

THE LEAGUE OF TWELVE BY GUY BOOTHBY

Author of "Dr. Nikola," "The Marriage of Esther," "Pharos the Egyptian," "Long Live the King," "My Indian Queen," etc., etc.

Beautiful Watch and No Money Required. Woman, Boy of Girl Opportunity Under...



PICTURE PUZZLE. "Good morning!" To whom is she speaking?

It is a very bad business. I would give a good deal to know what it all means. He is my oldest friend, and I am naturally very much grieved.

"No. The man says that he would not know him again if he were to see him." Then, with a confidence in other people that was one of his most charming characteristics, Jack went over to describe to his tenant the anonymous letter he had received, and the journey to Liverpool to which it had given rise.

"I sincerely trust that that may be so," Jack answered. "Nevertheless, I am not at all easy in my mind. However, I have no right to bore you with my troubles, just when you are new to the neighborhood. Doubtless you have good morning and thank you again for the permission you have given me to make use of that gate."

"Whatever else he may lack," said Jack, "he possesses excellent taste in horseshoes. That off-side animal is not at all perfect as it is possible for him to be." When the other had disappeared down the drive he returned to his study, to find his sister there awaiting his coming.

"Who was that with you?" she asked, eagerly, as if she hoped it might be a messenger with good tidings. "Your tenant at the Castle, Monsieur d'Alvaro," Jack replied. "He came to ask permission to open that old gate at the end of the Long Walk, a somewhat needless request so it seems to me. The place is his property for the time being, and he has a perfect right to open the gate, should he desire to do so, without consulting me. However, I suppose he wanted to be polite, so I should not grumble."

"I don't like his face, Jack," said Dot. "It made me shudder when I saw it." "Good gracious. And why?" "I cannot tell you, except that it seemed to me to be so cruel. He came to me about it, and I struck me as being exceedingly prepossessing. He is not half so foreign as I expected he would be. His English is exceptionally good. By the way, the lady about whom I spoke to you turns out to be his ward and not his wife or his daughter. You will have to call upon her."

"Oh, Jack, not now," she said. "I could not go out anywhere now. You must not ask me." In a moment Jack was repentant. "Forgive me, Dot," he said. "For the fault I had forgotten poor Jim. It is the first time he has been out of my thoughts since we heard the news." Dot threw her arms round his neck and cried softly on his shoulder. "Unless we can find him I shall never be able to get on," she said. "Is there nothing we can do for him?" "We can only wait and hope," answered Jack. "We know that the police are doing all in their power to discover who he is, and we could not leave the case in better hands."

"I'm not certain that I can do anything," said Jack. "I will think it over, however. As you are aware, now that I have given up the Castle, I have no need of keepers, otherwise, I would take him on myself."

"Well, if you can do anything I shall be deeply grateful to you," said the doctor. "And so, I am sure, will Brett." Jack promised to bear the matter in mind, and then went out to his car. As he drove slowly down the street he recalled the fact that the last time he had seen the young man in question had been when he had last shot at Langside park, and then poor Jim Ormsby had been shot in the chest. While he was thinking of this the memory of a certain beautiful face rose before his mind's eye.

"By Jove!" he muttered to himself. "There's my excuse ready made. Without more to do than to step up to his horse and leave the town at a smart pace. Having crossed the old bridge he turned to the left and followed the road along until he reached the Castle gates. They were closed, but the old lodge-keeper, who had known him since he was a baby, opened them to him with a smile of welcome upon his wrinkled face.

"Is Mr. d'Alvaro at home, Mrs. Penney?" Jack asked, when he had inquired after her health and that of her husband. "Yes, sir, I am almost sure he is," the woman replied. "Leastways, he hasn't passed through these gates this afternoon."

"Well, I shall very soon be able to find out," the young man replied, and continued his way up the drive. There are few finer residences in this dear old land of ours than Streffon Castle. Indeed, I have heard it compared favorably with several larger and better known ones. The Castle itself is about a mile from the lodge gates, the drive to it for the most part running through plantations where rabbits scurry about on business of so much importance that they have scarcely time to stop and look at it, and gorgeous cock pheasants strut and strut as if there were no such thing as a shooting season. After the plantations you skirt a miniature lake, where, as was once well-grown as a boy, and then after crossing under an arch you find yourself in a large courtyard which is the front door. As Jack entered it he found it difficult to realize that he was entering the home of his former tenant in the capacity of a stranger. The old place was filled with associations for him. He could recall the night, so many years ago, when the snow was on the ground, and he had been sitting in the courtyard, and Dot had been curled up in a large chair, and he and his sister had said farewell to the old place, fearing that it would never be possible for them to live there again.

"I have met him, Jack," he replied; but did not add that he thoroughly detected the old peer. "Did he seem to be much distressed?" "Well, sir, between ourselves, I can't say that he did. He asked a lot of questions, and told me things which I know at once if there were any news. He said that he was on the eve of leaving for America, and that all this confusion would detain him in England. That was his words, just as he spoke them. He said that his sons had always been a trouble to him in their lives, and now he supposed that this one was going to be by his death. "I'm almost inclined to agree with him," Jack remarked.

"I will speak to my head-keeper about it," said d'Alvaro. "I am afraid, however, that I shall not be able to oblige you. I fancy he has as many men as he wants, and he has a tendency to a little chagrin by the fact that so quiet one, and that what little poaching there is done is not of a very serious character. At the same time, it is always as well to have a few men, and should there be room for him I should be glad to avail myself of his services."

