**At Arms with Morpheus**

O. Henry

I never could quite understand how Tom Hopkins came to make that blunder, for he had been through a whole term at a medical college—before he inherited his aunt’s fortune—and had been considered strong in therapeutics.

We had been making a call together that evening, and afterward Tom ran up to my rooms for a pipe and a chat before going on to his own luxurious apartments. I had stepped into the other room for a moment when I heard Tom sing out:

“Oh, Billy, I’m going to take about four grains of quinine, if you don’t mind—I’m feeling all blue and shivery. Guess I’m taking cold.”

“All right,” I called back. “The bottle is on the second shelf. Take it in a spoonful of that elixir of eucalyptus. It knocks the bitter out.”

After I came back we sat by the fire and got our briars going. In about eight minutes Tom sank back into a gentle collapse.

I went straight to the medicine cabinet and looked.

“You unmitigated hayseed!” I growled. “See what money will do for a man’s brains!”

There stood the morphine bottle with the stopple out, just as Tom had left it.

I routed out another young M.D. who roomed on the floor above, and sent him for old Doctor Gales, two squares away. Tom Hopkins has too much money to be attended by rising young practitioners alone.

When Gales came we put Tom through as expensive a course of treatment as the resources of the profession permit. After the more drastic remedies we gave him citrate of caffeine in frequent doses and strong coffee, and walked him up and down the floor between two of us. Old Gales pinched him and slapped his face and worked hard for the big check he could see in the distance. The young M.D. from the next floor gave Tom a most hearty, rousing kick, and then apologized to me.

“Couldn’t help it,” he said. “I never kicked a millionaire before in my life. I may never have another opportunity.”

“Now,” said Doctor Gales, after a couple of hours, “he’ll do. But keep him awake for another hour. You can do that by talking to him and shaking him up occasionally. When his pulse and respiration are normal then let him sleep. I’ll leave him with you now.”

I was left alone with Tom, whom we had laid on a couch. He lay very still, and his eyes were half closed. I began my work of keeping him awake.

“Well, old man,” I said, “you’ve had a narrow squeak, but we’ve pulled you through. When you were attending lectures, Tom, didn’t any of the professors ever casually remark that m-o-r-p-h-i-a never spells ‘quinia,’ especially in four-grain doses? But I won’t pile it up on you until you get on your feet. But you ought to have been a druggist, Tom; you’re splendidly qualified to fill prescriptions.”

Tom looked at me with a faint and foolish smile.

“B’ly,” he murmured, “I feel jus’ like a hum’n bird flyin’ around a jolly lot of most ’shpensive roses. Don’ bozzer me. Goin’ sleep now.”

And he went to sleep in two seconds. I shook him by the shoulder.

“Now, Tom,” I said, severely, “this won’t do. The big doctor said you must stay awake for at least an hour. Open your eyes. You’re not entirely safe yet, you know. Wake up.”

Tom Hopkins weighs one hundred and ninety-eight. He gave me another somnolent grin, and fell into deeper slumber. I would have made him move about, but I might as well have tried to make Cleopatra’s needle waltz around the room with me. Tom’s breathing became stertorous, and that, in connection with morphia poisoning, means danger.

Then I began to think. I could not rouse his body; I must strive to excite his mind. “Make him angry,” was an idea that suggested itself. “Good!” I thought; but how? There was not a joint in Tom’s armour. Dear old fellow! He was good nature itself, and a gallant gentleman, fine and true and clean as sunlight. He came from somewhere down South, where they still have ideals and a code. New York had charmed, but had not spoiled, him. He had that old-fashioned chivalrous reverence for women, that—Eureka!—there was my idea! I worked the thing up for a minute or two in my imagination. I chuckled to myself at the thought of springing a thing like that on old Tom Hopkins. Then I took him by the shoulder and shook him till his ears flopped. He opened his eyes lazily. I assumed an expression of scorn and contempt, and pointed my finger within two inches of his nose.

