

# *Peter Rugg, the Missing Man*

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North American

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The idea of long wandering as a penalty, symbolized in “The Wandering Jew,” “The Flying Dutchman,” and the character of Kundry, in “Parsifal,” has application in the legend of Peter Rugg. This strange man, who lived in Middle Street, Boston, with his wife and daughter, was esteemed, as a person of probity and good manners except in his swearing fits, for he was subject to outbursts of passion, when he would kick his way through doors instead of opening them, bite tenpenny nails in two, and curse his wig off. In the autumn of 1770 he visited Concord, with his little girl, and on the way home was overtaken by a violent storm. He took shelter with a friend at Menotomy, who urged him to stay all night, for the rain was falling heavier every moment; but Rugg would not be stayed, and seeing that there was no hope of a dry journey back to town he roared a fearful oath and cried, “Let the storm increase. I will see home to-night in spite of it, or may I never see home!” With that he tossed the child into the open chaise, leaped in after her, lashed his horse, and was off.

Several nights afterward, while Rugg's neighbors were out with lanterns trying to discover the cause of a heavy jarring that had begun to disturb them in bad weather, the excitable gentleman, who had not been seen since his Concord visit, came whirling along the pavement in his carriage, his daughter beside him, his black horse plunging on in spite of his efforts to stop him. The lanterns that for a moment twinkled in Peter's face showed him as a wet and weary man, with eyes turned up longingly at the windows where his wife awaited him; then he was gone, and the ground trembled as with an earthquake, while the rain fell more heavily.

Mrs. Rugg died within a twelvemonth, and Peter never reached home, but from all parts of New England came stories of a man and child driving rapidly along the highways, never stopping except to inquire the way to Boston. Half of the time the man would be headed in a direction opposite to the one he seemed to want to follow, and when set right would cry that he was being deceived, and was sometimes heard to mutter, "No home to-night." In Hartford, Providence, Newburyport, and among the New Hampshire hills the anxious face of the man became known, and he was referred to as "the stormbreeder," for so surely as he passed there would be rain, wind, lightning, thunder, and darkness within the hour.

Some years ago a man in a Connecticut town stopped this hurrying traveller, who said, in reply to a question, "I have lost the road to Boston. My name is Peter Rugg." Then Rugg's disappearance half a century before was cited by those who had long memories, and people began to look askant at Peter and gave him generous road room when they met him. The toll-taker on Charlestown bridge declared that he had been annoyed and alarmed by a prodigious tramping of hoofs and rattling of wheels that seemed to pass toward Boston before his very face, yet he could see nothing. He took courage one night to plant himself in the middle of the bridge with a three-legged stool, and when the sound approached he dimly saw a large black horse driven by a weary looking man with a child beside him. The stool was flung at the horse's head, but passed through the animal as through smoke and skipped across the floor of the bridge. Thus much the toll-collector said, but when asked if Rugg had appeared again he made no reply.

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