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— BY —

## Geo. Allan England

**Author of "Darkness and Dawn," "Beyond the Great Oblivion," "The Empire in the Air," "The Golden Blight," "The After-Glow," "The Crime-Detector,", etc.**

CHAPTER VX.

While he was still asleep there in the Tombs, Walter Haynes Slayton, his face hard and set, entered the ramshackle old building where Jarboe, the money-shark, laired close up under the roof.

Slayton walked like a man who had business, albeit none of the most pleasant. The creaking elevator bore him slowly aloft, seeming too swift by far. Grimly he walked down the dusty and untended hallway, paused at the dirt-incrusted glass door that bore the legend:

Christopher Jarboe
LAONS.

and gave three taps upon the pane, followed by two.

For a moment no sound replied. Slayton stood there, gnawing his nails in a fever of emotion, the dim light through the glass showing his face screwed into a snarl of most extraordinary hate and malevolence.

"Counfound the viper!" he muttered. "He can't be out. He surely wouldn't make a definite appointment and then break it."

Again he rapped. This time a chair scraped within. A halting footfall crossed the floor. A chain rattler. A key turned, and the door swung inward just a crack.

Slayton perceived the old man's bald head, his disfiguring wen, and a single beady little eye that glittered craftily. Then all at once the door opened wide; and there in the aperture stood the aged Shylock, bowing and scraping and rubbing his hands together with a most malicious politeness.

"Well, now! Well, well, well! Bless my soul! This is a pleasure!" he wheezed, laughing silently to himself, as was his habit. "Come in, Mr. Slayton! Come into my poor abode! Not much to offer you, sir; but such as it is, such as it is—"

"For heaven's sake drop that!" growled the cashier, in a low voice, coming in and closing the door, which Jarboe immediately bolted and chained after him. "Drop all that mockery of yours and tell me what you want! When I paid up I thought I was through with you and done. But now—"

"Now it happens that you aren't, eh? Is that it?" chuckled the old usurer, hobbling over to his littered desk on the far side of a room indescribable in its dirt, clutter and neglect.

Books, cooking utensils, broken furniture, and old clothing all combined with miscellaneous disorder to figure forth a room more like the vagaries of a nightmare than any human dwelling. At the left a door gave hints of another room — a sleeping-place, perhaps; and if so then possibly the receptacle of the old man's money; for rumor had it that Jarboe's bed was lined with yellow-backs.

"Yes; it appears that you aren't through with old Jarboe after all, eh?" questioned the whizened patriarch. "Old Jarboe doesn't let his good friends go so easily. No, no, no! Not so easily as all that! Not so easily!"

He fished an old cigar-butt out of the pocket of his dirty, wine-colored dressing-gown, crumbled it in his unwashed palm, and stuffed a clay pipe with it.

"Not so easily, not so easily!" he mumbled, toothlessly, as he struck a match and lighted the vile dust of the weed. "No, no, no!"

"See here, you dirty old villain!" blurted Slayton, all his natural suavity and hypocritical smoothness rasped entirely away by his hatred of the miser. "See here now! What do you want? We'll omit all beating round the bush and subterfuge and all that sort of thing. You wrote for me to see you on urgent business. You made a definite appointment. I keep it. What's wanted?"

"Wanted,eh? Oh nothing, nothing but a little friendly arrangement between you and old Jarboe. That's all; nothing more. Just a little friendly—arrangement."

He leered hideously, puffing at his pipe.

"Just a little friendly arrangement; nothing more," Jarboe repeated.

"Damn you!" exclaimed Slayton, shaking a fist under his nose. "I want no friendliness with you! If you've got business with me, speak out. Come across with it. Otherwise—"

And he motioned toward the door.

"Don't hurry, Mr. Slayton," said the old man, dryly. "And please don't shake your fist in my face. That always makes me nervous. It makes old Jarboe nervous, so it does to have his friends shake their fists at him. Especially when all he wants is a friendly arrangement."

"Arrangement to do what, you Shylock?"

"Oh, to contribute to old Jarboe's income, that's all."

