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THOSE EXTRAORDINARY
TWIN

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Those Extraordinary Twins

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Those Extraordinary Twins:

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Mark Twain

Those Extraordinary Twins

A man who is not born with the novel-writing gift has a troublesome time of it when he tries to build a novel. I know this from experience. He has no clear idea of his story; in fact he has no story. He merely has some people in his mind, and an incident or two, also a locality. He knows these people, he knows the selected locality, and he trusts that he can plunge those people into those incidents with interesting results. So he goes to work. To write a novel? No – that is a thought which comes later; in the beginning he is only proposing to tell a little tale; a very little tale; a six-page tale. But as it is a tale which he is not acquainted with, and can only find out what it is by listening as it goes along telling itself, it is more than apt to go on and on and on till it spreads itself into a book. I know about this, because it has happened to me so many times.

And I have noticed another thing: that as the short tale grows into a long tale, the original intention (or motif) is apt to get abolished and find itself superseded by a quite different one. It was so in the case of a magazine sketch which I once started to write – a funny and fantastic sketch about a prince and a pauper; it presently assumed a grave cast of its own accord, and in that new shape spread itself out into a book. Much the same thing happened with “Pudd’nhead Wilson.” I had a sufficiently hard

time with that tale, because it changed itself from a farce to a tragedy while I was going along with it – a most embarrassing circumstance. But what was a great deal worse was, that it was not one story, but two stories tangled together; and they obstructed and interrupted each other at every turn and created no end of confusion and annoyance. I could not offer the book for publication, for I was afraid it would unseat the reader's reason. I did not know what was the matter with it, for I had not noticed, as yet, that it was two stories in one. It took me months to make that discovery. I carried the manuscript back and forth across the Atlantic two or three times, and read it and studied over it on shipboard; and at last I saw where the difficulty lay. I had no further trouble. I pulled one of the stories out by the roots, and left the other one – a kind of literary Caesarean operation.

Would the reader care to know something about the story which I pulled out? He has been told many a time how the born-and-trained novelist works. Won't he let me round and complete his knowledge by telling him how the jack-leg does it?

Originally the story was called "Those Extraordinary Twins." I meant to make it very short. I had seen a picture of a youthful Italian "freak" or "freaks" which was – or which were – on exhibition in our cities – a combination consisting of two heads and four arms joined to a single body and a single pair of legs – and I thought I would write an extravagantly fantastic little story with this freak of nature for hero – or heroes – a silly young miss for heroine, and two old ladies and two boys for the

minor parts. I lavishly elaborated these people and their doings, of course. But the tale kept spreading along, and spreading along, and other people got to intruding themselves and taking up more and more room with their talk and their affairs. Among them came a stranger named Pudd'nhead Wilson, and a woman named Roxana; and presently the doings of these two pushed up into prominence a young fellow named Tom Driscoll, whose proper place was away in the obscure background. Before the book was half finished those three were taking things almost entirely into their own hands and working the whole tale as a private venture of their own – a tale which they had nothing at all to do with, by rights.

When the book was finished and I came to look around to see what had become of the team I had originally started out with – Aunt Patsy Cooper, Aunt Betsy Hale, the two boys, and Rowena the light-weight heroine – they were nowhere to be seen; they had disappeared from the story some time or other. I hunted about and found them – found them stranded, idle, forgotten, and permanently useless. It was very awkward. It was awkward all around; but more particularly in the case of Rowena, because there was a love-match on, between her and one of the twins that constituted the freak, and I had worked it up to a blistering heat and thrown in a quite dramatic love-quarrel, wherein Rowena scathingly denounced her betrothed for getting drunk, and scoffed at his explanation of how it had happened, and wouldn't listen to it, and had driven him from her in the usual

“forever” way; and now here she sat crying and broken-hearted; for she had found that he had spoken only the truth; that it was not he, but the other half of the freak, that had drunk the liquor that made him drunk; that her half was a prohibitionist and had never drunk a drop in his life, and, although tight as a brick three days in the week, was wholly innocent of blame; and indeed, when sober, was constantly doing all he could to reform his brother, the other half, who never got any satisfaction out of drinking, anyway, because liquor never affected him. Yes, here she was, stranded with that deep injustice of hers torturing her poor torn heart.

