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— TO YPRES. —

Two British Tommies on demobilisation had managed to secure an old automobile establishing themselves modestly as excursion agents to the Flanders battlefields in a small town near the Belgian border. To them one day came a young "Cuthbert" with his girl, both bearing evidence of opulence acquired probably in munition factories.

"What!" cried Cuthbert, "you want five pounds to take me to Ypres."

"Too much, is it?" responded one of the partners. "Well, my lad, if you'd only come out here two years ago, you could have gone along there for nothing."

THE MAJOR'S MISTAKE.

At a local party, held for returned warriors, including all the staff of the town's regiment, after a little persuasion the adjutant stood up to sing.

Adjutant (singing): "And we didn't care a button if the odds were on the ten, twenty, thirty, forty years, etc."

Major (aroused from a nap): "As you were! Number!"

COMPLETE DRAMATIC SHORT STORY.

THE

OUTCAST.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

"A person to see you, sir!"

"A what?" queried Mr James Salter.

"A person to see you, sir," repeated Miss Turrell, elevating her pretty nose, if possible, a trifle more.

Jimmy Salter smiled up his sleeve. He knew exactly the extent of Miss Turrell's disapproval of a visitor by the angle of her expressive little nose. However, he concealed his merriment.

"Has the person got a name?" he asked genially.

"I don't know," returned Miss Turrell. "If he has he refuses to reveal it."

"H'm! A mysterious sort of Johnny. Show him in, anyway, and we'll have a look at him."

A moment later Jimmy Salter received the genuine shock of his life. A lean, dirty, cadaverous wreck of a man shuffled into the room, hesitated for a moment or so and then held out his hand with a sort of fierce aggressive movement, as if he quite anticipated a refusal.

"How do, Jimmy?" he muttered.

Jimmy Slater stared. Miss Turrell, arrested in her departure, stared also, and breathed quickly. She sniffed the scent of drama in the very air.

Mr Jimmy Salter was everything a young girl's ideal of what manhood ought to be. Immaculate, debonair, distractingly handsome. The visitor was a draggled tramp. He had not shaved for days. He had not bathed for an indefinite number of weeks. He wore the choker of the hovigan, the greasy, over-peaked cap of the Paris Apache. His clothes would have been an offence to a decent scarecrow.

There was a crash. Jimmy leapt to his feet, and his chair went over backwards. He literally rushed at the scarecrow man, and shook him by the shoulders with an amazing affectionateness that seemed incapable of any milder form of expression. "Drexel!" he said, with a choke in his voice. "Jack Drexel! By the Lord, it's you."

Miss Turrell sat in her little office a moment later, feeling and looking rather stunned. She was out of her depths. This was something altogether outside and beyond all the vast experience of life which she had accumulated in the course of nineteen years.

An hour later Jack Drexel, the scarecrow person, and Jimmy Salter, the fashionable solicitor, were still closeted together in the latter's pleasant office. The door was locked, and they were talking gravely. Of the two Salter looked the more grave.

"Look here, Jack!" he said. "Have you come to me for advice?"

"No," replied the other shortly. "I want nobody's advice. I have come home to do a certain thing. There's nothing very complicated about it, and if I had wanted the law and the lawyers to wrangle over my little difficulty, I could have done that seven years ago, couldn't I?"

"Exactly; and in my opinion it's a pity you didn't. Anyway, you haven't come to me for advice, what have you come for?"

"Chiefly to see if there is one man who knew me in the old days who is still ready to shake me by the hand, in spite of the wreck I've become. Secondly, I want some money, enough to fit myself out as a gentleman, and take my place as one for a few weeks."

"That's easy. You are a fairly well-to-do man. You left your small capital in my charge when you choose to disappear from the face of the earth. You haven't spent a penny of it for seven years, and, under my careful investment, it has flourished like the green bay tree. In a word, you are more than twice as well off as when you went away, in return for which I hope you will not think hard things about solicitors any more. Now, whether you like it or not, I am going to give you some advice, and I charge you nothing at all for it."

"Fire away!" said Drexel ungraciously. "You might as well save your breath for a more paying client."

"Look here, Jack! What have you come home for? It's not to resume your old life, because you say that in a few weeks you are going back to the South Seas or wherever was the last outlandish place you came from."

