

The Girl Who Lost Her Heart

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Cast of Characters

Avi, our young heroine
 Mama, her mother
 Mr. Ransom, a business man
 Annie, a housemaid
 Elizabeth, a girl
 Millicent, a girl
 Miles, a boy
 Leslie, a boy
 Professor Dilly, a puppeteer
 Golden Bird, a heart
 Miss Crumb, a teacher
 Headhunters
 Teekla, a Headhunter Chief
 Animals
 Mythos, a satyr
 The King Of Sorrows, a king
 Lucien, a royal page
 Ariachnia, a daemon lover
 True Thomas, a prince
 Count Hackelberg, a huntsman
 Wild Eadric, a tracker
 Hollow Phantoms, the heartless horde

London, Summer, 1845

Well my heart knows me better than I know myself
 So I'm gonna let it do all the talking.

"Black Horse & The Cherry Tree"
 - KT Tunstall

THE GIRL WHO LOST HER HEART

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

London, summer, 1845.

AVI, a 12 year old girl, sits on a chair next to what appears to be a narrow table covered with a white embroidered cloth. SHE wears a black dress that falls to mid-calf with a petticoat beneath and black slippers. SHE has brought the hem of the dress up between her legs in front and tucked it into her belt to form trouser legs.

Sitting on the table opposite her is a large propped-open newspaper, The London Times. It is assumed that her father is seated behind the paper, reading it over his breakfast but we see no sign of him.

AVI

I know Mama says it's wicked to brag, Papa, but I can't help it. You understand, don't you? After all, how many other children in the world may say they have a father who is an honest-to-goodness explorer for the Royal Geographical Society? Practically none! So when Elizabeth or Millicent start talking about how their fathers are meeting with bank presidents or having dinner with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, you can understand...(SHE jumps to her feet)...why I simply must point out how horribly dull and silly that is compared with you discovering tribes of Pygmies in the jungles of darkest Africa and almost being killed by the fearsome headhunters of Borneo! That stops them up quick as you please, you should see. And don't tell Mama but sometimes I even tell them that you *have* been killed, eaten by South Seas cannibals or gobbled up by fierce crocodiles in the Amazon! Of course, the next day I very casually mention that we've only just received a wire and you managed to escape after all and are safe and sound and Queen Victoria herself is simply dying to meet you and give you the biggest medal the instant you return! And don't they all just turn green with envy then because they know their fathers can't compare to my brave Papa at all. And do you know that when Leslie or Miles talk about how they're going to be barristers or ministers when they grow up, I tell them that when I'm bigger, I shall be joining you on expeditions to Egypt to dig up mummies and sail to find the Northwest Passage to have tea with the Emperor of China! Then their heads nearly explode with jealousy, you should see! Miles said I wasn't strong enough to do any of those things so I pushed him down. I like our breakfast talks, don't you, Papa?

MAMA

(Softly, off, a bit angry) Lavinia, where are you?

AVI

What do you think of my dress? Mama had it made special but black is so dreary. I'd rather be in khaki trousers like you. They're so much more practical for exploring.

MAMA

(Off, a bit louder) Lavinia!

AVI

(Frightened) Mama's coming! (Sadly) This will be all over in a moment, won't it, all over forever and ever. Oh, I wish we could stay here just like this until the very end of time...or just a few minutes more, even. It isn't fair! You said you were going to be home a long while this time, that there wasn't to be another expedition until maybe after Christmas even, you promised we'd be together for weeks and weeks and now you're going just a few days after you got here! We haven't had hardly any time together at all!

MAMA

(Off, louder, a bit more angry) Lavinia? Answer me!

AVI

And apoplexy, of all things! Not old pharaoh's curse or dreaded malaria or an evil witch doctor's spell or a hungry jaguar, even! Just an everyday, ordinary, silly, little, old leak in the brain that could happen to anyone. Anyone!

SHE stamps her foot.

AVI

It isn't fair at all!

Enter MAMA. SHE is dressed all in black. SHE is followed by MR. RANSOM, also dressed in black.

MAMA

There you are, Lavinia. I was beginning to worry.

AVI

Don't call me that!

MAMA

I know we are all of us very upset but you will not speak to me in that tone of voice. You were named after my grandmother and it's a perfectly lovely name and that is what you shall be called.

