

Curtis Wardon Allan

The Strange Adventures of Mr. Middleton



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Содержание

The Manner in Which Mr. Edward Middleton Encounters the Emir Achmed Ben Daoud	5
The Adventure of the Virtuous Spinster	9
What Befell Mr. Middleton Because of the Second Gift of the Emir	13
The Adventure of William Hicks	15
What Befell Mr. Middleton Because of the Third Gift of the Emir	19
The Adventure of Norah Sullivan and the Student of Heredity	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	28

Wardon Allan Curtis

The Strange Adventures of Mr. Middleton

The Manner in Which Mr. Edward Middleton Encounters the Emir Achmed Ben Daoud

It was a lowering and gloomy night in the early part of the present century. Mr. Edward Middleton, a gallant youth, who had but lately passed his twenty-third year, was faring northward along the southern part of that famous avenue of commerce, Clark Street, in the city of Chicago, wending his way toward the emporium of Mr. Marks Cohen. Suddenly the rain which the cloudy heaven had been promising for many hours, began to descend in great scattered drops that presaged a heavy shower. Mr. Middleton hastened his steps. It was possible that if the dress-suit he wore, hired for the occasion of the wedding of his friend, Mr. Chauncey Stackelberg, should become imbued with moisture in the shower that now seemed imminent, Mr. Cohen, of whom he had hired the suit, would not add to the modicum agreed upon, a charge for pressing it. But if his own suit for everyday wear, which he was carrying under his arm with the purpose of putting it on at good Mr. Cohen's establishment, should become wet, that would be a serious matter. It was, in fact, his only suit and that will explain the anxiety with which he scanned the heavens. Suddenly, Pluvius unloosed all the fountains of the sky, and with scarcely a thought whither he was going, Mr. Middleton darted into the first haven of refuge, a little shop he happened to be just passing. As the door closed behind him with the tinkle of a bell in some remote recess, for the first time he realized that the place he had entered was utterly dark. His ears, straining to their uttermost to make compensation for the inability of his eyes to be of service to him in this juncture, could no more than inform him that the place was utterly silent. But to his nose came the powerful fragrance of strange foreign aromas such as he had never had experience of before, – which, heavy and oppressive in their cloying perfume, seemed the very breath of mystery. All traffic had ceased without, as the night was well advanced and the rain beat so heavily that the few whom business or pleasure had called abroad at that hour, had sought shelter. But though the rain now fell with a steady roar, Mr. Middleton, perturbed by a nameless disquiet, was about to rush forth into the tempest and seek other shelter, when a door burst open and, outlined against a glare of light, stood a gigantic man who said in a deep, low voice that seemed to pervade every corner of the room and cause the air to shake in slow vibrations, “Salaam aleikoom!” Which being repeated again, Mr. Middleton replied:

“I do not understand the German language.”

A low, musical laugh greeted this remark and the laugh resolving itself into a low, musical voice that bade him enter, Mr. Middleton found himself in a small boudoir of oriental magnificence, facing a young man in the costume of the Moslem nations, who sat cross-legged upon a divan smoking a narghileh. He was of perhaps twenty-six, somewhat slight, but elegant of person. His face, extremely handsome, betokened that he was a man of intelligence and sensibility. Two brilliant, sparkling eyes illumined his countenance and the curl of his carmine lips was that of one who while kind – without condescension and the odiousness of patronage – to all whom the mischance of fate had made his inferiors in fortune, would not bend the fawning knee to any whom the world calls great. Behind him stood a giant blackamore, he of the voice that had saluted Mr. Middleton. The blackamore was dressed in crimson silk sparkling with an array of gold lace, but his immense turban was snowy white. Against his shoulder reposed a great glittering scimitar and a dozen silver-mounted pistols and poniards were thrust in his sash.

Presently the young man removed the golden mouth-piece of the narghileh from his lips and regarding Mr. Middleton fixedly, remarked:

“There is but one God and Mohammed is his Prophet.”

Now this was not the doctrine Mr. Middleton had been taught in the Methodist Sunday School in Janesville, Wisconsin, but disliking to dispute with one so engaging as the handsome Moslem, and having read in a book of etiquette that it was very ill mannered to indulge in theological controversy and, moreover, being conscious of the presence of the blackamore with the glittering scimeter, he began to make his excuses for an immediate departure. But the Moslem would not hear to this.

“Mesrour will bear your garments to Mr. Cohen. From your visage, I judge you to be a person I wish to know. I take you to be endowed with probity, discretion, and valor, and not without wit, good taste, and good manners. Mesrour, relieve the gentleman of his burden.”

Whereupon Mr. Middleton was compelled to state that it was the garment on his back that was to go to Mr. Cohen, though he feared this confession would cause him to fall in the estimation of the Moslem. But the stranger relaxed none of his deference at this intimation that Mr. Middleton was not a person of consequence.

“Mesrour, take two sequins from the ebony chest. The price the extortionate tailor charges, is some thirty piastres. Bring back the change and a receipt.”

“Salaam, effendim!” and Mesrour bowed until the crown of his head was presented toward his master, together with the palms of his hands, and in this posture backed from the room, leaving Mr. Middleton speculating upon the wonder and alarm little Mr. Cohen would experience at beholding the gigantic Nubian in all his outlandish panoply. While changing the dress suit for his street wear, from a back room came the sound of the blackamore moving about, chanting that weird refrain, tumpy, tumpy, tum – tum; tumpy, tumpy, tum – tum; which from Mesopotamia to the Pillars of Hercules, from the time of Ishmael to the present, has been the song of the sons of the desert. What was his surprise when the blackamore emerged. Gone were his turban, his flowing trousers, his scimeter, pistols, and poniards. He had on a long yellow mackintosh, which did not, however, conceal a pair of black and white checked pantaloons, a red tie, and green vest, from each upper pocket of which projected an ivory-handled razor.

“Don’t forget the change, Mesrour.”

“No indeed, boss,” replied the blackamore, whistling “Mah Tiger Lily,” as he departed.

The Moslem provided Mr. Middleton with one of those pipes which in various parts of the Orient are known as narghilehs, hubble-bubbles, or hookabadours, and seeing his guest entirely at his ease, without ado began as follows:

“My name is Achmed Ben Daoud, and I am hereditary emir of the tribe of Al-Yam, which ranges on the border of that fortunate part of the Arabian peninsular known as Arabia the Happy. My youngest brother, Ismail, desirous of seeing the world, went to the court of Oman, where struck by his inimitable skill in narration, the imam installed him as royal story-teller. But having in the space of a year exhausted his stock of stories, the imam, who is blessed with an excellent memory, discovering that he was telling the same stories over again, shut him up in a tower constructed of vermilion stone quarried on the upper waters of the great river Euphrates. There my poor brother is to stay until he can invent a new stock of stories, but being utterly devoid of invention, only death or relenting upon the part of the imam could release him. Hearing of his plight, I went to the imam with the proposition that I seek out some other story-teller and that upon bringing him to Muscat, my brother be released. But the imam exclaimed that he was tired of tales of genii and magicians, of enchantments and spells, devils, dragons, and rocs.

“These things are too common, too everyday. Go to the country of the Franks and bring me a story-teller who shall tell me tales of far nations, and I will release Ismail, and load him with treasure.”

“My Lord,’ said I, ‘peradventure no Frank story-teller will come. To guard against such eventuality, I will myself go to the lands of the Franks, there to learn of adventures worthy the ear of your highness. This I will do that my brother may be released from the vermilion tower.’

“Do this, and I will give him the vermilion tower and make him grand vizier of the dominions of Oman.’

“As hereditary emir of the tribe of Al-Yam, I am prince of a considerable population. My revenues are sufficient to support life becomingly. But desiring to escape attention, and moreover, feeling that I could better get in touch with all classes of the population, I have established here in Chicago a small bazaar for the sale of frankincense and myrrh, the balsam of Hadramaut and attar of roses from the vales of Nejd, coffee of Mocha – which is in Arabia the Happy – dates from Hedjaz, together with ornaments made from wood grown in Mecca and Medina. Such is my stock in trade. By day, Mesrour and I dress like Feringhis. But at night, it pleases us to cast aside the stiff garb of the infidel for the flowing garments of my native land. Mesrour then delights to make the obeisances my rank deserves, but which in the presence of the gjaours would excite mocking laughter. I have prospered. I have made acquaintances and have learned of many adventures. But I have made no friends. I have been much prepossessed by your bearing and feel that I would like to have you for a friend. I am also desirous of observing the effect of the tales of adventure I have been collecting. I need to acquire skill in the art of narration, and accordingly, I must have someone to tell them to, a person whose complaisance will cause him to overlook the faults of a novice. I am exceedingly anxious to have the distinguished honor of your company and if you have any evenings when you are at leisure, I should be only too glad to have you spend them here.”