"Contribute to—your—"

"To my income. Certainly! Why not? I'm sure you'll be extremely glad to when you understand my terms!"

"Terms?" echoed Slayton, staring in amazement, not untinged with fear. "Why, what terms? What arrangement? I don't you owe a cent now, you old rip! I paid you in full, principal and interest—"

"The very day after Mackenzie was murdered; yes, indeed," interrupted the usurer, with an evil glance of cunning.

He sat down in a creaking easy-chair cushioned with ragged carpeting and waved his hand at another to bid his guest be seated also.

"The very day after he was murdered and the bank touched for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars," the old man went on. "Odd, wasn't it? Very odd coincidence, says old Jarboe. H-m! Peculiar, very, that you should come in here and put eighty-four thousand dollars, plus or minus, right down there on that table where that lamp is standing now, the exact day after the night when the murder was done. And what's more peculiar is the fact that the money was all in thousand dollar bills, and the numbers—"

"What do you mean, you dog?" cried Slayton, menacing him with clenched fist.

The cashier's face had suddenly gone pasty; his thin lips twitched; his eyes, never firm, now blinked with strange rapidity.

"Mean? What does old Jarboe mean? Oh, nothing, nothing at all. Don't get excited. I was just saying it was peculiar. You'll allow old Jarboe to have an opinion and express it, won't you? Express an opinion to a friend?"

"Confound you! Are you insinuating—?"

Jarboe raised a deprecating hand.

"You asked me that once before," he replied. "The very same question the day of the murder. I answer you now as then: I'm insinuating nothing. Only I was thinking—yes, yes; old Jarboe was thinking—that if you felt disposed to make a little contribution, say a small sum to begin with, and then from time to time—"

"Blackmail, eh?" snarled the cashier, his white teeth glinting in the lamplight. "So that's your game, is it? Usury and gouging and shylocking in the open, plus blackmail on the side? Well, it won't go with me! Not this time, Jarboe. I'm through with you, for good and all, understand? Done, through, finished! Not a cent, to-day, to-morrow, or any other day. Get that?"

The usurer eyed Slayton a moment curiously noting the pale and writhen face, the swollen veins upon his brow, the look of fear and hate that distorted his face. Then just the vaguest suspicion of a smile curved the old man's lips.

"You interest me," said he, quite slowly. "Yes, yes, indeed; you interest old Jarboe. Bless my soul, Mr. Slayton, how very—h'm! —emphatic you seem over a mere trifle.

"If you didn't agree with my little plan, why just say 'N-o,' no. Just give Jarboe the block and stop him on a siding. No harm done. No need to get ugly, is there? Or work yourself into a passion? Or anything of that sort?"

"You skunk!"

"Easy! Easy with old Jarboe!"

And the usurer's narrow eyes glinted with menace.

"Don't abuse the old man. Maybe he knows something and maybe not. No telling. If he should just happen to—"

"What do you know, you—?"

"Ah, what, indeed?"

And Jarboe blew a cloud of stale smoke. "Now that's an interesting question. I admit it's mighty interesting. What does old Jarboe know, eh? The whole thing hinges right on that. What does he know? Maybe a lot. Maybe nothing. Maybe—"

"You told me the day I paid you that we were through — that if any skeletons rattled in your closet or mine it was nobody's business! That you—"

"Ah, yes; but I've changed my mind since then, you see. Old Jarboe's changed his mind. He's been thinking things over. His finances have been breaking a bit bad. He's been coming to see that you, with easy access to the kale, would think it a pleasure and a privilege to help the old man out, and—"

"Not a sou!"

"Very well. That settles it. Nothing more to be said; is there? Not a word to say.

"Only, I'm just telling you, if old Jarboe should happen to appear in court when the case is called, and if he should happen to produce certain matters and things, evidence and what not, and volunteer as a witness, and so forth, and so on, well—don't be surprised, that's all."

The old man leaned back in his chair, pulled at his foul pipe with satisfaction, and smiled horribly, his few discolored teeth showing broken and crooked in his purplish gums.

