

COBB IRVIN SHREWSBURY

THE ESCAPE OF MR.
TRIMM

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Cobb I.

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Irvin S. Cobb

The Escape of Mr. Trimm / His Plight and other Plights

I

THE ESCAPE OF MR. TRIMM

Mr. Trimm, recently president of the late Thirteenth National Bank, was taking a trip which was different in a number of ways from any he had ever taken. To begin with, he was used to parlor cars and Pullmans and even luxurious private cars when he went anywhere; whereas now he rode with a most mixed company in a dusty, smelly day coach. In the second place, his traveling companion was not such a one as Mr. Trimm would have chosen had the choice been left to him, being a stupid-looking German-American with a drooping, yellow mustache. And in the third place, Mr. Trimm's plump white hands were folded in his lap, held in a close and enforced companionship by a new and shiny pair of Bean's Latest Model Little Giant handcuffs. Mr. Trimm was on his way to the Federal penitentiary to serve twelve years at hard labor for breaking, one way or another, about all the laws that are presumed to govern national banks.

All the time Mr. Trimm was in the Tombs, fighting for a new trial, a certain question had lain in his mind unasked and unanswered. Through the seven months of his stay in the jail that question had been always at the back part of his head, ticking away there like a little watch that never needed winding. A dozen times a day it would pop into his thoughts and then go away, only to come back again.

When Copley was taken to the penitentiary—Copley being the cashier who got off with a lighter sentence because the judge and jury held him to be no more than a blind accomplice in the wrecking of the Thirteenth National—Mr. Trimm read closely every line that the papers carried about Copley's departure. But none of them had seen fit to give the young cashier more than a short and colorless paragraph. For Copley was only a small figure in the big intrigue that had startled the country; Copley didn't have the money to hire big lawyers to carry his appeal to the higher courts for him; Copley's wife was keeping boarders; and as for Copley himself, he had been wearing stripes several months now.

With Mr. Trimm it had been vastly different. From the very beginning he had held the public eye. His bearing in court when the jury came in with their judgment; his cold defiance when the judge, in pronouncing sentence, mercilessly arraigned him and the system of finance for which he stood; the manner of his life in the Tombs; his spectacular fight to beat the verdict, had all been worth columns of newspaper space. If Mr. Trimm had been a popular poisoner, or a society woman named as co-respondent in a sensational divorce suit, the papers could not have been more generous in their space allotments. And Mr. Trimm in his cell had read all of it with smiling contempt, even to the semi-hysterical outpourings of the lady special writers who called him The Iron Man of Wall Street and undertook to analyze his emotions—and missed the mark by a thousand miles or two.

Things had been smoothed as much as possible for him in the Tombs, for money and the power of it will go far toward ironing out even the corrugated routine of that big jail. He had a large cell to himself in the airiest, brightest corridor. His meals were served by a caterer from outside. Although he ate them without knife or fork, he soon learned that a spoon and the fingers can accomplish a good deal when backed by a good appetite, and Mr. Trimm's appetite was uniformly good. The warden and his underlings had been models of official kindness; the newspapers had sent their brightest young men to interview him whenever he felt like talking, which wasn't often; and surely his lawyers had done all in his behalf that money—a great deal of money—could do. Perhaps it was because of these things

that Mr. Trimm had never been able to bring himself to realize that he was the Hobart W. Trimm who had been sentenced to the Federal prison; it seemed to him, somehow, that he, personally, was merely a spectator standing to one side watching the fight of another man to dodge the penitentiary.

However, he didn't fail to give the other man the advantage of every chance that money would buy. This sense of aloofness to the whole thing had persisted even when his personal lawyer came to him one night in the early fall and told him that the court of last possible resort had denied the last possible motion. Mr. Trimm cut the lawyer short with a shake of his head as the other began saying something about the chances of a pardon from the President. Mr. Trimm wasn't in the habit of letting men deceive him with idle words. No President would pardon him, and he knew it.

"Never mind that, Walling," he said steadily, when the lawyer offered to come to see him again before he started for prison the next day. "If you'll see that a drawing-room on the train is reserved for me—for us, I mean—and all that sort of thing, I'll not detain you any further. I have a good many things to do tonight. Good night."

"Such a man, such a man," said Walling to himself as he climbed into his car; "all chilled steel and brains. And they are going to lock that brain up for twelve years. It's a crime," said Walling, and shook his head. Walling always said it was a crime when they sent a client of his to prison. To his credit be it said, though, they sent very few of them there. Walling made as high as fifty thousand a year at criminal law. Some of it was very criminal law indeed. His specialty was picking holes in the statutes faster than the legislature could make them and provide them and putty them up with amendments. This was the first case he had lost in a good long time.

When Jerry, the turnkey, came for him in the morning Mr. Trimm had made as careful a toilet as the limited means at his command permitted, and he had eaten a hearty breakfast and was ready to go, all but putting on his hat. Looking the picture of well-groomed, close-buttoned, iron-gray middle age, Mr. Trimm followed the turnkey through the long corridor and down the winding iron stairs to the warden's office. He gave no heed to the curious eyes that followed him through the barred doors of many cells; his feet rang briskly on the flags.

The warden, Hallam, was there in the private office with another man, a tall, raw-boned man with a drooping, straw-colored mustache and the unmistakable look about him of the police officer. Mr. Trimm knew without being told that this was the man who would take him to prison. The stranger was standing at a desk, signing some papers.

"Sit down, please, Mr. Trimm," said the warden with a nervous cordiality. "Be through here in just one minute. This is Deputy Marshal Meyers," he added.

Mr. Trimm started to tell this Mr. Meyers he was glad to meet him, but caught himself and merely nodded. The man stared at him with neither interest nor curiosity in his dull blue eyes. The warden moved over toward the door.

"Mr. Trimm," he said, clearing his throat, "I took the liberty of calling a cab to take you gents up to the Grand Central. It's out front now. But there's a big crowd of reporters and photographers and a lot of other people waiting, and if I was you I'd slip out the back way—one of my men will open the yard gate for you—and jump aboard the subway down at Worth Street. Then you'll miss those fellows."

"Thank you, Warden—very kind of you," said Mr. Trimm in that crisp, businesslike way of his. He had been crisp and businesslike all his life. He heard a door opening softly behind him, and when he turned to look he saw the warden slipping out, furtively, in almost an embarrassed fashion.

"Well," said Meyers, "all ready?"

"Yes," said Mr. Trimm, and he made as if to rise.

"Wait one minute," said Meyers.

He half turned his back on Mr. Trimm and fumbled at the side pocket of his ill-hanging coat. Something inside of Mr. Trimm gave the least little jump, and the question that had ticked away so

busily all those months began to buzz, buzz in his ears; but it was only a handkerchief the man was getting out. Doubtless he was going to mop his face.

He didn't mop his face, though. He unrolled the handkerchief slowly, as if it contained something immensely fragile and valuable, and then, thrusting it back in his pocket, he faced Mr. Trimm. He was carrying in his hands a pair of handcuffs that hung open-jawed. The jaws had little notches in them, like teeth that could bite. The question that had ticked in Mr. Trimm's head was answered at last—in the sight of these steel things with their notched jaws.

Mr. Trimm stood up and, with a movement as near to hesitation as he had ever been guilty of in his life, held out his hands, backs upward.

“I guess you're new at this kind of thing,” said Meyers, grinning. “This here way—one at a time.”

He took hold of Mr. Trimm's right hand, turned it sideways and settled one of the steel cuffs over the top of the wrist, flipping the notched jaw up from beneath and pressing it in so that it locked automatically with a brisk little click. Slipping the locked cuff back and forth on Mr. Trimm's lower arm like a man adjusting a part of machinery, and then bringing the left hand up to meet the right, he treated it the same way. Then he stepped back.

Mr. Trimm hadn't meant to protest. The word came unbidden.

“This—this isn't necessary, is it?” he asked in a voice that was husky and didn't seem to belong to him.

“Yep,” said Meyers. “Standin' orders is play no favorites and take no chances. But you won't find them things uncomfortable. Lightest pair there was in the office, and I fixed 'em plenty loose.”

For half a minute Mr. Trimm stood like a rooster hypnotized by a chalkmark, his arms extended, his eyes set on his bonds. His hands had fallen perhaps four inches apart, and in the space between his wrists a little chain was stretched taut. In the mounting tumult that filled his brain there sprang before Mr. Trimm's consciousness a phrase he had heard or read somewhere, the title of a story or, perhaps, it was a headline—The Grips of the Law. The Grips of the Law were upon Mr. Trimm—he felt them now for the first time in these shiny wristlets and this bit of chain that bound his wrists and filled his whole body with a strange, sinking feeling that made him physically sick. A sudden sweat beaded out on Mr. Trimm's face, turning it slick and wet.

He had a handkerchief, a fine linen handkerchief with a hemstitched border and a monogram on it, in the upper breast pocket of his buttoned coat. He tried to reach it. His hands went up, twisting awkwardly like crab claws. The fingers of both plucked out the handkerchief. Holding it so, Mr. Trimm mopped the sweat away. The links of the handcuffs fell in upon one another and lengthened out again at each movement, filling the room with a smart little sound.