“I can come this day week,” said Mr. Middleton.

“So be it. On that occasion I will tell you the tale of The Adventure of the Virtuous Spinster. I have not asked you your calling in life, for I am utterly without curiosity – ”

“I am a clerk in a law office,” said Mr. Middleton, quickly, “where I perform certain tasks and at the same time study law, and it is my hope to be soon admitted to the bar.”

Prince Achmed regarded him earnestly for a moment, and then withdrew to return with a sandalwood case in his hands. This he opened to disclose a leathern-bound volume. Upon the cover was stamped a great gilt monogram of letters in some strange language. The edges were stained a brilliant and peculiarly vivid green. The pages were of fine pearl-colored vellum, covered with strange characters in black. Each chapter began with a great red initial surrounded by an illuminated design of many colored arabesques. It was indeed a volume to cause a book-lover to cry out with joy.

“Here is all the law man needs, the sacred Koran. Here is the beginning and end of law, the source of regulations that ensure righteous conduct, the precepts of Mohammed, prophet of Allah. If other laws agree with those of the Koran, they are needless. If they disagree, they are evil. Study this guide of life, my friend, and there will be no need to worry your brain with tomes of the presumptuous wights who from their own imaginings dare attempt to dictate laws and impiously substitute them for the laws revealed to Mohammed from on high. Accept this gift and study it.”

With the sandalwood case containing the precious volume of the law under his arm, Mr. Middleton departed. After the lapse of three days, finding no immediate prospect of learning the Arabic language, and fearful of offending Prince Achmed if he returned the book, and having no possible use for it, he took it to a bibliophile, who exclaiming that it was the handiwork of a Mohammedan monastery of Damascus and bore on the cover the monogram of the fifth Fatimite caliph, and was therefore a thousand years old, he told Mr. Middleton that though it was worth much more, he could offer him but five hundred dollars, which sum the astonished friend of Achmed received in a daze, and departed to invest in a well located lot in a new suburb. Having no use for the sandalwood case after the Koran had been disposed of, he presented it to a young lady of Englewood as a receptacle for handkerchiefs.

Mr. Middleton said nothing of these transactions when on the appointed evening he once more sat in the presence of the urbane prince of the tribe of Al-Yam. Having handed him a bowl of delicately flavored sherbet, Achmed began to narrate The Adventure of the Virtuous Spinster.

The Adventure of the Virtuous Spinster

Miss Almira Johnson was a virtuous spinster, aged thirty-nine, who lived in a highly respectable boarding-house on the north side. Her days she spent in keeping the books of a large leather firm, in an office which she shared with two male clerks who were married, and a red-headed boy of sixteen, who was small for his age.

On the evening when my tale begins, Miss Almira, tastefully attired for her night's rest in a white nightgown trimmed with blue lace, was peeping under the bed for the ever-possible man, the nightly rite preliminary to her prayers. She fell back gasping in a vain attempt to scream, but not a sound could she give vent to. The precaution of years had been justified. *There lay a man!* He was habited in a very genteel frock-suit, patent-leather shoes, and although it must have caused him some inconvenience in his recumbent position, upon his head was a correct plug hat. The elegance and respectability of his garb somewhat reassured Miss Almira, who was unable to believe that one so apparelled could have secreted himself under her bed for an evil purpose, when a new fear seized her, for arguing from this assumption, she concluded he must have been placed there by others and was, in short, dead. Whereupon, having to some degree recovered possession of herself, she was opening her mouth to scream at this new terror, when the man spoke.

"Listen before you scream, I pray thee, beauteous lady, darling of my life, pearl of my desires, star of my hopes."

The strangeness of the address and the unaccustomed epithets caused Miss Almira to forbear, for she could not hear what he had to say and scream at the same time, and, moreover, she remembered how twenty years before, Jake Long had fled, never to return to her side, when after telling her she was the sweetest thing in the world, she had screamed as his arms clasped about her in a bearish hug.

"Fair lady, ornament of your sex, hear the words of your ardent admirer before you blast his hopes."

As he uttered these words, the stranger extricated himself from his undignified position and sat down in a rocking chair before the bureau. Miss Almira was more than ever prepossessed as she saw he wore white kid gloves and that in his shirt front gleamed a large diamond. He removed his hat, disclosing a heavy crop of black hair. He had blue eyes and a strong, clean-shaven face.

"For some time I have observed you and wondered how I was to realize my fondest hopes and make your acquaintance. All day you are in the office, where the two married men and the red-headed boy are always *de trop*. My employment is of a nature that takes me out nights. In fact, I teach a night school for Italians. To-day being an Italian holiday and so no school, and as there is a possibility I shall soon leave the city for an extended season, I have been unable to devise any other means of declaring myself before the time for my departure. Pray pardon me for the abruptness and importunity of my declaration, pray forgive me for the unusual way which I have taken to secure an interview alone with you. But if you only knew the ardor of my love, my impatience – oh, would that our union could be effected this very night!"

Ravished by the elegance of the stranger both in his outward seeming and his converse, melted by the warmth of a romantic devotion almost unknown in these degenerate days, though common enough of yore, Miss Almira paused a moment in the proud compliance of one about to gladly bestow an inestimable, but hardly hoped-for gift, and crying, "It can be done, it shall be done," threw herself into the cavalier's arms.

"How so?" asked the stranger, after Miss Almira had disengaged herself at the elapse of a proper interval.

"Why, the Rev. Eusebius Williams has the next room. We will call him."

"But," said the stranger, "I thought the occupant of the next room was Mr. Algernon Tibbs, a gentleman from the country, who has recently sold a large number of hogs here in the city and has

been ill in his room for a space by reason of a contusion on the head from a gold brick, which was, so to speak, twice thrown at his head, once figuratively as a ridiculously fine bargain which he refused to take, and again when the owner, angered, struck him with the rejected gold.”

“I see,” said Miss Almira archly, “that in planning for this, you have tried to study the lay of the land; but be gratified, sir, for the lucky chance which prevented a sad mistake. Mr. Tibbs and I do occupy adjoining rooms. But the one Mr. Tibbs occupies is really mine. To-day we exchanged and I will remain here for the four or five days Mr. Tibbs is to be in the city. He has a large sum of money in his possession, so we all infer. At any rate, he was afraid to sleep in this room, where there is a fire escape at the window, and took mine, where an unscalable wall prevents access. Suppose the Italian holiday had been last night and you had come then. He would then have taken you for a robber, notwithstanding that anybody could see you are a gentleman.”

For the first time did Miss Almira become conscious she was not robed as one should be while receiving callers, and blushing violently, she leaped into bed, whence she bid the stranger retire for a bit until she could dress, when they would invoke the kindly offices of the Rev. Eusebius Williams.

“Your name,” she called, as the stranger was about to retire.

“My name,” said he impressively, “which will soon be yours, is Breckenridge Endicott.”

“Mulvane,” said Mr. Breckenridge Endicott to himself, noiselessly descending the stairs, “what if she had screamed before you had pulled yourself together and thought of that stunt? You didn’t get old Tibb’s money, but you did get – away.”

Mr. Endicott tried the front door. To his apparent annoyance, there was no bolt, no knob to unlock it, and key there was none. In the parlors, he could hear the voices of boarders.

“No way there, Mulvane,” said Mr. Endicott. “I’ll go into the kitchen and walk out the back door. If there’s anybody there, they’ll think me a new boarder.”

But he started violently and stood for some moments trembling for no assignable reason, as he saw in front of the range a fat German hired girl sitting in the lap of a fat Irish policeman.

“No go through Almira’s room to the fire escape. But perhaps I can get out on the roof and get away somehow. She can’t have dressed so soon,” and he ascended the stairs to run plump into Miss Almira, who popped out of her room, resplendent in a rustling black silk.

“Oh, you impatient thing,” said Miss Almira, shaking a reproving finger. “I put this on, and then I thought I ought to wear something white, and so came out to tell you not to get impatient waiting, and why I kept you so long,” and back she popped.

“You are up against it, Mulvane,” said Mr. Breckenridge Endicott, sitting disconsolately down upon the stairs. “Hold on, just the thing. Why, as her husband, you’ll live here unsuspected and get in with old Tibbs. Why, the job will be pie. It won’t be mean to her, either. When you just vanish, she’ll have ‘Mrs.’ tacked to her name, and that’ll help her. It will be lots of satisfaction. They can’t call her an old maid. ‘Better ’tis to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.’ I’ll give her some of the boodle. She isn’t bad looking. Wonder why nobody ever grabbed on to her. If I had enough to live well, I’d marry her myself and settle down.”