I didn't know what to do with her. I was as sorry for her as anybody could be, but the campaign was over, the book was finished, she was sidetracked, and there was no possible way of crowding her in, anywhere. I could not leave her there, of course; it would not do. After spreading her out so, and making such a to-do over her affairs, it would be absolutely necessary to account to the reader for her. I thought and thought and studied and studied; but I arrived at nothing. I finally saw plainly that there was really no way but one – I must simply give her the grand bounce. It grieved me to do it, for after associating with her so much I had come to kind of like her after a fashion, notwithstanding she was such an ass and said such stupid irritating things and was so nauseatingly sentimental. Still it had to be done. So, at the top of Chapter XVII, I put in a “Calendar” remark concerning July the Fourth, and began the chapter with this statistic:

“Rowena went out in the back yard after supper to see the fireworks and fell down the well and got drowned.”

It seemed abrupt, but I thought maybe the reader wouldn't notice it, because I changed the subject right away to something else. Anyway it loosened up Rowena from where she was stuck and got her out of the way, and that was the main thing. It seemed a prompt good way of weeding out people that had got stalled, and a plenty good enough way for those others; so I hunted up the two boys and said “they went out back one night to stone the cat and fell down the well and got drowned.” Next I searched around and found old Aunt Patsy Cooper and Aunt Betsy Hale where they were aground, and said “they went out back one night to visit the sick and fell down the well and got drowned.” I was going to drown some of the others, but I gave up the idea, partly because I believed that if I kept that up it would arouse attention, and perhaps sympathy with those people, and partly because it was not a large well and would not hold any more anyway.

Still the story was unsatisfactory. Here was a set of new characters who were become inordinately prominent and who persisted in remaining so to the end; and back yonder was an older set who made a large noise and a great to-do for a little while and then suddenly played out utterly and fell down the well. There was a radical defect somewhere, and I must search it out and cure it.

The defect turned out to be the one already spoken of – two stories in one, a farce and a tragedy. So I pulled out the farce and

left the tragedy. This left the original team in, but only as mere names, not as characters. Their prominence was wholly gone; they were not even worth drowning; so I removed that detail. Also I took those twins apart and made two separate men of them. They had no occasion to have foreign names now, but it was too much trouble to remove them all through, so I left them christened as they were and made no explanation.

CHAPTER I. THE TWINS AS THEY REALLY WERE

The conglomerate twins were brought on the stage in Chapter I of the original extravaganza. Aunt Patsy Cooper has received their letter applying for board and lodging, and Rowena, her daughter, insane with joy, is begging for a hearing of it:

“Well, set down then, and be quiet a minute and don’t fly around so; it fairly makes me tired to see you. It starts off so: ‘HONORED MADAM’ – ”

“I like that, ma, don’t you? It shows they’re high-bred.”

“Yes, I noticed that when I first read it. ‘My brother and I have seen your advertisement, by chance, in a copy of your local journal – ’

“It’s so beautiful and smooth, ma-don’t you think so?”

“Yes, seems so to me – ‘and beg leave to take the room you offer. We are twenty-four years of age, and twins – ”

“Twins! How sweet! I do hope they are handsome, and I just know they are! Don’t you hope they are, ma?”

“Land, I ain’t particular. ‘We are Italians by birth – ”

“It’s so romantic! Just think there’s never been one in this town, and everybody will want to see them, and they’re all ours! Think of that!”

“ – ‘but have lived long in the various countries of Europe, and

several years in the United States.”

“Oh, just think what wonders they’ve seen, ma! Won’t it be good to hear them talk?”

“I reckon so; yes, I reckon so. ‘Our names are Luigi and Angelo Capello – ”

“Beautiful, perfectly beautiful! Not like Jones and Robinson and those horrible names.”

“You desire but one guest, but dear madam, if you will allow us to pay for two we will not discommode you. We will sleep together in the same bed. We have always been used to this, and prefer it.’ And then he goes on to say they will be down Thursday.”