"For some reason or another Jack felt that his companion was not pleased to see him. For a man usually so self-possessed, he was nervous and ill at ease. More than once he glanced nervously at the door, as if he were fearful someone might enter. Moreover, his conversation was disjointed and fragmentary, shewing plainly that his thoughts were not fixed upon the matter in hand. At last Jack rose to go, not without a little chagrin by the fact that the other had not offered to introduce him to his ward. Though d'Alvaro pressed him to remain a little longer, he could see that it was only for politeness' sake, and that his host was in reality extremely anxious to be rid of him.

"You can find an opening for young Brett," said Jack, as they passed down the hall, and moved, "I shall probably hear from you." "You may count upon hearing from me in any case, and you may be quite sure that I will do the best I can for the man." The elderly foreign tutor opened the door and d'Alvaro stood upon the steps until Jack had mounted his seat in the dog-cart. Then, with a wave of the hand, they drove off, each other waving, and the younger man drove out of the courtyard.

"Look here, Dinton," said Jack, when they were a short distance down the drive. "I have been thinking of you haven't had much exercise to-day, and it will do you good."



PICTURE PUZZLE. Find Father Time.

As Jack was well aware, by taking the first turning to the left and following the path that ran at the foot of the rose garden, he could reach what was known as the Long Walk, and then go on through the plantation to the gate concerning which M. d'Alvaro had called upon him on the previous day. Then he could follow the path across the meadows and so reach the Croft in something under half-an-hour. It was a charming walk on a summer's evening, but he was by no means in the humor to enjoy it.

Whether it was the fact that his old home was in a stranger's hands, or whether it was that he was weighed down by the mystery connected with Jim Ormsby, and the sorrow it had brought on Dot, it is impossible to say. He was more miserable, however, than he had been for many a long day. When he reached the end of the terrace he turned and looked back across the stately gardens to the Castle basking in the sunshine. A thin wreath of grey smoke curled up into the still air, while the rocks caved lazily in the clms behind the house.

With a heavy sigh he resumed his walk, passing from the terrace, by the little wicker gate, into the plantation. On either side of the path rabbits scurried away, the more adventurous sitting up as if they had travelled a few yards, as if to discover who this stranger was, but he was not for the moment troubled or troubled in his mind. He found himself walking through the plantation, and as it did not run to the end of the terrace, he was obliged to turn back. He was now in the middle of a beech tree, and as it did not run to the end of the terrace, he was obliged to turn back. He was now in the middle of a beech tree, and as it did not run to the end of the terrace, he was obliged to turn back.

"This is exceedingly kind of you Mr. Trowbridge," said d'Alvaro, as he advanced to shake hands with him. "I wonder whether anyone would take pity upon my loneliness." "I have come to see you," said Jack, "on behalf of someone else. A friend of mine is very much interested in you, and I am sure that you will be glad to see him. He has been very ill, and has just left the hospital. The place he occupied before his illness has been filled up, and I am almost inclined to agree with you that it is a pity that he should be so young. He is a very good fellow, and I am sure that you will be glad to see him. He has been very ill, and has just left the hospital. The place he occupied before his illness has been filled up, and I am almost inclined to agree with you that it is a pity that he should be so young. He is a very good fellow, and I am sure that you will be glad to see him."

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would avail yourself of it, should occasion arise?" She shook her head. "I have already told you," she said, "that there can be no help for me—no help at all."

Jack saw that it was useless discussing the question with her. He therefore rose and prepared to go. "Good-by," he said. "Good-by," she returned. He bowed to her and then walked away towards the path. Their interview had lasted only a few minutes, but he felt that he had known the girl all his life.

"Come what may," he muttered, "that man shall not have her. I see what his game is, and I will fight him upon his own ground. Good Heavens! How beautiful she is! And to be forced into a marriage with a man she does not like! It's barbarous!"

Thinking these thoughts, he strolled along through the plantation, sending the rabbits scuttling in all directions. When within a hundred yards or so of the gate he was anxious to reach, he was greeted by a gruff voice. "Stop!" it said. "I want a talk mit you."

Jack turned and found himself confronted with a burly man dressed in corduroys and carrying a gun upon his arm. "A keeper—and a foreigner," said Jack to himself. "German, if I am any judge of such matters." Aloud, he added: "Well, my friend, what do you want with me here?" "I want to know what you are doing mit yourself here," the other answered. "This is private property, and you must not walk here."

"Indeed," said Jack, running his eye over the burly man's figure, and making a mental note of its proportions. "And did your master give orders that the law against trespassers was to be extended to his guests?" "I know noddings about that," answered the keeper. "I only know that trespassers are not allowed, and I must ask you to go out."

"That is exactly what I am on my way to do. If you care to, you are at liberty to walk with me as far as the gate in order to make quite sure that I am off the premises." "Dot is just what I will do," responded the keeper. Jack thereupon continued his walk until he reached the gate which he had permitted Monsieur d'Alvaro to open. Here he paused and faced his conductor.

"Look here, my friend," he said. "In order that there may be no misunderstanding about this business, it would be as well for you to inform your master that the person you accused of trespassing is his landlord, and then we shall not be settling under false colors. Better still, here is my card. Give it to him." He took a card from his pocket and handed it to the keeper. "I have been passing in his landlord, and then we shall not be settling under false colors. Better still, here is my card. Give it to him."

"I thought that was so," the girl answered. "You are like some of the pictures that hang in the hall. It is kind of you to offer to help me, but that is impossible. I thank you sincerely, nevertheless, for your sympathy. Now I pray you to leave me. If you were seen talking to me here it would only add to my troubles and might make Monsieur—here she paused—"d'Alvaro take a dislike to you."

"What a fool I must have been not to have thought of that before," he muttered. "Now I can understand why Monsieur d'Alvaro did not introduce her to me. The fellow is evidently coaching her into marrying him, and the poor girl does not see any loophole of escape."

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