

COBB IRVIN SHREWSBURY

FROM PLACE TO PLACE

Irvin Cobb

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Irvin S. Cobb

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CHAPTER I

THE GALLOWSMITH

THIS man that I have it in mind to write about was, at the time of which I write, an elderly man, getting well along toward sixty-five. He was tall and slightly stooped, with long arms, and big, gnarled, competent-looking hands, which smelled of yellow laundry soap, and had huge, tarnished nails on the fingers. He had mild, pale eyes, a light blue as to colour, with heavy sacs under them, and whitish whiskers, spindly and thin, like some sort of second-growth, which were so cut as to enclose his lower face in a nappy fringe, extending from ear to ear under his chin. He suffered from a chronic heart affection, and this gave to his skin a pronounced and unhealthy pallor. He was neat and prim in his personal habits, kind to dumb animals, and tolerant of small children. He was inclined to be miserly; certainly in money matters he was most prudent and saving. He had the air about him of being lonely. His name was Tobias Dramm. In the town where he lived he was commonly known as Uncle Tobe Dramm. By profession he was a public hangman. You might call him a gallowsmith. He hanged men for hire.

So far as the available records show, this Tobias Dramm was the only man of his calling on this continent. In himself he constituted a specialty and a monopoly. The fact that he had no competition did not make him careless in the pursuit of his calling. On the contrary, it made him precise and painstaking. As one occupying a unique position, he realized that he had a reputation to sustain, and capably he sustained it. In the Western Hemisphere he was, in the trade he followed, the nearest modern approach to the paid executioners of olden times in France who went, each of them, by the name of the city or province wherein he was stationed, to do torturing and maiming and killing in the gracious name of the king.

A generous government, committed to a belief in the efficacy of capital punishment, paid Tobias Dramm at the rate of seventy-five dollars a head for hanging offenders convicted of the hanging crime, which was murder. He averaged about four hangings every three months or, say, about nine hundred dollars a year—all clear money.

The manner of Mr. Dramm's having entered upon the practise of this somewhat grisly trade makes in itself a little tale. He was a lifelong citizen of the town of Chickaloosa, down in the Southwest, where there stood a State penitentiary, and where, during the period of which I am speaking, the Federal authorities sent for confinement and punishment the criminal sweepings of half a score of States and Territories. This was before the government put up prisons of its own, and while still it parcelled out its human liabilities among State-owned institutions, paying so much apiece for their keep. When the government first began shipping a share of its felons to Chickaloosa, there came along, in one clanking caravan of shackled malefactors, a half-breed, part Mexican and the rest of him Indian, who had robbed a territorial post-office and incidentally murdered the postmaster thereof. Wherefore this half-breed was under sentence to expiate his greater misdeed on a given date, between the hours of sunrise and sunset, and after a duly prescribed manner, namely: by being hanged by the neck until he was dead.

At once a difficulty and a complication arose. The warden of the penitentiary at Chickaloosa was perfectly agreeable to the idea of keeping and caring for those felonious wards of the government who were put in his custody to serve terms of imprisonment, holding that such disciplinary measures fell within the scope of his sworn duty. But when it came to the issue of hanging any one of them, he

drew the line most firmly. As he pointed out, he was not a government agent. He derived his authority and drew his salary not from Washington, D. C., but from a State capital several hundreds of miles removed from Washington. Moreover, he was a zealous believer in the principle of State sovereignty. As a soldier of the late Southern Confederacy, he had fought four years to establish that doctrine. Conceded, that the cause for which he fought had been defeated; nevertheless his views upon the subject remained fixed and permanent. He had plenty of disagreeable jobs to do without stringing up bad men for Uncle Sam; such was the attitude the warden took. The sheriff of the county of which Chickaloosa was the county-seat, likewise refused to have a hand in the impending affair, holding it—and perhaps very properly—to be no direct concern of his, either officially or personally.

Now the government very much wanted the hybrid hanged. The government had been put to considerable trouble and no small expense to catch him and try him and convict him and transport him to the place where he was at present confined. Day and date for the execution of the law's judgment having been fixed, a scandal and possibly a legal tangle would ensue were there delay in the premises. It was reported that a full pardon had been offered to a long-term convict on condition that he carry out the court's mandate upon the body of the condemned mongrel, and that he had refused, even though the price were freedom for himself.

In this serious emergency, a volunteer in the person of Tobias Dramm came forward. Until then he had been an inconspicuous unit in the life of the community. He was a live-stock dealer on a small scale, making his headquarters at one of the town livery stables. He was a person of steady habits, with a reputation for sobriety and frugality among his neighbours. The government, so to speak, jumped at the chance. Without delay, his offer was accepted. There was no prolonged haggling over terms, either. He himself fixed the cost of the job at seventy-five dollars; this figure to include supervision of the erection of the gallows, testing of the apparatus, and the actual operation itself.

So, on the appointed day, at a certain hour, to wit, a quarter past six o'clock in the morning, just outside the prison walls, and in the presence of the proper and ordained number of witnesses, Uncle Tobe, with a grave, untroubled face, and hands which neither fumbled nor trembled, tied up the doomed felon and hooded his head in a black-cloth bag, and fitted a noose about his neck. The drop fell at eighteen minutes past the hour. Fourteen minutes later, following brief tests of heart and pulse, the two attending physicians agreed that the half-breed was quite satisfactorily defunct. They likewise coincided in the opinion that the hanging had been conducted with neatness, and with swiftness, and with the least possible amount of physical suffering for the deceased. One of the doctors went so far as to congratulate Mr. Dramm upon the tidiness of his handicraft. He told him that in all his experience he had never seen a hanging pass off more smoothly, and that for an amateur, Dramm had done splendidly. To this compliment Uncle Tobe replied, in his quiet and drawling mode of speech, that he had studied the whole thing out in advance.

"Ef I should keep on with this way of makin' a livin' I don't 'low ever to let no slip-ups occur," he added with simple directness. There was no suggestion of the morbid in his voice or manner as he said this, but instead merely a deep personal satisfaction.

Others present, having been made sick and faint by the shock of seeing a human being summarily jerked into the hereafter, went away hurriedly without saying anything at all. But afterward thinking it over when they were more composed, they decided among themselves that Uncle Tobe had carried it off with an assurance and a skill which qualified him most aptly for future undertakings along the same line; that he was a born hangman, if ever there was one.

This was the common verdict. So, thereafter, by a tacit understanding, the ex-cattle-buyer became the regular government hangman. He had no official title nor any warrant in writing for the place he filled. He worked by the piece, as one might say, and not by the week or month. Some years he hanged more men than in other years, but the average per annum was about twelve. He had been hanging them now for going on ten years.

It was as though he had been designed and created for the work. He hanged villainous men singly, sometimes by pairs, and rarely in groups of threes, always without a fumble or a hitch. Once, on a single morning, he hanged an even half-dozen, these being the chief fruitage of a busy term of the Federal court down in the Indian country where the combination of a crowded docket, an energetic young district attorney with political ambitions, and a businesslike presiding judge had produced what all unprejudiced and fair-minded persons agreed were marvellous results, highly beneficial to the moral atmosphere of the territory and calculated to make potential evil-doers stop and think. Four of the six had been members of an especially desperate gang of train and bank robbers. The remaining two had forfeited their right to keep on living by slaying deputy marshals. Each, with malice aforethought and with his own hands, had actually killed some one or had aided and abetted in killing some one.

This sextuple hanging made a lot of talk, naturally. The size of it alone commanded the popular interest. Besides, the personnel of the group of villains was such as to lend an aspect of picturesqueness to the final proceedings. The sextet included a full-blooded Cherokee; a consumptive ex-dentist out of Kansas, who from killing nerves in teeth had progressed to killing men in cold premeditation; a lank West Virginia mountaineer whose family name was the name of a clan prominent in one of the long-drawn-out hill-feuds of his native State; a plain bad man, whose chief claim to distinction was that he hailed originally from the Bowery in New York City; and one, the worst of them all, who was said to be the son of a pastor in a New England town. One by one, unerringly and swiftly, Uncle Tobe launched them through his scaffold floor to get whatever deserts await those who violate the laws of God and man by the violent shedding of innocent blood. When the sixth and last gunman came out of the prison proper into the prison enclosure—it was the former dentist, and being set, as the phrase runs, upon dying game, he wore a twisted grin upon his bleached face—there were six black boxes under the platform, five of them occupied, with their lids all in place, and one of them yet empty and open. In the act of mounting the steps the condemned craned his head sidewise, and at the sight of those coffins stretching along six in a row on the gravelled courtyard, he made a cheap and sorry gibe. But when he stood beneath the cross-arm to be pinioned, his legs played him traitor. Those craven knees of his gave way under him, so that trustees had to hold the weakening ruffian upright while the executioner snugged the halter about his throat.

On this occasion Uncle Tobe elucidated the creed and the code of his profession for a reporter who had come all the way down from St. Louis to report the big hanging for his paper. Having covered the hanging at length, the reporter stayed over one more day at the Palace Hotel in Chickaloosa to do a special article, which would be in part a character sketch and in part a straight interview, on the subject of the hangman. The article made a full page spread in the Sunday edition of the young man's paper, and thereby a reputation, which until this time had been more or less local, was given what approximated a national notoriety. Through a somewhat general reprinting of what the young man had written, and what his paper had published, the country at large eventually became acquainted with an ethical view-point which was already fairly familiar to nearly every resident in and about Chickaloosa. Reading the narrative, one living at a distance got an accurate picture of a personality elevated above the commonplace solely by the rôle which its owner filled; a picture of an old man thoroughly sincere and thoroughly conscientious; a man dull, earnest, and capable to his limits; a man who was neither morbid nor imaginative, but filled with rather a stupid gravity; a man canny about the pennies and affectionately inclined toward the dollars; a man honestly imbued with the idea that he was a public servant performing a necessary public service; a man without nerves, but in all other essentials a small-town man with a small-town mind; in short, saw Uncle Tobe as he really was. The reporter did something else which marked him as a craftsman. Without stating the fact in words, he nevertheless contrived to create in the lines which he wrote an atmosphere of self-defence enveloping the old man—or perhaps the better phrase would be self-extenuation. The reader was made to perceive that Dramm, being cognizant and mildly resentful of the attitude in which his

own little world held him, by reason of the fatal work of his hands, sought after a semiapologetic fashion to offer a plea in abatement of public judgment, to set up a weight of moral evidence in his own behalf, and behind this in turn, and showing through it, might be sensed the shy pride of a shy man for labour undertaken with good motives and creditably performed. With no more than a pardonable broadening and exaggeration of the other's mode of speech, the reporter succeeded likewise in reproducing not only the language, but the wistful intent of what Uncle Tobe said to him. From this interview I propose now to quote to the extent of a few paragraphs. This is Uncle Tobe addressing the visiting correspondent:

"It stands to reason—don't it?—that these here sinful men have got to be hung, an' that somebody has got to hang 'em. The Good Book says an eye fur an eye an' a tooth fur a tooth an' a life fur a life. That's perzactly whut it says, an' I'm one whut believes the Bible frum kiver to kiver. These here boys that they bring in here have broke the law of Gawd an' the law of the land, an' they jest natchelly got to pay fur their devilment. That's so, ain't it? Well, then, that bein' so, I step forward an' do the job. Ef they was free men, walkin' around like you an' me, I wouldn't lay the weight of my little finger on 'em to harm a single hair in their huids. Ef they hadn't done nothin' ag'in' the law, I'd be the last one to do 'em a hurt. I wisht you could make that p'int plain in the piece you aim to write, so's folks would understand jest how I feel—so's they'd understand that I don't bear no gredge ag'inst any livin' creature.

"Ef the job was left to some greenhawn he'd mebbe botch it up an' make them boys suffer more'n there's any call fur. Sech things have happened, a plenty times before now ez you yourself doubtless know full well. But I don't botch it up. I ain't braggin' none whilst I'm sayin' this to you; I'm jest tellin' you. I kin take an oath that I ain't never botched up one of these jobs yit, not frum the very fust. The warden or Dr. Slattery, the prison physician, or anybody round this town that knows the full circumstances kin tell you the same, ef you ast 'em. You see, son, I ain't never nervoused up like some men would be in my place. I'm always jest ez ca'm like ez whut you are this minute. The way I look at it, I'm jest a chosen instrument of the law. I regard it ez a trust that I'm called on to perform, on account of me havin' a natchel knack in that 'special direction. Some men have gifts fur one thing an' some men have gifts fur another thing. It would seem this is the perticular thing—hangin' men—that I've got a gift fur. So, sech bein' the case, I don't worry none about it beforehand, nor I don't worry none after it's all over with, neither. With me handlin' the details the whole thing is over an' done with accordin' to the law an' the statutes an' the jedgment of the high court in less time than some people would take fussin' round, gittin' ready. The way I look at it, it's a mercy an' a blessin' to all concerned to have somebody in charge that knows how to hang a man.