“And this is Tuesday – I don’t know how I’m ever going to wait, ma! The time does drag along so, and I’m so dying to see them! Which of them do you reckon is the tallest, ma?”

“How do you s’pose I can tell, child? Mostly they are the same size-twins are.”

“Well then, which do you reckon is the best looking?”

“Goodness knows – I don’t.”

“I think Angelo is; it’s the prettiest name, anyway. Don’t you think it’s a sweet name, ma?”

“Yes, it’s well enough. I’d like both of them better if I knew the way to pronounce them – the Eyetalian way, I mean. The Missouri way and the Eyetalian way is different, I judge.”

“Maybe – yes. It’s Luigi that writes the letter. What do you reckon is the reason Angelo didn’t write it?”

“Why, how can I tell? What’s the difference who writes it, so long as it’s done?”

“Oh, I hope it wasn’t because he is sick! You don’t think he is sick, do you, ma?”

“Sick your granny; what’s to make him sick?”

“Oh, there’s never any telling. These foreigners with that kind of names are so delicate, and of course that kind of names are not suited to our climate – you wouldn’t expect it.”

[And so-on and so-on, no end. The time drags along; Thursday comes: the boat arrives in a pouring storm toward midnight.]

At last there was a knock at the door and the anxious family jumped to open it. Two negro men entered, each carrying a trunk, and proceeded upstairs toward the guest-room. Then followed a stupefying apparition – a double-headed human creature with four arms, one body, and a single pair of legs! It – or they, as you please – bowed with elaborate foreign formality, but the Coopers could not respond immediately; they were paralyzed. At this moment there came from the rear of the group a fervent ejaculation – “My lan’!” – followed by a crash of crockery, and the slave-wench Nancy stood petrified and staring, with a tray of wrecked tea-things at her feet. The incident broke the spell, and brought the family to consciousness. The beautiful heads of the new-comer bowed again, and one of them said with easy grace and dignity:

“I crave the honor, madam and miss, to introduce to you my brother, Count Luigi Capello,” (the other head bowed)

“and myself – Count Angelo; and at the same time offer sincere apologies for the lateness of our coming, which was unavoidable,” and both heads bowed again.

The poor old lady was in a whirl of amazement and confusion, but she managed to stammer out:

“I’m sure I’m glad to make your acquaintance, sir – I mean, gentlemen. As for the delay, it is nothing, don’t mention it. This is my daughter Rowena, sir – gentlemen. Please step into the parlor and sit down and have a bite and sup; you are dreadful wet and must be uncomfortable – both of you, I mean.”

But to the old lady’s relief they courteously excused themselves, saying it would be wrong to keep the family out of their beds longer; then each head bowed in turn and uttered a friendly good night, and the singular figure moved away in the wake of Rowena’s small brothers, who bore candles, and disappeared up the stairs.

The widow tottered into the parlor and sank into a chair with a gasp, and Rowena followed, tongue-tied and dazed. The two sat silent in the throbbing summer heat unconscious of the million-voiced music of the mosquitoes, unconscious of the roaring gale, the lashing and thrashing of the rain along the windows and the roof, the white glare of the lightning, the tumultuous booming and bellowing of the thunder; conscious of nothing but that prodigy, that uncanny apparition that had come and gone so suddenly – that weird strange thing that was so soft-spoken and so gentle of manner and yet had shaken them up like an earthquake

with the shock of its gruesome aspect. At last a cold little shudder quivered along down the widow's meager frame and she said in a weak voice:

“Ugh, it was awful just the mere look of that phillipene!”

Rowena did not answer. Her faculties were still caked; she had not yet found her voice. Presently the widow said, a little resentfully:

“Always been used to sleeping together – in-fact, prefer it. And I was thinking it was to accommodate me. I thought it was very good of them, whereas a person situated as that young man is – ”

“Ma, you oughtn't to begin by getting up a prejudice against him. I'm sure he is good-hearted and means well. Both of his faces show it.”

“I'm not so certain about that. The one on the left – I mean the one on it's left – hasn't near as good a face, in my opinion, as its brother.”

“That's Luigi.”