The Rev. Eusebius Williams, with ten dollars fee in his right pantaloons pocket, and the radiant Almira, did not look happier during the wedding ceremony than did Mr. Breckenridge Endicott.

It was seldom that Mr. Endicott was absent from the side of his wife during the next few days. Occasionally pleading urgent business, he left her to go down town with Mr. Tibbs, whom he was seeking to interest in a plan to extract gold from sea water, a plan upon which Mr. Tibbs looked with some favor, for as presented by Mr. Endicott, it was one of great feasibility and promised enormous profits. In the setting forth of the method of extraction, Mr. Endicott was much aided by his wife, who overhearing him in earnest consultation with Mr. Tibbs bounded in and demanded to know what it was all about. Mr. Endicott demurred, saying it was an abstruse matter which should not burden so poetical a mind as hers. But Mr. Tibbs set it forth to her briefly. Having in her youth made much of the sciences of chemistry and physics, to the great amaze and admiration of Mr. Endicott, she

launched into a most lucid explication of the practicability of the plan, leaving Mr. Tibbs more than ever inclined to venture his thousands.

“By Jove, she’ll do, Mulvane. Why cut and run? Take her along. She is a splendid grafter,” said Mr. Endicott to himself, as he and his wife withdrew from the presence of Mr. Tibbs. “My dear,” he continued aloud, “I was overcome by respect for the way you aided me. You are indeed a jewel. I had never suspected you understood me, knew what I was, until you came in and explained that sucker trap. You are a most unexpected ally. You perceive clearly how the thing works?”

“Why, of course, Breckenridge. I have not studied science in vain, though I do not recall what part of the machine you call ‘sucker trap’. Doubtless the contrivance marked ‘converter,’ in the drawings. Of course I understood you, right from the first, a noble, noble man, and so romantic. But Brecky, dear, why let other people share in this invention? Why not make all the money ourselves and become million, millionaires? I shall build churches and libraries and support missionaries. Why let Mr. Tibbs, who is a somewhat gross person, enjoy any of the fruits of your genius?”

Whereupon Mr. Endicott’s face took on an expression of deep disappointment, disillusionment, and sorrow, until seeing his own sorrow mingled with alarm reflected on his wife’s face, he presently announced that they would depart on their wedding journey by boat for Mackinac three days hence.

“I shall stop fiddle-faddling and settle the business which delays me here, at one stroke. The old simple methods are the best.”

As Mr. and Mrs. Breckenridge Endicott were entering their cab to drive to the wharf, Mrs. Maxon, the landlady, came hurriedly with the scandal that Mr. Algernon Tibbs had been found in his room in the stupor of intoxication.

“Why, he might have been robbed while in that condition,” said Mrs. Maxon.

“He will not be robbed while under your roof,” said Mr. Endicott gallantly. “He is safe from robbing now. He will not, he cannot, I may say, be robbed now.”

The sun was touching the western horizon as the steamer glided out of the river’s mouth. The wind lay dead upon the water, and for a space the pair sat in the tender light of declining day indulging in the pleasures of conversation, but at length Mr. Endicott led his wife to their stateroom.

“On this auspicious day, I wish to make you a gift,” and he handed her a thousand dollars in bills. “My presence is now required on the lower deck for a time. Be patient during my absence,” whereupon he embraced her with an ardor he had never shown before and there was in his voice a strange ring of regret and longing such as Almira had never listened to. It thrilled her very soul and bestowing upon him a shower of passionate kisses and an embrace of the utmost affection, their parting took on almost the agony of a parting for years.

“Where the devil is that coal passer Mullanphy, I gave a job to?” said the engineer on the lower deck. “Is he aboard?”

“His dunnage is in his bunk, but nobody ain’t seen him,” replied one of the crew.

“Who the devil is that geezer in a Prince Albert and a plug hat that just went in back there, and what the devil is he up to?” said the engineer again, as a black-clothed figure passed toward the stern.

A few moments later, a sturdy man in a jumper and overalls, his face smeared with grime, peered cautiously around a bulkhead, and seeing nobody, stepped quickly to the side of the vessel, bearing a limp and spineless figure in a black frock and silk hat. With a dextrous movement, he cast the thing forth, and as it went flopping through the air and slapped the water, from somewhere arose the voice of Mr. Breckenridge Endicott crying, “Help! help! help!”

Mrs. Endicott, full of dole at the absence of her spouse and oppressed with a nameless disquiet, had paced the upper deck impatiently, and at this moment stood just above where her beloved went leaping to his doom. With one wild scream, she jumped, she scrambled, she fell to the lower deck, colliding with a man leaning out looking at the sinking figure. Down, with a vain and frantic clutching at the side that only served to stay his fall so that he slipped silently into the water under the vessel’s counter, went the unfortunate man.

Plump, into the yawl with the rescue crew, went Mrs. Endicott. Far astern through the dusk could be seen a black silk hat on the still water. Astern could be heard the voice of Mr. Breckenridge Endicott crying, "Quick, quick! I can swim a little, but I am almost gone!"

"Turn to the left, to the left," cried Mrs. Endicott.

"But the cries come from the right," said the coxswain.

"That's his hat to the left. I know his hat. I saw him fall. I know his voice. It's his hat and his voice."

The crew could have sworn that the cries came from the right, but to the hat they steered and the cries ceased before their arrival. They lifted the hat. Nothing beneath but eighty fathoms of water.

It was some time thereafter that a fisherman came upon a corpse floating inshore. Its face was bloated to such an extent as to prevent recognition. Its clothes were those of a steamboat roustabout. In the breastpocket was a large pocketbook bearing in gilt letters the legend, "Mr. Breckenridge Endicott."

"The present I gave him on the morning of our departure!" exclaimed Miss Almira, "now so strangely found on the dead body of the man who robbed him and probably murdered him."

Although soaked, the bills were redeemable. The fisherman was a fisherman who owned a town house on Prairie Avenue and a country house at Oconomowoc and he would take no reward. The bills amounted to nine thousand dollars. Taking her fortune, Almira retired to her former home in Ogle county, Illinois, where once more meeting Mr. Jake Long, lately made a widower, after a decent period of waiting, they became man and wife. So it ended happily for all except the person who called himself Mr. Breckenridge Endicott – though I suspect that was not his name – and for Mr. Algernon Tibbs. Lest you waste pity on Mr. Algernon Tibbs, let me say that in his youth, he was accustomed to kill little girl's cats, and that his fortune was entirely one he beat out of his brother-in-law, James Wilkinson.

What Befell Mr. Middleton Because of the Second Gift of the Emir

“The individual whose sad taking-off I have just narrated,” said the emir of the tribe of Al-Yam, “affords an excellent example of the power of good clothes. Suppose he had secreted himself under Miss Almira’s bed wearing a jumper, overalls, and a mask. He would have been arrested and lodged in the penitentiary.”

“But he is now dead,” said Mr. Middleton.

“He had better be dead, than continuing his career of villainy and crime,” quoth the emir sternly, and then passing his eyes over the person of Mr. Middleton, he remarked the somewhat threadbare and glossy garments of that excellent young man. “If you would accept a suit of raiment from me,” continued the emir with a hesitation that betrayed the delicacy which was one of the most marked of the many estimable traits that made his character so admirable, “I would be overjoyed and obliged. The interests of you, my only friend in this vast land, have become to me as my own. Unfortunately I have no Frank clothes except the one suit I wear daily. But of the costumes of my native land, I have abundant store, and as we are of the same stature, I beg you will make me happy by accepting one.”

Speaking some words to Mesrou in the language of Arabia, the blackamore brought in and proceeded to invest Mr. Middleton with an elegant silken habit consisting of a pair of exceedingly baggy trousers of the hue of emeralds, a round jacket whose crimson rivalled the rubies of Farther Ind, and a vest of snowy white. Double rows of small pearls ornamented the edges of the jacket, which was short and just met a copper-colored sash about the waist. After inducting him into a pair of white leggings and bronze shoes, Mesrou clapped upon his head a large white turban ornamented with a black aigret.

Mr. Middleton looked very well in his new garments and while the emir was complimenting him upon this fact and the grace of his bearing and Mr. Middleton was uttering protestations of gratitude, Mesrou busied himself, and Mr. Middleton, turning with intent to resume his wonted garb, was astonished to find it in a network of heavy twine tied with a multiplicity of knots.

“Mesrou will bring you your Frank clothes in the morning. I am very tired, and so I will bid you good night,” and the yawn which now overspread the face of the accomplished prince told more than his words that the audience was ended.