AVI

It's Avi.

MAMA

That horrible nickname is what your father called you and I'm not sorry that's all over. (SHE snatches off the newspaper. There is no one behind it.) What on earth are you doing? You're much too old to be playing at something now.

MR. RANSOM

(Taking the paper and folding it under his arm) How on earth did this get in here? My apologies, Mrs. Frobisher.

MR. RANSOM turns the "table" in preparation to wheeling it off...and the table is revealed to be a coffin!

MAMA

And what have you done to your dress?

MAMA pulls the hem of the dress from the belt.

MAMA

You look like I don't know what! What in heaven's name are you thinking? And today of all days. Can't you just behave like a little lady for once?

MR. RANSOM

Mrs. Frobisher, I believe everyone has assembled. Are you ready to begin the service? Or would you care for a few moments alone before we proceed?

MAMA

Thank you, Mr. Ransom, I think we could use a minute to compose ourselves.

MR. RANSOM takes the chair and paper and exits.

AVI

I'm perfectly composed.

MAMA

And that worries me, Lavinia. I believe you are too composed for your own good. You have not shed a single tear, not when your father dropped in his study, not when the doctor told us he was gone, not through all the visits or even during the photograph we took to remember him by. I'll admit I admired your reserve at first but now I am beginning to wonder...have you no feelings at all?

AVI

How can you say that?

MAMA

I have certainly seen no sign of any.

AVI

That doesn't mean they're not there.

MAMA

People expect some sort of mourning. It is a natural sign of attachment. Surely you don't want others to think poorly of you.

AVI

I'll not cry just to make others feel better.

MAMA

I do not ask that you do. You know that I do not enjoy scenes.

AVI

Crying isn't going to bring Papa back.

MAMA

(With a sigh) What about making yourself feel better, then? If you do not give vent to your sadness, you'll never be able to move past it. You'll be trapped right here in your sorrow forever. I know you do not want that.

AVI

I'm not sad and crying isn't going to make me feel better.

MAMA

How do you know if you don't give in to it?

AVI

I can only do what I feel and I don't feel like crying!

MAMA

Isn't your heart a stone, heavy in your chest? Isn't it weighed down by a great sadness you'd like to be rid of?

AVI

No.

MAMA

Just let go, Lavinia, let it out!

AVI

(Almost crying but holding it in) I tell you I don't feel anything!

MAMA

(With a sad sigh) Oh, Lavinia. Your father is gone and the next time you see him it will be with our Lord in heaven. (SHE cries a little, wipes away her tears with a black lace handkerchief, then calls) Mr. Ransom! We're ready.

MR. RANSOM enters.

MR. RANSOM

Very good, Madame.

MR. RANSOM rolls the coffin off. MAMA follows it off.

AVI

(In a whisper) Did they even remember to give you coins for the Ferryman? Papa!

ACT ONESCENE TWO

Light change. Enter ANNIE, a parlor maid and children ELIZABETH, MILLICENT, LESLIE and MILES. ANNIE pushes on a simple puppet theater which she sets up.

ELIZABETH

Lavinia, look! Professor Dilly has come with a Punch and Judy show!

AVI

It's Avi.

ANNIE

En't it darlin'?

MILLICENT

And he says as it's your birthday, you may play Judy if you wish!

AVI

(Not particularly interested) I should rather be the crocodile.

LESLIE

I'm going to ask it for my birthday next month.

MILES

Copy-cat, copy-cat!

LESLIE

I don't care! And I shall play the Devil...(HE uses his fingers to indicate horns on his head)...and send Mr. Punch right down to Hell and poke him with my fork, see if I don't!

MILES

(Punching LESLIE) Then I'll be Punch and get the best of you!

LESLIE

(Punching back) You just try it!

MILES

I will! You know Punch always beats the Devil...

LESLIE and MILES

(In a funny voice) That's the way to do it!

Enter a young man, PROFESSOR DILLY, with Punch, Judy and crocodile puppets. HE wears a hat.

PROFESSOR DILLY

(Holding up Punch, in his voice) Where's the guest of honor, then, eh?

The CHILDREN point to AVI.

CHILDREN

It's Lavinia!

AVI

Avi!