“Yes, Luigi; anyway it's the dark-skinned one; the one that was west of his brother when they stood in the door. Up to all kinds of mischief and disobedience when he was a boy, I'll be bound. I lay his mother had trouble to lay her hand on him when she wanted him. But the one on the right is as good as gold, I can see that.”

“That's Angelo.”

“Yes, Angelo, I reckon, though I can't tell t'other from which by their names, yet awhile. But it's the right-hand one – the blond

one. He has such kind blue eyes, and curly copper hair and fresh complexion – ”

“And such a noble face! – oh, it is a noble face, ma, just royal, you may say! And beautiful deary me, how beautiful! But both are that; the dark one’s as beautiful as – a picture. There’s no such wonderful faces and handsome heads in this town none that even begin. And such hands, especially Angelo’s – so shapely and – ”

“Stuff, how could you tell which they belonged to? – they had gloves on.”

“Why, didn’t I see them take off their hats?”

“That don’t signify. They might have taken off each other’s hats. Nobody could tell. There was just a wormy squirming of arms in the air – seemed to be a couple of dozen of them, all writhing at once, and it just made me dizzy to see them go.”

“Why, ma, I hadn’t any difficulty. There’s two arms on each shoulder – ”

“There, now. One arm on each shoulder belongs to each of the creatures, don’t it? For a person to have two arms on one shoulder wouldn’t do him any good, would it? Of course not. Each has an arm on each shoulder. Now then, you tell me which of them belongs to which, if you can. They don’t know, themselves – they just work whichever arm comes handy. Of course they do; especially if they are in a hurry and can’t stop to think which belongs to which.”

The mother seemed to have the rights of the argument, so the daughter abandoned the struggle. Presently the widow rose with

a yawn and said:

“Poor thing, I hope it won’t catch cold; it was powerful wet, just drenched, you may say. I hope it has left its boots outside, so they can be dried.”

Then she gave a little start, and looked perplexed.

“Now I remember I heard one of them ask Joe to call him at half after seven – I think it was the one on the left – no, it was the one to the east of the other one – but I didn’t hear the other one say any thing. I wonder if he wants to be called too. Do you reckon it’s too late to ask?”

“Why, ma, it’s not necessary. Calling one is calling both. If one gets up, the other’s got to.”

“Sho, of course; I never thought of that. Well, come along, maybe we can get some sleep, but I don’t know, I’m so shook up with what we’ve been through.”

The stranger had made an impression on the boys, too. They had a word of talk as they were getting to bed. Henry, the gentle, the humane, said:

“I feel ever so sorry for it, don’t you, Joe?”

But Joe was a boy of this world, active, enterprising, and had a theatrical side to him:

“Sorry? Why, how you talk! It can’t stir a step without attracting attention. It’s just grand!”

Henry said, reproachfully:

“Instead of pitying it, Joe, you talk as if – ”

“Talk as if what? I know one thing mighty certain: if you can

fix me so I can eat for two and only have to stub toes for one, I ain't going to fool away no such chance just for sentiment."

The twins were wet and tired, and they proceeded to undress without any preliminary remarks. The abundance of sleeve made the partnership coat hard to get off, for it was like skinning a tarantula; but it came at last, after much tugging and perspiring. The mutual vest followed. Then the brothers stood up before the glass, and each took off his own cravat and collar. The collars were of the standing kind, and came high up under the ears, like the sides of a wheelbarrow, as required by the fashion of the day. The cravats were as broad as a bankbill, with fringed ends which stood far out to right and left like the wings of a dragonfly, and this also was strictly in accordance with the fashion of the time. Each cravat, as to color, was in perfect taste, so far as its owner's complexion was concerned – a delicate pink, in the case of the blond brother, a violent scarlet in the case of the brunette – but as a combination they broke all the laws of taste known to civilization. Nothing more fiendish and irreconcilable than those shrieking and blaspheming colors could have been contrived. The wet boots gave no end of trouble – to Luigi. When they were off at last, Angelo said, with bitterness:

"I wish you wouldn't wear such tight boots, they hurt my feet."

Luigi answered with indifference:

"My friend, when I am in command of our body, I choose my apparel according to my own convenience, as I have remarked more than several times already. When you are in command, I

beg you will do as you please.”