He got the handkerchief stowed away with the same clumsiness. He raised the manacled hands to his hat brim, gave it a downward pull that brought it over his face and then, letting his short arms slide down upon his plump stomach, he faced the man who had put the fetters upon him, squaring his shoulders back. But it was hard, somehow, for him to square his shoulders—perhaps because of his hands being drawn so closely together. And his eyes would waver and fall upon his wrists. Mr. Trimm had a feeling that the skin must be stretched very tight on his jawbones and his forehead.

“Isn't there some way to hide these—these things?”

He began by blurting and ended by faltering it. His hands shuffled together, one over, then under the other.

“Here's a way,” said Meyers. “This'll help.”

He bestirred himself, folding one of the chained hands upon the other, tugging at the white linen cuffs and drawing the coat sleeves of his prisoner down over the bonds as far as the chain would let them come.

“There's the notion,” he said. “Just do that-a-way and them bracelets won't hardly show a-tall. Ready? Let's be movin', then.”

But handcuffs were never meant to be hidden. Merely a pair of steel rings clamped to one's wrists and coupled together with a scrap of chain, but they'll twist your arms and hamper the movements of your body in a way to constantly catch the eye of the passer-by. When a man is coming toward you, you can tell that he is handcuffed before you see the cuffs.

Mr. Trimm was never able to recall afterward exactly how he got out of the Tombs. He had a confused memory of a gate that was swung open by some one whom Mr. Trimm saw only from the feet to the waist; then he and his companion were out on Lafayette Street, speeding south toward the subway entrance at Worth Street, two blocks below, with the marshal's hand cupped under Mr. Trimm's right elbow and Mr. Trimm's plump legs almost trotting in their haste. For a moment it looked as if the warden's well-meant artifice would serve them.

But New York reporters are up to the tricks of people who want to evade them. At the sight of them a sentry reporter on the corner shouted a warning which was instantly caught up and passed on by another picket stationed half-way down the block; and around the wall of the Tombs came pelting a flying mob of newspaper photographers and reporters, with a choice rabble behind them. Foot passengers took up the chase, not knowing what it was about, but sensing a free show. Truckmen halted their teams, jumped down from their wagon seats and joined in. A man-chase is one of the pleasantest outdoor sports that a big city like New York can offer its people.

Fairly running now, the manacled banker and the deputy marshal shot down the winding steps into the subway a good ten yards ahead of the foremost pursuers. But there was one delay, while Meyers skirmished with his free hand in his trousers' pocket for a dime for the tickets, and another before a northbound local rolled into the station. Shouted at, jeered at, shoved this way and that, panting in gulping breaths, for he was stout by nature and staled by lack of exercise, Mr. Trimm, with Meyers clutching him by the arm, was fairly shot aboard one of the cars, at the apex of a human wedge. The astonished guard sensed the situation as the scrooging, shoving, noisy wave rolled across the platform toward the doors which he had opened and, thrusting the officer and his prisoner into the narrow platform space behind him, he tried to form with his body a barrier against those who came jamming in.

It didn't do any good. He was brushed away, protesting and blustering. The excitement spread through the train, and men, and even women, left their seats, overflowing the aisles.

There is no crueller thing than a city crowd, all eyes and morbid curiosity. But Mr. Trimm didn't see the staring eyes on that ride to the Grand Central. What he saw was many shifting feet and a hedge of legs shutting him in closely—those and the things on his wrists. What the eyes of the crowd saw was a small, stout man who, for all his bulk, seemed to have dried up inside his clothes so that they bagged on him some places and bulged others, with his head tucked on his chest, his hat over his face and his fingers straining to hold his coat sleeves down over a pair of steel bracelets.

Mr. Trimm gave mental thanks to a Deity whose existence he thought he had forgotten when the gate of the train-shed clanged behind him, shutting out the mob that had come with them all the way. Cameras had been shoved in his face like gun muzzles, reporters had scuttled alongside him, dodging under Meyers' fending arm to shout questions in his ears. He had neither spoken nor looked at them. The sweat still ran down his face, so that when finally he raised his head in the comparative quiet of the train-shed his skin was a curious gray under the jail paleness like the color of wet wood ashes.

“My lawyer promised to arrange for a compartment—for some private place on the train,” he said to Meyers. “The conductor ought to know.”

They were the first words he had uttered since he left the Tombs. Meyers spoke to a jaunty Pullman conductor who stood alongside the car where they had halted.

“No such reservation,” said the conductor, running through his sheaf of slips, with his eyes shifting from Mr. Trimm's face to Mr. Trimm's hands and back again, as though he couldn't decide which was the more interesting part of him; “must be some mistake. Or else it was for some other train. Too late to change now—we pull out in three minutes.”

“I reckon we better git on the smoker,” said Meyers, “if there's room there.”

Mr. Trimm was steered back again the length of the train through a double row of pop-eyed porters and staring trainmen. At the steps where they stopped the instinct to stretch out one hand and swing himself up by the rail operated automatically and his wrists got a nasty twist. Meyers and a brakeman practically lifted him up the steps and Meyers headed him into a car that was hazy with blue tobacco smoke. He was confused in his gait, almost as if his lower limbs had been fettered, too.

The car was full of shirt-sleeved men who stood up, craning their necks and stumbling over each other in their desire to see him. These men came out into the aisle, so that Meyers had to shove through them.

“This here'll do as well as any, I guess,” said Meyers. He drew Mr. Trimm past him into the seat nearer the window and sat down alongside him on the side next the aisle, settling himself on the stuffy plush seat and breathing deeply, like a man who had got through the hardest part of a not easy job.

“Smoke?” he asked.

Mr. Trimm shook his head without raising it.

“Them cuffs feel plenty easy?” was the deputy's next question. He lifted Mr. Trimm's hands as casually as if they had been his hands and not Mr. Trimm's, and looked at them.

“Seem to be all right,” he said as he let them fall back. “Don't pinch none, I reckon?” There was no answer.

The deputy tugged a minute at his mustache, searching his arid mind. An idea came to him. He drew a newspaper from his pocket, opened it out flat and spread it over Mr. Trimm's lap so that it covered the chained wrists. Almost instantly the train was in motion, moving through the yards.

“Be there in two hours more,” volunteered Meyers. It was late afternoon. They were sliding through woodlands with occasional openings which showed meadows melting into wide, flat lands.

“Want a drink?” said the deputy, next. “No? Well, I guess I'll have a drop myself. Travelin' fills a feller's throat full of dust.” He got up, lurching to the motion of the flying train, and started forward to the water cooler behind the car door. He had gone perhaps two-thirds of the way when Mr. Trimm felt a queer, grinding sensation beneath his feet; it was exactly as though the train were trying to go forward and back at the same time. Almost slowly, it seemed to him, the forward end of the car slued out of its straight course, at the same time tilting up. There was a grinding, roaring, grating sound, and before Mr. Trimm's eyes Meyers vanished, tumbling forward out of sight as the car floor buckled under his feet. Then, as everything—the train, the earth, the sky—all fused together in a great spatter of white and black, Mr. Trimm, plucked from his seat as though a giant hand had him by the collar, shot forward through the air over the seatbacks, his chained hands aloft, clutching wildly. He rolled out of a ragged opening where the smoker had broken in two, flopped gently on the sloping side of the right-of-way and slid easily to the bottom, where he lay quiet and still on his back in a bed of weeds and wild grass, staring straight up.

How many minutes he lay there Mr. Trimm didn't know. It may have been the shrieks of the victims or the glare from the fire that brought him out of the daze. He wriggled his body to a sitting posture, got on his feet, holding his head between his coupled hands, and gazed full-face into the crowning railroad horror of the year.

There were numbers of the passengers who had escaped serious hurt, but for the most part these persons seemed to have gone daft from terror and shock. Some were running aimlessly up and down and some, a few, were pecking feebly with improvised tools at the wreck, an indescribable jumble of ruin, from which there issued cries of mortal agony, and from which, at a point where two locomotives were lying on their sides, jammed together like fighting bucks that had died with locked horns, a tall flame already rippled and spread, sending up a pillar of black smoke that rose straight, poisoning the clear blue of the sky. Nobody paid any attention to Mr. Trimm as he stood swaying upon his feet. There wasn't a scratch on him. His clothes were hardly rumpled, his hat was still on his head. He stood a minute and then, moved by a sudden impulse, he turned round and went

running straight away from the railroad at the best speed his pudgy legs could accomplish, with his arms pumping up and down in front of him and his fingers interlaced. It was a grotesque gait, almost like a rabbit hopping on its hindlegs.

Instantly, almost, the friendly woods growing down to the edge of the fill swallowed him up. He dodged and doubled back and forth among the tree trunks, his small, patent-leathered feet skipping nimbly over the irregular turf, until he stopped for lack of wind in his lungs to carry him another rod. When he had got his breath back Mr. Trimm leaned against a tree and bent his head this way and that, listening. No sound came to his ears except the sleepy calls of birds. As well as Mr. Trimm might judge he had come far into the depths of a considerable woodland. Already the shadows under the low limbs were growing thick and confused as the hurried twilight of early September came on.

