for a moment before she slipped from his grasp. Torn from him, Cordelia plummeted helplessly into the freezing water roaring below. Edward was left in horror, holding nothing but the ring. The frozen river consumed her strength immediately.

The cold shadow of that wintery scene is where Edward remained for the next seven years. The old, thick-banded, gold wedding ring was his only peace. Snapping himself back to the unforgiving present day, he reluctantly dropped the ring in his pocket and looked over the bridge. The spring air was mild, his loneliness intense. He walked along the meandering path from the river to the house. Upon the breeze of that golden season, he could almost smell Cordelia's Yorkshire pudding carried on the breeze. Edward slid his hand into his pocket, searching for the comfort of the ring. Instead, he closed his hand around nothing. In a panic he ran back to the bridge and searched.

Edward searched for hours, well into the night. Finally, he retired to his chamber where he sat on his bed and wept. He knew that he had to find the ring or lose himself trying. Searching became Edward's new routine. Hours became days became months. Spring turned to summer turned to fall. He dug through the gravel, clawed at the rocks, hoping for any shimmer that the ring would put off.

One especially cold night, Edward had fallen asleep in the dirt. He awoke to a stranger standing over him. "I am here to take you home" he said. Edward conceded and retired reluctantly to his bed chamber. After a few fleeting and fitful hours of sleep, Edward awoke. His mind was immediately upon the task of finding the ring. So distracted was he that he never saw the man leave. To Edward, it was as if the old man, like a ghost, simply disappeared without a trace.

As time went on, visitors like this became more frequent, Edward's searches more methodical. He combed the ribboning pathway to the river, inch by inch, foot by foot. His eyes red from dust and wind, his mind cloudy from fatigue, his muscles weak from want of rest, he searched. Endlessly shifting gravel, tirelessly turning rocks, at times sustained only by berries

plucked from the thorny riverside bushes. Like a dog in the heat of summer, he drank from the river, involuntarily drifting into short bouts of sleep.

More than once, his brother-in-law Leonard, found Edward outside after night fall, a pitiful heap of dying light. On one such night, Edward was supremely pleased that Leonard was accompanied by a full search and rescue crew who intended to help find the ring. The team knew, almost instinctually, where to look, where Cordelia had fallen, and what stretches of sleeping earth Edward had already overturned in his search.

That night Edward slept well, knowing that the search was continuing as he slept. He awoke the next morning to Leonard's voice. "Eddie, come eat some porridge I've made for you," Leonard called. At once, the urgency to continue the search cascaded over Edward. The tireless work crew had labored all night and continued still! The search team became a constant part of the scenery at Armitage Bridge. Their faces became familiar to Edward. Always the same and yet, ever changing. He wondered sometimes at the myriad faces, frightened that they would at times appear to morph before his eyes into different community members or relatives.

Dr. Brennis, who lived in the city and led a group of what modern psychiatrists were now calling "schizophrenics," arranged meetings with Edward frequently. Brennis worked at New Haven, a mental health institution. Most of Brennis' patients were emotionally blunted and withdrawn. "This must be why Brennis seems so interested in me" Edward thought. In the beginning, Edward went once or twice just to please the lonely chap.

Dr. Brennis would often give Edward chocolate coins from a jar on his desk. Much by chance, Edward had discovered that the troll under Armitage Bridge was pleasingly eager to labor in search of the ring in exchange for one of these coins! After revealing this to Brennis, the

doctor insisted that the troll was a manifestation of some illness Edward had. From then on, Edward kept this secret to himself but returned to Brennis often to obtain more chocolate coins to bribe the troll with.

Late one winter night as he was about to quit searching, Edward got a call from Dr. Brennis. "When you arrive at your house, please check your mailbox," his message said. But the mail could wait. Edward knew it was time to retire, but in one last effort, he peered over the old bridge into the deep. He felt the cold mist from the rapids. In the water, he thought he saw a glimmer of gold! Bending further over the rail he knew it was the ring. His fingers wanted it so badly he could almost feel it. Reaching for it, he slowly tipped over the railing. Edward entered his own eternal winter that night as he was washed away in the rapids. Edward never did check the mail, and so never found the schizophrenia diagnosis that Dr. Brennis had mailed him along with a request for an office visit to be given a newly discovered medication to treat his schizophrenia. Nor did Edward ever find the ring that sat under his bed where it had rolled from within the cuff of his pants seven years before.