PROFESSOR DILLY

(As Judy, hitting Punch) So say happy birthday to the birthday girl, you old git! (Holding up Punch and hitting Judy, in his voice) You silly thing! She's 13 now - she's not a girl any more - she's a lady! (As Judy) Then why don't you wish the lady many happy returns of the day then instead of bothering me? (As Punch) I can do both! (Punch hits Judy) Many happy returns of the day, Miss!

The CHILDREN laugh. AVI does not.

ANNIE

I think it's all ready, sir.

PROFESSOR DILLY

(As Punch) Who's for a show, then?

CHILDREN (except AVI)

(Laughing and clapping) I am! We are! Hurrah for Mr. Punch! (etc)

PROFESSOR DILLY gets into the puppet theater, takes off his hat and prepares to do his show. The CHILDREN settle down to watch. ANNIE also watches. AVI, however, has turned away.

ANNIE

What's the matter, Miss Lavinia? Don't you like Punch and Judy?

MILES

Go on and do Judy, then. The Professor said you might.

AVI

It's for babies.

MILLICENT

Well, yes, but still...

ELIZABETH

It's funny *sometimes*.

LESLIE

(Punching MILES) It's funny *all* times when Punch is using his stick!

MILES

(Pretending he is a crocodile and biting LESLIE) Or when the crocodile is eating someone! Didn't your father get eaten by a crocodile once, Lavinia?

MILLICENT

Miles!

MILES

What?

ELIZABETH

You mustn't talk like that about her father.

MILES

Why not?

ELIZABETH

It'll make her sad.

MILES

But she used to talk about him dying all the time before and she was never sad then.

LESLIE

She used to laugh about it and brag.

MILLICENT

That was different.

MILES

I don't see how. Dead is dead.

PROFESSOR DILLY

(Poking out his head) Now, will my special assistant please join me?

AVI

I don't want to.

PROFESSOR DILLY

Shy, are you? That's all right, love, not to worry. Let's have a cheer for Punch, then!

ANNIE and all the CHILDREN except AVI cheer.

PROFESSOR DILLY

And on with the show!

PROFESSOR DILLY disappears behind his theater and does a little show.

ANNIE and all the CHILDREN except AVI enthusiastically enjoy it. When the crocodile is about to eat Punch, AVI suddenly crosses to the theater and grabs the crocodile.

AVI

That's not what happened at all! It wasn't my fault!

ANNIE quickly exits. PROFESSOR DILLY's head pops up.

PROFESSOR DILLY

Here now, what's all this then?

MILLICENT

Lavinia, you're ruining it!

CHILDREN (except AVI)

Give it back! We want to see the show! You're not being very nice! (etc)

PROFESSOR DILLY

What's the matter, Miss? Is something wrong?

Enter MAMA and ANNIE.

MAMA

What is all this trouble? Lavinia, return that puppet to the Professor this instant!

AVI throws the puppet at the PROFESSOR DILLY.

MAMA

(To AVI) I'm very disappointed in you. (TO PROFESSOR DILLY) I beg your pardon, sir, there's been a death in the family and the suddenness of it has upset us all terribly. I was hoping this party might take my daughter out of herself but I see now it was a bad idea.

PROFESSOR DILLY

No need for apologies, Madam, I understand.

MILLICENT

We want the rest of the show!

MAMA

Later, perhaps. I think it best if we adjourn for the moment for the cake and ice cream. Would you like that?

CHILDREN (except AVI)

Yes, please! Hurrah! I want the biggest piece! I hope it's strawberry, that's my favorite! (etc)

MAMA

Annie will show you to the parlor. Professor Dilly, you're invited as well.

ANNIE leads the CHILDREN off.

MAMA

Lavinia may join us when she's ready to behave herself.

MAMA exits.

AVI

(Picking up the crocodile puppet) I wish I was a crocodile. (As the crocodile) Better to be eating than eaten!

PROFESSOR DILLY

I dare say you're right there, young Miss. Well, you shall be whomever you like as all of them are yours now.

AVI

What, all the puppets and the theater, too?

PROFESSOR DILLY

It's my understanding that it's to be a birthday present for Miss Lavinia...

AVI

Avi...just Avi...

PROFESSOR DILLY

...for Avi and I'm only engaged to give a short performance and show you how to work 'em and then you're to keep 'em for your very own.

AVI

(Suddenly) But I don't want it! I'm too old for such baby things.