Mr. Trimm sat down on a natural cushion of thick green moss between two roots of an oak. The place was clean and soft and sweet-scented. For some little time he sat there motionless, in a sort of mental haze. Then his round body slowly slid down flat upon the moss, his head lolled to one side and, the reaction having come, Mr. Trimm's limbs all relaxed and he went to sleep straightway.

After a while, when the woods were black and still, the half-grown moon came up and, sifting through a chink in the canopy of leaves above, shone down full on Mr. Trimm as he lay snoring gently with his mouth open, and his hands rising and falling on his breast. The moonlight struck upon the Little Giant handcuffs, making them look like quicksilver.

Toward daylight it turned off sharp and cool. The dogwoods which had been a solid color at nightfall now showed pink in one light and green in another, like changeable silk, as the first level rays of the sun came up over the rim of the earth and made long, golden lanes between the tree trunks. Mr. Trimm opened his eyes slowly, hardly sensing for the first moment or two how he came to be lying under a canopy of leaves, and gaped, seeking to stretch his arms. At that he remembered everything; he haunched his shoulders against the tree roots and wriggled himself up to a sitting position where he stayed for a while, letting his mind run over the sequence of events that had brought him where he was and taking inventory of the situation.

Of escape he had no thought. The hue and cry must be out for him before now; doubtless men were already searching for him. It would be better for him to walk in and surrender than to be taken in the woods like an animal escaped from a traveling menagerie. But the mere thought of enduring again what he had already gone through—the thought of being tagged by crowds and stared at, with his fetters on—filled him with a nausea. Nothing that the Federal penitentiary might hold in store for him could equal the black, blind shamefulness of yesterday; he knew that. The thought of the new ignominy that faced him made Mr. Trimm desperate. He had a desire to burrow into the thicket yonder and hide his face and his chained hands.

But perhaps he could get the handcuffs off and so go to meet his captors in some manner of dignity. Strange that the idea hadn't occurred to him before! It seemed to Mr. Trimm that he desired to get his two hands apart more than he had ever desired anything in his whole life before.

The hands had begun naturally to adjust themselves to their enforced companionship, and it wasn't such a very hard matter, though it cost him some painful wrenches and much twisting of the fingers, for Mr. Trimm to get his coat unbuttoned and his eyeglasses in their small leather case out of his upper waistcoat pocket. With the glasses on his nose he subjected his bonds to a critical examination. Each rounded steel band ran unbroken except for the smooth, almost jointless hinge and the small lock which sat perched on the back of the wrist in a little rounded excrescence like a steel wart. In the flat center of each lock was a small keyhole and alongside of it a notched nub, the nub being sunk in a minute depression. On the inner side, underneath, the cuffs slid into themselves—two notches on each showing where the jaws might be tightened to fit a smaller hand than his—and right over the large blue veins in the middle of the wrists were swivel links, shackle-bolted to the cuffs and connected by a flat, slightly larger middle link, giving the hands a palm-to-palm play of not

more than four or five inches. The cuffs did not hurt—even after so many hours there was no actual discomfort from them and the flesh beneath them was hardly reddened.

But it didn't take Mr. Trimm long to find out that they were not to be got off. He tugged and pulled, trying with his fingers for a purchase. All he did was to chafe his skin and make his wrists throb with pain. The cuffs would go forward just so far, then the little humps of bone above the hands would catch and hold them.

Mr. Trimm was not a man to waste time in the pursuit of the obviously hopeless. Presently he stood up, shook himself and started off at a fair gait through the woods. The sun was up now and the turf was all dappled with lights and shadows, and about him much small, furtive wild life was stirring. He stepped along briskly, a strange figure for that green solitude, with his correct city garb and the glint of the steel at his sleeve ends.

Presently he heard the long-drawn, quavering, banshee wail of a locomotive. The sound came from almost behind him, in an opposite direction from where he supposed the track to be. So he turned around and went back the other way. He crossed a half-dried-up runlet and climbed a small hill, neither of which he remembered having met in his night from the wreck, and in a little while he came out upon the railroad. To the north a little distance the rails ran round a curve. To the south, where the diminishing rails running through the unbroken woodland met in a long, shiny V, he could see a big smoke smudge against the horizon. This smoke Mr. Trimm knew must come from the wreck—which was still burning, evidently. As nearly as he could judge he had come out of cover at least two miles above it. After a moment's consideration he decided to go south toward the wreck. Soon he could distinguish small dots like ants moving in and out about the black spot, and he knew these dots must be men.

A whining, whirring sound came along the rails to him from behind. He faced about just as a handcar shot out around the curve from the north, moving with amazing rapidity under the strokes of four men at the pumps. Other men, laborers to judge by their blue overalls, were sitting on the edges of the car with their feet dangling. For the second time within twelve hours impulse ruled Mr. Trimm, who wasn't given to impulses normally. He made a jump off the right-of-way, and as the handcar flashed by he watched its flight from the covert of a weed tangle.

But even as the handcar was passing him Mr. Trimm regretted his hastiness. He must surrender himself sooner or later; why not to these overalled laborers, since it was a thing that had to be done? He slid out of hiding and came trotting back to the tracks. Already the handcar was a hundred yards away, flitting into distance like some big, wonderfully fast bug, the figures of the men at the pumps rising and falling with a walking-beam regularity. As he stood watching them fade away and minded to try hailing them, yet still hesitating against his judgment, Mr. Trimm saw something white drop from the hands of one of the blue-clad figures on the handcar, unfold into a newspaper and come fluttering back along the tracks toward him. Just as he, starting doggedly ahead, met it, the little ground breeze that had carried it along died out and the paper dropped and flattened right in front of him. The front page was uppermost and he knew it must be of that morning's issue, for across the column tops ran the flaring headline: "Twenty Dead in Frightful Collision."

Squatting on the cindered track, Mr. Trimm patted the crumpled sheet flat with his hands. His eyes dropped from the first of the glaring captions to the second, to the next—and then his heart gave a great bound inside of him and, clutching up the newspaper to his breast, he bounded off the tracks back into another thicket and huddled there with the paper spread on the earth in front of him, reading by gulps while the chain that linked wrist to wrist tinkled to the tremors running through him. What he had seen first, in staring black-face type, was his own name leading the list of known dead, and what he saw now, broken up into choppy paragraphs and done in the nervous English of a trained reporter throwing a great news story together to catch an edition, but telling a clear enough story nevertheless, was a narrative in which his name recurred again and again. The body of the United States deputy marshal, Meyers, frightfully crushed, had been taken from the wreckage of the smoker

—so the double-led story ran—and near to Meyers another body, with features burned beyond recognition, yet still retaining certain distinguishing marks of measurement and contour, had been found and identified as that of Hobart W. Trimm, the convicted banker. The bodies of these two, with eighteen other mangled dead, had been removed to a town called Westfield, from which town of Westfield the account of the disaster had been telegraphed to the New York paper. In another column farther along was more about Banker Trimm; facts about his soiled, selfish, greedy, successful life, his great fortune, his trial, and a statement that, lacking any close kin to claim his body, his lawyers had been notified.

Mr. Trimm read the account through to the end, and as he read the sense of dominant, masterful self-control came back to him in waves. He got up, taking the paper with him, and went back into the deeper woods, moving warily and watchfully. As he went his mind, trained to take hold of problems and wring the essence out of them, was busy. Of the charred, grisly thing in the improvised morgue at Westfield, wherever that might be, Mr. Trimm took no heed nor wasted any pity. All his life he had used live men to work his will, with no thought of what might come to them afterward. The living had served him, why not the dead?

He had other things to think of than this dead proxy of his. He was as good as free! There would be no hunt for him now; no alarm out, no posses combing every scrap of cover for a famous criminal turned fugitive. He had only to lie quiet a few days, somewhere, then get in secret touch with Walling. Walling would do anything for money. And he had the money—four millions and more, cannily saved from the crash that had ruined so many others.

He would alter his personal appearance, change his name—he thought of Duvall, which was his mother's name—and with Walling's aid he would get out of the country and into some other country where a man might live like a prince on four millions or the fractional part of it. He thought of South America, of South Africa, of a private yacht swinging through the little frequented islands of the South Seas. All that the law had tried to take from him would be given back. Walling would work out the details of the escape—and make it safe and sure—trust Walling for those things. On one side was the prison, with its promise of twelve grinding years sliced out of the very heart of his life; on the other, freedom, ease, security, even power. Through Mr. Trimm's mind tumbled thoughts of concessions, enterprises, privileges—the back corners of the globe were full of possibilities for the right man. And between this prospect and Mr. Trimm there stood nothing in the way, nothing but—

Mr. Trimm's eyes fell upon his bound hands. Snug-fitting, shiny steel bands irked his wrists. The Grips of the Law were still upon him.

But only in a way of speaking. It was preposterous, unbelievable, altogether out of the question that a man with four millions salted down and stored away, a man who all his life had been used to grappling with the big things and wrestling them down into submission, a man whose luck had come to be a byword—and had not it held good even in this last emergency?—would be balked by puny scraps of forged steel and a trumpery lock or two. Why, these cuffs were no thicker than the gold bands that Mr. Trimm had seen on the arms of overdressed women at the opera. The chain that joined them was no larger and, probably, no stronger than the chains which Mr. Trimm's chauffeur wrapped around the tires of the touring car in winter to keep the wheels from skidding on the slush. There would be a way, surely, for Mr. Trimm to free himself from these things. There must be—that was all there was to it.