Mr. Middleton looked at the bundle with its array of knots. To untie it would require a long time and the prince was repeating his yawn and his good night. Even had he not hesitated to offend the prince by demanding opportunity to resume his customary vestments and to weary him by making him wait for this operation, which promised to be a long one, he would have been without volition in the matter; for in obedience to a gesture, Mesrou grasped his arm and with great deference, but inflexible and unalterable firmness, led him through the shop and closed the street door behind him.

Mr. Middleton was greatly disconcerted at finding himself in the street arrayed in these brilliant and barbarous habiliments, but reflecting that the citizens traveling the streets at this hour would perhaps take him for some high official in one of the many fraternal orders that entertain, instruct, and edify the inhabitants of the city, he proceeded on his way somewhat reassured. As he was changing cars well toward his lodgings, at a corner where a large public hall reared its façade, he heard himself accosted, and turning, beheld a portly person wearing a gilt paper crown, a long robe of purple velvet bordered with rabbit’s fur spotted with black, and bearing in his hand a bung-starter, which, covered with gilt paper, made a very creditable counterfeit of a royal scepter.

“Come here once,” said this personage.

With great affableness expressing a willingness to come twice, if it were desired, Mr. Middleton accompanied the personage, as with an air of brooding mystery, the latter led him down the street twenty feet from where they had first stood.

“Was you going to the masquerade?”

“Yes,” said Mr. Middleton, divining from the presence of the personage and two other masquers whom he now beheld entering the hall, that a masquerade was in progress.

“What’ll you take to stay away?”

“Why?”

“You’ll take the prize.”

“What is the prize and why should the possibility of winning it deter me?”

“The prize is five dollars. It’s this way. I am a saloonkeeper. Gustaf Kleiner and I are in love with the same girl. She is in love with all both of us. She don’t know what to say. She can’t marry all both, so she says she’ll marry the one what gits the prize at the masquerade. If you git the prize, don’t either of us git the girl already. I’ll give you twenty dollars to stay away.”

“But what of Gustaf Kleiner? Have you paid him?”

“He is going to be a devil. I hired two Irishmans for five dollars to meet him up the street, cut off his tail, break his horns, and put whitewash on his red suit. He is all right. I’ll make it thirty dollars and a ticket of the raffle for my watch to-morrow.”

“Done,” said Mr. Middleton, and he proceeded to draw up a contract binding him to stay away from the masquerade for a consideration of thirty dollars.

It was not the least remarkable part of his adventure that he did not meet Gustaf Kleiner in his damaged suit and for a consideration of fifty dollars, lend him the magnificent Oriental costume. He did not see Gustaf Kleiner at all, nor did he win the watch in the raffle and the chronicler hopes that the setting down of these facts will not cause the readers to doubt his veracity, for he is aware that usually these things are ordered differently.

Having kept the Oriental costume for several days and seeing no prospect of ever wearing it, and his small closet having become crowded by the presence of a new twenty-dollar suit which he purchased with part of his gains, he presented it to the young lady in Englewood previously mentioned, who reduced the ruby red jacket to a beautiful bolero jacket, made a table throw of the sash, and after much hesitation seized the exceedingly baggy trousers – which were made with but one seam – and ripping them up, did, with a certain degree of confusion, fashion them into two lovely shirt waists. But she did not wear them in the presence of Mr. Middleton and did not even mention them to him. Nor did Mr. Middleton allude to any of these transactions when on the appointed day and hour he again sat in the presence of the urbane prince of the tribe of Al-Yam. Handing him a bowl of delicately flavored sherbet, Achmed began to narrate The Adventure of William Hicks.

The Adventure of William Hicks

Young William Hicks was a native of the village of Bensonville, in the southern part of Illinois. Having, at the age of twenty, graduated at the head of a class of six in the village school, his father thought to reward him for his diligence in study by a short trip to the city of Chicago, which metropolis William had never beheld. Addressing him in a discourse which, while not long, abounded in valuable advice, Mr. Hicks presented his son with a sum of money sufficient for a stay of a week, provided it were not expended imprudently.

One evening, William was walking along Wabash Avenue, feeling somewhat lonely as he soberly reflected that not one in all that vast multitude cared anything about him, when he heard himself accosted in a most cheery manner, and looking up, beheld a beautiful lady smiling at him. It was plain that she belonged to the upper classes. A hat of very large proportions, ornamented with a great ostrich plume, shaded a head of lovely yellow hair. She was clothed all in rustling purple silk and sparkled with jewelry. Her cheeks and lips glowed with a carmine quite unknown among the fair but pale damosels of Bensonville, which is situated in a low alluvial location, surrounded by flat plains, the whole being somewhat damp and malarial. William had never imagined eyes so wide open and glistening.

“My name is Willy, to be sure. But you have the advantage of me, for ashamed as I am to say it, I cannot quite recall you. You are not the lady who came to Bensonville and stayed at the Campbellite minister’s?”

“Oh, how are all the dear folks in Bensonville? But, say, Will, don’t you want to come along with me awhile and talk it all over?”

“I should be honored to do so, if you will lead the way. I confess I am lonely to-night, and I always enjoy talking over old times.”

At this juncture, a sudden look of alarm spread over the lady’s beauteous face and a lumbering minion of the law stepped before her.

“Up to your old tricks, eh?” he growled. “Didn’t I tell you that the next time I caught you tackling a man, I’d run you in? Run you in it is. Come on, now.”

“Oh, oh,” panted the lady, and great tears welled into her adorable eyes. At that moment, there was a crash in the street, as a poor Italian exile had his push cart overturned by the sudden and unexpected backing of a cab. The policeman turned to look and, like a frightened gazelle, the lady bounded away, closely followed by young William.

“Is there nothing I can do? Cannot I complain to the judge for you, or address a communication to some paper describing and condemning this conduct?”

“Is he coming? Is he coming?” asked the lady, piteously.

“No. But if he were, I would strike him, big as he is. Cannot a former visitor in Bensonville greet one of its citizens without interference from the police?”

Hereupon the lady, who seemed to be giving little heed to what William was saying, beyond the information that the policeman was not in pursuit, gave a gay little laugh of relief, which caused William’s eyes to light in pitying sympathy.

“Now that we are away from him, what do you say to a friendly game of cards somewhere, to pass away the evening, which hangs heavy on my hands and doubtless does on yours?”

“I have never played cards,” said William, “for while there is nothing intrinsically wrong in them, they are the vehicle of much that is injurious, and at the very least, they cause one to fritter away valuable time in profitless amusement.”

“Oh, la! you are wrong there,” said the lady, with a little silvery laugh. “They are not a profitless amusement. Why, a man has to keep his brains in good trim when he plays cards, and whist is just as good a mental exercise as geometry and algebra, or any other study where the mind is engaged upon

various problems. You see I stand up for cards, for I teach whist myself and I assure you that many of the leading ladies of this city spend their time in little else than whist, which they would not do if cards were what you say. Before you pass your opinion, why not let me show you some of the fine points, and then you will have something to base your judgment upon.”

William, quite impressed by the elegance and social standing of the lady, as well as influenced by her beauty, despite her evident seniority of ten or fifteen years, assented, and the lady continued:

“I would invite you to my own apartments, but they are so far away, and as we are now in front of the Hotel Dieppe, let us go up and engage a room for a few hours and I will teach you a few little interesting tricks with which you can amuse the people of Bensonville, and even obtain some profit, if you wish to. What do you say?”

William averring that he would be pleased to receive the proffered instruction, she led the way up a flight of stairs and paused in the doorway of the hotel office, for the Hotel Dieppe was a hostelry of no great pretensions and occupied the upper stories of a building, the lower floors of which were devoted to a furniture emporium. Behind the counter stood a low-browed clerk with a large diamond in his shirt front, who scrutinized them keenly.

“You get the room,” said the lady, coyly. “I’m bashful and don’t like to go in there where are all those smoking men. You may take it in my name if you wish, – Madeleine Montmorency.”

“Number 15,” said the clerk, and in a space William found himself in a dark room, alone with the lady, and heard the door close behind them and the key turn in the lock.

“We are locked in!” exclaimed Miss Montmorency.

“What’s that?” said a deep voice in the darkness.

Miss Montmorency screamed, and screamed again as William turned on the light and they beheld a man lying in bed!

William was stepping hastily to her side to shield her vision from this improper spectacle, when he paused as if frozen to the floor. The man was now sitting up in bed and he had a *red flannel night gown, one eye, AND TWO NOSES!*

“What the devil are you doing here?” exclaimed the monster in the red flannel nightgown.

“That I will gladly tell you, for I would not have you believe that we wantonly intruded upon your slumbers.” And thereupon William related that he was a citizen of Bensonville who had met a former visitor there and they had come here to talk over mutual acquaintances and improve their minds by discreet discourse. “But, sir,” he said, in concluding, “pardon my natural curiosity concerning yourself. Who are you and why are you?”

