

The Healer  
by Kara Moran

An old woman rapped sharply on Augustus Leer's door at approximately 3 in the morning of October 24th. Her old, withered knuckles and translucent skin made it clear she was nearing the end of her time. Augustus beckoned her inside, a fire roaring in the brick chimney of his cottage on the hill. The room was warm and welcoming, and the woman sank into a plush armchair gratefully as she began to speak.

"I know my end is near. It likely seems apparent that I have come to you to fix these old bones, but I only want you to help my granddaughter. She's sick with colic and we fear for her life. I have a small pension to share if you want payment." She withdrew from her blouse a small cloth pouch of coins, out of which came three copper pieces and a single, shining gold coin.

Augustus smiled kindly, "I want no payment. By tomorrow she will be well."

The old woman laughed, "Selflessness seems to be common in this home. Good day, and thank you very, very much." As she hobbled to the door, Augustus saw her pull an old handkerchief from her blouse and dab at her eyes, mouthing, "Bless this man".

Roselaih Dubourough screamed loud enough to wake the rest of the valley the next morning, finding her baby dead in its crib, her face extorted in pain. "Who did this? Who did this, Mary? Mary, wake up!" She fell to her knees, sobbing. "Mother?! Mother, Mary is dead!"

A chubby woman raced into the room, grasping her daughter tightly. She rocked her back and forth, trying to calm her daughter. "Honey, honey. It's okay. You'll be okay." She grimly looked at the still crib, shaking her head. *God save her soul.*

Augustus sat in his front room, recalling his clients from the past day. One man from India had come with incurable skin boils. Another man came to Augustus with a crippled leg. A woman came in during labor, asking for him to alleviate the pains. And a child with scarlet fever had been escorted to his cottage by his mother, half delirious. All of them he had cured--and for cheap. He was the town apothecary and was well known. He had a... gift of sorts. If he simply willed someone to get well, they did. He was the hill's hero. But he never visited the valley. He was hated there. He couldn't quite put together why, however. It didn't help that when he tried to speak with someone there all he got in response was "devil" or "away with you." Then they would back away and mutter a prayer at the sky, slamming shut any doors or windows behind them. It simply seemed strange to him he could be so loved, yet so hated. He had to visit there that day, however, for he had run out of lye, and lord help him if he became ill. He could never cure himself. He wrapped a small parcel of bread and cheese and hopped into his horse cart, setting off down the hill.

When he arrived at town, the busy atmosphere quieted to hushed whispers. The crowded plaza seemed to evacuate all its customers, the shopkeepers frowning in dismay. Augustus walked up to the nearest stall, a tailor shop filled to the brim with cloth. He rung the bell on the desk, "Do you know where I can acquire some lye?"

The tailor turned slowly around, seemingly in pain. Covering his face and neck were huge blisters and boils, of seemingly impossible quantity. "Leave. I don't want your business."

Augustus was appalled at the man's condition and shakily said, "My, sir! I'm a local apothecary. Would you like me to treat your... skin problem?"

The tailor growled, "I know who you are. Pretty sure we all do. Now get out."

Augustus left the stall, shaking his head. The man needed medical attention, but the fool wouldn't take it. Suddenly, a dirt covered boy in overalls ran up to the tailor. "Mr. Stave! Jim's fallen from the ladder and broke his leg, really badly!"

"By god, is he all right?"

"He'll live, but I doubt his leg will be worth a horse's dung anymore."

Augustus began to think, his mind racing. The boils, the cripple. What was next? Labor pains. With that thought he heard screams coming from a house down the road. The door burst open and a midwife cried for help. "This isn't normal, Lucy needs help! The baby's fine but Lucy is on the brink of shock! She's saying it's double the pain of her first!" Augustus fell to his knees as he remembered the final treatment for that day. Scarlet fever. Deadly. He was not a healer, but a murderer. How many people had he killed?

What innocent would die next?

A sob echoed from up the road, a small cottage very much like his own. He already knew what the mother would say before she burst through the door. "My son is dead, my son is dead!"