Mr. Trimm looked himself over. His clothes were not badly rumpled; his patent-leather boots were scarcely scratched. Without the handcuffs he could pass unnoticed anywhere. By night then he must be free of them and on his way to some small inland city, to stay quiet there until the guarded telegram that he would send in cipher had reached Walling. There in the woods by himself Mr. Trimm no longer felt the ignominy of his bonds; he felt only the temporary embarrassment of them and the need of added precaution until he should have mastered them.

He was once more the unemotional man of affairs who had stood Wall Street on its esteemed head and caught the golden streams that trickled from its pockets. First making sure that he was in a well-screened covert of the woods he set about exploring all his pockets. The coat pockets were comparatively easy, now that he had got used to using two hands where one had always served, but it cost him a lot of twisting of his body and some pain to his mistreated wrist bones to bring forth the contents of his trousers' pockets. The chain kinked time and again as he groped with the undermost hand for the openings; his dumpy, pudgy form writhed grotesquely. But finally he finished. The search produced four cigars somewhat crumpled and frayed; some matches in a gun-metal case, a silver cigar cutter, two five-dollar bills, a handful of silver chicken feed, the leather case of the eyeglasses, a couple of quill toothpicks, a gold watch with a dangling fob, a notebook and some papers. Mr. Trimm ranged these things in a neat row upon a log, like a watchmaker setting out his kit, and took swift inventory of them. Some he eliminated from his design, stowing them back in the pockets easiest to reach. He kept for present employment the match safe, the cigar cutter and the watch.

This place where he had halted would suit his present purpose well, he decided. It was where an uprooted tree, fallen across an incurving bank, made a snug little recess that was closed in on three sides. Spreading the newspaper on the turf to save his knees from soiling, he knelt and set to his task. For the time he felt neither hunger nor thirst. He had found out during his earlier experiments that the nails of his little fingers, which were trimmed to a point, could invade the keyholes in the little steel warts on the backs of his wrists and touch the locks. The mechanism had even twitched a little bit under the tickle of the nail ends. So, having already smashed the gun-metal match safe under his heel, Mr. Trimm selected a slender-pointed bit from among its fragments and got to work, the left hand drawn up under the right, the fingers of the right busy with the lock of the left, the chain tightening and slackening with subdued clinking sounds at each movement.

Mr. Trimm didn't know much about picking a lock. He had got his money by a higher form of burglary that did not require a knowledge of lock picking. Nor as a boy had he been one to play at mechanics. He had let other boys make the toy fluttermills and the wooden traps and the like, and then he had traded for them. He was sorry now that he hadn't given more heed to the mechanical side of things when he was growing up.

He worked with a deliberate slowness, steadily. Nevertheless, it was hot work. The sun rose over the bank and shone on him through the limbs of the uprooted tree. His hat was on the ground alongside of him. The sweat ran down his face, streaking it and wilting his collar flat. The scrap of gun metal kept slipping out of his wet fingers. Down would go the chained hands to scabble in the grass for it, and then the picking would go on again. This happened a good many times. Birds, nervous with the spirit that presages the fall migration, flew back and forth along the creek, almost grazing Mr. Trimm sometimes. A rain crow wove a brown thread in the green warp of the bushes above his head. A chattering red squirrel sat up on a tree limb to scold him. At intervals, distantly, came the cough of laboring trains, showing that the track must have been cleared. There were times when Mr. Trimm thought he felt the lock giving. These times he would work harder.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Trimm lay back against the bank, panting. His face was splotched with red, and the little hollows at the sides of his forehead pulsed rapidly up and down like the bellies of scared tree frogs. The bent outer case of the watch littered a bare patch on the log; its mainspring had gone the way of the fragments of the gun-metal match safe which were lying all about, each a worn-down, twisted wisp of metal. The spring of the eyeglasses had been confiscated long ago and the broken crystals powdered the earth where Mr. Trimm's toes had scraped a smooth patch. The nails of the two little fingers were worn to the quick and splintered down into the raw flesh. There were countless tiny scratches and mars on the locks of the handcuffs, and the steel wristbands were dulled with blood smears and pale-red tarnishes of new rust; but otherwise they were as stanch and strong a pair of Bean's Latest Model Little Giant handcuffs as you'd find in any hardware store anywhere.

The devilish, stupid malignity of the damned things! With an acid oath Mr. Trimm raised his hands and brought them down on the log violently. There was a double click and the bonds tightened painfully, pressing the chafed red skin white. Mr. Trimm snatched up his hands close to his near-sighted eyes and looked. One of the little notches on the under side of each cuff had disappeared. It was as if they were living things that had turned and bitten him for the blow he gave them.

From the time the sun went down there was a tingle of frost in the air. Mr. Trimm didn't sleep much. Under the squeeze of the tightened fetters his wrists throbbed steadily and racking cramps ran through his arms. His stomach felt as though it were tied into knots. The water that he drank from the branch only made his hunger sickness worse. His undergarments, that had been wet with perspiration, clung to him clammy. His middle-aged, tenderly-cared-for body called through every pore for clean linen and soap and water and rest, as his empty insides called for food.

After a while he became so chilled that the demand for warmth conquered his instinct for caution. He felt about him in the darkness, gathering scraps of dead wood, and, after breaking several of the matches that had been in the gun-metal match safe, he managed to strike one and with its tiny flame started a fire. He huddled almost over the fire, coughing when the smoke blew into his face and twisting and pulling at his arms in an effort to get relief from the everlasting cramps. It seemed to him that if he could only get an inch or two more of play for his hands he would be ever so much more comfortable. But he couldn't, of course.

He dozed, finally, sitting crosslegged with his head sunk between his hunched shoulders. A pain in a new place woke him. The fire had burned almost through the thin sole of his right shoe, and as he scrambled to his feet and stamped, the clap of the hot leather flat against his blistered foot almost made him cry out.

Soon after sunrise a boy came riding a horse down a faintly traced footpath along the creek, driving a cow with a bell on her neck ahead of him. Mr. Trimm's ears caught the sound of the clanking bell before either the cow or her herder was in sight, and he limped away, running, skulking through the thick cover. A pendent loop of a wild grapevine, swinging low, caught his hat and flipped it off his head; but Mr. Trimm, imagining pursuit, did not stop to pick it up and went on bareheaded until he had to stop from exhaustion. He saw some dark-red berries on a shrub upon which he had trod, and, stooping, he plucked some of them with his two hands and put three or four in his mouth experimentally. Warned instantly by the acrid, burning taste, he spat the crushed berries out and went on doggedly, following, according to his best judgment, a course parallel to the railroad. It was characteristic of him, a city-raised man, that he took no heed of distances nor of the distinguishing marks of the timber.

Behind a log at the edge of a small clearing in the woods he halted some little time, watching and listening. The clearing had grown up in sumacs and weeds and small saplings and it seemed deserted; certainly it was still. Near the center of it rose the sagging roof of what had been a shack or a shed of some sort. Stooping cautiously, to keep his bare head below the tops of the sumacs, Mr. Trimm made for the ruined shanty and gained it safely. In the midst of the rotted, punky logs that had once formed the walls he began scraping with his feet. Presently he uncovered something. It was a broken-off harrow tooth, scaled like a long, red fish with the crusted rust of years.

Mr. Trimm rested the lower rims of his handcuffs on the edge of an old, broken watering trough, worked the pointed end of the rust-crusted harrow tooth into the flat middle link of the chain as far as it would go, and then with one hand on top of the other he pressed downward with all his might. The pain in his wrists made him stop this at once. The link had not sprung or given in the least, but the twisting pressure had almost broken his wrist bones. He let the harrow tooth fall, knowing that it would never serve as a lever to free him—which, indeed, he had known all along—and sat on the side of the trough, rubbing his wrists and thinking.

He had another idea. It came into his mind as a vague suggestion that fire had certain effects upon certain metals. He kindled a fire of bits of the rotted wood, and when the flames ran together

and rose slender and straight in a single red thread he thrust the chain into it, holding his hands as far apart as possible in the attitude of a player about to catch a bounced ball. But immediately the pain of that grew unendurable too, and he leaped back, jerking his hands away. He had succeeded only in blackening the steel and putting a big water blister on one of his wrists right where the shackle bolt would press upon it.

Where he huddled down in the shelter of one of the fallen walls he noticed, presently, a strand of rusted fence wire still held to half-tottering posts by a pair of blackened staples; it was part of a pen that had been used once for chickens or swine. Mr. Trimm tried the wire with his fingers. It was firm and springy. Rocking and groaning with the pain of it, he nevertheless began sliding the chain back and forth, back and forth along the strand of wire.

Eventually the wire, weakened by age, snapped in two. A tiny shined spot, hardly deep enough to be called a nick, in its tarnished, smudged surface was all the mark that the chain showed.

Staggering a little and putting his feet down unsteadily, Mr. Trimm left the clearing, heading as well as he could tell eastward, away from the railroad. After a mile or two he came to a dusty wood road winding downhill.

