

**THE TABLES TURNED:  
OR, NUPKINS  
AWAKENED: PART I**

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The tables turned: or, Nupkins awakened: Part I by William Morris

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**WILLIAM MORRIS**

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# THE TABLES TURNED;

OR,

## NUPKINS AWAKENED.

—:O:—

### PART I.

SCENE.—*A Court of Justice.*

USHER, CLERK OF THE COURT, MR. HUNGARY, Q.C., and others.  
MR. LA-DI-DA, the prisoner, not in the dock, but seated in a  
chair before it. [Enter MR. JUSTICE NUPKINS.

*Usher.* Silence!—silence!

*Mr. Justice Nupkins.* Prisoner at the bar, you have been found guilty by a jury, after a very long and careful consideration of your remarkable and strange case, of a very serious offence; an offence which squeamish moralists are apt to call robbing the widow and orphan; a cant phrase also, with which I hesitate to soil my lips, designates this offence as swindling. You will permit me to remark that the very fact that such nauseous and improper words can be used about the conduct of a gentleman shows how far you have been led astray from the path traced out for the feet of a respectable member of society. Mr. La-di-da, if you were less self-restrained, less respectful, less refined, less of a gentleman, in short, I might point out to you with more or less severity the disastrous consequences of your conduct; but I cannot doubt, from the manner in which you have borne yourself during the whole of this trial, that you are fully impressed with the seriousness of the occasion. I shall say no more then, but perform the painful duty which devolves on me of passing sentence on you. I am compelled in doing so to award you a term of imprisonment; but I shall take care that you shall not be degraded by contamination with thieves and rioters, and other coarse persons, or share the diet and treatment which

is no punishment to persons used to hard living : that would be to inflict a punishment on you not intended by the law, and would cast a stain on your character not easily wiped away. I wish you to return to that society of which you have up to this untoward event formed an ornament without any such stain. You will, therefore, be imprisoned as a first-class misdemeanant for the space of one calendar month ; and I trust that during the retirement thus enforced upon you, which to a person of your resources should not be very irksome, you will reflect on the rashness, the incaution, the impropriety, in one word, of your conduct, and that you will never be discovered again appropriating to your personal use money which has been entrusted to your care by your friends and relatives.

*Mr. La-di-da.* I thank you, my lord, for your kindness and consideration. May I be allowed to ask you to add to your kindness by permitting me to return to my home and make some necessary arrangements before submitting myself to the well-merited chastisement which my imprudence has brought upon me ?

*Mr. J. N.* Certainly. I repeat I do not wish to make your sentence any heavier by forcing a hard construction upon it. I give you a week to make all arrangements necessary for your peace of mind and your bodily comfort.

*Mr. L.* I thank your lordship. [Exit.

[The case of MARY PINCH called.]

*Mr. Hungary, Q.C.* I am for the prosecution, my lord, instructed by the Secretary of State for the Home Department. (JUDGE bites his pen and nods.) My lord, and gentlemen of the Jury, although this case may seem to some ill-judging persons a trivial one, I think you will be able to see before it is over that it is really important in its bearing on the welfare of society, the welfare of the public ; that is, of the respectable public,—of the respectable public, gentlemen. For in these days, when the spirit of discontent is so wide-spread, all illegal actions have, so to say, a political bearing, my lord, and all illegal actions are wicked, gentlemen of the Jury, since they tend towards the insecurity of society, or in other words, are definitely aimed at the very basis of all morality and religion. Therefore, my lord, I have received instructions from the Home Secretary to prosecute this woman, who, as I shall be able to prove to you, gentlemen of the Jury, by the testimony of three witnesses occupying responsible official positions, has been guilty of a breach at once of the laws of the country and the dictates of morality, and has thereby seriously inconvenienced a very respectable tradesman, nay (looking at his brief) three respectable tradesmen. I shall be able to show,

gentlemen, that this woman has stolen three loaves of bread : (*impressively*) not one, gentlemen, but three.

*A Voice.* She's got three children, you palavering blackguard !

[*Confusion.*]

*Mr. Justice N.* (*who has made an elaborate show of composing himself to slumber since the counsel began, here wakes up and cries out*) Arrest that man, officer ; I will commit him, and give him the heaviest punishment that the law allows of.

[*The USHER dives among the audience amidst great confusion, but comes back empty-handed.*]

*J. N.* A most dangerous disturbance ! A most dangerous disturbance !

*Mr. H.* Gentlemen of the Jury, in confirmation of my remarks on the spirit that is abroad, I call your attention to the riot which has just taken place, endangering, I doubt not, the life of his lordship, and your own lives, gentlemen, so valuable to—to—to—in short, to yourselves. Need I point out to you at any length, then, the danger of allowing criminals, offenders against the sacred rights of property, to go at large ? This incident speaks for me, and I have now nothing to do but let the witnesses speak for themselves. Gentlemen of the Jury, I do not ask you to convict on insufficient evidence ; but I *do* ask you not to be swayed by any false sentiment bearing reference to the so-called smallness of the offence, or the poverty of the offender. The law is made for the poor as well as for the rich, for the rich as well as for the poor. The poor man has no more right to shelter himself behind his poverty, than the rich man behind his riches. In short, gentlemen of the Jury, what I ask you in all confidence to do, is to do justice and fear not.—I call Sergeant Sticktoit.