“If I had the printed copies of my life here, I would gladly sell you one, but I left them all behind. My name is Walker Sheldrup. I am registered from Springfield, Mass., but I am from Dubuque, Iowa. I was born in Sedalia, Mo., where my father was a prominent citizen. It was he who led the company of men who, with five ox teams, hauled the courthouse away from Georgetown and laid the foundations of Sedalia’s greatness. Had he lived, Sedalia would not have tried in vain to swipe the capital from Jefferson City. As a youth I was distinguished – but I’ll cut all that out. Your presence here and the door being locked behind you only too surely warns me that we have no time to lose. They have taken you for the snake-eating lady and the rubber-skinned boy, who ran away when I did and who were to meet me here in Chicago. If you will turn your heads away so I can dress, I will continue. You have heard of prenatal influences. Shortly before I was born, my mother made nine pumpkin pies and set them to cool on a stone wall beneath the shade of a large elm. As luck would have it, a menagerie passed by and an elephant grabbed those pies one after another and ate them. The sight of that enormous pachyderm gobbling my mother’s cherished handiwork, completely upset her. I was born with two noses like the two tusks of the beast. At the same time, like the trunk, they are movable. My two noses are as mobile and useful as two fingers and if you have a quarter with you, I will gladly perform some curious feats. My noses being so near together, ordinarily, I join them with flesh-colored wax. I then seem to have but one nose, although a very large one. I thus escape

the annoying attention of the multitude, which is very disagreeable to a proud man of good family, like me. Young man, do you ever drink? In Dubuque, they got me drunk so I didn't know what I was about and I signed a contract with a dime museum company for twenty-five dollars a week. Take warning from my fate. Never drink, never drink."

"I can well imagine your sufferings at being a spectacle for a ribald crowd," said William. "To a man of refined sensibilities, it must be excruciating, and it was an outrage to entrap you into such a contract."

"I ought to have had seventy-five and could have got fifty. So I ran away. Well, now, how are we going to get out of here? Can you climb over the transom, young man?"

As he said these words, the door flew open and in rushed some villainous looking men, who gagged, handcuffed, and shackled Miss Montmorency, William, and the two-nosed man.

"We have the legal right to do this," said the leader, displaying the badge of the Jinkins private detective agency. "Advices from Dubuque set us at work. We early located Sheldrup at this hotel, and when the clerk saw the rubber-skinned boy and the snake-eating lady come in, he suspicioned who they was at once and by a great stroke, put 'em in with old two-nose. Do you think we are going to put you through for breach of contract and for swiping that money out of the till on the claim it was due you on salary? Nit. Cost too much, take too much time, and you git sent to jail instead of being back in the museum helping draw crowds. We are in for saving time and trouble for you, us, and your employer. To-night you ride out of here for Dubuque, covered up with hay, in the corner of the car carrying the new trick horse for the museum. Save your fare and all complications. Now, boys, we want to work this on the quiet, so we will just leave 'em all here until the streets are deserted and there won't be anybody around to notice us gitting 'em into the hack."

"Hadn't one of us better stay?" asked a subordinate.

"How can people gagged, their ankles shackled, their hands handcuffed behind 'em, git out? Why, I'll just leave the handcuff keys here on the table and tantalize 'em."

Tears welled in the soft, beauteous orbs of Miss Montmorency and William's eyes spoke keen distress, but Mr. Sheldrup's eyes gleamed triumphantly above the cloth tied about the lower part of his face. Hardly had the steps of the detectives died away on the stair, when a little click was heard behind Miss Montmorency and her handcuffs fell to the floor. There stood Mr. Sheldrup, politely bowing, with the key held between his two noses. She seized it and in a twinkling, the bonds of all had been removed and, forcing the door, they started away. At the street entrance stood the policeman who had insulted Miss Montmorency!

"Oh, he's waiting for me, and I'll get six months. He knew where I'd go. I haven't any money," and tears not only filled the wondrous optics of poor Miss Montmorency, but flowed down her cheeks.

"Six months, your grandmother. I'll not go back on you. Young man, follow me into the office and when I am fairly in front of the clerk, give me a shove," and the two-nosed man, with a grip in each hand, walked up to the clerk and began to rebuke him for his ungentlemanly and unprincipled conduct.

"You white-livered son of a sea-cook, you double-dyed, concentrated essence of a skunk," and at that moment young William pushed him and the two-nosed gentleman lurched forward, and bending his head to avoid contact with the clerk's face, it rested against the latter's bosom for a moment. Departing immediately, at the foot of the stairs the two-nosed gentleman said to the policeman:

"Officer, please let this lady pass. For various reasons, I desire it enough to spare this stud, which will look well upon the best policeman on the force."

"All right," said the policeman. "Go along for all of me, Bet Higgins," and he courteously accepted the diamond.

"My stage name," said Miss Montmorency, in answer to an inquiring look from William. "The name I sign to articles in the Sunday papers."

“Now of course they are watching all the depots,” said the two-nosed gentleman. “Before they located me here they did that, and as they have also been looking for the snake-eating lady and the rubber-skinned boy, our late captors have not had time to notify them that we have been captured. It is useless to try to escape that way, then; it is too far to walk out, or go by street car, and as it is a fair, moonlight night with a soft breeze, I am for getting a boat and sailing out.”

After some search, they found a small sail boat. Miss Montmorency had decided to flee from the wicked city with the two-nosed gentleman. She had heard such delightful reports of Michigan. The owner of the boat not being there and there being no probability that they would ever return it, the two-nosed gentleman wrote a check on a Dubuque bank for one hundred and seventy-five dollars, and Miss Montmorency an order on the school board for a like amount, and these they pinned up where the boatman could find them.

“It will be quite like a fairy tale when the good boatman comes in the morning and finds this large sum left him by those to whom his little craft has been of such inestimable service,” said William, and then for fear the boatman might not find the check and the order, in two other places he pinned up cards giving the whereabouts of the remuneration for the boat and some statement concerning the circumstances of its requisition. On the back of one of the cards had been penciled his name and city address, and though he had erased the black of this inscription, the impression yet remained distinctly legible. This erasure was not due to any desire to conceal his identity or lodgings, but because he had thought at first that he could not get all the information on one side of the card. Having seen his friends go slipping out on the deep, he turned pensively homeward, somewhat heavy of heart, for when one faces perils with another, fast friendships are quickly welded.

In the morning, young William was arrested and lodged in jail and a corrupt and venal judge laughed with contempt at his plea. After three long days in jail, came Mr. Hicks, senior, who compounded with the boat owner for two hundred and fifty dollars, the boat being, as the owner swore, of Spanish cedar with nickel-plated trimmings.

“That is always the way when a person of good heart befriends another,” said Mr. Middleton.

“Alas, too often,” said the emir of the tribe of Al-Yam. “But I am pleased to say that when once across the lake, the two-nosed gentleman married Miss Montmorency, who whatever she might be, did not lack certainly womanly qualities and had been the sport of an unkind world. Having something to live for, the two-nosed gentleman signed with a Detroit dime museum company at seventy-five dollars a week. His two noses were not the most remarkable thing about him, for in course of time hearing of young William’s misadventure, he sent him a sum equivalent to all the episode had cost him, together with a handsome diamond stud, which he had with great deftness and cleverness taken from the officious policeman, as he visited the dime museum with two ladies while spending his vacation in Detroit. And this beautiful ornament William delighted to wear, not merely because of its intrinsic worth, which was considerable, but through regard for its thoughtful and considerate donor.”

“The two-nosed man did truly show himself a man of gratitude, and I am glad to hear of such an instance. Yet from what you said of him in the beginning of the tale, I should not have expected it of him. How often is one deceived by appearances and how hard it is to trust to them.”

“Even the wisest is unable to distinguish an enemy wearing the guise of a friend, but we may bring to our assistance the aid of forces more powerful than our poor little human intelligence. Let me present you with a talisman which will ever warn you when any one plots against you.”

“How?”

“How? You must wait until some one plots against you and the talisman will answer that question. Its ways of warning will be as manifold as the plots villains may conceive. Here is the talisman, an Egyptian scarabæus of pure gold. So cunningly fashioned is it that not nature itself made ever a bug more perfect in the outward seeming.”