"Why, it's come to sech a pass that when there's a hangin' comin' off anywhere in this part of the country they send fur me to be present ez a kind of an expert. I've been to hangin's all over this State, an' down into Louisiana, an' wunst over into Texas in order to give the sheriffs the benefit of my experience an' my advice. I make it a rule not never to take no money fur doin' sech ez that—only my travelin' expenses an' my tavern bills; that's all I ever charge 'em. But here in Chickaloosa the conditions is different, an' the gover'mint pays me seventy-five dollars a hangin'. I figger that it's wuth it, too. The Bible says the labourer is worthy of his hire. I try to be worthy of the hire I git. I certainly aim to earn it—an' I reckon I do earn it, takin' everything into consideration—the responsibility an' all. Ef there's any folks that think I earn my money easy—seventy-five dollars fur whut looks like jest a

few minutes' work—I'd like fur 'em to stop an' think ef they'd consider themselves qualified to hang ez many men ez I have without never botchin' up a single job."

That was his chief boast, if boasting it might be called—that he never botched the job. It is the common history of common hangmen, so I've been told, that they come after a while to be possessed of the devils of cruelty, and to take pleasure in the exercise of their most grim calling. If this be true, then surely Uncle Tobe was to all outward appearances an exception to the rule. Never by word or look or act was he caught gloating over his victims; always he exhibited a merciful swiftness in the dread preliminaries and in the act of execution itself. At the outset he had shown deftness. With frequent practise he grew defter still. He contrived various devices for expediting the proceeding. For instance, after prolonged experiments, conducted in privacy, he evolved a harnesslike arrangement of leather belts and straps, made all in one piece, and fitted with buckles and snaffles. With this, in a marvellously brief space, he could bind his man at elbows and wrists, at knees and ankles, so that in less time almost than it would take to describe the process, the latter stood upon the trap, as a shape deprived of motion, fully caparisoned for the end. He fitted the inner side of the crosspiece of the gallows with pegs upon which the rope rested, entirely out of sight of him upon whom it was presently to be used, until the moment when Uncle Tobe, stretching a long arm upward, brought it down, all reeved and ready. He hit upon the expedient of slickening the noose parts with yellow bar soap so that it would run smoothly in the loop and tighten smartly, without undue tugging. He might have used grease or lard, but soap was tidier, and Uncle Tobe, as has been set forth, was a tidy man.

After the first few hangings his system began to follow a regular routine. From somewhere to the west or southwest of Chickaloosa the deputy marshals would bring in a man consigned to die. The prison people, taking their charge over from them, would house him in a cell of a row of cells made doubly tight and doubly strong for such as he; in due season the warden would notify Uncle Tobe of the date fixed for the inflicting of the penalty. Four or five days preceding the day, Uncle Tobe would pay a visit to the prison, timing his arrival so that he reached there just before the exercise hour for the inmates of a certain cell-tier. Being admitted, he would climb sundry flights of narrow iron stairs and pause just outside a crisscrossed door of iron slats while a turnkey, entering that door and locking it behind him, would open a smaller door set flat in the wall of damp-looking grey stones and invite the man caged up inside to come forth for his daily walk. Then, while the captive paced the length and breadth of the narrow corridor back and across, to and fro, up and down, with the futile restlessness of a cat animal in a zoo, his feet clumping on the flagged flooring, and the watchful turnkey standing by, Uncle Tobe, having flattened his lean form in a niche behind the outer lattice, with an appraising eye would consider the shifting figure through a convenient cranny of the wattled metal strips. He took care to keep himself well back out of view, but since he stood in shadow while the one he marked so keenly moved in a flood of daylight filtering down through a skylight in the ceiling of the cell block, the chances were the prisoner could not have made out the indistinct form of the stranger anyhow. Five or ten minutes of such scrutiny of his man was all Uncle Tobe ever desired. In his earlier days before he took up this present employment, he had been an adept at guessing the hoof-weight of the beeves and swine in which he dealt. That early experience stood him in good stead now; he took no credit to himself for his accuracy in estimating the bulk of a living human being.

Downstairs, on the way out of the place, if by chance he encountered the warden in his office, the warden, in all likelihood, would say: "Well, how about it this time, Uncle Tobe?"

And Uncle Tobe would make some such answer as this:

"Well, suh, accordin' to my reckonin' this here one will heft about a hund'ed an' sixty-five pound, ez he stands now. How's he takin' it, warden?"

"Oh, so-so."

"He looks to me like he was broodin' a right smart," the expert might say. "I jedge he ain't relishin' his vittles much, neither. Likely he'll worry three or four pound more off'n his bones 'twixt now an' Friday mornin'. He oughter run about one hund'ed an' sixty or mebbe one-sixty-one by then."

"How much drop do you allow to give him?"

"Don't worry about that, suh," would be the answer given with a contemplative squint of the placid, pale eye. "I reckon my calculations won't be very far out of the way, ef any."

They never were, either.

On the day before the day, he would be a busy man, what with superintending the fitting together and setting up of the painted lumber pieces upon which tomorrow's capital tragedy would be played; and, when this was done to his liking, trying the drop to see that the boards had not warped, and trying the rope for possible flaws in its fabric or weave, and proving to his own satisfaction that the mechanism of the wooden lever which operated to spring the trap worked with an instantaneous smoothness. To every detail he gave a painstaking supervision, guarding against all possible contingencies. Regarding the trustworthiness of the rope he was especially careful. When this particular hanging was concluded, the scaffold would be taken apart and stored away for subsequent use, but for each hanging the government furnished a brand new rope, especially made at a factory in New Orleans at a cost of eight dollars. The spectators generally cut the rope up into short lengths after it had fulfilled its ordained purpose, and carried the pieces away for souvenirs. So always there was a new rope provided, and its dependability must be ascertained by prolonged and exhaustive tests before Uncle Tobe would approve of it. Seeing him at his task, with his coat and waistcoat off, his sleeves rolled back, and his intent mien, one realised why, as a hangman, he had been a success. He left absolutely nothing to chance. When he was through with his experimenting, the possibility of an exhibition of the proneness of inanimate objects to misbehave in emergencies had been reduced to a minimum.

Before daylight next morning Uncle Tobe, dressed in sober black, like a country undertaker, and with his mid-Victorian whiskers all cleansed and combed, would present himself at his post of duty. He would linger in the background, an unobtrusive bystander, until the condemned sinner had gone through the mockery of eating his last breakfast; and, still making himself inconspicuous during the march to the gallows, would trail at the very tail of the line, while the short, straggling procession was winding out through gas-lit murky hallways into the pale dawn-light slanting over the walls of the gravel-paved, high-fenced compound built against the outer side of the prison close. He would wait on, always holding himself discreetly aloof from the middle breadth of the picture, until the officiating clergyman had done with his sacred offices; would wait until the white-faced wretch on whose account the government was making all this pother and taking all this trouble, had mumbled his farewell words this side of eternity; would continue to wait, very patiently, indeed, until the warden nodded to him. Then, with his trussing harness tucked under his arm, and the black cap neatly folded and bestowed in a handy side-pocket of his coat, Uncle Tobe would advance forward, and laying a kindly, almost a paternal hand upon the shoulder of the man who must die, would steer him to a certain spot in the centre of the platform, just beneath a heavy cross-beam. There would follow a quick shifting of the big, gnarled hands over the unresisting body of the doomed man, and almost instantly, so it seemed to those who watched, all was in order: the arms of the murderer drawn rearward and pressed in close against his ribs by a broad girth encircling his trunk at the elbows, his wrists caught together in buckled leather cuffs behind his back; his knees and his ankles fast in leathern loops which joined to the rest of the apparatus by means of a transverse strap drawn tautly down the length of his legs, at the back; the black-cloth head-bag with its peaked crown in place; the noose fitted; the hobbled and hooded shape perhaps swaying a trifle this way and that; and Uncle Tobe on his tiptoes stepping swiftly over to a tilted wooden lever which projected out and upward through the planked floor, like the handle of a steering oar.

It was at this point that the timorous-hearted among the witnesses turned their heads away. Those who were more resolute—or as the case might be, more morbid—and who continued to look, were made aware of a freak of physics which in accord, I suppose, with the laws of horizontals and parallels decrees that a man cut off short from life by quick and violent means and fallen prone upon

the earth, seems to shrink up within himself and to grow shorter in body and in sprawling limb, whereas one hanged with a rope by the neck has the semblance of stretching out to unseemly and unhuman lengths all the while that he dangles.

Having repossessed himself of his leather cinches, Uncle Tobe would presently depart for his home, stopping *en route* at the Chickaloosa National Bank to deposit the greater part of the seventy-five dollars which the warden, as representative of a satisfied Federal government, had paid him, cash down on the spot. To his credit in the bank the old man had a considerable sum, all earned after this mode, and all drawing interest at the legal rate. On his arrival at his home, Mr. Dramm would first of all have his breakfast. This over, he would open the second drawer of an old black-walnut bureau, and from under a carefully folded pile of spare undergarments would withdraw a small, cheap book, bound in imitation red leather, and bearing the word "Accounts" in faded script upon the cover. On a clean, blue-lined page of the book, in a cramped handwriting, he would write in ink, the name, age, height, and weight of the man he had just despatched out of life; also the hour and minute when the drop fell, the time elapsing before the surgeons pronounced the man dead; the disposition which had been made of the body, and any other data which seemed to him pertinent to the record. Invariably he concluded the entry thus: "Neck was broke by the fall. Everything passed off smooth." From his first time of service he had never failed to make such notations following a hanging, he being in this, as in all things, methodical and exact.

The rest of the day, in all probabilities, would be given to small devices of his own. If the season suited he might work in his little truck garden at the back of the house, or if it were the fall of the year he might go rabbit hunting; then again he might go for a walk. When the evening paper came—Chickaloosa had two papers, a morning paper and an evening paper—he would read through the account given of the event at the prison, and would pencil any material errors which had crept into the reporter's story, and then he would clip out the article and file it away with a sheaf of similar clippings in the same bureau drawer where he kept his account-book and his underclothing. This done he would eat his supper, afterward washing and wiping the supper dishes and, presently bedtime for him having arrived, he would go to bed and sleep very soundly and very peacefully all night. Sometimes his heart trouble brought on smothering spells which woke him up. He rarely had dreams, and never any dreams unpleasantly associated with his avocation. Probably never was there a man blessed with less of an imagination than this same Tobias Dramm. It seemed almost providential, considering the calling he followed, that he altogether lacked the faculty of introspection, so that neither his memory nor his conscience ever troubled him.

Thus far I have made no mention of his household, and for the very good reason that he had none. In his youth he had not married. The forked tongue of town slander had it that he was too stingy to support a wife, and on top of that expense, to run the risk of having children to rear. He had no close kindred excepting a distant cousin or two in Chickaloosa. He kept no servant, and for this there was a double cause. First, his parsimonious instincts; second, the fact that for love or money no negro would minister to him, and in this community negroes were the only household servants to be had. Among the darkies there was current a belief that at dead of night he dug up the bodies of those he had hanged and peddled the cadavers to the "student doctors." They said he was in active partnership with the devil; they said the devil took over the souls of his victims, paying therefor in red-hot dollars, after the hangman was done with their bodies. The belief of the negroes that this unholy traffic existed amounted with them to a profound conviction. They held Mr. Dramm in an awesome and horrified veneration, bowing to him most respectfully when they met him, and then sidling off hurriedly. It would have taken strong horses to drag any black-skinned resident of Chickaloosa to the portals of the little three-roomed frame cottage in the outskirts of the town which Uncle Tobe tenanted. Therefore he lived by himself, doing his own skimpy marketing and his own simple housekeeping. Loneliness was a part of the penalty he paid for following the calling of a gallowsmith.

Among members of his own race he had no close friends. For the most part the white people did not exactly shun him, but, as the saying goes in the Southwest, they let him be. They were well content to enshrine him as a local celebrity, and ready enough to point him out to visitors, but by an unwritten communal law the line was drawn there. He was as one set apart for certain necessary undertakings, and yet denied the intimacy of his kind because he performed them acceptably. If his aloof and solitary state ever distressed him, at least he gave no outward sign of it, but went his uncomplaining way, bearing himself with a homely, silent dignity, and enveloped in those invisible garments of superstition which local prejudice and local ignorance had conjured up.