Slayton gasped and leaned heavily against the table. His face had gone absolutely ashen.

"You —you wouldn't!" he exclaimed in a husky whisper.

"Did I say I would? Did old Jarboe state that he would? Emphatically no! He merely remarked that if he did you weren't to be astonished. That's all. Nothing more. Why misunderstand me?"

"You couldn't do it! Your record is too rotten. They've got too much on you! You'd never dare appear in court. And then beside you don't know anything!"

"Well, that remains to be seen. That's your problem to solve. Maybe I know and maybe I don't who really entered the Powhatan Bank that night, and whose hand was inside that glove, and whose those gray hairs came from that were found in Mackenzie's fingers next morning. Maybe—"

Slayton sprang at him, to clutch him by the throat; but with extraordinary agility the old man slid down and away, scrambled out of reach behind the table, and stood up, facing him, still with the sneering smile on his lips.

"Don't hurt old Jarboe," he pleaded with mock supplication. "Don't assault the old man or injure him or kill him. Because in that case it would be so very unpleasant, so extremely embarrassing for you. There are papers, you know—writings, documents, and so on—that in case old Jarboe were to die might go to District Attorney Ainslow. I'm not threatening you, understand. Old Jarboe never indulges in threats. I'm only warning you like the good friend I am. Warning you—in time."

Slayton, realizing through all his passion that he was caught, groaned in extreme anguish and terror. How much did the old sewer-rat know? Nothing, perhaps. Everything, perhaps, in possible to tell.

Hopeless to think of risking life on the gamble of this being all a bluff. No, no! A thousand times no! Not that! Not life! Life could not be gambled with, that way.

Slayton, recoiling, lifted a hand to his brow. A cry of utter misery forced itself from his lips. The old man, watching, smiled with satisfaction, nodded, and stroked his chin. The trap, he saw, had caught its victim.

"Well?" he demanded. "Shall we do business? Will you enter negotiations with old Jarboe? All in a nice, quiet, friendly way? Business now?"

Slayton eyed him a minute in silence with a look so baleful, so terrible in its hate, that any other save the aged usurer would have trembled. But Jarboe did not tremble. He only puffed his pipe, smiled a discolored smile, and scratched his wen.

"Business?" he demanded once more.

"Yes."

The answer came in a guttural breath.

"All right. Old Jarboe's ready. Terms reasonable, security and perfect satisfaction guaranteed. As long as you keep your bargain—when we've made it—not a sound will old Jarboe utter. Not a bone of the skeleton will he rattle. Not a breath will he breathe. All you have to do is meet your just obligations, and—"

"How much? One lump sum?"

Slayton leaned over the table, steadying himself with both palms pressed on its filthy top.

"Oh, no, no, no! Not a lump sum! Oh, no! Old Jarboe wouldn't say that!" leered the usurer.

"How much a month, then?" gulped Slayton.

"One thousand dollars."

"One — thousand? Five hundred, Jarboe! Make it five hundred! Five hundred's all I can pay—all I can possibly—"

"I said a thousand—and a thousand goes. Bottom figure for the service. Cheap, Slayton; very, very cheap. Sing Sing is so extremely uncomfortable, and they use such tremendously high voltage for the chair, you know, it quite singes a fellow's flesh. Burns it shockingly. I believe. Yes, old Jarboe has heard it shrivels—"

"Stop, stop! Hold on! I give in! I —I'll pay!"

"Very good; very good, indeed. I knew you'd be reasonable—reasonable with old Jarboe. It's a life contract, you know. Get that quite clear, Mr. Slayton. As long as old Jarboe lives—and you daren't make way with him, because that would lead to most deplorable results—the little friendly arrangements will last. Is that quite understood?"

Slayton nodded, his face tense with impotent hate and malice.

"Very good, then." The old man smiled with a hideous, oblique leer. "It's all done and settled, you see, quite pleasantly and in good order. Mr. Slayton and old Jarboe are still friends—still the best of friends. One party's got his life insured. The other has a life income, positively sure that not a single payment will be allowed to default. What could be more satisfactory?