Angelo was hurt, and the tears came into his eyes. There was gentle reproach in his voice, but, not anger, when he replied:

“Luigi, I often consult your wishes, but you never consult mine. When I am in command I treat you as a guest; I try to make you feel at home; when you are in command you treat me as an intruder, you make me feel unwelcome. It embarrasses me cruelly in company, for I can see that people notice it and comment on it.”

“Oh, damn the people,” responded the brother languidly, and with the air of one who is tired of the subject.

A slight shudder shook the frame of Angelo, but he said nothing and the conversation ceased. Each buttoned his own share of the nightshirt in silence; then Luigi, with Paine’s Age of Reason in his hand, sat down in one chair and put his feet in another and lit his pipe, while Angelo took his Whole Duty of Man, and both began to read. Angelo presently began to cough; his coughing increased and became mixed with gaspings for breath, and he was finally obliged to make an appeal to his brother’s humanity:

“Luigi, if you would only smoke a little milder tobacco, I am sure I could learn not to mind it in time, but this is so strong, and the pipe is so rank that – ”

“Angelo, I wouldn’t be such a baby! I have learned to smoke in a week, and the trouble is already over with me; if you would try, you could learn too, and then you would stop spoiling my

comfort with your everlasting complaints.”

“Ah, brother, that is a strong word – everlasting – and isn’t quite fair. I only complain when I suffocate; you know I don’t complain when we are in the open air.”

“Well, anyway, you could learn to smoke yourself.”

“But my principles, Luigi, you forget my principles. You would not have me do a thing which I regard as a sin?”

“Oh, bosh!”

The conversation ceased again, for Angelo was sick and discouraged and strangling; but after some time he closed his book and asked Luigi to sing “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” with him, but he would not, and when he tried to sing by himself Luigi did his best to drown his plaintive tenor with a rude and rollicking song delivered in a thundering bass.

After the singing there was silence, and neither brother was happy. Before blowing the light out Luigi swallowed half a tumbler of whisky, and Angelo, whose sensitive organization could not endure intoxicants of any kind, took a pill to keep it from giving him the headache.

CHAPTER II. MA COOPER GETS ALL MIXED UP

The family sat in the breakfast-room waiting for the twins to come down. The widow was quiet, the daughter was alive with happy excitement. She said:

“Ah, they’re a boon, ma, just a boon! Don’t you think so?”

“Laws, I hope so, I don’t know.”

“Why, ma, yes you do. They’re so fine and handsome, and high-bred and polite, so every way superior to our gawks here in this village; why, they’ll make life different from what it was – so humdrum and commonplace, you know – oh, you may be sure they’re full of accomplishments, and knowledge of the world, and all that, that will be an immense advantage to society here. Don’t you think so, ma?”

“Mercy on me, how should I know, and I’ve hardly set eyes on them yet.” After a pause she added, “They made considerable noise after they went up.”

“Noise? Why, ma, they were singing! And it was beautiful, too.”

“Oh, it was well enough, but too mixed-up, seemed to me.”

“Now, ma, honor bright, did you ever hear ‘Greenland’s Icy Mountains’ sung sweeter – now did you?”

“If it had been sung by itself, it would have been uncommon

sweet, I don't deny it; but what they wanted to mix it up with 'Old Bob Ridley' for, I can't make out. Why, they don't go together, at all. They are not of the same nature. 'Bob Ridley' is a common rackety slam-bang secular song, one of the rippingest and rantingest and noisiest there is. I am no judge of music, and I don't claim it, but in my opinion nobody can make those two songs go together right."

"Why, ma, I thought – "

"It don't make any difference what you thought, it can't be done. They tried it, and to my mind it was a failure. I never heard such a crazy uproar; seemed to me, sometimes, the roof would come off; and as for the cats – well, I've lived a many a year, and seen cats aggravated in more ways than one, but I've never seen cats take on the way they took on last night."