Ready as he was when occasion suited, to justify his avocation in the terms of that same explanation which he had given to the young reporter from St. Louis that time, and greatly though he may have craved to gain the good-will of his fellow citizens, he was never known openly to rebel against his lot. The nearest he ever came to doing this was once when he met upon the street a woman of his acquaintance who had suffered a recent bereavement in the death of her only daughter. He approached her, offering awkward condolences, and at once was moved to a further expression of his sympathy for her in her great loss by trying to shake her hand. At the touch of his fingers to hers the woman, already in a mood of grief bordering on hysteria, shrank back screaming out that his hand smelled of the soap with which he coated his gallows-nooses. She ran away from him, crying out as she ran, that he was accursed; that he was marked with that awful smell and could not rid himself of it. To those who had witnessed this scene the hangman, with rather an injured and bewildered air, made explanation. The poor woman, he said, was wrong; although in a way of speaking she was right, too. He did, indeed, use the same yellow bar soap for washing his hands that he used for anointing his ropes. It was a good soap, and cheap; he had used the same brand regularly for years in cleansing his hands. Since it answered the first purpose so well, what possible harm could there be in slicking the noose of the rope with it when he was called upon to conduct one of his jobs over up at the prison? Apparently he was at a loss to fathom the looks they cast at him when he had finished with this statement and had asked this question. He began a protest, but broke off quickly and went away shaking his head as though puzzled that ordinarily sane folks should be so squeamish and so unreasonable. But he kept on using the soap as before.

Until now this narrative has been largely preamble. The real story follows. It concerns itself with the birth of an imagination.

In his day Uncle Tobe hanged all sorts and conditions of men—men who kept on vainly hoping against hope for an eleventh-hour reprieve long after the last chance of reprieve had vanished, and who on the gallows begged piteously for five minutes, for two minutes, for one minute more of precious grace; negroes gone drunk on religious exhortation who died in a frenzy, sure of salvation, and shouting out halleluiahs; Indians upborne and stayed by a racial stoicism; Chinamen casting stolid, slant-eyed glances over the rim of the void before them and filled with the calmness of the fatalist who believes that whatever is to be, is to be; white men upon whom at the last, when all prospect of intervention was gone, a mental numbness mercifully descended with the result that they came to the rope's embrace like men in a walking coma, with glazed, unseeing eyes, and dragging feet; other white men who summoned up a mockery of bravado and uttered poor jests from between lips drawn back in defiant sneering as they gave themselves over to the hangman, so that only Uncle Tobe, feeling their flesh crawling under their grave-clothes as he tied them up, knew a hideous terror berode their bodies. At length, in the tenth year of his career as a paid executioner he was called upon to visit his professional attentions upon a man different from any of those who had gone down the same dread chute.

The man in question was a train-bandit popularly known as the Lone-Hand Kid, because always he conducted his nefarious operations without confederates. He was a squat, dark ruffian, as malignant as a moccasin snake, and as dangerous as one. He was filthy in speech and vile in habit, being in his person most unpicturesque and most unwholesome, and altogether seemed a creature more viper than

he was man. The sheriffs of two border States and the officials of a contiguous reservation sought for him many times, long and diligently, before a posse overcame him in the hills by over-powering odds and took him alive at the cost of two of its members killed outright and a third badly crippled. So soon as surgeons plugged up the holes in his hide which members of the vengeful posse shot into him after they had him surrounded and before his ammunition gave out, he was brought to bar to answer for the unprovoked murder of a postal clerk on a transcontinental limited. No time was wasted in hurrying his trial through to its conclusion; it was felt that there was crying need to make an example of this red-handed desperado. Having been convicted with commendable celerity, the Lone-Hand Kid was transferred to Chickaloosa and strongly confined there against the day of Uncle Tobe's ministrations upon him.

From the very hour that the prosecution was started, the Lone-Hand Kid, whose real name was the prosaic name of Smith, objected strongly to this procedure which in certain circles is known as "railroading." He insisted that he was being legally expedited out of life on his record and not on the evidence. There were plenty of killings for any one of which he might have been tried and very probably found guilty, but he reckoned it a profound injustice that he should be indicted, tried, and condemned for a killing he had not committed. By his code he would not have rebelled strongly against being punished for the evil things he himself had done; he did dislike, though, being hanged for something some rival hold-up man had done. Such was his contention, and he reiterated it with a persistence which went far toward convincing some people that after all there might be something in what he said, although among honest men there was no doubt whatsoever that the world would be a sweeter and a healthier place to live in with the Lone-Hand Kid entirely translated out of it.

Having been dealt with, as he viewed the matter, most unfairly, the condemned killer sullenly refused to make submission to his appointed destiny. On the car journey up to Chickaloosa, although still weak from his wounds and securely ironed besides, he made two separate efforts to assault his guards. In his cell, a few days later, he attacked a turnkey in pure wantonness seemingly, since even with the turnkey eliminated, there still was no earthly prospect for him to escape from the steel strong-box which enclosed him. That was what it truly was, too, a strong-box, for the storing of many living pledges held as surety for the peace and good order of the land. Of all these human collaterals who were penned up there with him, he, for the time being, was most precious in the eyes of the law. Therefore the law took no chance of losing him, and this he must have known when he maimed his keeper.

After this outbreak he was treated as a vicious wild beast, which, undoubtedly, was exactly what he was. He was chained by his ankles to his bed, and his food was shoved in to him through the bars by a man who kept himself at all times well out of reach of the tethered prisoner. Having been rendered helpless, he swore then that when finally they unbarred his cell door and sought to fetch him forth to garb him for his journey to the gallows, he would fight them with his teeth and his bare hands for so long as he had left an ounce of strength with which to fight. Bodily force would then be the only argument remaining to him by means of which he might express his protest, and he told all who cared to listen that most certainly he meant to invoke it.

There was a code of decorum which governed the hangings at Chickaloosa, and the resident authorities dreaded mightily the prospect of having it profaned by spiteful and unmannerly behaviour on the part of the Lone-Hand Kid. There was said to be in all the world just one living creature for whom the rebellious captive entertained love and respect, and this person was his half-sister. With the good name of his prison at heart, the warden put up the money that paid her fare from her home down in the Indian Territory. Two days before the execution she arrived, a slab-sided, shabby drudge of a woman. Having first been primed and prompted for her part, she was sent to him, and in his cell she wept over the fettered prisoner, and with him she pleaded until he promised her, reluctantly, he would make no physical struggle on being led out to die.

He kept his word, too; but it was to develop that the pledge of non-resistance, making his body passive to the will of his jailers, did not, according to the Lone-Hand Kid's sense of honour, include the muscles of his tongue. His hour came at sunup of a clear, crisp, October morning, when a rime of frost made a silver carpet upon the boarded floor of the scaffold, and in the east the heavens glowed an irate red, like the reflections of a distant bale-fire. From his cell door before the head warder summoned him forth, he drove away with terrible oaths the clergyman who had come to offer him religious consolation. At daylight, when the first beams of young sunlight were stealing in at the slitted windows to streak the whitewashed wall behind him with a barred pattern of red, like brush strokes of fresh paint, he ate his last breakfast with foul words between bites, and outside, a little later, in the shadow of the crosstree from which shortly he would dangle in the article of death, a stark offence before the sight of mortal eyes, he halted and stood reviling all who had a hand in furthering and compassing his condemnation. Profaning the name of his Maker with every breath, he cursed the President of the United States who had declined to reprieve him, the justices of the high court who had denied his appeal from the verdict of the lower, the judge who had tried him, the district attorney who had prosecuted him, the grand jurors who had indicted him, the petit jurors who had voted to convict him, the witnesses who had testified against him, the posse men who had trapped him, consigning them all and singly to everlasting damnation. Before this pouring flood of blasphemy the minister, who had followed him up the gallows steps in the vain hope that when the end came some faint sign of contrition might be vouchsafed by this poor lost soul, hid his face in his hands as though fearing an offended Deity would send a bolt from on high to blast all who had been witnesses to such impiety and such impenitence.

The indignant warden moved to cut short this lamentable spectacle. He signed with his hand for Uncle Tobe to make haste, and Uncle Tobe, obeying, stepped forward from where he had been waiting in the rear rank of the shocked spectators. Upon him the defiant ruffian turned the forces of his sulfurous hate, full-gush. First over one shoulder and then over the other as the executioner worked with swift fingers to bind him into a rigid parcel of a man, he uttered what was both a dreadful threat and a yet more dreadful promise.

"I ain't blamin' these other folks here," he proclaimed. "Some of 'em are here because it's their duty to be here, an' ef these others kin git pleasure out of seem' a man croaked that ain't afeared of bein' croaked, they're welcome to enjoy the free show, so fur ez I'm concerned. But you—you stingy, white-whiskered old snake!—you're doin' this fur the little piece of dirty money that's in it fur you.

"Listen to me, you dog: I know I'm headin' straight fur hell, an' I ain't skeered to go, neither. But I ain't goin' to stay there. I'm comin' back fur you! I'm comin' back this very night to git you an' take your old, withered, black soul back down to hell with me. No need fur you to try to hide. Wherever you hide I'll seek you out. You can't git away frum me. You kin lock your door an' you kin lock your winder, an' you kin hide your head under the bedclothes, but I'll find you wharever you are, remember that! An' you're goin' back down there with me!

"Now go ahead an' hang me—I'm all set fur it ef you are!"

Through this harangue Uncle Tobe worked on, outwardly composed. Whatever his innermost emotions may have been, his expression gave no hint that the mouthings of the Lone-Hand Kid had sunk in. He drew the peaked black sack down across the swollen face, hiding the glaring eyes and the lips that snarled. He brought the rope forward over the cloaked head and drew the noose in tautly, with the knot adjusted to fit snugly just under the left ear, so that the hood took on the semblance of a well-filled, inverted bag with its puckered end fluting out in the effect of a dark ruff upon the hunched shoulders of its wearer. Stepping back, he gripped the handle of the lever-bar, and with all his strength jerked it toward him. A square in the floor opened as the trap was flapped back upon its hinges, and through the opening the haltered form shot straight downward to bring up with a great jerk, and after that to dangle like a plumb-bob on a string. Under the quick strain the gallows-arm creaked and whined; in the silence which followed the hangman was heard to exhale his breath in a

vast puff of relief. His hand went up to his forehead to wipe beads of sweat which for all that the morning was cool almost to coldness, had suddenly popped out through his skin. He for one was mighty glad the thing was done, and, as he in this moment figured, well done.

But for once and once only as those saw who had the hardihood to look, Uncle Tobe had botched up a job. Perhaps it was because of his great haste to make an end of a scandalous scene; perhaps because the tirade of the bound malefactor had discomfited him and made his fingers fumble this one time at their familiar task. Whatever the cause, it was plainly enough to be seen that the heavy knot had not cracked the Lone-Hand Kid's spine. The noose, as was ascertained later, had caught on the edge of the broad jawbone, and the man, instead of dying instantly, was strangling to death by degrees and with much struggling.

In the next half minute a thing even more grievous befell. The broad strap which girthed the murderer's trunk just above the bend of the elbows, held fast, but the rest of the harness, having been improperly snaffled on, loosened and fell away from the twitching limbs so that as the elongated body twisted to and fro in half circles, the lower arms winnowed the air in foreshortened and contorted flappings, and the freed legs drew up and down convulsively.

Very naturally, Uncle Tobe was chagrined; perhaps he had hidden within him emotions deeper than those bred of a personal mortification. At any rate, after a quick, distressed glance through the trap at the writhing shape of agony below, he turned his eyes from it and looked steadfastly at the high wall facing him. It chanced to be the western wall, which was bathed in a ruddy glare where the shafts of the upcoming sun, lifting over the panels at the opposite side of the fenced enclosure, began to fall diagonally upon the whitewashed surface just across. And now, against that glowing plane of background opposite him, there appeared as he looked the slanted shadow of a swaying rope framed in at right and at left by two broader, deeper lines which were the shadows marking the timber uprights that supported the scaffold at its nearer corners; and also there appeared, midway between the framing shadows, down at the lower end of the slender line of the cord, an exaggerated, wriggling manifestation like the reflection of a huge and misshapen jumping-jack, which first would lengthen itself grotesquely, and then abruptly would shorten up, as the tremors running through the dying man's frame altered the silhouette cast by the oblique sunbeams; and along with this stencilled vision, as a part of it, occurred shifting shadow movements of two legs dancing busily on nothing, and of two foreshortened arms, flapping up and down. It was no pretty picture to look upon, yet Uncle Tobe, plucking with a tremulous hand at the ends of his beard, continued to stare at the apparition, daunted and fascinated. To him it must have seemed as though the Lone-Hand Kid, with a malignant pertinacity which lingered on in him after by rights the last breath should have been squeezed out of his wretched carcass, was painting upon those tall planks the picture and the presentiment of his farewell threat.

Nearly half an hour passed before the surgeons consented that the body should be taken down and boxed. His harness which had failed him having been returned to its owner, he made it up into a compact bundle and collected his regular fee and went away very quietly. Ordinarily, following his habitual routine, he would have gone across town to his little house; would have washed his hands with a bar of the yellow laundry soap; would have cooked and eaten his breakfast, and then, after tidying up the kitchen, would have made the customary entry in his red-backed account-book. But this morning he seemed to have no appetite, and besides, he felt an unaccountable distaste for his home, with its silence and its emptiness. Somehow he much preferred the open air, with the skies over him and wide reaches of space about him; which was doubly strange, seeing that he was no lover of nature, but always theretofore had accepted sky and grass and trees as matters of course—things as inevitable and commonplace as the weathers and the winds.

