

[The second and final part of the TV Times story]

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THOMAS AND SARAH?

THE STORY SO FAR...

Thomas and Sarah, the former chauffeur and maid in Upstairs, Downstairs, who feature in a major new ITV series beginning next week, have left the Bellamy household and are running a garage. But one fateful evening they visit the family and servants. On the way home in their car, Thomas overtakes and tries to stop a runaway horse and cart, but the vehicle overturns.

Now the driver lies in the gutter, a policeman bending over him...

THE SPIN OF THE WHEEL

BY ALFRED SHAUGHNESSY

Part 2

To Thomas it seemed an eternity before P.C. Brooking lowered the unconscious young cart driver's head gently to the pavement, supporting it with a piece of sacking taken from the cart.

"Is he dead?" It was Sarah standing by the horse, who found her voice. Thomas could only stare at the constable's back, until the latter turned round shaking his head.

"Have to get him to hospital, sharp," he said. "He's breathing but his pulse isn't too good. If one of you'd come and sit by him, I'll go round to the station and telephone for an ambulance." As P.C. Brooking hurried away down the street, a window opened on the first floor of a tobacconist's shop and a woman in her night attire peered out.

"Somebody been hurt?" she called down.

"Driver of the cart," Thomas told her. "The bobby's gone for an ambulance."

"Bring him in the shop, if you like. Better than leaving him lying there in the cold. I'll come down and open up."

"Better not move him," said Thomas. "Thanks all the same. In case there's any bones broken. The constable's put something over him to keep him warm."

The woman disappeared and the window closed. Thomas and Sarah were left in the silence of the deserted street to face the consequences of Thomas's well-meant but reckless attempt to overtake the runaway cart and stop it. The minutes ticked slowly by, with Sarah – fighting off a feeling of dizziness from the shock – standing dutifully beside the grey mare, keeping it calm. Thomas, cradling the cart driver's head in his arms, was aware of the lad's weight, and anxiously glancing along the street. Ten minutes passed before a St. John ambulance stopped beside the overturned cart. P.C. Brooking got down from his seat beside the driver, and two ambulancemen with a stretcher emerged from the back.

While the ambulancemen were dealing with the injured lad, easing him carefully on to the stretcher, Thomas and the policeman managed to get the mare out of the shafts and, with an almighty heave, to right the cart. A quick inspection showed only minor damage to the vehicle – a broken tailboard, some splits in the woodwork, and one wheel slightly bent. However, it would run.

The ambulance had come from a nearby infirmary in the Harrow Road. P.C. Brooking decided to take charge of the horse and cart and lead it to the police station, where the mare could be stabled while inquiries were made about its owner. For until the driver recovered consciousness, nobody knew where he came from, there being nothing in his pockets to identify him.

Thomas, still worried about the lad's condition and unable to suppress a feeling of responsibility for what had happened, told Sarah to get into their two-seater. They would follow the ambulance to the hospital and stay with the injured lad. Sarah suddenly felt she'd had enough. The shock of the accident, the drama of the long evening before it happened, hit her with a surge of nausea. In a panic she gripped her stomach and swayed as the old fear came over her, the fear of losing her baby.

"I want to get home, Tom," she said, almost in tears. "He'll be all right, they'll look after him. There's nothing we can do now. Tom, please. Leave him to the hospital people and the police and take me home."

Thomas was in a quandary. For all his tough, hard-headed preoccupation with himself and his interest in Sarah's well-being, part of him was a good citizen. Perhaps it was his strict Welsh upbringing in the old days at the Methodist Chapel in Gethyn. Or the lessons learned from the Bible readings at home and at Sunday School. Whatever it was, Thomas

suddenly saw himself as the Good Samaritan and told Sarah it would be wrong to leave a man injured on the roadside and not to be concerned whether he lived or died.

Sarah pointed out that there were good Samaritans on the spot – the constable and the ambulancemen were paid to look after people.

“That’s not very Christian,” Thomas told her sharply. “Get in the motorcar, go on.”