"I've come home to get my own back," muttered Drexel grimly.

"Which, in a word, means revenge! To revenge yourself on Harold Archer?"

Drexel nodded.

"Well, my advice to you is to leave it alone. You won't go about the business in the proper legal manner. You want to deal out justice with an axe. That may be all right in the South Seas or the Klondyke Trail, or the Montana Ranges, or in most of the places where you've been spending your time the last seven years; but not here, Jack. In this place, and in this year of Grace, that sort of thing is not done."

"I admit your grievance. I admit that you've been miserably wronged by Archer. But you should have stood up to your trouble when it came at you, instead of running away from it and nursing it for seven years."

"Do you know what you've done? You've got the whole thing out of proportion. You've got yourself into such a frame of mind that you're inclined to believe that even homicide would be justifiable."

"You wrote a play—'The Star of India.' And a dashed good play, too. You submitted it to an actor-manager, named Harold Archer, who was by the way of being a friend of yours. Archer kept it some time, and then returned it, with regrets that he was unable to make use of it."

"He did not return it," interrupted Drexel. "He sent a letter of regret in a large envelope, torn and burst open. It was the device of a child. I was asked to believe that the manuscript had been returned, but had been lost in the post through the bursting of the envelope. But the letter was not lost."

"Very good," continued the solicitor. "We will say he adopted this transparent device. A few months later he brings out a play called 'The Veil of Silence.' That is a great play. It ran for three years, and Archer made pots of money out of it. You claim it as a colourable imitation of your play."

"It is my play!" snapped Drexel. "The names are changed. It is staged in China instead of India. The Hindoo characters are Chinamen. A few unimportant details are altered, and spoilt. But the play is my play, and Harold Archer never wrote anything like it, and never could."

"Very good," continued Salter. "I believe it is all as you say. But there is a bit more in it than that, and I'm going to speak plainly to you. Archer married Diana Carrington. I believe you were once more than a little absorbed in that direction yourself?"

Drexel shrugged his shoulders, and Salter went on grimly.

"You were only in the same boat as several other eligible young men, myself included. But she chose to marry Archer—before he produced your play, mind—and she loves him."

"How do you know?" growled Drexel.

"Because I have common sense and ordinary perception, and I know the colour of the light which shines in a woman's eyes when she finds herself married to the man for whom she would give up all the rest of the world, and count it well lost."

"And what's all this to do with me?" demanded Drexel.

"Just a theory of mine," went on Salter. "I admit that Archer may be all sorts of a scoundrel, but I would sooner see you laugh at all this business, and go and write another play that will wipe the floor with the 'Star of India.'"

"Why?"

"Because that would be more like the man you were, and the man I believe you still are under the skin. And because I believe there is still some good in Archer, or he would not win and keep the love of a good woman, as he has won and kept it."

"That may be your way of looking at the matter, but mine is different," said Drexel, as he went out.

A new play by Harold Archer was billed to make its appearance in a West End theatre shortly. It was a fragment of newspaper giving this information which had brought Drexel back from the Southern Pacific.

He realised that Fate was playing into his hands, and that the revenge for which

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he had waited seven years was imminent. The new play was entitled "The Outcast."

Once he had obtained some new clothes and got himself fitted out as a gentleman, it did not take Drexel long to find out what the play was like.

Within a week he had witnessed a dress-rehearsal. Before it was half through he knew that Archer was riding for a fall that would finish his play-writing career for ever. This was obviously not a stolen play. He had written it himself, probably with the curious idea that having produced one success he could foist another on the public by the mere weight of his reputation.

But Drexel knew better. The play was rubbish. The whole thing depended on one character—the outcast. And the part was hopeless—a dull-witted torrent of words which the best actor in the world could not have raised from the level of boredom.

But Drexel was not content to wait for this fiasco and count that as his revenge. He had arranged another programme, which he proceeded to put into execution a few nights later.

He knocked at the door of the big house in the neighbourhood of Regent's Park, and asked for Mr Archer.

He had seen him and Mrs Archer go out a few minutes before, so was not surprised when he was told they were not at home.