Throughout the day and until well on toward night he was beset by a curious, uncommon restlessness which made it hard for him to linger long in any one spot. He idled about the streets of the town; twice he wandered aimlessly miles out along roads beyond the town. All the while, without

cessation, there was a tugging and nagging at his nerve-ends, a constant inward irritation which laid a hold on his thoughts, twitching them off into unpleasant channels. It kept him from centering his interest upon the casual things about him; inevitably it turned his mind back to inner contemplations. The sensation was mental largely, but it seemed so nearly akin to the physical that to himself Uncle Tobe diagnosed it as the after-result of a wrench for his weak heart. You see, never before having experienced the reactions of a suddenly quickened imagination, he, naturally, was at a loss to account for it on any other ground.

Also he was weighted down by an intense depression that his clean record of ten years should have been marred by a mishap; this regret, constantly recurring in his thoughts, served to make him unduly sensitive. He had a feeling that people stared hard at him as they passed and, after he had gone by, that they turned to stare at him some more. Under this scrutiny he gave no sign of displeasure, but inwardly he resented it. Of course these folks had heard of what had happened up at the prison, and no doubt among themselves would be commenting upon the tragedy and gossiping about it. Well, any man was liable to make a slip once; nobody was perfect. It would never happen again; he was sure of that much.

All day he mooned about, a brooding, uneasy figure, speaking to scarcely any one at all, but followed wherever he went by curious eyes. It was late in the afternoon before it occurred to him that he had eaten nothing all day, and that he had failed to deposit the money he had earned that morning. It would be too late now to get into the bank; the bank, which opened early, closed at three o'clock. To-morrow would do as well. Although he had no zest for food despite his fast, he figured maybe it was the long abstinence which was filling his head with such flighty notions, so he entered a small, smelly lunch-room near the railroad station, and made a pretense of eating an order of ham and eggs. He tried not to notice that the black waiter who served him shrank away from his proximity, shying off like a breechy colt, from the table where Uncle Tobe sat, whenever his business brought him into that part of the place. What difference did a fool darky's fears make, anyway?

Dusk impended when he found himself approaching his three-room house, looming up as a black oblong, where it stood aloof from its neighbours, with vacant lands about it. The house faced north and south. On the nearer edge of the unfenced common, which extended up to it on the eastern side, he noted as he drew close that somebody—perhaps a boy, or more probably a group of boys—had made a bonfire of fallen autumn leaves and brushwood. Going away as evening came, they had left their bonfire to burn itself out. The smouldering pile was almost under his bedroom window. He regretted rather that the boys had gone; an urgent longing for human companionship of some sort, however remote—a yearning he had never before felt with such acuteness—was upon him. Tormented, as he still was, by strange vagaries, he had almost to force himself to unlock the front door and cross the threshold into the gloomy interior of his cottage. But before entering, and while he yet wrestled with a vague desire to retrace his steps and go back down the street, he stooped and picked up his copy of the afternoon paper which the carrier, with true carrierlike accuracy, had flung upon the narrow front porch.

Inside the house, the floor gave off sharp little sounds, the warped floor squeaking and wheezing under the weight of his tread. Subconsciously, this irritated him; a lot of causes were combining to harass him, it seemed; there was a general conspiracy on the part of objects animate and inanimate to make him—well, suspicious. And Uncle Tobe was not given to nervousness, which made it worse. He was ashamed of himself that he should be in such state. Glancing about him in a furtive, almost in an apprehensive way, he crossed the front room to the middle room, which was his bed chamber, the kitchen being the room at the rear. In the middle room he lit a coal-oil lamp which stood upon a small centre table. Alongside the table he opened out the paper and glanced at a caption running half-way across the top of the front page; then, fretfully he crumpled up the printed sheet in his hand and let it fall upon the floor. He had no desire to read the account of his one failure. Why should the editor dwell at such length and with so prodigal a display of black head-line type upon this one bungled job

when every other job of all the jobs that had gone before, had been successful in every detail? Let's see, now, how many men had he hanged with precision and with speed and with never an accident to mar the proceedings? A long, martial array of names came trooping into his brain, and along with the names the memories of the faces of all those dead men to whom the names had belonged. The faces began to pass before him in a mental procession. This wouldn't do. Since there were no such things as ghosts or haunts; since, as all sensible men agreed, the dead never came back from the grave, it was a foolish thing for him to be creating those unpleasant images in his mind. He shook his head to clear it of recollections which were the better forgotten. He shook it again and again.

He would get to bed; a good night's rest would make him feel better and more natural. It was an excellent idea—this idea of sleep. So he raised the bottommost half of the curtain-less side window for air, drew down the shade by the string suspended from its lower cross breadth, until the lower edge of the shade came even with the window sash, and undressed himself to his undergarments. He was about to blow out the light when he remembered he had left the money that was the price of his morning's work in his trousers which hung, neatly folded, across the back of a chair by the centre table. He was in the act of withdrawing the bills from the bottom of one of the trouser-pockets when right at his feet there was a quick, queer sound of rustling. As he glared down, startled, out from under the crumpled newspaper came timorously creeping a half-grown, sickly looking rat, minus its tail, having lost its tail in a trap, perhaps, or possibly in a battle with other rats.

At best a rat is no pleasant bedroom companion, and besides, Uncle Tobe had been seriously annoyed. He kicked out with one of his bare feet, taking the rat squarely in its side as it scurried for its hole in the wainscoting. He hurt it badly. It landed with a thump ten feet away and sprawled out on the floor kicking and squealing feebly. Holding the wad of bills in his left hand, with his right Uncle Tobe deftly plucked up the crushed vermin by the loose fold of skin at the nape of its neck, and with a quick flirt of his arm tossed it sidewise from him to cast it out of the half-opened window. He returned to the table and bent over and blew down the lamp chimney, and in the darkness felt his way across the room to his bed. He stretched himself full length upon it, drew the cotton comforter up to cover him, and shoved the money under the pillow.

His fingers were relaxing their grip on the bills when he saw something—something which instantly turned him stiff and rigid and deathly cold all over, leaving him without will-power or strength to move his head or shift his gaze. Over the white, plastered wall alongside his bed an unearthly red glow sprang up, turning a deeper, angrier red as it spread and widened. Against this background next stood out two perpendicular masses like the broad shadows of uprights—like the supporting uprights of a gallows, say—and in the squared space of brightness thus marked off, depending midway from the shadow crossing it at right angles at the top, appeared a filmy, fine line, which undoubtedly was the shadow of a cord, and at the end of the cord dangled a veritable jumping-jack of a silhouette, turning and writhing and jerking, with a shape which in one breath grotesquely lengthened and in the next shrank up to half its former dimensions, which kicked out with indistinct movements of its lower extremities, which flapped with foreshortened strokes of the shadowy upper limbs, which altogether so contorted itself as to form the likeness of a thing all out of perspective, all out of proportion, and all most horribly reminiscent.

A heart with valves already weakened by a chronic affection can stand just so many shocks in a given time and no more.

A short time later in this same night, at about eight-forty-five o'clock, to be exact, a man who lived on the opposite side of the unfenced common gave the alarm of fire over the telephone. The Chickaloosa fire engine and hose reels came at once, and with the machines numerous citizens.

In a way of speaking, it turned out to be a false alarm. A bonfire of leaves and brush, abandoned at dusk by the boys who kindled it, had, after smouldering a while, sprung up briskly and, flaming high, was now scorching the clap-boarded side of the Dramm house.

There was no need for the firemen to uncouple a line of hose from the reel. While two of them made shift to get retorts of a patent extinguisher from the truck, two more, wondering why Uncle Tobe, even if in bed and asleep at so early an hour, had not been aroused by the noise of the crowd's coming, knocked at his front door. There being no response from within at once, they suspected something must be amiss. With heaves of their shoulders they forced the door off its hinges, and entering in company, they groped their passage through the empty front room into the bedroom behind it, which was lighted after a fashion by the reflection from the mounting flames without.

The tenant was in bed; he lay on his side with his face turned to the wall; he made no answer to their hails. When they bent over him they knew why. No need to touch him, then, with that look on his face and that stare out of his popped eyes. He was dead, all right enough; but plainly had not been dead long; not more than a few minutes, apparently. One of his hands was shoved up under his pillow with the fingers touching a small roll containing seven ten-dollar bills and one five-dollar bill; the other hand still gripped a fold of the coverlet as though the fatal stroke had come upon the old man as he lifted the bedclothing to draw it up over his face. These incidental facts were noted down later after the coroner had been called to take charge; they were the subject of considerable comment next day when the inquest took place. The coroner was of the opinion that the old man had been killed by a heart seizure, and that he had died on the instant the attack came.

However, this speculation had no part in the thoughts of the two startled firemen at the moment of the finding of the body. What most interested them, next only to the discovery of the presence of the dead man there in the same room with them, was a queer combination of shadows which played up and down against the wall beyond the bed, it being plainly visible in the glare of the small conflagration just outside.

With one accord they turned about, and then they saw the cause of the phenomenon, and realised that it was not very much of a phenomenon after all, although unusual enough to constitute a rather curious circumstance. A crippled, tailless rat had somehow entangled its neck in a loop at the end of the dangling cord of the half-drawn shade at the side window on the opposite side of the room and, being too weak to wriggle free, was still hanging there, jerking and kicking, midway of the window opening. The glow of the pile of burning leaves and brush behind and beyond it, brought out its black outlines with remarkable clearness.

The patterned shadow upon the wall, though, disappeared in the same instant that the men outside began spraying their chemical compound from the two extinguishers upon the ambitious bonfire to douse it out, and one of the firemen slapped the rat down to the floor and killed it with a stamp of his foot.

CHAPTER II

THE BROKEN SHOELACE

I

IN the aching, baking middle of a sizzling New York's summer, there befell New York's regular "crime wave." When the city is a brazen skillet, whereon mankind, assailed by the sun from above and by the stored-up heat from below, fries on both sides like an egg; when nerves are worn to frazzle-ends; when men and women, suffocating by tedious degrees in the packed and steaming tenements, lie there and curse the day they were born—then comes the annual "crime wave," as the papers love to name it. In truth the papers make it first and then they name it. Misdeeds of great and small degree are ranged together and displayed in parallel columns as common symptoms of a high tide of violence, a perfect ground swell of lawlessness. To a city editor the scope of a crime wave is as elastic a thing as a hot weather "story," when under the heading of Heat Prostrations are listed all who fall in the streets, stricken by whatsoever cause. This is done as a sop to local pride, proving New York to be a deadlier spot in summer than Chicago or St. Louis.

True enough, in such a season, people do have shorter tempers than at other times; they come to blows on small provocation and come to words on still less. So maybe there was a real "crime wave," making men bloody-minded and homicidal. Be that as it may, the thing reached its apogee in the murder of old Steinway, the so-called millionaire miser of Murray Hill, he being called a millionaire because he had money, and a miser because he saved it.

It was in mid-August that the aged Steinway was choked to death in his rubbishy old house in East Thirty-ninth Street, where by the current rumour of the neighbourhood, he kept large sums in cash. Suspicion fell upon the recluse's nephew, one Maxwell, who vanished with the discovery of the murder.

The police compiled and widely circulated a description of the suspect, his looks, manners, habits and peculiarities; and certain distant relatives and presumptive heirs of the dead man came forward promptly, offering a lump sum in cash for his capture, living; but all this labour was without reward. The fugitive went uncaptured, while the summer dragged on to its end, burning up in the fiery furnace of its own heat.

For one dweller of the city—and he, I may tell you, is the central figure in this story—it dragged on with particular slowness. Judson Green, the hero of our tale—if it has any hero—was a young man of some wealth and more leisure. Also he was a young man of theories. For example, he had a theory that around every corner of every great city romance lurked, ready for some one to come and find it. True, he never had found it, but that, he insisted, was because he hadn't looked for it; it was there all right, waiting to be flushed, like a quail from a covert.

Voicing this belief over a drink at a club, on an evening in June, he had been challenged promptly by one of those argumentative persons who invariably disagree with every proposition as a matter of principle, and for the sake of the debate.

"All rot, Green," the other man had said. "Just plain rot. Adventure's not a thing that you find yourself. It's something that comes and finds you—once in a life-time. I'll bet that in three months of trying you couldn't, to save your life, have a real adventure in this town—I mean an adventure out of the ordinary. Elopements and automobile smash-ups are barred."

"How much will you bet?" asked Judson Green.

"A hundred," said the other man, whose name was Wainwright.

Reaching with one hand for his fountain pen, Judson Green beckoned a waiter with the other and told him to bring a couple of blank checks.