Sarah knew better than to argue at certain times and this was one of them. Thomas was clearly upset by the accident and in no mood to be crossed.

He went over to P.C. Brooking, who was backing the mare between the shafts ready for the journey to the constabulary. “I’m going with the ambulance, see,” he said. “Soon as I can find out the name and address of the injured party, I’ll come to the police station and let you know.”

The constable thanked Thomas, who walked back to the two-seater, where Sarah was sitting bunched and miserable. Thomas cranked up the motor, signalled to the ambulance driver, and followed him through the empty streets to the infirmary.

Sarah was red-eyed with fatigue as she sat with Thomas on a hard bench in the casualty department. She was aware of nurses moving about, of low murmuring and the smell of surgical spirit. Every now and then Thomas got up and paced about nervously. They’d taken the cart driver through a glass-panelled door, and after Thomas had explained that he was responsible for the patient’s injury and intended to stay until the man recovered consciousness, a sister had told Thomas to sit in the waiting hall while the doctor examined the patient.

The clock in the waiting hall showed almost 3a.m. Nine hours had passed since Thomas and Sarah had set out for Eaton Place from Kilburn, little imagining what a night lay ahead of them.

The sister came bustling out, looking at a chart in her hand, and Thomas approached her.

“Any news yet, sister? I mean the young chap brought in from the cart accident.”

Sarah looked up wearily to hear the verdict.

“He’s alive, but suffering severe head injuries; may have a fractured skull; they’re not sure yet.”

“Is he conscious?”

“Only just. In another hour you should be able to see him for a moment.”

And the sister bustled off through another door.

Daylight was beginning to flood into the casualty ward through the big east window at the far end. Golden rays of sunshine were crossing the rows of beds and the floor between them. Outside, early traffic was on the move. You could hear the milk floats and the distant rumble of trams.

“My... name... Tubwell, Sir... Jim... Sir. Jim... Tubwell.” The cart driver had opened his eyes for the first time since the cart overturned. Now he was trying to whisper his name to Thomas, who sat beside the bed, wondering how badly the man’s head had been injured, for it was swathed in bandages.

Sarah was sitting in a chair at the foot of the bed, barely able to keep awake.

“Tubwell, did you say?” asked Thomas.

The lad nodded with some difficulty. “Jim Tubwell. I’m usually called ‘Tubby’, my nickname.” The lad managed a faint smile.

“Tubby. I see. Can you tell us your address, where you live? I’ve got to inform the police, so they can get your cart back to your place.”

Tubby closed his eyes. Thomas held his breath. Didn’t want to press him too hard and tire him.

“What happened?” asked the patient, half opening his eyes.

“Your horse ran away with you in Kilburn High Road. I chased after you in my motorcar, tried to get in front to stop you. But the mare turned left, wheels hit the kerb and you turned over. You were thrown out on the pavement, cracked your nut.”

“I’ll say,” murmured Tubby. “How’s Patsy, my horse? She all right?”

“Fine,” said Thomas. Sarah began to take an interest, feeling herself to have been Patsy’s guardian at the scene of the accident.

“She’s been taken to the police station for a good feed,” said Sarah. “She’s none the worse.”

“Your cart’s gone there, too,” added Thomas, “slightly damaged, one wheel a bit wobbly. But it’ll run.”

Tubby was now able to explain to Thomas that he worked for Mr. Morley, a scrap and junk merchant, and that the yard was at the end of

Wendell Street, a short distance from where the accident had occurred. And he described the cottage adjoining the yard, where he lived with his grandmother.

“She’ll be worried, ’cos she’s all alone there – nobody to look after her, only me,” said Tubby.

Thomas promised to go back to the police station and collect the horse and cart. They would tell Tubby’s grandmother about the accident, reassure her about her grandson, and come back to the infirmary. Tubby seemed relieved, nodded weakly and closed his eyes.