To the north of the clearing where Mr. Trimm had halted were a farm and a group of farm buildings. To the southward a mile or so was a cluster of dwellings set in the midst of more farm lands, with a shop or two and a small white church with a green spire in the center. Along a road that ran northward from the hamlet to the solitary farm a ten-year-old boy came, carrying a covered tin pail. A young gray squirrel flirted across the wagon ruts ahead of him and darted up a chestnut sapling. The boy put the pail down at the side of the road and began looking for a stone to throw at the squirrel.

Mr. Trimm slid out from behind a tree. A hemstitched handkerchief, grimed and stained, was loosely twisted around his wrists, partly hiding the handcuffs. He moved along with a queer, sliding gait, keeping as much of his body as he could turned from the youngster. The ears of the little chap caught the faint scuffle of feet and he spun around on his bare heel.

“My boy, would you—” Mr. Trimm began.

The boy's round eyes widened at the apparition that was sidling toward him in so strange a fashion, and then, taking fright, he dodged past Mr. Trimm and ran back the way he had come, as fast as his slim brown legs could take him. In half a minute he was out of sight round a bend.

Had the boy looked back he would have seen a still more curious spectacle than the one that had frightened him. He would have seen a man worth four million dollars down on his knees in the yellow dust, pawing with chained hands at the tight-fitting lid of the tin pail, and then, when he had got the lid off, drinking the fresh, warm milk which the pail held with great, choking gulps, uttering little mewling, animal sounds as he drank, while the white, creamy milk ran over his chin and splashed down his breast in little, spurting streams.

But the boy didn't look back. He ran all the way home and told his mother he had seen a wild man on the road to the village; and later, when his father came in from the fields, he was soundly thrashed for letting the sight of a tramp make him lose a good tin bucket and half a gallon of milk worth six cents a quart.

The rich, fresh milk put life into Mr. Trimm. He rested the better for it during the early part of that night in a haw thicket. Only the sharp, darting pains in his wrists kept rousing him to temporary wakefulness. In one of those intervals of waking the plan that had been sketchily forming in his mind from the time he had quit the clearing in the woods took on a definite, fixed shape. But how was he with safety to get the sort of aid he needed, and where?

Canvassing tentative plans in his head, he dozed off again.

On a smooth patch of turf behind the blacksmith shop three yokels were languidly pitching horseshoes—“quaits” they called them—at a stake driven in the earth. Just beyond, the woods shredded out into a long, yellow and green peninsula which stretched up almost to the back door of the smithy, so that late of afternoons the slanting shadows of the near-most trees fell on its roof

of warped shingles. At the extreme end of this point of woods Mr. Trimm was squatted behind a big boulder, squinting warily through a thick-fringed curtain of ripened goldenrod tops and sumacs, heavy-headed with their dark-red tapers. He had been there more than an hour, cautiously waiting his chance to hail the blacksmith, whose figure he could make out in the smoky interior of his shop, passing back and forth in front of a smudgy forge fire and rattling metal against metal in intermittent fits of professional activity.

From where Mr. Trimm watched to where the horseshoe-pitching game went on was not more than sixty feet. He could hear what the players said and even see the little puffs of dust rise when one of them clapped his hands together after a pitch. He judged by the signs of slackening interest that they would be stopping soon and, he hoped, going clear away.

But the smith loafed out of his shop and, after an exchange of bucolic banter with the three of them, he took a hand in their game himself. He wore no coat or waistcoat and, as he poised a horseshoe for his first cast at the stake, Mr. Trimm saw, pinned flat against the broad strap of his suspenders, a shiny, silvery-looking disk. Having pitched the shoe, the smith moved over into the shade, so that he almost touched the clump of undergrowth that half buried Mr. Trimm's protecting boulder. The near-sighted eyes of the fugitive banker could make out then what the flat, silvery disk was, and Mr. Trimm cowered low in his covert behind the rock, holding his hands down between his knees, fearful that a gleam from his burnished wristlets might strike through the screen of weed growth and catch the inquiring eye of the smith. So he stayed, not daring to move, until a dinner horn sounded somewhere in the cluster of cottages beyond, and the smith, closing the doors of his shop, went away with the three yokels.

Then Mr. Trimm, stooping low, stole back into the deep woods again. In his extremity he was ready to risk making a bid for the hire of a blacksmith's aid to rid himself of his bonds, but not a blacksmith who wore a deputy sheriff's badge pinned to his suspenders.

He caught himself scraping his wrists up and down again against the rough, scrofulous trunk of a shellbark hickory. The irritation was comforting to the swollen skin. The cuffs, which kept catching on the bark and snagging small fragments of it loose, seemed to Mr. Trimm to have been a part and parcel of him for a long time—almost as long a time as he could remember. But the hands which they clasped so close seemed like the hands of somebody else. There was a numbness about them that made them feel as though they were a stranger's hands which never had belonged to him. As he looked at them with a sort of vague curiosity they seemed to swell and grow, these two strange, fettered hands, until they measured yards across, while the steel bands shrunk to the thinness of piano wire, cutting deeper and deeper into the flesh. Then the hands in turn began to shrink down and the cuffs to grow up into great, thick things as cumbersome as the couplings of a freight car. A voice that Mr. Trimm dimly recognized as his own was saying something about four million dollars over and over again.

Mr. Trimm roused up and shook his head angrily to clear it. He rubbed his eyes free of the clouding delusion. It wouldn't do for him to be getting light-headed.

On a flat, shelving bluff, forty feet above a cut through which the railroad ran at a point about five miles north of where the collision had occurred, a tramp was busy, just before sundown, cooking something in an old washboiler that perched precariously on a fire of wood coals. This tramp was tall and spindle-legged, with reddish hair and a pale, beardless, freckled face with no chin to it and not much forehead, so that it ran out to a peak like the profile of some featherless, unpleasant sort of fowl. The skirts of an old, ragged overcoat dangled grotesquely about his spare shanks.

Desperate as his plight had become, Mr. Trimm felt the old sick shame at the prospect of exposing himself to this knavish-looking vagabond whose help he meant to buy with a bribe. It was the sight of a dainty wisp of smoke from the wood fire curling upward through the cloudy, damp air that had brought him limping cautiously across the right-of-way, to climb the rocky shelf along the cut; but now he hesitated, shielded in the shadows twenty yards away. It was a whiff of something

savory in the washboiler, borne to him on the still air and almost making him cry out with eagerness, that drew him forth finally. At the sound of the halting footsteps the tramp stopped stirring the mess in the washboiler and glanced up apprehensively. As he took in the figure of the newcomer his eyes narrowed and his pasty, nasty face spread in a grin of comprehension.

“Well, well, well,” he said, leering offensively, “welcome to our city, little stranger.”

Mr. Trimm came nearer, dragging his feet, for they were almost out of the wrecks of his patent-leather shoes. His gaze shifted from the tramp's face to the stuff on the fire, his nostrils wrinkling. Then slowly: “I'm in trouble,” he said, and held out his hands.

“Wot I'd call a mild way o' puttin' it,” said the tramp coolly. “That purticular kind o' joolry ain't gen'lly wore for pleasure.”

His eyes took on a nervous squint and roved past Mr. Trimm's stooped figure down the slope of the hillock.

“Say, pal, how fur ahead are you of yore keeper?” he demanded, his manner changing.

“There is no one after me—no one that I know of,” explained Mr. Trimm. “I am quite alone—I am certain of it.”

“Sure there ain't nobody lookin' fur you?” the other persisted suspiciously.

“I tell you I am all alone,” protested Mr. Trimm. “I want your help in getting these—these things off and sending a message to a friend. You'll be well paid, very well paid. I can pay you more money than you ever had in your life, probably, for your help. I can promise—”

He broke off, for the tramp, as if reassured by his words, had stooped again to his cooking and was stirring the bubbling contents of the washboiler with a peeled stick. The smell of the stew, rising strongly, filled Mr. Trimm with such a sharp and an aching hunger that he could not speak for a moment. He mastered himself, but the effort left him shaking and gulping.

“Go on, then, an' tell us somethin' about yourself,” said the freckled man. “Wot brings you roamin' round this here railroad cut with them bracelets on?”

“I was in the wreck,” obeyed Mr. Trimm. “The man with me—the officer—was killed. I wasn't hurt and I got away into these woods. But they think I'm dead too—my name was among the list of dead.”

The other's peaky face lengthened in astonishment.

“Why, say,” he began, “I read all about that there wreck—seen the list myself—say, you can't be Trimm, the New York banker? Yes, you are! Wot a streak of luck! Lemme look at you! Trimm, the swell financeer, sportin' 'round with the darbies on him all nice an' snug an' reg'lar! Mister Trimm—well, if this ain't rich!”

“My name is Trimm,” said the starving banker miserably. “I've been wandering about here a great many hours—several days, I think it must be—and I need rest and food very much indeed. I don't—don't feel very well,” he added, his voice trailing off.

At this his self-control gave way again and he began to quake violently as if with an ague. The smell of the cooking overcame him.

“You don't look so well an' that's a fact, Trimm,” sneered the tramp, resuming his malicious, mocking air. “But set down an' make yourself at home, an' after a while, when this is done, we'll have a bite together—you an' me. It'll be a reg'lar tea party fur jest us two.”

He broke off to chuckle. His mirth made him appear even more repulsive than before.