II

So that was how it had started, and that was why Judson Green had spent the summer in New York instead of running away to the north woods or the New England shore, as nearly everybody he knew did. Diligently had he sought to win that hundred dollars of the contentious Wainwright; diligently had he ranged from one end of New York to the other, seeking queer people and queer things—seeking anything that might properly be said to constitute adventure. Sometimes a mildly interested and mildly satirical friend accompanied him; oftener he went alone, an earnest and determined young man. Yet, whether with company or without it, his luck uniformly was poor. The founts of casual adventure had, it seemed, run stone dry; such weather was enough to dry up anything.

Yet he had faithfully tried all those formulas which in the past were supposed to have served the turns of those seeking adventure in a great city. There was the trick of bestowing a thousand-dollar bill upon a chance vagrant and then trailing after the recipient to note what happened to him, in his efforts to change the bill. Heretofore, in fiction at least, the following of this plan had invariably brought forth most beautiful results. Accordingly, Judson Green tried it.

He tried it at Coney Island one July evening. He chose Coney Island deliberately, because of all the places under the sun, Coney Island is pre-eminently the home and haunt of the North American dime. At Coney, a dime will buy almost anything except what a half-dime will buy. On Surf Avenue, then, which is Coney's Greatest Common Divisor, he strolled back and forth, looking for one of an aspect suitable for this experiment. Mountain gorges of painted canvas and sheet-tin towered above him; palace pinnacles of lath and plaster speared the sky; the moist salt air, blowing in from the adjacent sea, was enriched with dust and with smells of hot sausages and fried crabs, and was shattered by the bray of bagpipes, the exact and mechanical melodies of steam organs, and the insistent, compelling, never-dying blat of the spieler, the barker and the ballyhoo. Also there were perhaps a hundred thousand other smells and noises, did one care to take the time and trouble to classify them. And here the very man he sought to find, found him.

There came to him, seeking alms, one who was a thing of shreds and patches and broken shoes. His rags seemed to adhere to him by the power of cohesive friction rather than by any visible attachments; it might have been years since he had a hat that had a brim. It was in the faint and hungered whine of the professional that he asked for the money to buy one cup of coffee; yet as he spoke, his breath had the rich alcoholic fragrance of a hot plum pudding with brandy sauce.

The beggar made his plea and, with a dirty palm outstretched, waited in patient supplianace. He sustained the surprise of his whole panhandling life. He was handed a new, uncreased one-thousand-dollar bill. He was told that he must undertake to change the bill and spend small fractional parts of it. Succeeding here, he should have five per cent of it for his own. As Judson Green impressed these details upon the ragged vagrant's dazed understanding, he edged closer and closer to his man, ready to cut off any sudden attempt at flight.

The precaution was entirely unnecessary. Perhaps it was because this particular panhandler had the honour of his profession—in moments of confidence he might have told you, with some pride, that he was no thief. Or possibly the possession of such unheard-of wealth crippled his powers of imagination. There are people who are made financially embarrassed by having no money at all, but more who are made so by having too much. Our most expensive hotels are full of whole families who, having become unexpectedly and abruptly wealthy, are now suffering from this painful form of financial embarrassment; they wish to disburse large sums freely and gracefully, and they don't know how. They lack the requisite training. In a way of speaking, this mendicant of Coney Island

was perhaps of this class. With his jaw lolling, he looked at the stranger dubiously, uncertainly, suspiciously, meanwhile studying the stranger's yellow-back.

"You want me to git this here bill changed?" he said dully.

"That is the idea," said Judson Green, patiently. "You are to take it and change it—and I will trail behind you to see what happens. I'm merely making an experiment, with your help, and I'm willing to pay for it."

"This money ain't counterfeit?" inquired the raggedy one. "This ain't no game to git me in bad?"

"Well, isn't it worth taking a chance on?" cross-fired Green. The pimpled expanse of face lost some of its doubt, and the owner of the face fetched a deep breath.

"You're on," he decided. "Where'bouts'll I start?"

"Anywhere you please," Judson Green told him. "You said you were hungry—that for two days you hadn't eaten a bite?"

"Aw, boss, that was part of the spiel," he confessed frankly. "Right now I'm that full of beef stew I couldn't hold another bite."

"Well, how about a drink? A long, cool glass of beer, say? Or anything you please."

The temporary custodian of the one-thousand-dollar bill mentally considered this pleasing project; his bleared eye glinted brighter.

"Naw," he said, "not jist yit. If it's all the same to you, boss, I'll wait until I gits a good thirst on me. I think I'll go into that show yonder, to start on." He pointed a finger towards a near-by amusement enterprise. This institution had opened years before as "The Galveston Flood." Then, with some small scenic changes, it had become "The Mount Pelee Disaster," warranted historically correct in all details; now it was "The Messina Earthquake," no less. Its red and gold gullet of an entrance yawned hungrily, not twenty yards from where they stood.

"Go ahead," ordered Judson Green, confirming the choice with a nod. "And remember, my friend, I will be right behind you."

Nothing, however, seemed further from the panhandler's thoughts than flight. His rags fluttered freely in the evening air and his sole-less shoes flopped up and down upon his feet, rasping his bare toes, as he approached the nearest ticket booth.

Behind the wicket sat a young woman of much self-possession. By all the outward signs she was a born and bred metropolitan and therefore one steeled against surprise and armed mentally against trick and device. Even before she spoke you felt sure she would say *oily* if she meant *early*, and *early* if she meant *oily*—sure linguistic marks of the native-born New York cockney.

To match the environment of her employment she wore a costume that was fondly presumed to be the correct garbing of a Sicilian peasant maid, including a brilliant bodice that laced in front and buttoned behind, an imposing headdress, and on both her arms, bracelets of the better known semi-precious metals.

Coming boldly up to her, the ragged man laid upon the shelf of the wicket his precious bill—it was now wadded into a greenish-yellow wisp like a sprig of celery top—and said simply, "One!"

With a jangle of her wrist jewelry, the young woman drew the bill in under the bars and straightened it out in front of her. She considered, with widening gaze, the numeral 1 and the three naughts following it. Then through the bars she considered carefully him who had brought it. From one to the other and back again she looked.

"Woit one minute," she said. It is impossible to reproduce in cold type the manner in which this young woman uttered the word *minute*. But there was an "o" in it and a labial hint of an extra "u."

"Woit, please," she said again, and holding the bill down flat with one hand she turned and beckoned to some one at her left.

A pace behind the panhandler, Judson Green watched. Now the big comedy scene was coming, just as it always came in the books. Either the tattered possessor of the one-thousand-dollar bill would be made welcome by a gratified proprietor and would be given the liberty of the entire island and

would have columns written about him by a hundred gratified press-agents, or else there would be a call for the police and for the first time in the history of New York a man would be locked up, not for the common crime of having no money, but for having too much money.

Obedient to the young woman's request, the panhandler waited. At her beck there came a stout person in a green coat and red trousers—Italian soldiers wear these colours, or at least they often do at Coney Island—and behind her free hand the young woman whispered in his ear. He nodded understandingly, cast a sharp look at the opulent individual in the brimless hat, and then hurried away toward the inner recesses of the entrance. In a minute he was back, but not with determined police officers behind him. He came alone and he carried in one hand a heavy canvas bag that gave off a muffled jingling sound, and in the other, a flat green packet.

The young woman riffled through the packet and drove a hand into the jingling bag. Briskly she counted down before her the following items in currency and specie:

Four one-hundred-dollar bills, six fifty-dollar bills, twelve twenty-dollar bills, five ten-dollar bills, one five-dollar bill, four one-dollar bills, one fifty-cent piece, one quarter, two dimes and one nickel. Lifting one of the dimes off the top of this pleasing structure, she dropped it in a drawer; then she shoved the remaining mound of money under the wicket, accompanying it by a flat blue ticket of admission, whisked the one-thousand-dollar bill out of sight and calmly awaited the pleasure of the next comer.

All downcast and disappointed, Green drew his still bewildered accomplice aside, relieved him of the bulk of his double handful of change, endowed him liberally with cash for his trouble, and making his way to where his car waited, departed in haste and silence for Manhattan. A plan that was recommended by several of the leading fiction authorities as infallible, had, absolutely failed him.

III

Other schemes proved equally disappointing. Choosing mainly the cool of the evening, he travelled the town from the primeval forests of the Farther Bronx to the sandy beaches of Ultimate Staten Island, which is in the city, and yet not of it. He roamed through queer streets and around quaint by-corners, and he learned much strange geography of his city and yet had no delectable adventures.

Once, acting on the inspiration of the plot of a popular novel that he had read at a sitting, he bought at an East Side pawnshop a strange badge, or token, of gold and black enamel, all mysteriously embossed over with intertwined Oriental signs and characters. Transferring this ornament from the pawnshop window to the lapel of his coat, he went walking first through the Syrian quarter, where the laces and the revolutionary plots come from, and then through the Armenian quarter, where the rugs come from, and finally in desperation through the Greek quarter, where the plaster statues and the ripe bananas come from.

By rights,—by all the rights of fiction,—he, wearing this jewelled emblem in plain sight, should have been hailed by a bearded foreigner and welcomed to the inner councils of some secret *Bund*, cabal, council or propaganda, as one coming from afar, bearing important messages. It should have turned out so, certainly. In this case, however, the sequel was very different and in a great measure disappointing.

A trifle foot-weary and decidedly overheated, young Mr. Green came out of the East Side by way of Nassau Street, and at Fulton turned north into Broadway. Just across from the old Astor House, a man wearing a stringy beard and a dusty black suit stood at the curbing, apparently waiting for a car. He carried an umbrella under one arm and at his feet rested a brown wicker suit-case with the initials "G. W. T." and the address, "Enid, Oklahoma," stencilled on its side in black letters. Plainly he was a stranger in the city. Between glances down the street to see whether his car was nearing him, he counted the upper stories of the near-by skyscrapers and gazed at the faces of those who streamed past him.

His roving eye fell upon a splendid badge of gold enamel gleaming against a background of blue serge, and his face lighted with the joy of one meeting a most dear friend in a distant land. Shifting his umbrella from the right hand to the left, he gave three successive and careful tugs at his right coat lapel, all the while facing Judson Green. Following this he made a military salute and then, stepping two paces forward, he undertook to engage Green's hand in a peculiar and difficult cross-fingered clasp. And he uttered cabalistic words of greeting in some strange tongue, all the while beaming gladly.

In less than no time, though, his warmth all changed to indignation; and as Green backed away, retreating in poor order and some embarrassment, he gathered from certain remarks thrown after him, that the outraged brother from Enid was threatening him with arrest and prosecution as a rank impostor—for wearing, without authority, the sacred insignia of an Imperial Past Potentate of the Supreme Order of Knightly Somethings or Other—he didn't catch the last words, being then in full flight. So the adventure-seeker counted that day lost too and buried the Oriental emblem at the bottom of a bureau drawer to keep it out of mischief.

He read the papers closely, seeking there the seeds of adventure. In one of them, a pathetic story appeared, telling of a once famous soldier of fortune starving in a tenement on Rivington Street, a man who in his day—so the papers said—had made rulers and unmade them, had helped to alter the map of more than one continent. Green investigated personally. The tale turned out to be nine-tenths reporter's imagination, and one-tenth, a garrulous, unreliable old man.

In another paper was an advertisement richly laden with veiled pleadings for immediate aid from a young woman who described herself as being in great danger. He looked into this too, but stopped looking, when he ran into an affable and accommodating press-agent. The imperilled young lady was connected with the drama, it seemed, and she sought free advertisement and was willing to go pretty far to get it.

Coming away from a roof garden show one steaming night, a slinky-looking, slightly lame person asked Green for the time, and as Green reached for his watch he endeavoured to pick Green's pocket. Being thwarted in this, the slinky person made slowly off. A *Van Bibber* would have hired vigilant aides to dog the footsteps of the disappointed thief and by harrying him forth with threats from wherever he stopped, would speedily have driven him desperate from lack of sleep and lack of food. Green had read somewhere of this very thing having been done successfully. He patterned after the plan. He trailed the gimpy one to where he mainly abided and drove him out of one lunchroom, and dispossessed him from one lodging house; and at that, giving his pursuer malevolent looks, the "dip" went limping to the Grand Central and caught the first train leaving for the West.

And then, at the fag end of the summer, when all his well-laid plans had one by one gone agley, chance brought to Green an adventure—sheer chance and a real adventure. The circumstance of a deranged automobile was largely responsible—that and the added incident of a broken shoe-string.

IV

It was in the first week in September and Judson Green, a tired, badly sunburned young man, disappointed and fagged, looked forward ten days to the expiration of the three months, when confessing himself beaten, and what was worse, wrong, he must pay over one hundred dollars to the jubilant Wainright. With him it wasn't the money—he had already spent the amount of the wager several times over in the prosecution of his vain campaigning after adventure—it was the upsetting of his pet theory; that was the worst part of it.