"So ten, no need to detain you longer. You're a busy man, I know. So is old Jarboe. Very, very busy. Let's say good evening, then, and au revoir! I needn't detain you. Good night, Mr. Slayton! Good night!"

Slayton eyed him a moment with virulent hate.

"Some day," said he in a low, trembling voice, "I'll get you—get you hard!"

Quest without looking up:

Best without looking up:

"Please close the door when you go out. Close it, but don't slam it. Good night."

When the cashier, speechless with passion, was gone, the old man chuckled slyly.

"I knew he'd be reasonable with old Jarboe," said he. "Reasonable and sensible, after all, and willing to do business. As a bluff, my game was surely some bluff. Nothing to go on really except those new thousand-dollar bills, and yet see how he fell for it! If ever a man took a pot on a pair of deuces, that man's old Jarboe! Ha, ha, ha!"

Thus cheered by his reflections, he sat his down again in his easy-chair, took up a list of loans, and, pipe in mouth, once more applied himself to the delightful task of calculating his extensive usuries.

CHAPTER XVI.

Indicted on two charges — grand larceny and murder—by a special grand jury on the last day of November, Arthur was remanded to the Tombs for speedy trial. In view of the autrocity of the crime and the state of public opinion, Governor McIntyre appointed Judge Grossmith to hear the usual order of the court calendar, eighteen months or more might have elapsed before Arthur could have been summoned to the bar. But now, on December 15, he was destined to appear as defendant in the People of the State of New York vs. Arthur Mansfield.

The murder charge, of course, obscured the other of grand larceny, with its subsidiary charges. While the robbery, the threat against Slayton, and the assault at the time of arrest would doubtless have their bearing on the case, as factors tending to establish the character of the accused, any specific action on them, or on the admitted theft of the one thousand two hundred and fifty dollars would be held in abeyance till such time as the murder charge could have been heard. Only in the very improbable event of the defendant being acquitted would any of these lesser accusations ever be heard of again.

Every effort made by the police to force Arthur to confess what he had done with the one hundred and fifty thousand dollars they assumed him to have stolen resulted only in more furious denials on his part. For the present, at least, no progress could be made in locating the money.

That Arthur's position was serious in the extreme became more and more apparent with the passage of the lagging December days. Though no new evidence against him developed, and though the "third degree," to which he was brutally subjected, failed to extort any confession, or even shake his sturdy assertion of "Innocent!" nevertheless both press and public were now lining up solidly against him.

Sensationalism rioted with the fact of Enid's support in ways appallingly cruel. But Enid neither retracted nor hesitated. Her colors flying from her lance, she still declared Arthur's innocence. She retained Hosmer & Keene in his defence — ignoring her father's protests and the world's cynical amusement—and entered the lists against the power of the State as militantly bold as ever Jeanne d'Arc rode at the head of the mailed fighting men of France.

Arthur had only his mother and Sheridan and Enid to lean upon in his deadly peril. Enid proved the only real none. Had it not been for her letters, her flowers, her visits, the messages of cheer she brought him, and the promises of speedy acquittal, Arthur must have sunk, annihilated, beneath his burden.

The support of ex-Teller Sheridan, now that he had resigned from the bank, had ceased to have much value. In some ways it even tended to injure Arthur. Just how it happened who could say? But means were found by somebody to discredit the former teller to such an extent that within a few days Hosmer & Keene wrote him, requesting him to cease all activities on their client's behalf. Thenceforth he dropped out of the case entirely.

Arthur's mother, helpless with rheumatism and without funds, could do nothing save furnish pitiful interviews and fervent protestations, read with tongue in cheek by a hostile world. A poor, dazed, impotent old woman, she too subsided into oblivion, crushed by this tragedy as by the death of her husband, which added its burden to her son's bowed shoulders.

(To be continued.)

"Although I was late," said the new boarder, "I found the landlady had saved for me the tenderest part of the chicken." What was that?" asked the old boarder, jealously. "Some of the gravy."—Pearson's Weekly.


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