"Well, I don't think that that goes for anything, ma, because it is the nature of cats that any sound that is unusual – "

"Unusual! You may well call it so. Now if they are going to sing duets every night, I do hope they will both sing the same tune at the same time, for in my opinion a duet that is made up of two different tunes is a mistake; especially when the tunes ain't any kin to one another, that way."

"But, ma, I think it must be a foreign custom; and it must be right too; and the best way, because they have had every opportunity to know what is right, and it don't stand to reason that with their education they would do anything but what the highest musical authorities have sanctioned. You can't help but

admit that, ma.”

The argument was formidably strong; the old lady could not find any way around it; so, after thinking it over awhile she gave in with a sigh of discontent, and admitted that the daughter’s position was probably correct. Being vanquished, she had no mind to continue the topic at that disadvantage, and was about to seek a change when a change came of itself. A footstep was heard on the stairs, and she said:

“There-he’s coming!”

“They, ma – you ought to say they – it’s nearer right.”

The new lodger, rather shoutingly dressed but looking superbly handsome, stepped with courtly carnage into the trim little breakfast-room and put out all his cordial arms at once, like one of those pocket-knives with a multiplicity of blades, and shook hands with the whole family simultaneously. He was so easy and pleasant and hearty that all embarrassment presently thawed away and disappeared, and a cheery feeling of friendliness and comradeship took its place. He – or preferably they – were asked to occupy the seat of honor at the foot of the table. They consented with thanks, and carved the beefsteak with one set of their hands while they distributed it at the same time with the other set.

“Will you have coffee, gentlemen, or tea?”

“Coffee for Luigi, if you please, madam, tea for me.”

“Cream and sugar?”

“For me, yes, madam; Luigi takes his coffee, black. Our

natures differ a good deal from each other, and our tastes also.”

The first time the negro girl Nancy appeared in the door and saw the two heads turned in opposite directions and both talking at once, then saw the commingling arms feed potatoes into one mouth and coffee into the other at the same time, she had to pause and pull herself out of a faintness that came over her; but after that she held her grip and was able to wait on the table with fair courage.

Conversation fell naturally into the customary grooves. It was a little jerky, at first, because none of the family could get smoothly through a sentence without a wobble in it here and a break there, caused by some new surprise in the way of attitude or gesture on the part of the twins. The weather suffered the most. The weather was all finished up and disposed of, as a subject, before the simple Missourians had gotten sufficiently wonted to the spectacle of one body feeding two heads to feel composed and reconciled in the presence of so bizarre a miracle. And even after everybody's mind became tranquilized there was still one slight distraction left: the hand that picked up a biscuit carried it to the wrong head, as often as any other way, and the wrong mouth devoured it. This was a puzzling thing, and marred the talk a little. It bothered the widow to such a degree that she presently dropped out of the conversation without knowing it, and fell to watching and guessing and talking to herself:

“Now that hand is going to take that coffee to – no, it's gone to the other mouth; I can't understand it; and Now, here is the dark-

completed hand with a potato in its fork, I'll see what goes with it – there, the light-complected head's got it, as sure as I live!"

Finally Rowena said:

"Ma, what is the matter with you? Are you dreaming about something?"

The old lady came to herself and blushed; then she explained with the first random thing that came into her mind: "I saw Mr. Angelo take up Mr. Luigi's coffee, and I thought maybe he – sha'n't I give you a cup, Mr. Angelo?"

"Oh no, madam, I am very much obliged, but I never drink coffee, much as I would like to. You did see me take up Luigi's cup, it is true, but if you noticed, I didn't carry it to my mouth, but to his."

"Y-es, I thought you did: Did you mean to?"

"How?"

The widow was a little embarrassed again. She said:

"I don't know but what I'm foolish, and you mustn't mind; but you see, he got the coffee I was expecting to see you drink, and you got a potato that I thought he was going to get. So I thought it might be a mistake all around, and everybody getting what wasn't intended for him."

Both twins laughed and Luigi said:

"Dear madam, there wasn't any mistake. We are always helping each other that way. It is a great economy for us both; it saves time and labor. We have a system of signs which nobody can notice or understand but ourselves. If I am using both

my hands and want some coffee, I make the sign and Angelo furnishes it to me; and you saw that when he needed a potato I delivered it.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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