“Listen to me, Hopkins,” I said, in cutting and distinct tones, “you and I have been good friends, but I want you to understand that in the future my doors are closed against any man who acts as much like a scoundrel as you have.”

Tom looked the least bit interested.

“What’s the matter, Billy?” he muttered, composedly. “Don’t your clothes fit you?”

“If I were in your place,” I went on, “which, thank God, I am not, I think I would be afraid to close my eyes. How about that girl you left waiting for you down among those lonesome Southern pines—the girl that you’ve forgotten since you came into your confounded money? Oh, I know what I’m talking about. While you were a poor medical student she was good enough for you. But now, since you are a millionaire, it’s different. I wonder what she thinks of the performances of that peculiar class of people which she has been taught to worship—the Southern gentlemen? I’m sorry, Hopkins, that I was forced to speak about these matters, but you’ve covered it up so well and played your part so nicely that I would have sworn you were above such unmanly tricks.”

Poor Tom. I could scarcely keep from laughing outright to see him struggling against the effects of the opiate. He was distinctly angry, and I didn’t blame him. Tom had a Southern temper. His eyes were open now, and they showed a gleam or two of fire. But the drug still clouded his mind and bound his tongue.

“C-c-confound you,” he stammered, “I’ll s-smash you.”

He tried to rise from the couch. With all his size he was very weak now. I thrust him back with one arm. He lay there glaring like a lion in a trap.

“That will hold you for a while, you old loony,” I said to myself. I got up and lit my pipe, for I was needing a smoke. I walked around a bit, congratulating myself on my brilliant idea.

I heard a snore. I looked around. Tom was asleep again. I walked over and punched him on the jaw. He looked at me as pleasant and ungrudging as an idiot. I chewed my pipe and gave it to him hard.

“I want you to recover yourself and get out of my rooms as soon as you can,” I said, insultingly. “I’ve told you what I think of you. If you have any honour or honesty left you will think twice before you attempt again to associate with gentlemen. She’s a poor girl, isn’t she?” I sneered. “Somewhat too plain and unfashionable for us since we got our money. Be ashamed to walk on Fifth Avenue with her, wouldn’t you? Hopkins, you’re forty-seven times worse than a cad. Who cares for your money? I don’t. I’ll bet that girl don’t. Perhaps if you didn’t have it you’d be more of a man. As it is you’ve made a cur of yourself, and”—I thought that quite dramatic—“perhaps broken a faithful heart.” (Old Tom Hopkins breaking a faithful heart!) “Let me be rid of you as soon as possible.”

I turned my back on Tom, and winked at myself in a mirror. I heard him moving, and I turned again quickly. I didn’t want a hundred and ninety-eight pounds falling on me from the rear. But Tom had only turned partly over, and laid one arm across his face. He spoke a few words rather more distinctly than before.

“I couldn’t have—talked this way—to you, Billy, even if I’d heard people—lyin’ ‘bout you. But jus’ soon’s I can s-stand up—I’ll break your neck—don’ f’get it.”

I did feel a little ashamed then. But it was to save Tom. In the morning, when I explained it, we would have a good laugh over it together.

In about twenty minutes Tom dropped into a sound, easy slumber. I felt his pulse, listened to his respiration, and let him sleep. Everything was normal, and Tom was safe. I went into the other room and tumbled into bed.

I found Tom up and dressed when I awoke the next morning. He was entirely himself again with the exception of shaky nerves and a tongue like a white-oak chip.

“What an idiot I was,” he said, thoughtfully. “I remember thinking that quinine bottle looked queer while I was taking the dose. Have much trouble in bringing me ‘round?”

I told him no. His memory seemed bad about the entire affair. I concluded that he had no recollection of my efforts to keep him awake, and decided not to enlighten him. Some other time, I thought, when he was feeling better, we would have some fun over it.

When Tom was ready to go he stopped, with the door open, and shook my hand.

“Much obliged, old fellow,” he said, quietly, “for taking so much trouble with me—and for what you said. I’m going down now to telegraph to the little girl.”