What Befell Mr. Middleton Because of the Third Gift of the Emir

Putting the scarabæus in his left trousers pocket, Mr. Middleton departed, and as he went about his affairs during the next several days, he ceased to think of the talisman, but on the fourth day his attention was recalled to it in a way that indeed seemed to prove that it was a charm possessed of the powers the emir of the tribe of Al-Yam had attributed to it. He was faring northward in a street car at eleven of the morning, diverting himself with the study of the passengers sitting opposite, when he became aware that the scarabæus in his left trousers pocket was slowly traveling up his leg. Had the talisman been other than the heavy object it was, he would not have noticed it, but it was of too considerable weight to travel over his person without making its progress felt. Deterred by none of the superstitious tremors which the unaccountable peregrinations of the gold beetle would have excited in one less intrepid, he quickly thrust his hand into his pocket to close it over another hand already there, a hand which beyond a first little start to escape, lay passive and unresisting, a hand soft and delicate, yet well-muscled withal, long-fingered and finely formed. At the same time, a well-modulated voice at his side exclaimed:

“Why, I did not recognize you at first. I was not looking when you came and you evidently did not notice me.”

“No, I did not,” said Mr. Middleton, composedly, still retaining his grasp upon the hand in his pocket. “I cannot see that you have changed any,” he continued, scrutinizing the young woman at his side, for she was young and, moreover, of a very pleasing presence, and he did not altogether rebel against the circumstances that allowed him to fondle the hand of one so comely. The day, which had begun with a slight chill, had turned off warm and she had removed her cloak, which, lying across her own lap and partially across Mr. Middleton’s, had been the blind behind which she had introduced her hand into the pocket where reposed the fateful talisman.

The persons in the car seemed to take an interest in this sudden recognition on the part of a pair who had been riding side by side for so long, oblivious of each other’s identity. Moreover, the young woman was tastefully gowned and of a very smart appearance, while Mr. Middleton’s new suit became him and fitted him nicely and altogether they were a couple nearly any one would find pleasure in looking upon. A slight movement to withdraw the hand lying within his own, caused Mr. Middleton’s grasp to tighten and almost simultaneously, the young woman at his side leaned forward and with a look in which sorrow and pain were mingled, said in a lowered voice:

“Oh, I have such a dreadful thing to tell you about our friend Amy. I hate to tell you, but as I wish to bespeak your kind offices, I must do so. I am going to ask you to be the agent of a restitution. She has, oh, she has become a kleptomaniac. With every luxury, with her fine home on the Lake Shore Drive, with all her father’s wealth, with no want money can gratify, she takes things. In her circumstances it is out of the question to call it stealing. It is a mania, a form of insanity. When she is doing it, she seems to be in the grasp of some other mind, to be another person, and her actions are involuntary, unconscious. Then she seems to come to herself, when her agony is dreadful to behold.”

The young woman’s voice broke a little here, she paused a moment to resume control of herself, and perceiving her eyes swimming with tears and her lips quivering with unhappiness, Mr. Middleton was penetrated with pity and pressed most tenderly and sympathetically the delicate hand of which he was temporarily custodian.

“She took things in stores, trumpery, cheap things. She took magazines and penny papers from news stands. But oh, she descended to the dreadful depths of – oh, I can hardly tell it – she was detected in trying to pick a man’s pocket. It is here that I wish to employ you as an agent of restitution, or rather retribution, I should say. Will you please take this ring off my left hand and take it to the

man she tried to rob? I cannot use the fingers of my right hand owing to temporary incapacitation,” and she held out to Mr. Middleton her left hand, upon the third finger of which gleamed a splendid ring of diamonds and emeralds. Mr. Middleton possessed himself of this second hand, but paused, and regarding the sweet face turned up to his so beseechingly, so piteously, said:

“But that would be compounding a felony. And how do you know the man will not have her arrested anyway?”

“The man is a gentleman and having heard her story, will not think of such a thing. You are to ask him to accept the ring not as a price for immunity from arrest, but as a punishment, a retribution to Amy. The loss of the ring, which she has commissioned me to get to this gentleman in some manner, will be a lesson she is only too anxious to give herself, a forcible reminder, as it were. Let me beg of you to undertake this commission.”

All the while, Mr. Middleton was retaining hold of both the hands of the sorrowful young woman. Had they been other than the soft and shapely hands they were, had they been hard and gnarled and large, long before would he, melted by compassion at the young woman’s tale, have released her. But her very charms had been her undoing and because of her perfect hands, this tale has grown long. That he might have excuse in the eyes of the other passengers for holding the young woman’s hand, Mr. Middleton removed the ring as he had been bidden, planning to return it shortly. As he removed the ring, he released the hand in his pocket and his plan was frustrated by the young woman starting up with the exclamation that she had passed her corner, and springing from the car. She was so far in advance of him, when he succeeded in getting off the car and was walking so rapidly, that he could not overtake her except by running, and he was averse to attracting the attention that this would occasion. So he determined to shadow her and ascertaining her residence, find some means of restoring the ring without the knowledge of her friends, as he had no desire to do anything which might cause them to learn of her unfortunate infirmity, especially, as this last experience might have worked a cure. She did indeed enter a stately mansion of the Lake Shore Drive – but by the back door.

Pondering upon this episode, Mr. Middleton went to an acquaintance who kept a large loan bank on Madison Street, who, after discovering that he had no desire to pawn the ring, appraised it at seven hundred dollars.

On the following evening, Mr. Middleton was replacing his new suit by his old, as was his custom when he intended to remain in his room of an evening. This example cannot be too highly commended to all young men. The amount which would be saved in this nation were all to economize in this way, would be sufficient to buy beer for all the Teutonic citizens of the large state of Illinois. As Mr. Middleton was changing his clothes, the scarabæus dropped from his pocket and as he picked it up, a collar button fell from his neckband, and scrambling for it as it rolled toward the unexplored regions under his bed, he tripped and sprawled at full length, his nose coming in sharp contact with an evening paper lying on the floor. He was about to rise from his recumbent position, when his eyes, glancing along his nose to discover if it had sustained any injury, observed that said member rested upon a notice which read:

“Lost, a diamond and emerald ring. \$800 will be paid for its return and no questions asked. David O. Crecelius.”

The address was that of the house on the Lake Shore Drive which the kleptomaniac had entered! Once more did the scarabæus seem to be exerting its influence. But for the talisman, he would never have seen the notice, and a little shiver ran through him as he thought of this. Immediately he re clothed himself in his new suit.

“There is time for me to think out a course of action between here and my destination,” said he. “The walking so conducive to reflection can be much better employed in taking me toward the Lake Shore Drive, than in uselessly pacing my room, and I’ll be there when I get through.”

As he traveled eastward, he engaged in a series of ratiocinative processes and the result of the deductive and inductive reasoning which he applied to the case in hand, was as follows:

The kleptomaniac could hardly be a daughter of the house. She would have entered by the front door. If she were the daughter of the house, she would not have had the ring advertised for, counting herself fortunate to get out of the difficulty so cheaply. However, if her parents had noted the absence of the ring, she might have said it was lost and so they advertised, but nothing could have been further from her wishes, for there would be the great danger that the outcome of the advertisement would be a complete exposure. She could easily prevent her parents noticing the ring was gone, at least making satisfactory explanations for not wearing it. With her wealth, she could have it duplicated inside of a few days and her friends never know the original was lost. As this is what the daughter of the house in all probability would have done, the kleptomaniac could hardly have been the daughter of the house. He suspected that she was a lady's maid, who, wearing her mistress's jewelry, had purchased her way out of one difficulty at the risk of getting into another. The advertisement would seem to indicate that she was trusted. The disappearance of the ring was apparently not connected with her. The matter was very simple. He would hand over the ring and take the eight hundred dollars and need say nothing that would implicate the young woman, be she daughter of the house and kleptomaniac, or serving-maid and common thief. But one thing puzzled him. Why was the reward greater than the value of the ring?

Eight hundred dollars. The young lady in Englewood was getting nearer.

A bitter east wind was blowing as he walked up to the entrance of the mansion of Mr. David Crecelius. Behind him the street lay all deserted and the melancholy voice of the waves filled the air. Nowhere could he see a light about the house and he was oppressed by a feeling of undefinable apprehension as he pressed the bell. A considerable interval elapsing without any one appearing and a second and a third ringing failing to elicit any response from within the silent pile, he was about to depart, feeling greatly relieved that it was not necessary to hold parley with any one within the gloomy and forbidding edifice, when he heard a sudden light thud at his feet and discovered that the scarabæus had dropped through a hole in his trousers' pocket which had at that moment reached a size large enough to allow it to escape. After a hurried search, he had possessed himself of the talisman and was about to depart, when the door swung open before him and a venerable white-haired man stood in a dim green glow. Boldly did Mr. Middleton enter, for had not the talisman delayed him until the venerable man opened the door?