[*SERGEANT STICKTOIT sworn.*]

*Mr. H.* Well, sergeant, you saw this woman steal the loaves ?

*Sticktoit.* Yes, sir.

*Mr. H.* All of them ?

*St.* Yes, all.

*Mr. H.* From different shops, or from one ?

*St.* From three different shops.

*Mr. H.* Yes, just so. (*Aside* : Then why the devil did he say from one shop when his evidence was taken before ?) (*To Sr.*) You were an eye-witness of that ? You noticed her take all three loaves ?

*St.* (*Aside* : He wants me to say from three different shops ; I'm sure I don't know why. Anyhow, I'll say it—and swear it.)

(*To the Court*) Yes, I was an eye-witness of the deed; (*pompously*) I followed her, and then I took her.

*Mr. H.* Yes, then you took her. Please tell the Court how.

*St.* (*Aside*: Let's see, what did we agree was the likeliest way?)

(*To Court*) I saw her take the first loaf and hide it in her shawl; and then the second one; and the second one tumbled down into the mud; and she picked it up again and wiped it with her shawl; and then she took the third; and when she tried to put that with the two others they all three tumbled down; and as she stooped down to pick them up it seemed the best time to take her, as the two constables had come up; so I took her.

*Mr. H.* Yes; you took her.

*St.* And she cried.

*Mr. H.* Ah, she cried. Well, sergeant, that will do; you may go. (*Aside*: The sooner he goes the better. Wouldn't I like to have the cross-examining of him if he was called on the other side!) Constable Potlegoff.

[POTLEGOFF sworn.]

*Mr. H.* Well, constable, did you see the woman take the loaves?

*Potlegoff.* Yes, sir.

*Mr. H.* How did she take them?

*Pot.* Off the counter, sir.

*Mr. H.* Did she go into the shop to take them?

*Pot.* Yes, sir. (*Aside*: I thought I was to say into three shops.)

*Mr. H.* One after another?

*Pot.* Yes, out of one shop one after another. (*Aside*: Now it's right, I hope.)

*Mr. H.* (*Aside*: Confound him, he's contradicting the other!)

(*To Pot.*) Yes, just so; one after the other. And did you see the second loaf tumble down?

*Pot.* Yes, sir.

*Mr. H.* When was that?

*Pot.* As she took it off the counter.

*Mr. H.* Yes, after she took it off the counter, in the street?

*Pot.* No, sir. (*Catching the SERGEANT'S eye.*) I mean yes, sir, and she wiped the mud off them; the sergeant saw her—and I saw her.

*A Voice.* Off *rr*, you liar! 'twas the second loaf, the single loaf, the other liar said!

[*Confusion.* The JUDGE wakes up and splutters, and tries to say something; the USHER goes through the audience, but finds no one; HUNGARY spreads out his hands to the Jury, appealingly.]



*Mr. H.* Yes, so it was in the street that you saw the loaves fall down ?

*Pot.* Yes, sir ; it was in the street that I saw it tumble down.

*A Voice.* You mean *them*, you fool ! You haven't got the story right yet !

[*Confusion again. The JUDGE sits up and stares like a man awaked from a nightmare, then calls out Officer ! Officer ! very loud. The USHER goes his errand again, and comes back bootless.*

*Mr. H. (very blandly).* It was in the street that you saw the three loaves fall down ?

*Pot.* Yes, it was in the street that I saw the loaf fall down.

*Mr. H.* Yes, in the street ; just so, in the street. You may go (*Aside: for a damned fool !*). Constable Strongithoath.

[CONSTABLE STRONGITHOATH sworn.

*Mr. H.* Constable, did you see this robbery ?

*Strong.* I saw it.

*Mr. H.* Tell us what you saw.

*Strong. (very slowly and stolidly, and as if repeating a lesson).* I saw her steal them all—all—all from one shop—from three shops—I followed her—I took her. When she took it up—she let it drop—in the shop—and wiped the street mud off it. Then she dropped them all three in the shop—and came out—and I took her—with the help—of the two constables—and she cried.

*Mr. H.* You may go (*Aside: for a new-caught joskin and a fool !*). I won't ask him any questions.

*J. N. (waking up, and languid).* Do you call any other witnesses, Mr. Hungary ?

*Mr. H.* No, my lord. (*Aside: Not if I know it, considering the quality of the evidence. Not that it much matters ; the Judge is going to get a conviction ; the Jury will do as he tells them—always do.*) (*To the Court*): My lord and gentlemen of the Jury, that's my case.