“But looky here, you wus sayin' somethin' about money,” he said suddenly. “Le's take a look at all this here money.”

He came over to him and went through Mr. Trimm's pockets. Mr. Trimm said nothing and stood quietly, making no resistance. The tramp finished a workmanlike search of the banker's pockets. He looked at the result as it lay in his grimy palm—a moist little wad of bills and some chicken-feed change—and spat disgustedly with a nasty oath.

“Well, Trimm,” he said, “fur a Wall Street guy seems to me you travel purty light. About how much did you think you'd get done fur all this pile of wealth?”

“You will be well paid,” said Mr. Trimm, arguing hard; “my friend will see to that. What I want you to do is to take the money you have there in your hand and buy a cold chisel or a file—any tools that will cut these things off me. And then you will send a telegram to a certain gentleman in New York. And let me stay with you until we get an answer—until he comes here. He will pay you well; I promise it.”

He halted, his eyes and his mind again on the bubbling stuff in the rusted washboiler. The freckled vagrant studied him through his red-lidded eyes, kicking some loose embers back into the fire with his toe.

“I've heard a lot about you one way an' another, Trimm,” he said. “'Tain't as if you wuz some pore down-an'-out devil tryin' to beat the cops out of doin' his bit in stir. You're the way-up, high-an'-mighty kind of crook. An' from wot I've read an' heard about you, you never toted fair with nobody yet. There wuz that young feller, wot's his name?—the cashier—him that wuz tried with you. He went along with you in yore games an' done yore work fur you an' you let him go over the road to the same place you're tryin' to dodge now. Besides,” he added cunningly, “you come here talkin' mighty big about money, yet I notice you ain't carryin' much of it in yore clothes. All I've had to go by is yore word. An' yore word ain't worth much, by all accounts.”

“I tell you, man, that you'll profit richly,” burst out Mr. Trimm, the words falling over each other in his new panic. “You must help me; I've endured too much—I've gone through too much to give up now.” He pleaded fast, his hands shaking in a quiver of fear and eagerness as he stretched them out in entreaty and his linked chain shaking with them. Promises, pledges, commands, orders, arguments poured from him. His tormentor checked him with a gesture.

“You're wot I'd call a bird in the hand,” he chuckled, hugging his slack frame, “an' it ain't fur you to be givin' orders—it's fur me. An', anyway, I guess we ain't a-goin' to be able to make a trade—leastwise not on yore terms. But we'll do business all right, all right—anyhow, I will.”

“What do you mean?” panted Mr. Trimm, full of terror. “You'll help me?”

“I mean this,” said the tramp slowly. He put his hands under his loose-hanging overcoat and began to fumble at a leather strap about his waist. “If I turn you over to the Government I know wot you'll be worth, purty near, by guessin' at the reward; an' besides, it'll maybe help to square me up fur one or two little matters. If I turn you loose I ain't got nothin' only your word—an' I've got an idea how much faith I kin put in that.”

Mr. Trimm glanced about him wildly. There was no escape. He was fast in a trap which he himself had sprung. The thought of being led to jail, all foul of body and fettered as he was, by this filthy, smirking wretch made him crazy. He stumbled backward with some insane idea of running away.

“No hurry, no hurry a-tall,” gloated the tramp, enjoying the torture of this helpless captive who had walked into his hands. “I ain't goin' to hurt you none—only make sure that you don't wander off an' hurt yourself while I'm gone. Won't do to let you be damagin' yoreself; you're valuable property. Trimm, now, I'll tell you wot we'll do! We'll just back you up agin one of these trees an' then we'll jest slip this here belt through yore elbows an' buckle it around behind at the back; an' I kinder guess you'll stay right there till I go down yonder to that station that I passed comin' up here an' see wot kind of a bargain I kin strike up with the marshal. Come on, now,” he threatened with a show of bluster, reading the resolution that was mounting in Mr. Trimm's face. “Come on peaceable, if you don't want to git hurt.”

Of a sudden Mr. Trimm became the primitive man. He was filled with those elemental emotions that make a man see in spatters of crimson. Gathering strength from passion out of an exhausted frame, he sprang forward at the tramp. He struck at him with his head, his shoulders, his knees, his manacled wrists, all at once. Not really hurt by the puny assault, but caught by surprise, the freckled

man staggered back, clawing at the air, tripped on the washboiler in the fire, and with a yell vanished below the smooth edge of the cut.

Mr. Trimm stole forward and looked over the bluff. Half-way down the cliff on an outcropping shelf of rock the man lay, face downward, motionless. He seemed to have grown smaller and to have shrunk into his clothes. One long, thin leg was bent up under the skirts of the overcoat in a queer, twisted way, and the cloth of the trouser leg looked flattened and empty. As Mr. Trimm peered down at him he saw a red stain spreading on the rock under the still, silent figure's head.

Mr. Trimm turned to the washboiler. It lay on its side, empty, the last of its recent contents sputtering out into the half-drowned fire. He stared at this ruin a minute. Then without another look over the cliff edge he stumbled slowly down the hill, muttering to himself as he went. Just as he struck the level it began to rain, gently at first, then hard, and despite the shelter of the full-leaved forest trees, he was soon wet through to his skin and dripped water as he lurched along without sense of direction or, indeed, without any active realization of what he was doing.

Late that night it was still raining—a cold, steady, autumnal downpour. A huddled figure slowly climbed upon a low fence running about the house-yard of the little farm where the boy lived who got thrashed for losing a milkpail. On the wet top rail, precariously perching, the figure slipped and sprawled forward in the miry yard. It got up, painfully swaying on its feet. It was Mr. Trimm, looking for food. He moved slowly toward the house, tottering with weakness and because of the slick mud underfoot; peering near-sightedly this way and that through the murk; starting at every sound and stopping often to listen.

The outlines of a lean-to kitchen at the back of the house were looming dead ahead of him when from the corner of the cottage sprang a small terrier. It made for Mr. Trimm, barking shrilly. He retreated backward, kicking at the little dog and, to hold his balance, striking out with short, dabby jerks of his fettered hands—they were such motions as the terrier itself might make trying to walk on its hindlegs. Still backing away, expecting every instant to feel the terrier's teeth in his flesh, Mr. Trimm put one foot into a hotbed with a great clatter of the breaking glass. He felt the sharp ends of shattered glass tearing and cutting his shin as he jerked free. Recovering himself, he dealt the terrier a lucky kick under the throat that sent it back, yowling, to where it had come from, and then, as a door jerked open and a half-dressed man jumped out into the darkness, Mr. Trimm half hobbled, half fell out of sight behind the woodpile.

Back and forth along the lower edge of his yard the farmer hunted, with the whimpering, cowed terrier to guide him, poking in dark corners with the muzzle of his shotgun for the unseen intruder whose coming had aroused the household. In a brushpile just over the fence to the east Mr. Trimm lay on his face upon the wet earth, with the rain beating down on him, sobbing with choking gulps that wrenched him cruelly, biting at the bonds on his wrists until the sound of breaking teeth grinded in the air. Finally, in the hopeless, helpless frenzy of his agony he beat his arms up and down until the bracelets struck squarely on a flat stone and the force of the blow sent the cuffs home to the last notch so that they pressed harder and faster than ever upon the tortured wrist bones.

When he had wasted ten or fifteen minutes in a vain search the farmer went shivering back indoors to dry out his wet shirt. But the groveling figure in the brushpile lay for a long time where it was, only stirring a little while the rain dripped steadily down on everything.

The wreck was on a Tuesday evening. Early on the Saturday morning following the chief of police, who was likewise the whole of the day police force in the town of Westfield, nine miles from the place where the collision occurred, heard a peculiar, strangely weak knocking at the front door of his cottage, where he also had his office. The door was a Dutch door, sawed through the middle, so that the top half might be opened independently, leaving the lower panel fast. He swung this top half back.

A face was framed in the opening—an indescribably dirty, unutterably weary face, with matted white hair and a rime of whitish beard stubble on the jaws. It was fallen in and sunken and it drooped

on the chest of its owner. The mouth, swollen and pulpy, as if from repeated hard blows, hung agape, and between the purplish parted lips showed the stumps of broken teeth. The eyes blinked weakly at the chief from under lids as colorless as the eyelids of a corpse. The bare white head was filthy with plastered mud and twigs, and dripping wet.

“Hello, there!” said the chief, startled at this apparition. “What do you want?”

With a movement that told of straining effort the lolled head came up off the chest. The thin, corded neck stiffened back, rising from a dirty, collarless neckband. The Adam's apple bulged out prominently, as big as a pigeon's egg.

“I have come,” said the specter in a wheezing rasp of a voice which the chief could hardly hear —“I have come to surrender myself. I am Hobart W. Trimm.”

“I guess you got another thing comin’,” said the chief, who was by way of being a neighborhood wag. “When last seen Hobart W. Trimm was only fifty-two years old. Besides which, he's dead and buried. I guess maybe you'd better think agin, grandpap, and see if you ain't Methus'lah or the Wanderin' Jew.”

“I am Hobart W. Trimm, the banker,” whispered the stranger with a sort of wan stubbornness.

“Go on and prove it,” suggested the chief, more than willing to prolong the enjoyment of the sensation. It wasn't often in Westfield that wandering lunatics came a-calling.