"Come in, sir, come in," said the venerable man, whom Mr. Middleton saw was none other than David O. Crecelius, the capitalist, whose portraits he had seen again and again in the Sunday papers and the weekly papers of a moral and entertaining nature, accompanying accounts of his life and achievements, with exhortations to the youth of the land to imitate them, advice which Mr. Middleton then and there resolved to follow, reflecting upon the impeccable sources from which it emanated.

"All the servants seem to be gone. My family is abroad and the household force has been cut down, and I have given everybody leave to go out to-night, all but one maid, and she seems to have gone, too," said Mr. Crecelius, leading Mr. Middleton into a spacious salon and seating him near where great portières of a funereal purple moved uneasily in the superheated atmosphere of the house. At that moment, a voice from the hallway, a voice he had surely heard before, said:

"Did some one ring? I am very sorry, but it was impossible for me to come," and Mr. Middleton was aware that some one was looking hard at the back of his head.

"Yes. I let them in. It's no matter. Run away now."

When Mr. Middleton had finished explaining the reason for his call and had fished up the ring, Mr. Crecelius did not, as he had expected he would, arise and make out a check for \$800.

"This ring," said that gentleman after a little pause, "have you it with you?"

Mr. Middleton glanced at the hollow of his left hand. He had fished up the scarabæus instead of the ring. But his left thumb soon showed him the ring was safe in his vest pocket. The delay and

caution of Mr. Crecelius, and above all, the prevention of the immediate delivery of the ring caused by the scarabæus coming up in its stead caused Mr. Middleton to delay.

“It can be produced,” said he.

“How did you get it?”

“It came into my possession innocently enough so far as I was concerned. As to the person from whom I received it, that is a different matter, but though I made no promises, I feel I am in honor bound not to disclose that person’s identity.”

As he uttered these words, Mr. Middleton saw the portière at his side rustle slightly. It was not the swaying caused by the currents of overheated air.

“I will give you two hundred dollars more to tell me who gave you or sold you the ring.”

“I cannot do that.”

“Very well. I’ll only give you four hundred dollars reward.”

“The ring is worth more than that.”

“If you retain it, or sell it, you become a thief.”

“You have advertised eight hundred dollars reward and no questions asked. I may have found it. Knowing of your loss through reading your advertisement, I may have gone to great trouble to recover it. At any rate, I have it. I deliver it. Your advertisement is in effect a contract which I can call upon you to carry out. The ring is not mine, but for my services in getting it, I am entitled to the eight hundred dollars you agree to give. You cannot give less.”

“Do you think it right to take advantage of my necessity in this way? You ought to accept less. The ring is not worth over seven hundred dollars. For returning it, three hundred dollars ought to be enough. It is wrong to drive a hard bargain by taking advantage of my necessity.”

“You have built your fortune on such principles. You have engineered countless schemes and your dollars came from the straits you reduced others to.”

“But do you think it right? What I may have done, does not justify you. I venture to say you and other young chaps have sat with heels cocked up and pipes in mouth and discussed me and called me a villain for doing what you are trying to do with me.”

“I have indeed. But that was in the past and I have changed my views materially. At present, I have the exclusive possession of the ability to secure something you very much want. You offered eight hundred dollars. Intrinsically, the ring is not worth it, but for certain reasons, possession of the ring is worth eight hundred dollars.”

“Possession of the ring! Certain reasons!” said Mr. Crecelius, springing to his feet and pacing up and down the room angrily. As Mr. Middleton was cudgelling his brains to find some reason for this outburst of anger, he became cognizant of a small piece of folded paper lying near his feet. He was about to pick it up and hand it to the financier, when he was stayed by the reflection that it might have dropped from his own pocket and examining it, read:

“It’s his wife’s ring. I wore it along with some of her other things. Ten years ago, he gave it to another woman, and his wife found it out and he had to buy it back. He is afraid his wife will think he gave the ring away a second time. That is why I dared give it to you. Make him give you a thousand.

“The One You Didn’t Give Away.”

Mr. Middleton put the note in his pocket, and the eminent capitalist having ceased pacing and standing gazing at him, he remarked:

“Certain reasons, such as preventing an altercation with your wife over her suspicions that you had not lost the ring, but had disposed of it as on a former occasion ten years since.”

“Young man, you cannot blackmail me. My wife knows all about that. The knowledge of that occurrence is worthless as a piece of blackmail.”

“As blackmail, yes; but not worthless as an indication of the extent you desire to regain possession of the ring. Your wife knows of your former escapade and that is gone and past. But the present disappearance of the ring will cause her to think you have repeated the escapade. This knowledge of certain conditions causes me to see that my services in securing and delivering the ring are worth one thousand dollars. Upon the payment of that sum, cash, I hand you the ring.”

The distinguished money-king gave Mr. Middleton a very black look and then left the room to return almost immediately with a thousand dollars in bills, which Mr. Middleton counted, placed in his vest pocket, and forthwith delivered the ring. As he did so, yielding to the pride with which the successful outcome of his tilt with the great capitalist inflamed him, he remarked with a condescension which the suavity of his tones could not conceal:

“Had you, sir, employed in this affair the perspicacity you have displayed on so many notable occasions, it would have occurred to you that this ring, being of a common pattern, could be duplicated for seven hundred dollars and so you be saved both money and worry.”

A look of admiration overspread the face of the eminent manipulator, and grasping Mr. Middleton’s hand with great fervor, he exclaimed:

“A man after my own heart. I am always ready to acknowledge a defeat. You have good stuff in you. I must know you better. You must stay and have a glass of champagne with me. I will get it myself,” and he hurried out of the room.

In the state of Wisconsin, from which Mr. Middleton hailed, there is a great deal of the alcoholic beverage, beer, but such champagne as is to be found there is all due to importation, since it is not native to the soil, but is brought in at great expense from France, La Belle France, and New Jersey, La Belle New Jersey. Mr. Middleton had seen, smelled, and tasted beer, but champagne was unknown to him save by hearsay, and his improper curiosity and his readiness to succumb to temptation caused him to linger in the salon of Mr. Crecelius, thereby nearly accomplishing his ruin. Suddenly there was a patter of light steps across the floor, a hand fell lightly on his shoulder and a voice lightly on his ear.

“You made him raving mad when you said what you did. He telephoned the police. Now he has gone for the wine and will try to hold you until they come.”

“But he cannot arrest me. I have done nothing,” said Mr. Middleton, his heart going pit-a-pat, in spite of the boldness of his words.

“He can make all sorts of trouble for you. Even if you did come out all right in the end, think of the trouble. Come, come quick!”

A soft hand had grasped one of his and he was up and away, following his fair guide up stairs, through the house, and down into the kitchen.

“I have recovered my wits a bit,” said Mr. Middleton. “He is so angry that he has no thought but immediate vengeance, and so accordingly telephones the police, and if they were to catch me here, it certainly would be bad. But to-morrow he will be in a mood to appreciate the good sense of the letter I shall send him, calling his attention to the fact that if he arrests me, in the trial there must come out the reason why I demanded one thousand dollars, the story of his domestic indiscretion, and so he will not think of pursuing the matter further.”

“It was very kind and very noble of you not to expose me,” said the young woman in a voice in which gratitude and sadness were mingled; “and all the admiration and gratitude a woman can feel under such circumstances, I feel toward you. To you I owe my continued good name and even my very freedom. I know that marriage with such as you, is not for such as me. I am going to ask you to give to her who would have all, but expects and deserves nothing, the consolation of a kiss. Whatever happy maiden may be so fortunate as to receive your love, I shall have treasured in memory the golden remembrance that once my preserver bestowed on me the symbol of love.”

Mr. Middleton looked down at the girl, supplicating for the favor her sex is wont to deny, and he said to himself that seldom had he seen a more flower-like face. Her lovely lips were already puckered in a rosy pout, her hands raised ready to rest on his shoulders as he should encircle her with

his arms, when he noted with a start that her eyes, snapping, alert, and eager, were bent not upon his face, but upon his upper left hand vest pocket, where bulged the one thousand dollars in bills.

“I am more than honored and I shall be ravished with delight to comply. But here, where we stand, we are exposed to view from three sides. If Mr. Crecelius were to look in and see you being kissed by me, whom he so dislikes, in what a bad plight you would be. Not even for the exquisite pleasure of kissing you would I subject you to such a danger. But in the shadow by the outer door, we would not be seen.”

As he said these words, Mr. Middleton placed the money in his inside vest pocket, buttoned his vest, buttoned his inner coat, and buttoned his overcoat, moving toward the outer door as he did so, the young woman following him more and more slowly, the light in her eyes dying with each successive buttoning. In fact, she did not enter into the shadow at all, and Mr. Middleton stepped back a bit when he threw his arms about her and pressed her to his bosom. Perfunctorily and coldly did she yield to his embrace, but whatever ardor was lacking on her part, was compensated for by Mr. Middleton, who clasped her with exceeding tightness and showered kisses upon her pouting lips until she pushed him from her, exclaiming with annoyance:

“You’ve kissed me quite enough, you great big softy.”