*J. N.* Well, my good woman, what have you to say to this ?

*Mary Pinch.* Say to it ! What's the use of saying anything to it ? I'd do to it, if I could.

*J. N.* Woman ! what do you mean ? Violence will not do here. Have you witnesses to call ?

*M. P.* Witnesses ! how can I call witnesses to swear that I didn't steal the loaves ?

*J. N.* Well, do you wish to question the witnesses ? You have a right to.

*M. P.* Much good that would be ! Would you listen to me

if I did? I didn't steal the loaves; but I wanted them, I can tell you that. But it's all one; you are going to have it so, and I might as well have stolen a diamond necklace for all the justice I shall get here. What's the odds? It's of a piece with the rest of my life for the last three years. My husband was a handsome young countryman once, God help us! He could live on ten shillings a-week before he married me; let alone that he could pick up things here and there. Rabbits and hares some of them, as why should he not? And I could earn a little too; it was not so bad there. And then and for long the place was a pretty place, the little grey cottage among the trees, if the cupboard hadn't been so bare; one can't live on flowers and nightingale's songs. Then the children came brisk, and the wages came slack; and the farmer got the new reaping-machine, and my binding came to an end; and topping turnips for a few days in the foggy November mornings don't bring you in much, even when you havn't just had a baby. And the skim milk was long ago gone, and the leasing, and the sack of tail-wheat, and the cheap cheeses almost for nothing, and the hedge-clippings, and it was just the bare ten shillings a-week. So at last, when we had heard enough of eighteen shillings a-week up in London, and we scarce knew what London meant, though we knew well enough what ten shillings a-week in the country meant, we said we'd go to London and try it there; and it had been a good harvest, quickly saved, which made it bad for us poor folk, as there was the less for us to do; and winter was creeping in on us. So up to London we came; for says Robert: "They'll let us starve here, for aught I can see: they'll do naught for us; let us do something for ourselves." So up we came; and when all's said, we had better have lain down and died in the grey cottage clean and empty. I dream of it yet at whiles: clean, but no longer empty; the crockery on the dresser, the fitch hanging from the rafters, the pot on the fire, the smell of new bread about; and the children fat and ruddy tumbling about in the sun; and my lad coming in at the door stooping his head a little; for our door is low, and he was a tall handsome chap in those days.—But what's the use of talking! I've said enough: I didn't steal the loaves.—and if I had a done, where was the harm?

*J. N.* Enough, woman? Yes, and far more than enough. You are an undefended prisoner. You have not the advantage of counsel, or I would not have allowed you to go on so long. You would have done yourself more good by trying to refute the very serious accusation brought against you, than by rambling into a long statement of your wrongs against society. We all

have our troubles to bear, and you must bear your share of them without offending against the laws of your country—the equal laws that are made for rich and poor alike.

*A Voice.* You can bear *her* troubles well enough, can't you, old fat-guts?

*J. N.* (*scarcely articulate with rage*). Officer! officer! arrest that man, or I will arrest you!

[*USHER again makes a vain attempt to get hold of some one.*

*J. N.* (*puffing and blowing with offended dignity*). Woman, woman, have you anything more to say?

*M. P.* Not a word. Do what you will with me. I don't care.

*J. N.* (*impressively*). Gentlemen of Jury, simple as this case seems, it is a most important one under the present condition of discontent which afflicts this country, and of which we have had such grievous manifestations in this Court to-day. This is not a common theft, gentlemen—if indeed a theft has been committed—it is a revolutionary theft, based on the claim on the part of those who happen unfortunately to be starving, to help themselves at the expense of their more fortunate, and probably—I may say certainly—more meritorious countrymen. I do not indeed go so far as to say that this woman is in collusion with those ferocious ruffians who have made these sacred precincts of justice ring with their ribald and threatening scoffs. But the persistence of these riotous interruptions, and the ease with which their perpetrators have evaded arrest, have produced a strange impression in my mind. (*Very impressively.*) However, gentlemen, that impression I do not ask you to share; on the contrary, I warn you against it, just as I warn you against being moved by the false sentiment uttered by this woman, tinged as it was by the most revolutionary—nay, the most bloodthirsty feeling. Dismiss all these non-essentials from your minds, gentlemen, and consider the evidence only; and show this mistaken woman the true majesty of English Law by acquitting her—if you are not satisfied with the abundant, clear, and obviously unbiassed evidence, put before you with that terseness and simplicity of diction which distinguishes our noble civil force. The case is so free from intricacy, gentlemen, that I need not call your attention to any of the details of that evidence. You must either accept it as a whole and bring in a verdict of guilty, or your verdict must be one which would be tantamount to accusing the sergeant and constables of wilful and corrupt perjury; and I may add, wanton perjury; as there could be no possible reason for these officers departing from the strict line of truth. Gentlemen I leave you to your deliberations.