He said he would wait, and was conscious of a thrill of excitement when he was shown into the study—the very room he intended to get into by fair means or foul.

He had lived for seven years too near the stern realities of existence to be over particular about methods. He was determined to make a search for the manuscript of his play. He had a presentiment that Archer would not have destroyed it.

He threw a glance round the spacious and handsomely furnished study as soon as the servant left him alone.

There was a massive oak writing-desk.

"Not very likely to be there," he muttered.

His eyes went instinctively to a safe standing in a corner.

"A tin-pot affair," he said with a grim smile of satisfaction. "I could force it with a sardine tin-opener."

He produced a polished steel implement from his pocket. It was in two sections, beautifully made and tempered. He was in the act of fitting it together when there came a surprising interruption.

"What is that, if you please?"

It was a little girl who had been curled up in the depths of a big armchair at the further end of the room. Her fair curls were rumpled all over her head, and her big blue eyes were winking suspiciously as if she had been asleep. In Drexel's disordered and shocked mind nothing prettier could have stepped out of fairyland.

He grabbed at the shining instrument to save it from falling. Then, feeling a curious giddiness, he sat down in a chair.

"Who are you little lady?" he demanded, as she advanced gravely towards him.

Drexel was in evening dress, and the child seemed instinctively to recognise him as a friend.

"I'm Molly," replied the little one—"Molly Archer. You ought to know my name!"

Drexel momentarily pressed his hand to his forehead. Indeed, he ought to know her. She had the wonderful, deep blue eyes, and the soft, smiling mouth of the woman he had loved years ago. He controlled himself with a fierce effort.

"But you haven't told me what that is!" demanded Molly.

"That! Oh, that's called a jemmy."

"A jemmy."

"No; a jemmy."

"Well, I said a jemmy, silly! What's it for?"

"To open things. Never mind about that. How old are you?"

"Five and a half, nearly," said Molly, all in one breath. "And I'm always a good girl—except sometimes. Are you going to tell me a story, Mr Drexel?"

The amateur burglar almost jumped out of his chair.

"How do you know my name?"

"Of course I know it!" returned Molly. "I've seen your pictures, haven't I? There's one on the mantelpiece—see. And there's another one in the drawing-room—a big one. And father and mother talk to me about you."

Drexel felt himself losing grip of his surroundings. Sure enough, there was a photograph of himself on the mantel, in a silver frame. But he had no time to collect his scattered wits. Molly was insistent.

"Will you tell me a story, please? I've got to go to bed soon, so there isn't much time."

"I'm afraid I can't," muttered Drexel, trying not to look at her. He had a shocked, stunned feeling, and was conscious of nothing but a desire to get out of the house. Why had he come here?"

"If I kiss you, will you tell me a story?"

Before he realised it, Molly was on his knees, and was pressing her little rosebud mouth to his. Something tore at him inside his throat, and he struggled with himself and fought it down. For more years than he cared to remember no child's or woman's lips had touched his. Without realising what he was doing, he crushed the little one to him, and Molly put her soft little arms round his neck and responded with a delicious enthusiasm.

"There! That was a big one, wasn't it? Now begin, please."

Drexel plunged desperately.

"Once upon a time there was a little pet lamb—"

"Oh, I don't want a story about a little pet lamb! I want one about a big grizzly bear that eats bad little girls—not like me, or about a wolf with big white teeth—I mean teeth."

"I'm sorry; I don't know any stories about bears or wolves."

"Don't you? Father knows heaps. He'll tell you some when he comes home."

"Do you love your father?"

"Of course! Don't you? My father's the best father in the world!"

"How do you know that?"

"Because mother says so, and because he loves me ever so. Shall we have a game? Look! Would you like me to show you a secret? Promise you won't show anybody else, or it won't be a secret, will it?"

"I promise," said Drexel.

Molly sprang from his knees and ran round to the side of the big writing-desk. With elaborate secretiveness she pressed some hidden part of the ornamentation, and a secret drawer in front of the desk sprang open.

Molly gurgled with delight and jumped like a bouncing ball. Drexel glared down into the open drawer with dilated eyes.

He was looking at the manuscript of his old play, "The Star of India."

He snatched it out, and grabbed his hat.

(Continued on page 4)