Mr. Middleton said nothing of these transactions when on the ensuing evening he sat in the presence of the young lady of Englewood, nor did he, when on the evening thereafter he once more sat in the presence of the urbane prince of the tribe of Al-Yam. Having handed him a bowl of delicately flavored sherbet, Achmed began to narrate The Adventure of Nora Sullivan and the Student of Heredity.

The Adventure of Norah Sullivan and the Student of Heredity

It was the time of full moon. As the orb of day dropped its red, huge disk below the western horizon, over the opposite side of the world, the moon, even more huge and scarcely less red, rose to irradiate with its mild beams the scenes which the shadows of darkness had not yet touched. Miss Nora Sullivan, a teacher in the public schools of the metropolis, sat upon the front porch of the paternal residence enjoying the loveliness of the vernal prospect and the balm of the air, for it was in the flowery month of June. Although the residence of Timothy Sullivan was well within the limits of the municipality of Chicago, one visiting at that hospitable abode might imagine himself in the country. From no part of the enclosure could you, during the leafy season, see another human habitation. A quarter of a mile down the road to the east, the electric cars for Calumet could be seen flitting by, but except at the intervals of their passing, there was seldom anything to suggest that the location was part of a great city. A quarter of a mile to the west, on the edge of a marsh – a situation well suited to such culture – lived a person engaged in the raising of African geese. As it is probable that you may never have heard of African geese, I will tell you that they are the largest of their tribe and that specimens of them often weigh as high as seventy pounds.

The person engaged in the culture of African geese was Wilhelm Klingenspiel, a man of German ancestry, but born in this country. Miss Sullivan had often heard of him, she had even partaken of the left leg of an African goose, which leg he had given Mr. Sullivan for the Sunday dinner, but she had never seen him. As Wilhelm Klingenspiel was young and single and as no other man of any description lived in the vicinity, it is not strange that Nora, who was also young and single, should sometimes fall to thinking of Mr. Klingenspiel and wonder what manner of man he was.

On this evening so attuned to romantic reveries, when the flowers, the birds, and all nature spoke of love, more than ever did Nora Sullivan's thoughts turn toward the large grove of trees to the westward in the midst of which Wilhelm Klingenspiel had his home and carried on his pleasant and harmless vocation of raising African geese. The evening song of the geese, tempered and sweetened by distance, came to her, accompanied by the most extraordinary booming and racketing of frogs which is to be heard outside of the tropical zone; for not only did Klingenspiel raise the largest geese on this terraqueous globe, but having, as a means of cheapening the cost of their production, devoted himself to the increasing of their natural food, by principles well known to all breeders he had developed a breed of frogs as monstrous among their kind as African geese are among theirs. By these huge batrachians was an extensive marsh inhabited, and battenning upon the succulent nutriment thus afforded, the African geese gained a size and flavor which was rapidly making the fortune of Wilhelm Klingenspiel.

Nora had often meditated upon plans for making the acquaintance of Wilhelm, but it was plain that he was either very bashful or so immersed in his pursuits as to be indifferent to the charms of woman, for he had never made an attempt to see Nora in all the six months she had been his neighbor, and she was well worth seeing.

Accordingly, she decided that if she did not wish to indefinitely postpone making the acquaintance of the poulterer, she must take the initiative. Timothy Sullivan was a market gardener. Klingenspiel was not the only man in the neighborhood who grew big things. Mr. Sullivan was experimenting upon some cabbages of unusual size. He had started them in a hothouse during the winter. Later transferred to the garden, they had attained an amplitude such as few if any cabbages had ever attained before. In the pleasant light of the moon, even now was he engaged with the cabbages, pouring something upon them from a watering pot. As she watched her father, it occurred to Nora that she could find no more suitable excuse for visiting Mr. Klingenspiel than in carrying him some

present in return for the goose's left leg he had presented her family for a Sunday dinner, and that there was no more appropriate present than one of the great cabbages.

No sooner had her father gone in than, selecting the largest cabbage, she started off with it, putting it in a small push-cart, as it was so large as to be too heavy and inconvenient to carry. It was somewhat late to call, but the evening was so delightful that Wilhelm Klingenspiel could hardly have gone to bed. Proceeding on her way, as the road passed into the swampy land of Klingenspiel's domain, her attention was engaged by the fact that a most singular commotion was taking place among the giant batrachians at some remote place south of the road. Their ordinary calls had increased both in volume and frequency, and at intervals she heard the sound of crashing in the brake and brush, as if some objects of unheard of size were falling into the marsh. Looking in the direction whence the sounds came, she saw indistinct and vague against the night sky, an enormous rounded thing rise in the air and descend, whereupon was borne to her another of the strange crashings. These inexplicable sounds and the inexplicable sight would have frightened Miss Sullivan had she not the resources with which modern science fortifies the mind against credulity and superstition. The round object, she told herself, was some sudden puff of smoke on a railway track far beyond; the crashing was the shunting of cars, which things, coming coincidentally with a battle of the frogs, to an ignorant mind would appear to be a phenomenon in the immediate vicinity. Bearing in mind that this seemingly real, but impossible, phenomenon could only be due to a fortuitous concatenation of actual occurrences, Nora was not disturbed in her mind. Leaving her cart some little distance up the road, in order that she might not be seen in the undignified position of pushing it, she walked into Klingenspiel's front yard, bearing her gift.

The two-story white house of Wilhelm Klingenspiel seemed to be deserted. Despite the genial season, every door was shut, and so was every window, so far as Nora could see, for if any windows were open down stairs, at least the blinds were shut. There were no blinds in the second story. Looking around in no little disappointment, she was astonished to see a row of sheds and fences in rear of the house had been demolished as if struck by a cyclone and that a goodly sized barn had departed from its normal position and with frame intact was lying on its side like a toy barn tipped over by a child. As she was gazing upon this ruinage and striving to conjecture what had caused it, she heard a voice, muffled and strange, yet distinctly audible, saying:

"Ribot is running amuck, Ribot is running amuck," and looking up she beheld, darkly visible against the panes of an upper story window, a human form. As she looked, the form disappeared and presently a person rushed from the front door, hauled her into the house and upstairs, where she found herself still holding her cabbage and observing a short man of a full habit, with a round moon face, illuminated by a large pair of spectacles that sustained themselves with difficulty upon a very snub nose. He was nearly bald, yet nevertheless of a kindly, studious, and astute appearance. One did not need to look twice to see that Wilhelm Klingenspiel was a scholar.

"What – what – what is the matter?" exclaimed Nora.

"Ribot is running amuck."

"Who is Ribot?"

Klingenspiel was about to answer, when the whole air was filled with what one would have called a squeal if it had been one fiftieth part so loud, and over a row of willow bushes across the road leapt an astounding great creature, twice as large as the largest elephant, and Nora began to realize that her scientific deductions regarding the phenomenon in the swamp had been utterly erroneous. The creature was of an oblong build, rounded in contour, and its hide was marked by large blotches of black and rufous yellow upon a ground of white. With extreme swiftness the creature scurried down the road, its legs being so short in proportion to its body and moving with such twinkling rapidity that it seemed to be propelled upon wheels. The appearance of this strange monster and the appalling character of its squealing, caused Nora to tremble like a leaf, but the animal having departed, a laudable curiosity made her forget her fears, and she asked:

“What is it?”

“That was Ribot.”

“Who and what is Ribot?”

“Ribot was a celebrated French scientist, an authority on the subject of heredity. You doubtless know something of the subject, how certain traits appear in families generation after generation. Accidental traits, if repeated for two or three generations, often become inherent traits. To show you to what a strange extent this is true, I will call your attention to the case of the ducal house of Bethune in France, where three successive generations having had the left hand cut off at the wrist in battle, the next three generations were born without a left hand.”

The erudite dissertation of Wilhelm Klingenspiel was here interrupted by the reappearance of the mottled monster, who, with a scream that filled the blue vault of heaven, rushed into the yard and paused before a mighty oak, whose sturdy trunk had stood rooted in that soil before the city of Chicago existed, before the United States was born, when Cahokia was the capital of Illinois and the flag of France waved over the great West. The flash of terrible white teeth showed in the moonlight as the monster gnawed at the base of the tree a few times and with a crash its leafy length lay upon the ground. Contemplating for a brief space the ruin it had wrought, the monster emitted another of its appalling screams and was off once more on its erratic, aimless course.

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