I believe I stated a little earlier in this narrative that Judson Green was a young man of profoundly professed theories. It came to pass, therefore, that on the Saturday before Labour Day, Judson Green, being very much out of sorts, found himself very much alone and didn't know what to do with himself. He thought of the beaches, but dismissed the thought. Of a Saturday afternoon

in the season, the sea beaches that lie within the city bounds are a-crawl with humans. There is small pleasure in surf-bathing where you must share every wave with from one to a dozen total strangers.

Mr. Green climbed into his car and told his driver to take him to Van Cortlandt Park, which, lying at the northernmost boundaries of New York City, had come, with successive northerly shifts of the centre of population, to be the city's chief playground.

When, by reason of a confusion of tongues, work was knocked off on the Tower of Babel, if then all hands had turned to outdoor sports, the resultant scene would have been, I imagine, much like the picture that is presented on most Saturdays on the sixty-acre stretch of turf known as Indian Field, up in Van Cortlandt Park. Here there are baseball games by the hundred and football games by the score—all the known varieties of football games too, Gaelic, Soccer, Rugby and others; and coal black West Indian negroes in white flannels, with their legs buskined like the legs of comic opera brigands, play at cricket, meanwhile shouting in the broadest of British accents; and there is tennis on the tennis courts and boating on the lake near-by and golf on the links that lie beyond the lake. Also, in odd corners, there are all manners of queer Scandinavian and Latin games, for which no one seems to know the name; and on occasion, there are polo matches.

Accordingly, when his car drew up at the edge of the parking space, our young man beheld a wide assortment of sporting events spread before his eyes. The players disported themselves with enthusiasm, for there was now a soft coolness in the air. But the scars of a brutal summer still showed, in the turf that was burnt brown and crisp, and in the withered leaves on the elms, and in white dust inches deep on the roadways.

Young Mr. Green sat at his ease and looked until he was tired of looking, and then he gave the order for a home-bound spin. Right here was where chanced stepped in and diverted him from his appointed paths. For the car, now turned cityward, had rolled but a few rods when a smell of overheated metals assailed the air, and with a tired wheezing somewhere down in its vital organs, the automobile halted itself. The chauffeur spent some time tinkering among its innermost works before he stood up, hot and sweaty and disgusted, to announce that the breakdown was serious in character. He undertook to explain in highly technical terms the exact nature of the trouble, but his master had no turn for mechanics and small patience for listening. He gathered that it would take at least an hour to mend the mishap, perhaps even longer, and he was not minded to wait.

"I'll walk across yonder and catch the subway," he said. "You mend the car and bring it downtown when you get it mended."

At its farthest point north, the Broadway subway, belying its name, emerges from the earth and becomes an elevated structure, rearing high above the ground. Its northernmost station stands aloft, butt-ended and pierced with many windows, like a ferry-boat cabin set up on stilts. Through a long aisle of sun-dried trees, Judson Green made for this newly risen landmark. A year or two years before, all this district had been well wooded and sparsely inhabited. But wherever a transit line goes in New York it works changes in the immediate surroundings, and here at this particular spot, the subway was working them, and many of them. Through truck patches and strips of woodland, cross-streets were being cut, and on the hills to the westward, tall apartment houses were going up. On the raw edge of a cut, half of an old wooden mansion stood, showing tattered strips of an ancient flowered wallpaper and a fireplace, clinging like a chimney-swift's nest to a wall, where the rest of the room had been sheared away bodily. Along Broadway, beyond a huddle of merry-go-rounds and peanut stands, a row of shops had sprung up, as it were, overnight; they were shiny, trim, citified shops, looking a trifle strange now in this half-transformed setting, but sure to have plenty of neighbours before long. There was even a barber shop, glittering inside and out with the neatness of newness, and complete, even to a manicuring table and a shoe-shining stand. The door of the shop was open; within, electric fans whirled in little blurs of rapid movement.

See now how chance still served our young man: Crossing to the station, Judson Green took note of this barber shop and took note also that his russet shoes had suffered from his trudge through

the dusty park. Likewise one of the silken strings had frayed through; the broken end stood up through the top eyelet in an untidy fringed effect. So he turned off short and went into the little place and mounted the new tall chair that stood just inside the door. The only other customer in the place was in the act of leaving. This customer got up from the manicure table opposite the shoe-shining stand, slipped a coin into the palm of the manicure girl and passed out, giving Green a brief profile view of a thin, bearded face. Behind the back of her departing patron, the manicure girl shrugged her shoulders inside of an ornate bodice and screwed up her nose derisively. It was plainly to be seen that she did not care greatly for him she had just served.

From where he was languidly honing a razor, the head barber, he who presided over the first of the row of three chairs, spoke:

"You ought'n'ter be making faces at your regular steadies, Sadie. If you was to ask me, I think you've got a mash on that there gent."

The young person thus addressed shook her head with a sprightly motion.

"Not on your life," she answered. "There's certainly something about that man I don't like."

"It don't never pay to knock a stand-by," opined the head barber, banteringly.

As though seeking sympathy from these gibes, the young lady denominated as Sadie turned toward the well-dressed, alert-looking young man who had just come in. Apparently he impressed her as a person in whom she might confide.

"Speaking about the fella that just went out," she said. "August yonder is all the time trying to guy me about him. I should worry! He ain't my style. Honest, I think he's nutty."

Politely Green uttered one of those noncommittal sounds that may be taken to mean almost anything. But the manicure lady was of a temperament needing no prompting. She went on, blithe to be talking to a new listener.

"Yes, sir, I think he's plumb dippy. He first came in here about two weeks ago to have his nails did, and I don't know whether you'll believe it or not—but August'll tell you it's the truth—he's been back here every day since. And the funniest part of it is I'm certain sure he never had his nails done in his life before then—they was certainly in a untidy state the first time he came. And there's another peculiar thing about him. He always makes me scrape away down under his nails, right to the quick. Sometimes they bleed and it must hurt him."

"Apparently the gentleman has the manicuring habit in a serious form," said Green, seeing that Miss Sadie had paused, in expectation of an answer from him.

"He sure has—in the most vi'lent form," she agreed. "He's got other habits too. He's sure badly stuck on the movies."

"I beg your pardon—on the what?"

"On the movies—the moving pictures," she explained. "Well, oncet in a while I enjoy a good fillum myself, but I'm no bigot on the subject—I can take my movies or I can let 'em be. But not that man that just now went out. All the time I'm doing his nails he don't talk about nothing else hardly, except the moving pictures, he's seen that day or the day before. It's right ridiculous, him being a grown-up man and everything. I actually believe he never misses a new fillum at that new moving picture place three doors above here, or at that other one, that's opened up down by Two Hundred an' Thirtieth Street. He seems to patronise just those two. I guess he lives 'round here somewhere. Yet he don't seem to be very well acquainted in this part of town neither. Well, it sure takes all kind of people to make a world, don't it?"

Temporarily Miss Sadie lapsed into silence, never noticing that what she said had caused her chief auditor to bend forward in absorbed interest. He sat with his eyes on the Greek youth who worked over his shoes, but his mind was busy with certain most interesting speculations.

When the bootblack had given his restored and resplendent russets a final loving rub, and had deftly inserted a new lace where the old one had been, Mr. Green decided that he needed a manicure and he moved across the shop, and as the manicure lady worked upon his nails he siphoned the shallow

reservoir of her little mind as dry as a bone. The job required no great amount of pump-work either, for this Miss Sadie dearly loved the sound of her own voice and was gratefully glad to tell him all she knew of the stranger who favoured such painful manicuring processes and who so enjoyed a moving picture show. For his part, Green had seen only the man's side face, and that casually and at a fleeting glance; but before the young lady was through with her description, he knew the other's deportment and contour as though he had passed him a hundred times and each time had closely studied him.

To begin with, the man was sallow and dark, and his age was perhaps thirty, or at most thirty-two or three. His beard was newly grown; it was a young beard, through which his chin and chops still showed. He smoked cigarettes constantly—the thumb and forefinger of his right hand were stained almost black, and Miss Sadie, having the pride of her craft, had several times tried unsuccessfully to bleach them of their nicotine disfigurements.

He had a manner about him which the girl described as "kind of suspicious and scary,"—by which Green took her to mean that he was shy and perhaps furtive in his bearing. His teeth, his eyes, his expression, his mode of dress—Mr. Green knew them all before Miss Sadie gave his left hand a gentle pat as a sign that the job was concluded. He tipped her generously and caught the next subway train going south.

V

Southbound subway trains run fast, especially when the rush of traffic is northward. Within the hour Judson Green sat in the reading room of his club, industriously turning the pages of the club's file of the *World* for the past month. Presently he found what he was seeking. He read a while, and for a while then he took notes. Pocketing his notes, he ate dinner alone and in due season thereafter he went home and to bed. But before this, he sent off a night lettergram to the Byrnes private detective agency down in Park Row. He wanted—so in effect the message ran—the best man in the employ of that concern to call upon him at his bachelor apartments in the Hotel Sedgwick, in the morning at ten o'clock. The matter was urgent, important—and confidential.

If the man who knocked at Green's sitting-room door that next morning at ten was not the best man of the Byrnes staff he looked the part. He was square-jawed, with an appraising eye and a good pair of shoulders. He had the right kind of a name for a detective, too. The name was Cassidy—Michael J.

"Mr. Cassidy," said Judson Green, when the preliminaries of introduction were over, "you remember, don't you, what the papers said at the time of the Steinway murder about the suspect Maxwell, the old man's nephew—the description they printed of him, and all?"

"I ought to," said Cassidy. "Our people had that case from the start—I worked on it myself off and on, up until three days ago." From memory he quoted: "Medium height, slender, dark-complected, smooth-faced and about thirty-one years old; a good dresser and well educated; smokes cigarettes constantly; has one upper front tooth crowned with gold—" He hesitated, searching his memory for more details.

"Remember anything else about him that was striking?" prompted Green.

"Let's see?" pondered Mr. Cassidy. Then after a little pause, "No, that's all I seem to recall right now."

"How about his being a patron of moving pictures?"

"That's right," agreed the other, "that's the only part of it I forgot." He repeated pretty exactly the language of the concluding paragraph of the official police circular that all the papers had carried for days: "Formerly addicted to reading cheap and sensational novels, now an inveterate attendant of motion-picture theatres." He glanced at Judson Green over his cigar. "What's the idea?" he asked. "Know something about this case?"

"Not much," said Green, "except that I have found the man who killed old Steinway."

Forgetting his professional gravity, up rose Mr. Cassidy, and his chair, which had been tilted back, brought its forelegs to the floor with a thump.

"No!" he said, half-incredulously, half-hopefully.

"Yes," stated Mr. Green calmly. "At least I've found Maxwell. Or anyway, I think I have."

Long before he was through telling what he had seen and heard the afternoon before, Mr. Cassidy, surnamed Michael J., was almost sitting in his lap. When the younger man had finished his tale the detective fetched a deep and happy breath.

"It sounds good to me," he commented, "it certainly sounds to me like you've got the right dope on this party. But listen, Mr. Green, how do you figure in this here party's fad for getting himself manicured as a part of the lay-out—I can see it all but that?"

"Here is how I deduced that element of the case," stated Green. "Conceding this man to be the fugitive Maxwell, it is quite evident that he has a highly developed imagination—his former love of trashy literature and his present passion for moving pictures would both seem to prove that. Now then, you remember that all the accounts of that murder told of the deep marks of finger-nail scratches in the old man's throat. If this man is the murderer, I would say, from what we know of him, that he cannot rid himself of the feeling that the blood of his victim is still under his nails. And so, nursing that delusion, he goes daily to that manicure girl—"

He got no farther along than that. Mr. Cassidy extended his large right hand in a congratulatory clasp, and admiration was writ large upon his face.

"Colonel," he said, "you're immense—you oughter be in the business. Say, when are we going to nail this guy?"

"Well," said Green, "I think we should start watching his movements at once, but we should wait until we are pretty sure of the correctness of our theory before acting. And of course, in the meanwhile, we must deport ourselves in such a way as to avoid arousing his suspicions."

"Just leave that to me. You do the expert thinking on this here case; I'll guarantee a good job of trailing."

Inside of forty-eight hours these two, working discreetly, knew a good deal of their man. For example, they knew that under the name of Morrison he was living in a summer boarding house on a little hill rising to the west of the park; that he had been living there for a little more than a fortnight; that his landlady didn't know his business, but thought that he must be an invalid. Among the other lodgers the impression prevailed that he suffered from a nervous trouble. Mornings, he kept to his room, sleeping until late. In fact, as well as the couple occupying the room below his might judge, he did most of his sleeping in the daytime—they heard him night after night, walking the floor until all hours.

A maid-servant of ultra conversational tendencies gratuitously furnished most of these valued details, after Michael J. Cassidy had succeeded in meeting her socially.