“Got any way to prove it?” he repeated as the visitor stared at him.

“Yes,” came the creaking, rusted hinge of a voice, “I have.”

Slowly, with struggling attempts, he raised his hands into the chief's sight. They were horribly swollen hands, red with the dried blood where they were not black with the dried dirt; the fingers puffed up out of shape; the nails broken; they were like the skinned paws of a bear. And at the wrists, almost buried in the bloated folds of flesh, blackened, rusted, battered, yet still strong and whole, was a tightly-locked pair of Bean's Latest Model Little Giant handcuffs.

“Great God!” cried the chief, transfixed at the sight. He drew the bolt and jerked open the lower half of the door.

“Come in,” he said, “and lemme get them irons off of you—they must hurt something terrible.”

“They can wait,” said Mr. Trimm very feebly, very slowly and very humbly. “I have worn them a long, long while—I am used to them. Wouldn't you please get me some food first?”

II

THE BELLED BUZZARD

There was a swamp known as Little Niggerwool, to distinguish it from Big Niggerwool, which lay across the river. It was traversable only by those who knew it well—an oblong stretch of tawny mud and tawny water, measuring maybe four miles its longest way and two miles roughly at its widest; and it was full of cypress and stunted swamp oak, with edgings of canebrake and rank weeds; and in one place, where a ridge crossed it from side to side, it was snagged like an old jaw with dead tree trunks, rising close-ranked and thick as teeth. It was untenanted of living things—except, down below, there were snakes and mosquitoes, and a few wading and swimming fowl; and up above, those big woodpeckers that the country people called logcocks—larger than pigeons, with flaming crests and spiky tails—swooping in their long, loping flight from snag to snag, always just out of gunshot of the chance invader, and uttering a strident cry which matched those surroundings so fitly that it might well have been the voice of the swamp itself.

On one side little Niggerwool drained its saffron waters off into a sluggish creek, where summer ducks bred, and on the other it ended abruptly at a natural bank of high ground, along which the county turnpike ran. The swamp came right up to the road and thrust its fringe of reedy, weedy undergrowth forward as though in challenge to the good farm lands that were spread beyond the barrier. At the time I am speaking of it was mid-summer, and from these canes and weeds and waterplants there came a smell so rank as almost to be overpowering. They grew thick as a curtain, making a blank green wall taller than a man's head.

Along the dusty stretch of road fronting the swamp nothing living had stirred for half an hour or more. And so at length the weed-stems rustled and parted, and out from among them a man came forth silently and cautiously. He was an old man—an old man who had once been fat, but with age had grown lean again, so that now his skin was by odds too large for him. It lay on the back of his neck in folds. Under the chin he was pouched like a pelican and about the jowls was wattled like a turkey gobbler.

He came out upon the road slowly and stopped there, switching his legs absently with the stalk of a horseweed. He was in his shirtsleeves—a respectable, snuffy old figure; evidently a man deliberate in words and thoughts and actions. There was something about him suggestive of an old staid sheep that had been engaged in a clandestine transaction and was afraid of being found out.

He had made amply sure no one was in sight before he came out of the swamp, but now, to be doubly certain, he watched the empty road—first up, then down—for a long half minute, and fetched a sighing breath of satisfaction. His eyes fell upon his feet, and, taken with an idea, he stepped back to the edge of the road and with a wisp of crabgrass wiped his shoes clean of the swamp mud, which was of a different color and texture from the soil of the upland. All his life Squire H. B. Gathers had been a careful, canny man, and he had need to be doubly careful on this summer morning. Having disposed of the mud on his feet, he settled his white straw hat down firmly upon his head, and, crossing the road, he climbed a stake-and-rider fence laboriously and went plodding sedately across a weedfield and up a slight slope toward his house, half a mile away, upon the crest of the little hill.

He felt perfectly natural—not like a man who had just taken a fellowman's life—but natural and safe, and well satisfied with himself and with his morning's work. And he was safe; that was the main thing—absolutely safe. Without hitch or hindrance he had done the thing for which he had been planning and waiting and longing all these months. There had been no slip or mischance; the whole thing had worked out as plainly and simply as two and two make four. No living creature except himself knew of the meeting in the early morning at the head of Little Niggerwool, exactly where the squire had figured they should meet; none knew of the device by which the other man had been

lured deeper and deeper in the swamp to the exact spot where the gun was hidden. No one had seen the two of them enter the swamp; no one had seen the squire emerge, three hours later, alone.

The gun, having served its purpose, was hidden again, in a place no mortal eye would ever discover. Face downward, with a hole between his shoulder blades, the dead man was lying where he might lie undiscovered for months or for years, or forever. His pedler's pack was buried in the mud so deep that not even the probing crawfishes could find it. He would never be missed probably. There was but the slightest likelihood that inquiry would ever be made for him—let alone a search. He was a stranger and a foreigner, the dead man was, whose comings and goings made no great stir in the neighborhood, and whose failure to come again would be taken as a matter of course—just one of those shiftless, wandering Dagoes, here today and gone tomorrow. That was one of the best things about it—these Dagoes never had any people in this country to worry about them or look for them when they disappeared. And so it was all over and done with, and nobody the wiser. The squire clapped his hands together briskly with the air of a man dismissing a subject from his mind for good, and mended his gait.

He felt no stabbings of conscience. On the contrary, a glow of gratification filled him. His house was saved from scandal; his present wife would philander no more—before his very eyes—with these young Dagoes, who came from nobody knew where, with packs on their backs and persuasive, wheedling tongues in their heads. At this thought the squire raised his head and considered his homestead. It looked good to him—the small white cottage among the honey locusts, with beehives and flower beds about it; the tidy whitewashed fence; the sound outbuildings at the back, and the well-tilled acres roundabout.

At the fence he halted and turned about, carelessly and casually, and looked back along the way he had come. Everything was as it should be—the weedfield steaming in the heat; the empty road stretching along the crooked ridge like a long gray snake sunning itself; and beyond it, massing up, the dark, cloaking stretch of swamp. Everything was all right, but—the squire's eyes, in their loose sacs of skin, narrowed and squinted. Out of the blue arch away over yonder a small black dot had resolved itself and was swinging to and fro, like a mote. A buzzard—hey? Well, there were always buzzards about on a clear day like this. Buzzards were nothing to worry about—almost any time you could see one buzzard, or a dozen buzzards if you were a mind to look for them.

But this particular buzzard now—wasn't he making for Little Niggerwool? The squire did not like the idea of that. He had not thought of the buzzards until this minute. Sometimes when cattle strayed the owners had been known to follow the buzzards, knowing mighty well that if the buzzards led the way to where the stray was, the stray would be past the small salvage of hide and hoofs—but the owner's doubts would be set at rest for good and all.

There was a grain of disquiet in this. The squire shook his head to drive the thought away—yet it persisted, coming back like a midge dancing before his face. Once at home, however, Squire Gathers deported himself in a perfectly normal manner. With the satisfied proprietorial eye of an elderly husband who has no rivals, he considered his young wife, busied about her household duties. He sat in an easy-chair upon his front gallery and read his yesterday's Courier-Journal which the rural carrier had brought him; but he kept stepping out into the yard to peer up into the sky and all about him. To the second Mrs. Gathers he explained that he was looking for weather signs. A day as hot and still as this one was a regular weather breeder; there ought to be rain before night.

“Maybe so,” she said; “but looking's not going to bring rain.”

Nevertheless the squire continued to look. There was really nothing to worry about; still at midday he did not eat much dinner, and before his wife was half through with hers he was back on the gallery. His paper was cast aside and he was watching. The original buzzard—or, anyhow, he judged it was the first one he had seen—was swinging back and forth in great pendulum swings, but closer down toward the swamp—closer and closer—until it looked from that distance as though the

buzzard flew almost at the level of the tallest snags there. And on beyond this first buzzard, coursing above him, were other buzzards. Were there four of them? No; there were five—five in all.

Such is the way of the buzzard—that shifting black question mark which punctuates a Southern sky. In the woods a shoat or a sheep or a horse lies down to die. At once, coming seemingly out of nowhere, appears a black spot, up five hundred feet or a thousand in the air. In broad loops and swirls this dot swings round and round and round, coming a little closer to earth at every turn and always with one particular spot upon the earth for the axis of its wheel. Out of space also other moving spots emerge and grow larger as they tack and jib and drop nearer, coming in their leisurely buzzard way to the feast. There is no haste—the feast will wait. If it is a dumb creature that has fallen stricken the grim coursers will sooner or later be assembled about it and alongside it, scrouging ever closer and closer to the dying thing, with awkward out-thrustings of their naked necks and great dust-raising flaps of the huge, unkempt wings; lifting their feathered shanks high and stiffly like old crippled grave-diggers in overalls that are too tight—but silent and patient all, offering no attack until the last tremor runs through the stiffening carcass and the eyes glaze over. To humans the buzzard pays a deeper meed of respect—he hangs aloft longer; but in the end he comes. No scavenger shark, no carrion crab, ever chambered more grisly secrets in his digestive processes than this big charnel bird. Such is the way of the buzzard.