By the time Thomas and Sarah in their two-seater, and P.C. Brooking, leading the horse and cart, reached the scrap yard, Tubby had relapsed into unconsciousness again and his condition was causing the doctors concern.

Thomas opened the gate into the yard and they led the cart in, unharnessed Patsy, and settled her in the loose box. P.C. Brooking made a few notes and left Thomas and Sarah to call on the injured lad’s grandmother. There was a dim light burning in the ground floor window of her cottage and Thomas tapped on the door.

After some time, a bolt was slid across and the door creaked open to reveal a frail woman of 70 or more.

“I’m afraid your grandson’s had an accident. May we come in, please?”

At first there was no reply. The old woman stared at Thomas, seemingly unaware of what he had said. Her mouth was moving as though in speech, but this was a symptom of her senility. Thomas and Sarah realised she was deaf.

Finally they managed to get through to her that something had happened to Tubby, and with a feeble gesture to them to come in, she shuffled ahead into a small, dark and musty hall that smelled of stale fish and old carpet. They followed the old woman into a kitchen that bore shocking witness to the poverty in which the cart driver and his sole surviving relative lived.

Taking care not to alarm her, Thomas explained that Tubby had been taken to hospital, where he would have to remain for some time. The old woman began to speak in a husky whisper. She told them that her son had been Tubby’s father. He had been the local plumber until his death from pneumonia five years ago. Tubby’s mother had died from diphtheria last year, so the lad was orphaned,

with the heavy responsibility of looking after an ageing, sick grandmother.

When Sarah asked the old woman about Tubby’s work for Mr. Morley, the scrap merchant, for the first time the old lady showed signs of animation. She became angry.

“Mean old rascal,” she muttered. “If it wasn’t for having to be on hand in case I got took sick, Tubby would look for work somewhere else – the measly wages he gets from Mr. Morley.”

Sarah glanced round the kitchen with its peeling walls and felt a wave of pity for the lad.

Gone was her indifference to his fate. She, too, recognised the need to be a Good Samaritan.

“We must do something for him, Tom,” she said quietly.

“Quite right, we must,” said Thomas. “If he’s spared, poor chap.”

After Thomas had managed to convince the old woman that her grandson wouldn’t be coming back tonight, Sarah helped her upstairs to a filthy bedroom, and put her to bed.

Thomas made sure the mare was all right and shut the yard gate. Then he and Sarah drove back to Kilburn arriving at 5.30.

Over a cup of tea, Sarah and Thomas told Madge of their grim adventure and of their anxiety for the cart driver, and Madge, with typical warmth of heart, volunteered to move in with the lad’s grandmother and look after her.

And so, later that morning, Thomas and Sarah put Madge in the back of the two-seater and drove her to the cottage. Mrs. Tubwell seemed not to take it all in at first, but after Madge had put the kettle on the stove and helped Sarah bring her down to sit in the kitchen, arranging her shawl and a cushion for her head, the old lady reached out and patted Madge’s hand.

Thomas and Sarah had a long wait at the infirmary, because Tubby was having a bone set and a blood transfusion. Surgery had cost him a good deal of blood and he was extremely weak. When they were allowed to creep in and see him he was the colour of marble, his eyes closed. Sarah thought he must be dying. With a little sob, she went quickly out of the ward. Thomas followed and they drove back in silence to the garage.

Throughout the next two days, Thomas and Sarah went about their business in a daze. Thomas found it difficult to concentrate on his

repair work in the garage yard and on several occasions snapped at his customers.

The next morning, Thomas had a motor-car to deliver in Neasden, so he dropped Sarah at the infirmary on the way.

She walked into the ward, smiling with anticipation, for she had woken with a new feeling of optimism. He must get better soon.

But Sarah's face fell as she entered the ward and saw a screen round Tubby's bed. As she approached, the ward sister and a doctor came from behind the screen and told her not to stay too long. The patient was still very weak.

Tubby was able to look at the fruit and magazines she had brought him, but his eyes drooped and he seemed listless.