Afternoons, the suspect followed a more or less regular itinerary. He visited the manicure girl at the new barber shop; he patronized one or both of the moving picture places in the vicinity, but usually both, and then he went for a solitary walk through the park, and along toward dusk he returned to the boarding house, ate his supper and went to his room. He had no friends, apparently; certainly he had no callers. He received no letters and seemingly wrote none. Cassidy was convinced; he burned with eagerness to make the arrest without further delay. For this would be more than a feather in the Cassidy cap; it would be a whole war bonnet.

"You kin stay in the background if you want to," he said. "Believe me, I'm perfectly willing to take all the credit for pulling off this pinch."

As he said this they were passing along Broadway just above the subway terminal. The straggling line of new shops was on one side and the park stretched away on the other. Green was on the inner side of the pavement. Getting no answer to his suggestion, Mr. Cassidy started to repeat it.

"I heard you," said Green, stopping now dead short, directly in front of the resplendent front of the Regal Motion Picture Palace. He contemplated with an apparently unwarranted interest the illuminated and lithographed announcements of the morrow's bill.

"I'm perfectly willing to stay in the background," he said. "But—but I've just this very minute thought of a plan that ought to make us absolutely sure of our man—providing the plan works! Are you at all familiar with the tragedy of 'Macbeth'?"

"I don't know as I am," admitted Mr. Cassidy honestly. "When did it happen and who done it?"

Again his employer seemed not to hear him.

"Let's go into this place," he said, turning in towards the hospitable portals of the Regal. "I want to have a business talk with the proprietor of this establishment, if he's in."

The manager was in, and they had their talk; but after all it was money—which in New York speaks with such a clarion-loud and convincing voice—that did most of the talking. As soon as Judson Green had produced a bill-roll of august proportions, the proprietor, doubtful until that moment, showed himself to be a man open to all reasonable arguments. Moreover, he presently scented in this enterprise much free advertisement for his place.

VI

On the following afternoon, the weather being rainy, the Regal opened its doors for the three-o'clock performance to an audience that was smaller than common and mostly made up of dependable neighbourhood patrons. However, there were at least two newcomers present. They sat side by side, next to central aisle, in the rearmost row of chairs—Judson Green and Michael J. Cassidy. Their man was almost directly in front of them, perhaps halfway down toward the stage. Above a scattering line of heads of women and children they could see, in the half light of the darkened house, his head and shoulders as he bent his body forward at an interested angle.

Promptly on the hour, a big bull's-eye of light flashed on, making a shimmering white target in the middle of the screen. The music started up, and a moving-picture soloist with a moving-picture soloist's voice, appeared in the edge of the illuminated space and rendered a moving-picture ballad, having reference to the joys of life down in Old Alabam', where the birds are forever singing in the trees and the cotton-blossoms bloom practically without cessation. This, mercifully, being soon over, a film entitled "The Sheriff's Sweetheart" was offered, and for a time, in shifting pictures, horse-thieves in leather "chaps," and heroes in open-necked shirts, and dashing cow-girls in divided skirts, played out a thrilling drama of the West, while behind them danced and quivered a background labelled Arizona, but suggesting New Jersey. When the dashing and intrepid sheriff had, after many trials, won his lady love, the ballad singer again obliged throatily, and then from his coop in the little gallery the lantern man made an announcement, in large, flickering letters, of a film depicting William Shakespeare's play, "Macbeth."

Thereupon scene succeeded scene, unfolding the tragic tale. The ill-fated Duncan was slain; the Witches of Endor capered fearsomely about their fearsome cauldron of snaky, froggy horrors; and then—taking some liberties with the theme as set down by the original author—the operator presented a picture wherein Macbeth, tortured by sleeplessness and hag-ridden with remorse, saw, in imagination, the dripping blood upon his hands and vainly sought to scour it off.

Right here, too, came another innovation which might or might not have pleased the Bard of Avon. For as Macbeth wrestled with his fears, the phantom of the murdered Duncan, a cloaked, shadowy shape, crossed slowly by him from right to left, traversing the breadth of the screen, while the orchestra rendered shivery music in appropriate accompaniment.

Midway of the lighted space the ghost raised its averted head and looked out full, not at the quivering Macbeth, but, with steady eyes and set, impassive face, into the body of the darkened little theatre. In an instant the sheeted form was gone—gone so quickly that perhaps no keen-eyed juvenile

in the audience detected the artifice by which, through a skilful scissoring and grafting and doctoring of the original film, the face of the actor who played the dead and walking Duncan had been replaced by the photographed face, printed so often in the newspapers, of murdered Old Man Steinway!

There was a man near the centre of the house who got instantly upon his legs and stumbling, indeed almost running in his haste, made up the centre aisle for the door; and in the daylight which strengthened as he neared the open, it might be seen that he wore the look of one stunned by a sudden blighting shock. And at once Green and Cassidy were noisily up too, and following close behind him, their nerves a-tingle.

All unconscious of surveillance, the suspect was out of the door, on the pavement, when they closed on him. At the touch of Cassidy's big hand upon his shoulder he spun round, staring at them with wide-open, startled eyes. Above his scraggy beard his face was dappled white and red in patches, and under the mottled skin little muscles twitched visibly.

"What—what do you want?" he demanded in a shaken, quick voice. A gold-capped tooth showed in his upper jaw between his lips.

"We want a word or two with you," said Cassidy, with a sort of threatening emphasis.

"Are you—are you officers?" He got the question out with a separate gulp for each separate word.

"Not exactly," answered Cassidy, and tightened his grip on the other's shoulder the least bit more firmly. "But we can call one mighty easy if you ain't satisfied to talk to us a minute or two. There's one yonder."

He ducked his head toward where, forty yards distant, a middle-aged and somewhat puffy patrolman was shepherding the traffic that eddied in small whirls about the steps of the subway terminal.

"All right, all right," assented the captive eagerly. "I'll talk to you. Let's go over there—where it's quiet." He pointed a wavering finger, with a glistening, highly polished nail on it, toward the opposite side of the street; there the park came right up to the sidewalk and ended. They went, and in a minute all three of them were grouped close up to the shrub-lined boundary. The mottled-faced man was in the middle. Green stood on one side of him and Cassidy on the other, shouldering up so close that they blocked him off, flank and front.

"Now, then, we're all nice and cozy," said Cassidy with a touch of that irony which a cat often displays, in different form, upon capturing a live mouse. "And we want to ask you a few questions. What's your name—your real name?" he demanded roughly.

"Morrison," said the man, licking with his tongue to moisten his lips.

"Did you say Maxwell?" asked Cassidy, shooting out his syllables hard and straight.

"No, no—I said Morrison." The man looked as though he were going to collapse then and there.

"One name's as good as another, I guess, ain't it?" went on the detective. "Well, what's your business?"

"My business?" He was parrying as though seeking time to collect his scattered wits. "Oh, I haven't any business—I've been sick lately."

"Oh, you've been sick lately—well, you look sick right now." Cassidy shoved his hands in his pockets and with a bullying, hectoring air pushed his face, with the lower jaw undershot, into the suspect's face. "Say, was it because you felt sick that you came out of that there moving-picture show so sudden?"

Just as he had calculated, the other jumped at the suggestion.

"Yes—yes," he nodded nervously. "That was it—the heat in there made me faint." He braced himself tauter. "Say," he said, and tried to put force into his tones, "what business have you men got spying on me and asking me these things? I'm a free American citizen—"

"Well now, young fellow, that all depends," broke in Cassidy, "that all depends." He sank his voice almost to a whisper, speaking deliberately. "Now tell us why you didn't feel real sick until you seen your dead uncle's face looking at you—"

"Look out!" screamed the prisoner. He flinched back, pointing with one arm wildly, and flinging up the other across his face as though to shut out a sight of danger. There was a rattle of wheels behind them.

Judson Green pivoted on his heel, with the thought of runaways springing up to his mind. But Mr. Cassidy, wiser in the tricks of the hunter and the hunted, made a darting grab with both hands for the shoulder which he had released. His greedy fingers closed on space. The suspect, with a desperate and unexpected agility, had given his body a backward nimble fling that carried him sprawling through a gap between the ornamental bushes fringing the park sward. Instantly he was up and, with never a backward glance, was running across the lower, narrower verge of Indian Field, making for the trees which edged it thickly upon the east. He could run fast, too. Nor were there men in front to hinder him, since because of the rain, coming down in a thin drizzle, the wide, sloped stretch of turf was for this once bare of ball-players and cricket teams.

Upon the second, Cassidy was through the hedge gap and hot-foot after him, with Green coming along only a pace or two behind. Over his shoulder Cassidy whooped a call for aid to the traffic policeman in the roadway. But that stout person, who had been exiled to these faraway precincts by reason of his increasing girth and a tendency toward fallen arches, only took one or two steps upon his flat feet and then halted, being in doubt as to what it was all about. Before he could make up his mind whether or not to join the chase, it was too late to join it. The fugitive, travelling a straight course, had crossed the field at its narrowest point and had bounded into the fringe of greenery bordering the little lake, heading apparently for the thick swampy place lying between the ball ground and the golf links. The two pursuers, legging along behind, did their best to keep him in sight, but, one thing sure, they were not gaining on him.

As a matter of truth, they were losing. Twice they lost him and twice they spied him again—once crossing a bit of open glade, once weaving in and out among the tree trunks farther on. Then they lost him altogether. Cassidy had shown the better pair of legs at the start of the race, but now his wind began to fail. Panting and blowing fit to shame porpoises, he slackened his speed, falling back inch by inch, while the slighter and younger man took the lead. Green settled to a steady, space-eating jog-trot, all the time watching this way and that. There were singularly few people in sight—only a chronic golfer here and there up on the links—and these incurables merely stared through the rain-drops at him as he forced his way among the thickets below them.

Cassidy, falling farther and farther behind, presently met a mounted policeman ambling his horse along a tree-shaded roadway that crossed the park from east to west, and between gulps for breath told what he knew. Leaning half out of his saddle, the mounted man listened, believed—and acted. Leaving Cassidy behind, he spurred his bay to a walloping gallop, aiming for the northern confines of the park, and as he travelled, he spread the alarm, gathering up for the man-chase such recruits as two park labourers and a park woodchopper and an automobile party of young men, so that presently there was quite a good-sized search party abroad in the woodland.

As for Judson Green, he played his hand out alone. Dripping wet with rain and his own sweat, he emerged from a mile-long thicket upon an asphalted drive that wound interminably under the shouldering ledges of big gray rocks and among tall elms and oaks. Already he had lost his sense of direction, but he ran along the deserted road doggedly, pausing occasionally to peer among the tree trunks for a sight of his man. He thought, once, he heard a shot, but couldn't be sure, the sound seemed so muffled and so far away.

On a venture he left the road, taking to the woods again. He was working through a small green tangle when something caught at his right foot and he was spun about so that he faced the opposite direction from the one in which he had been travelling, and went down upon his hands and knees,

almost touching with his head a big licheny boulder, half buried in vines and grass. Glancing back, he saw what had twisted him off his course and thrown him down—it was an upward-aimed tree-root, stubby and pointed, which had thrust itself through his right shoe lacing. The low shoe had been pulled half-way off his foot, and, under the strain, the silken lace had broken short off.

In the act of raising himself upright, he had straightened to a half-crouch when, just beyond the big green-masked boulder, he saw that which held him petrified in his pose. There, in a huddle among the shrubs, where he would never have seen it except for the chance shifting-about of his gaze, was the body of a man lying face downward the head hidden under the upturned skirts of the coat.

He went to it and turned it over. It was the body of the man he sought—Maxwell—and there was a revolver in Maxwell's right hand and a hole in Maxwell's right temple, and Maxwell was dead.

Judson Green stood up and waited for the other pursuers. He had won a hundred-dollar bet and Cassidy had lost a thousand-dollar reward.

CHAPTER III

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

WHEN Judge Priest, on this particular morning, came puffing into his chambers at the courthouse, looking, with his broad beam and in his costume of flappy, loose white ducks, a good deal like an old-fashioned full-rigger with all sails set, his black shadow, Jeff Poindexter, had already finished the job of putting the quarters to rights for the day. The cedar water bucket had been properly replenished; the upper flange of a fifteen-cent chunk of ice protruded above the rim of the bucket; and alongside, on the appointed nail, hung the gourd dipper that the master always used. The floor had been swept, except, of course, in the corners and underneath things; there were evidences, in streaky scrolls of fine grit particles upon various flat surfaces, that a dusting brush had been more or less sparingly employed. A spray of trumpet flowers, plucked from the vine that grew outside the window, had been draped over the framed steel engraving of President Davis and his Cabinet upon the wall; and on the top of the big square desk in the middle of the room, where a small section of cleared green-blotter space formed an oasis in a dry and arid desert of cluttered law journals and dusty documents, the morning's mail rested in a little heap.