The squire missed his afternoon nap, a thing that had not happened in years. He stayed on the front gallery and kept count. Those moving distant black specks typified uneasiness for the squire—not fear exactly, or panic or anything akin to it, but a nibbling, nagging kind of uneasiness. Time and again he said to himself that he would not think about them any more; but he did—unceasingly.

By supper time there were seven of them.

He slept light and slept badly. It was not the thought of that dead man lying yonder in Little Niggerwood that made him toss and fume while his wife snored gently alongside him. It was something else altogether. Finally his stirrings roused her and she asked him drowsily what ailed him. Was he sick? Or bothered about anything?

Irritated, he answered her snappishly. Certainly nothing was bothering him, he told her. It was a hot enough night—wasn't it? And when a man got a little along in life he was apt to be a light sleeper—wasn't that so? Well, then? She turned upon her side and slept again with her light, purring snore. The squire lay awake, thinking hard and waiting for day to come.

At the first faint pink-and-gray glow he was up and out upon the gallery. He cut a comic figure standing there in his shirt in the half light, with the dewlap at his throat dangling grotesquely in the neck opening of the unbuttoned garment, and his bare bowed legs showing, splotched and varicose. He kept his eyes fixed on the skyline below, to the south. Buzzards are early risers too. Presently, as the heavens shimmered with the miracle of sunrise, he could make them out—six or seven, or maybe eight.

An hour after breakfast the squire was on his way down through the weedfield to the county road. He went half eagerly, half unwillingly. He wanted to make sure about those buzzards. It might be that they were aiming for the old pasture at the head of the swamp. There were sheep grazing there—and it might be that a sheep had died. Buzzards were notoriously fond of sheep, when dead. Or, if they were pointed for the swamp, he must satisfy himself exactly what part of the swamp it was. He was at the stake-and-rider fence when a mare came jogging down the road, drawing a rig with a man in it. At sight of the squire in the field the man pulled up.

“Hi, squire!” he saluted. “Goin' somewheres?”

“No; jest knockin' about,” the squire said—“jest sorter lookin' the place over.”

“Hot agin—ain't it?” said the other.

The squire allowed that it was, for a fact, mighty hot. Commonplaces of gossip followed this—county politics and a neighbor's wife sick of breakbone fever down the road a piece. The subject of crops succeeded inevitably. The squire spoke of the need of rain. Instantly he regretted it, for the

other man, who was by way of being a weather wisacre, cocked his head aloft to study the sky for any signs of clouds.

“Wonder whut all them buzzards are doin' yonder, squire,” he said, pointing upward with his whipstock.

“Whut buzzards—where?” asked the squire with an elaborate note of carelessness in his voice.

“Right yonder, over Little Niggerwool—see 'em there?”

“Oh, yes,” the squire made answer. “Now I see 'em. They ain't doin' nothin', I reckon—jest flyin' round same as they always do in clear weather.”

“Must be somethin' dead over there!” speculated the man in the buggy.

“A hawg probably,” said the squire promptly—almost too promptly. “There's likely to be hawgs usin' in Niggerwool. Bristow, over on the other side from here—he's got a big drove of hawgs.”

“Well, mebbe so,” said the man; “but hawgs is a heap more apt to be feedin' on high ground, seems like to me. Well, I'll be gittin' along towards town. G'day, squire.” And he slapped the lines down on the mare's flank and jogged off through the dust.

He could not have suspected anything—that man couldn't. As the squire turned away from the road and headed for his house he congratulated himself upon that stroke of his in bringing in Bristow's hogs; and yet there remained this disquieting note in the situation, that buzzards flying, and especially buzzards flying over Little Niggerwool, made people curious—made them ask questions.

He was half-way across the weedfield when, above the hum of insect life, above the inward clamor of his own busy speculations, there came to his ear dimly and distantly a sound that made him halt and cant his head to one side the better to hear it. Somewhere, a good way off, there was a thin, thready, broken strain of metallic clinking and clanking—an eery ghost-chime ringing. It came nearer and became plainer—tonk-tonk-tonk; then the tonks all running together briskly.

A sheep bell or a cowbell—that was it; but why did it seem to come from overhead, from up in the sky, like? And why did it shift so abruptly from one quarter to another—from left to right and back again to left? And how was it that the clapper seemed to strike so fast? Not even the breachiest of breachy young heifers could be expected to tinkle a cowbell with such briskness. The squire's eye searched the earth and the sky, his troubled mind giving to his eye a quick and flashing scrutiny. He had it. It was not a cow at all. It was not anything that went on four legs.

One of the loathly flock had left the others. The orbit of his swing had carried him across the road and over Squire Gathers' land. He was sailing right toward and over the squire now. Craning his flabby neck, the squire could make out the unwholesome contour of the huge bird. He could see the ragged black wings—a buzzard's wings are so often ragged and uneven—and the naked throat; the slim, naked head; the big feet folded up against the dingy belly. And he could see a bell too—an undersized cowbell—that dangled at the creature's breast and jangled incessantly. All his life nearly Squire Gathers had been hearing about the Belled Buzzard. Now with his own eye he was seeing him.

Once, years and years and years ago, some one trapped a buzzard, and before freeing it clamped about its skinny neck a copper band with a cowbell pendent from it. Since then the bird so ornamented has been seen a hundred times—and heard oftener—over an area as wide as half the continent. It has been reported, now in Kentucky, now in Texas, now in North Carolina—now anywhere between the Ohio River and the Gulf. Crossroads correspondents take their pens in hand to write to the country papers that on such and such a date, at such a place, So-and-So saw the Belled Buzzard. Always it is the Belled Buzzard, never a belled buzzard. The Belled Buzzard is an institution.

There must be more than one of them. It seems hard to believe that one bird, even a buzzard in his prime, and protected by law in every Southern state and known to be a bird of great age, could live so long and range so far and wear a clinking cowbell all the time! Probably other jokers have emulated the original joker; probably if the truth were known there have been a dozen such; but the country people will have it that there is only one Belled Buzzard—a bird that bears a charmed life and on his neck a never silent bell.

Squire Gathers regarded it a most untoward thing that the Belled Buzzard should have come just at this time. The movements of ordinary, unmarked buzzards mainly concerned only those whose stock had strayed; but almost anybody with time to spare might follow this rare and famous visitor, this belled and feathered junkman of the sky. Supposing now that some one followed it today—maybe followed it even to a certain thick clump of cypress in the middle of Little Niggerwool!

But at this particular moment the Belled Buzzard was heading directly away from that quarter. Could it be following him? Of course not! It was just by chance that it flew along the course the squire was taking. But, to make sure, he veered off sharply, away from the footpath into the high weeds so that the startled grasshoppers sprayed up in front of him in fan-like flights.

He was right; it was only a chance. The Belled Buzzard swung off too, but in the opposite direction, with a sharp tonking of its bell, and, flapping hard, was in a minute or two out of hearing and sight, past the trees to the westward.

Again the squire skimped his dinner, and again he spent the long drowsy afternoon upon his front gallery. In all the sky there were now no buzzards visible, belled or unbelled—they had settled to earth somewhere; and this served somewhat to soothe the squire's pestered mind. This does not mean, though, that he was by any means easy in his thoughts. Outwardly he was calm enough, with the ruminative judicial air befitting the oldest justice of the peace in the county; but, within him, a little something gnawed unceasingly at his nerves like one of those small white worms that are to be found in seemingly sound nuts. About once in so long a tiny spasm of the muscles would contract the dewlap under his chin. The squire had never heard of that play, made famous by a famous player, wherein the murdered victim was a pedler too, and a clamoring bell the voice of unappeasable remorse in the murderer's ear. As a strict churchgoer the squire had no use for players or for play actors, and so was spared that added canker to his conscience. It was bad enough as it was.

That night, as on the night before, the old man's sleep was broken and fitful and disturbed by dreaming, in which he heard a metal clapper striking against a brazen surface. This was one dream that came true. Just after daybreak he heaved himself out of bed, with a flop of his broad bare feet upon the floor, and stepped to the window and peered out. Half seen in the pinkish light, the Belled Buzzard flapped directly over his roof and flew due south, right toward the swamp—drawing a direct line through the air between the slayer and the victim—or, anyway, so it seemed to the watcher, grown suddenly tremulous.

Knee deep in yellow swamp water the squire squatted, with his shotgun cocked and loaded and ready, waiting to kill the bird that now typified for him guilt and danger and an abiding great fear. Gnats plagued him and about him frogs croaked. Almost overhead a log-cock clung lengthwise to a snag, watching him. Snake doctors, limber, long insects with bronze bodies and filmy wings, went back and forth like small living shuttles. Other buzzards passed and repassed, but the squire waited, forgetting the cramps in his elderly limbs and the discomfort of the water in his shoes.

At length he heard the bell. It came nearer and nearer, and the Belled Buzzard swung overhead not sixty feet up, its black bulk a fair target against the blue. He aimed and fired, both barrels bellowing at once and a fog of thick powder smoke enveloping him. Through the smoke he saw the bird careen and its bell jangled furiously; then the buzzard righted itself and was gone, fleeing so fast that the sound of its bell was hushed almost instantly. Two long wing feathers drifted slowly down; torn disks of gunwadding and shredded green scraps of leaves descended about the squire in a little shower.

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