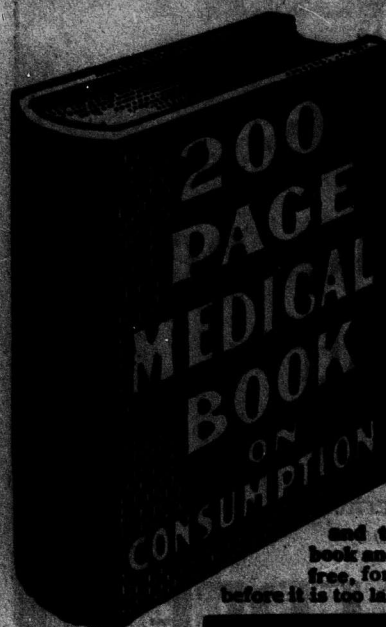


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A Clever Disguise

By Hero Strong.

JORLETTE will be on board the 7.30 mail train. Follow him to Liverpool. Will meet you there. Look sharp!

"Cathcart." This was the wording of the telegram I received one wet, ugly night last December. I was sitting in my little snugger back of my office, before a blazing grate, with my feet in slippers, and my body in a warm dressing-gown. I had a mug of hot punch and a cold mince pie on the table beside me, with an uncut novel and a genuine Havana, with which I intended to regale myself presently. And although I had a very strong anxiety to secure Jorlette, it must be confessed that I was altogether too comfortably situated to relish going out into the cold that dimly dirty night.

This telegram was from my chief, who, I might as well say, was a detective; and I had followed that thankless and precarious business for several years. People considered me very successful in working up difficult cases, but I was never quite satisfied with myself. I wonder if any man ever is?

This same Jorlette had given us a great deal of trouble. We had never had so keenly cunning a spirit to cope with. Strategy was matched with strategy, diplomacy with diplomacy; and scores of times, when we were sure of him, he had slipped from under our fingers like a flea, and left us wondering how he managed it.

Perhaps it would be well to explain that Pierre Jorlette was a murderer, upon whose head was set the price of two thousand pounds by the crown. A Frenchman and a nobleman by birth, a gentleman by education, he had when very young married a beautiful English girl, with whom he passed two years of unalloyed happiness. At the end of that time some fearful shadow came between them—none knew of what nature—and the inhuman husband stabbed his wife to the heart! Her confidential maid witnessed the deed, and attempted to save the life of her mistress, but Jorlette fell upon her with savage ferocity and left the corpses lying together side by side.

These are the facts as briefly as I can place them before you. Of course, there were many minor circumstances not worth recording, as they have little bearing upon the short story I am writing.

It seemed from this telegram that Jorlette was to be on the 7.30 train. I wondered how Cathcart had got his information, but he had armies of spies constantly working for him, and probably some of them had made the discovery.

I had only to follow instructions. For the hundredth time I took Jorlette's photograph from my pocket-book, and examined the features of the murderer. It was a singularly handsome face that I saw—clearly cut, with large hazel eyes shaded by long dark lashes, a mouth delicate and sensitive as a woman's, a high, rather narrow forehead, half hidden in clustering curls of auburn hair, a form rather spare, yet well knit, and a hand symmetrical and rounded as a woman's.

The picture would have answered splendidly for that of a sentimental, sonnet-making poet—but for a murderer it was a dead failure. Nevertheless, somewhere in the past, before crime had scathed him, Jorlette had sat for it.

I changed my slippers for boots, got myself inside my fur overcoat, stuffed a valise with brown paper and blacking brushes, that I might appear a respectable traveler, and looking at my watch found I had just time to reach the station.

The train stopped ten minutes for refreshments, and taking the guard, who was an old friend of mine, sufficiently into my confidence, I was

given an opportunity of looking through the carriages previous to the starting of the train.

It was a full train, but, singularly enough, there was not a red-headed man on board of it. Jorlette was red-headed, and aside from that circumstance, he had a face which I flattered myself I could not readily mistake.

As I stood irresolute, and feeling very much as if I had been fooled, there came toward me from the dining-room an individual, tall and spare, with a slouched hat, a white cravat, a huge piece of game pie in his hand—and this person had red hair! And dark eyes!

I watched him closely. There was a certain dogged, skulking look about him; he would not meet my eye, and he walked off to the extreme end of the platform by himself, and remained there munching his pie until the last bell rang; and then he hurried on board with the air of one who felt that a great deal depended on his getting a seat.

I was convinced that he was my man, though he was not altogether like the photograph. Still, faces and photographs differ a great deal, since to the picture there is little expression and no color—and do not the characteristics of a face depend more on color and expression than a mere outline of feature?

He entered carriage No. 171, and, at a hint, the guard put me in the same van. There were three persons already there beside my pie-eating friend and myself. An elderly gentleman, who was reading the Times wrong side up, and nodding blandly over its fascinating columns; a pair of rural lovers, lounging on each other's shoulders, and discussing peppermint drops together; and presently we were reinforced by an old lady in a very prim bonnet with brown ribbons, and bearing luggage in the shape of a bird-cage, a basket with a cat in it, an umbrella, and a very large carpet sack.

Jorlette had produced another section of pie, and was demolishing it vigorously. Seemingly he enjoyed it. Well, I suppose even a murderer may enjoy eating pie.

Just as the train began to move, the door opened, and a young lady came hesitatingly forward. You know what helpless creatures women are on their feet in a bouncing, swaying railway car, and this young beauty was no exception. She tottered, and would have fallen, but I put out my arm and caught her, at the same time offering her the unoccupied seat by my side.

She blushed rosily, thanked me in the sweetest voice I had ever heard, and sank down on the cushions, covering my knees with billows of ruffling and fringing, and making me feel—well, not many removes from the gates of Paradise.

A lovelier face I had never seen. The skin was clear and fair; the mouth sweet, sensitive, and a little sad; the eyes dark and melting; and the beautiful dark brown hair, which hung over her shoulders in the prevailing style, was soft as floss silk, and rippled like the bosom of a meadow brook when it flows over a bed of pebbles.

But so lost was I in contemplating the charms of this fair creature that I suddenly remembered I was not "looking sharp," as Cathcart had ordered me, and I turned to regard my unsuspecting Jorlette.

If a criminal, he was a very self-possessed one. He had finished his pie, and was picking his teeth with a quill, and furtively regarding his boots, which, by a peculiar tightness and stiffness of look, I judged were new ones. Occasionally he felt of them, as if, perhaps, his corns were pinched, and once I was sure he muttered something like an oath as he rubbed his long white fingers over the locality of his great toe.

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