"You'll be better soon, Tubby," whispered Sarah. He shook his head slowly and she saw a tear trickle down his cheek.

"Not... sure I want to get better," he said. "Nothing to live for... only Patsy and Gran. But she'll be gone soon... Don't care if I never work for Mr. Morley again... Rather be unemployed, or dead."

Sarah was shocked. The lad was in a bad way. Inconsolable and depressed. There was nothing more she could say. So she patted his hand gently and turned quickly to go, anxious to conceal her own moist eyes.

Sarah took an omnibus back to the garage and arrived home in pouring rain. Madge had come back for a few hours to do the shopping for both herself and Mrs. Tubwell.

"She's at the butcher's," Thomas had returned from Neasden and had just settled himself at the table for a snack. "She said she wouldn't be long."

That was when Sarah heard a thumping and scratching sound downstairs. She hurried down to open the front door and found a wet little mongrel dog wagging its tail and looking up at her.

"Hello," said Sarah, "what do you want, eh?" And she bent down to pat the creature. But the dog had shot past her into the kitchen, where it stood by the range, dripping pools of water and still wagging its tail. Sarah found it irresistible.

"Oh, Thomas," she said, hugging it to her, "the poor little thing's a stray. Must be – just look at the state of him." She bustled off to find some scraps for it. "Let's adopt it – I've always wanted a dog of my own."

Thomas had been surveying the scene darkly. "You don't want that dirty creature," he snapped, and getting up from the table he walked out of the room.

Sarah was surprised. "Thomas is jealous," she murmured to the dog as she patted her rounded stomach thoughtfully.

But there was no tone for pondering. The door opened and in came Madge.

"There he is," she said, going straight over to take the dog from Sarah. "Mr. Westby, the butcher, has been looking all over the place for that dog. It's his little girl's. She left the door open and it got out. Its name is Digger." Sarah knew that her dream was over and, without much protest, she allowed Madge to remove the dog.

"Oh good. I was just minding him," was all she said. "Giving him a bit to eat, just 'til someone claimed him." When Madge had gone, Sarah started thinking about Tubby again. Perhaps her maternal instinct had been aroused by the little dog. True Tubby had a home of sorts, but he was vulnerable and needing a woman's care – not fair that he should have to struggle to keep that sick old woman on his meagre wages, in that hovel... if he lived, that was.

The following afternoon, Thomas drove Sarah to the infirmary. She had put an idea to him and he'd accepted it. It was all a question of Tubby's will to live.

Tubby was lying very quietly, breathing slowly, when Thomas and Sarah sat down beside the bed. "If you've had enough of horses and carts, Tubby, as you said you had last time we was here, you can come and work for me, see. Help me at the garage. I'll teach you about motor-cars, make you into a good mechanic like what I am, see."

"When you are better, that is," added Sarah. "Got to get well and strong again."

At first there was no reaction. Then, very slowly, a faint smile turned Tubby's mouth up at the sides. "Work with motor-cars... always wanted to do that"

Thomas took a visiting card from his wallet and placed it on the table beside Tubby's bed. "Thomas Watkins. Motor Engineers off Kilburn Lane," he said. "There's the address."

Sarah smiled and a feeling of warmth and hope glowed inside the pale young lad's breast. The kindness of these two people, total strangers, knew no bounds. After years of bullying from Mr. Morley, and the drudgery of caring for his

grandmother, suddenly Jim Tubwell regained his faith in human nature and felt he belonged.

“I’ll get better quick,” he murmured. “Come and see you. Perhaps learn to drive a motor-car... and mend ’em.”

The sister came at that point to end the visit.

“He’s on the mend, by the look of it,” said Thomas.

As they walked down the infirmary corridor towards the exit, Sarah felt a twinge of pain. But she didn’t say anything to Thomas, because the matter of the baby and of marriage was liable to cause words between them. So she kept quiet rather than spoil the moment, which belonged to the young cart driver in the infirmary, whose future might also be in their hands.

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