Having placed his old cotton umbrella in a corner, having removed his coat and hung it upon a peg behind the hall door, and having seen to it that a palm-leaf fan was in arm's reach should he require it, the Judge, in his billowy white shirt, sat down at his desk and gave his attention to his letters. There was an invitation from the Hylan B. Gracey Camp of Confederate Veterans of Eddyburg, asking him to deliver the chief oration at the annual reunion, to be held at Mineral Springs on the twelfth day of the following month; an official notice from the clerk of the Court of Appeals concerning the affirmation of a judgment that had been handed down by Judge Priest at the preceding term of his own court; a bill for five pounds of a special brand of smoking tobacco; a notice of a lodge meeting—altogether quite a sizable batch of mail.

At the bottom of the pile he came upon a long envelope addressed to him by his title, instead of by his name, and bearing on its upper right-hand corner several foreign-looking stamps; they were British stamps, he saw, on closer examination.

To the best of his recollection it had been a good long time since Judge Priest had had a communication by post from overseas. He adjusted his steel-bowed spectacles, ripped the wrapper with care and shook out the contents. There appeared to be several inclosures; in fact, there were several—a sheaf of printed forms, a document with seals attached, and a letter that covered two sheets of paper with typewritten lines. To the letter the recipient gave consideration first. Before he reached the end of the opening paragraph he uttered a profound grunt of surprise; his reading of the rest was frequently punctuated by small exclamations, his face meantime puckering up in interested lines. At the conclusion, when he came to the signature, he indulged himself in a soft low whistle. He read the letter all through again, and after that he examined the forms and the document which had accompanied it.

Chuckling under his breath, he wriggled himself free from the snug embrace of his chair arms and waddled out of his own office and down the long bare empty hall to the office of Sheriff Giles Birdsong. Within, that competent functionary, Deputy Sheriff Breck Quarles, sat at ease in his shirt sleeves, engaged, with the smaller blade of his pocketknife, in performing upon his finger nails an operation that combined the fine deftness of the manicure with the less delicate art of the farrier. At the sight of the Judge in the open doorway he hastily withdrew from a tabletop, where they rested, a pair of long thin legs, and rose.

"Mornin', Breck," said Judge Priest to the other's salutation. "No, thank you, son, I won't come in; but I've got a little job fur you. I wisht, ef you ain't too busy, that you'd step down the street and see ef you can't find Peep O'Day fur me and fetch him back here with you. It won't take you long, will it?"

"No, suh—not very." Mr. Quarles reached for his hat and snuggled his shoulder holster back inside his unbuttoned waistcoat. "He'll most likely be down round Gafford's stable. Whut's Old Peep been doin', Judge—gettin' himself in contempt of court or somethin'?" He grinned, asking the question with the air of one making a little joke.

"No," vouchsafed the Judge; "he ain't done nothin'. But he's about to have somethin' of a highly onusual nature done to him. You jest tell him I'm wishful to see him right away—that'll be sufficient, I reckon."

Without making further explanation, Judge Priest returned to his chambers and for the third time read the letter from foreign parts. Court was not in session, and the hour was early and the weather was hot; nobody interrupted him. Perhaps fifteen minutes passed. Mr. Quarles poked his head in at the door.

"I found him, suh," the deputy stated. "He's outside here in the hall."

"Much obliged to you, son," said Judge Priest. "Send him on in, will you, please?"

The head was withdrawn; its owner lingered out of sight of His Honour, but within earshot. It was hard to figure the presiding judge of the First Judicial District of the state of Kentucky as having business with Peep O'Day; and, though Mr. Quarles was no eavesdropper, still he felt a pardonable curiosity in whatsoever might transpire. As he feigned an absorbed interest in a tax notice, which was pasted on a blackboard just outside the office door, there entered the presence of the Judge a man who seemingly was but a few years younger than the Judge himself—a man who looked to be somewhere between sixty-five and seventy. There is a look that you may have seen in the eyes of ownerless but well-intentioned dogs—dogs that, expecting kicks as their daily portion, are humbly grateful for kind words and stray bones; dogs that are fairly yearning to be adopted by somebody—by anybody—being prepared to give to such a benefactor a most faithful doglike devotion in return.

This look, which is fairly common among masterless and homeless dogs, is rare among humans; still, once in a while you do find it there too. The man who now timidly shuffled himself across the threshold of Judge Priest's office had such a look out of his eyes. He had a long, simple face, partly inclosed in grey whiskers. Four dollars would have been a sufficient price to pay for the garments he stood in, including the wrecked hat he held in his hands and the broken, misshaped shoes on his feet. A purchaser who gave more than four dollars for the whole in its present state of decrepitude would have been but a poor hand at bargaining.

The man who wore this outfit coughed in an embarrassed fashion and halted, fumbling his ruinous hat in his hands.

"Howdy do?" said Judge Priest heartily. "Come in!"

The other diffidently advanced himself a yard or two.

"Excuse me, suh," he said apologetically; "but this here Breck Quarles he come after me and he said ez how you wanted to see me. 'Twas him ez brung me here, suh."

Faintly underlying the drawl of the speaker was just a suspicion—a mere trace, as you might say—of a labial softness that belongs solely and exclusively to the children, and in a diminishing degree to the grandchildren, of native-born sons and daughters of a certain small green isle in the sea. It was not so much a suggestion of a brogue as it was the suggestion of the ghost of a brogue; a brogue almost extinguished, almost obliterated, and yet persisting through the generations—South of Ireland struggling beneath south of Mason and Dixon's Line.

"Yes," said the Judge; "that's right. I do want to see you." The tone was one that he might employ in addressing a bashful child. "Set down there and make yourself at home."

The newcomer obeyed to the extent of perching himself on the extreme forward edge of a chair. His feet shuffled uneasily where they were drawn up against the cross rung of the chair.

The Judge reared well back, studying his visitor over the tops of his glasses with rather a quizzical look. In one hand he balanced the large envelope which had come to him that morning.

"Seems to me I heared somewheres, years back, that your regular Christian name was Paul—is that right?" he asked.

"Shorely is, suh," assented the ragged man, surprised and plainly grateful that one holding a supremely high position in the community should vouchsafe to remember a fact relating to so inconsequent an atom as himself. "But I ain't heared it fur so long I come mighty nigh furgittin' it sometimes, myself. You see, Judge Priest, when I wasn't nothin' but jest a shaver folks started in to callin' me Peep—on account of my last name bein' O'Day, I reckon. They been callin' me so ever since. 'Fust off, 'twas Little Peep, and then jest plain Peep; and now it's got to be Old Peep. But my real entitled name is Paul, jest like you said, Judge—Paul Felix O'Day."

"Uh-huh! And wasn't your father's name Philip and your mother's name Katherine Dwyer O'Day?"

"To the best of my recollection that's partly so, too, suh. They both of 'em up and died when I was a baby, long before I could remember anything a-tall. But they always told me my paw's name was Phil, or Philip. Only my maw's name wasn't Kath—Kath—wasn't whut you jest now called it, Judge. It was plain Kate."

"Kate or Katherine—it makes no great difference," explained Judge Priest. "I reckon the record is straight this fur. And now think hard and see ef you kin ever remember hearin' of an uncle named Daniel O'Day—your father's brother."

The answer was a shake of the tousled head.

"I don't know nothin' about my people. I only jest know they come over from some place with a funny name in the Old Country before I was born. The onliest kin I ever had over here was that there no-'count triflin' nephew of mine—Perce Dwyer—him that uster hang round this town. I reckon you call him to mind, Judge?"

The old Judge nodded before continuing:

"All the same, I reckon there ain't no manner of doubt but whut you had an uncle of the name of Daniel. All the evidences would seem to p'int that way. Accordin' to the proofs, this here Uncle Daniel of yours lived in a little town called Kilmare, in Ireland." He glanced at one of the papers that lay on his desktop; then added in a casual tone: "Tell me, Peep, whut are you doin' now fur a livin'?"

The object of this examination grinned a faint grin of extenuation.

"Well, suh, I'm knockin' about, doin' the best I kin—which ain't much. I help out round Gafford's liver' stable, and Pete Gafford he lets me sleep in a little room behind the feed room, and his wife she gives me my vittles. Oncet in a while I git a chancet to do odd jobs fur folks round town—cuttin' weeds and splittin' stove wood and packin' in coal, and sech ez that."

"Not much money in it, is there?"

"No, suh; not much. Folks is more prone to offer me old clothes than they are to pay me in cash. Still, I manage to git along. I don't live very fancy; but, then, I don't starve, and that's more'n some kin say."

"Peep, whut was the most money you ever had in your life—at one time?"

Peep scratched with a freckled hand at his thatch of faded whitish hair to stimulate recollection.

"I reckon not more'n six bits at any one time, suh. Seems like I've sorter got the knack of livin' without money."

"Well, Peep, sech bein' the case, whut would you say ef I was to tell you that you're a rich man?"

The answer came slowly.

"I reckon, suh, ef it didn't sound disrespectful, I'd say you was prankin' with me—makin' fun of me, suh."

Judge Priest bent forward in his chair.

"I'm not prankin' with you. It's my pleasant duty to inform you that at this moment you are the rightful owner of eight thousand pounds."

"Pounds of whut, Judge?" The tone expressed a heavy incredulity.

"Why, pounds in money."

Outside, in the hall, with one ear held conveniently near the crack in the door, Deputy Sheriff Quarles gave a violent start; and then, at once, was torn between a desire to stay and hear more and an urge to hurry forth and spread the unbelievable tidings. After the briefest of struggles the latter inclination won; this news was too marvellously good to keep; surely a harbinger and a herald was needed to spread it broadcast.

Mr. Quarles tiptoed rapidly down the hall. When he reached the sidewalk the volunteer bearer of a miraculous tale fairly ran. As for the man who sat facing the Judge, he merely stared in a dull bewilderment.

"Judge," he said at length, "eight thousand pounds of money oughter make a powerful big pile, oughten it?"

"It wouldn't weigh quite that much ef you put it on the scales," explained His Honour painstakingly. "I mean pounds sterlin'—English money. Near ez I kin figger offhand, it comes in our money to somewheres between thirty-five and forty thousand dollars—nearer forty than thirty-five. And it's all yours, Peep—every red cent of it."

"Excuse me, suh, and not meanin' to contradict you, or nothin' like that; but I reckon there must be some mistake. Why, Judge, I don't scursely know anybody that's ez wealthy ez all that, let alone anybody that'd give me sech a lot of money."

"Listen, Peep: This here letter I'm holdin' in my hand came to me by to-day's mail—jest a little spell ago. It's frum Ireland—from the town of Kilmare, where your people came frum. It was sent to me by a firm of barristers in that town—lawyers we'd call 'em. In this letter they ask me to find you and to tell you whut's happened. It seems, frum whut they write, that your uncle, by name Daniel O'Day, died not very long ago without issue—that is to say, without leavin' any children of his own, and without makin' any will.

"It appears he had eight thousand pounds saved up. Ever since he died those lawyers and some other folks over there in Ireland have been tryin' to find out who that money should go to. They learnt in some way that your father and your mother settled in this town a mighty long time ago, and that they died here and left one son, which is you. All the rest of the family over there in Ireland have already died out, it seems; that natchelly makes you the next of kin and the heir at law, which means that all your uncle's money comes direct to you.

"So, Peep, you're a wealthy man in your own name. That's the news I had to tell you. Allow me to congratulate you on your good fortune."

The beneficiary rose to his feet, seeming not to see the hand the old Judge had extended across the desktop toward him. On his face, of a sudden, was a queer, eager look. It was as though he foresaw the coming true of long-cherished and heretofore unattainable visions.

"Have you got it here, suh?"

He glanced about him as though expecting to see a bulky bundle. Judge Priest smiled.

"Oh, no; they didn't send it along with the letter—that wouldn't be regular. There's quite a lot of things to be done fust. There'll be some proofs to be got up and sworn to before a man called a British consul; and likely there'll be a lot of papers that you'll have to sign; and then all the papers and the proofs and things will be sent across the ocean. And, after some fees are paid out over there—why, then you'll git your inheritance."

The rapt look faded from the strained face, leaving it downcast. "I'm afeared, then, I won't be able to claim that there money," he said forlornly.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know how to sign my own name. Raised the way I was, I never got no book learnin'. I can't neither read nor write."

Compassion shadowed the Judge's chubby face; and compassion was in his voice as he made answer:

"You don't need to worry about that part of it. You can make your mark—just a cross mark on the paper, with witnesses present—like this."

He took up a pen, dipped it in the ink-well and illustrated his meaning.

"Yes, suh; I'm glad it kin be done thataway. I always wisht I knowed how to read big print and spell my own name out. I ast a feller oncet to write my name out fur me in plain letters on a piece of paper. I was aimin' to learn to copy it off; but I showed it to one of the hands at the liver' stable and he busted out laughin'. And then I come to find out this here feller had tricked me fur to make game of me. He hadn't wrote my name out a-tall—he'd wrote some dirty words instid. So after that I give up tryin' to educate myself. That was several years back and I ain't tried sence. Now I reckon I'm too old to learn. . . . I wonder, suh—I wonder ef it'll be very long before that there money gits here and I begin to have the spendin' of it?"

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