

"So Isidore was left alone in the dim half-darkness of the shop. A little light filtered in through the cracks of the door, enough to show him the baskets of peaches, the melons piled on the floor, and the late Summer fruits spread out in attractive order on the shelves and counters. The smell of them mingled in that small warm room in one musky, intoxicating odor. It mounted to the boy's brain as he sat there and drew labored breaths of the close, rich, enervating air. He felt the clean cold cover of his bank-book, he twirled his watch in his hand, and its bright surface caught the light from a shutter chink. As he dropped his chain it fell with a pleasant musical sound upon his silver box. But he must have sat longest playing with the purse of gold, and making its bright orange stream ripple beneath the silken meshes, as he softly cascaded it from hand to hand.

"For then and there in the darkness the Devil seized upon him and rent him. How long the struggle between his good and bad angels may have been no man may know; nor what agony of spirit worked within him in the musty depths of the close little fruit-shop. But when his mother returned to greet her boy, he was gone and had left no trace behind him—not even one orange flower from his white straw hat.

"She hurried to the house of Mme. Husson, and with Joconde to help them through the crowds that still surged aimlessly about the streets, they went to find the Maire. He could give them no information, however, nor could the officers of the police. The news got out, and within an hour the whole town was looking for Isidore, with the extravagant animation of people who take their first delightful taste of a mystery. A general alarm was sent out. The Colonel of the Grenadiers despatched scouting parties to make the external circuit of the town. One of these discovered on the Paris road the spray of orange blossoms. For the rest of the night, half of the inhabitants of Gisors sat up comparing conjectures with each other and discussing the possibilities of the young man's having met with foul play.

"On the evening of the next day, when the regular stage-coach got in on its return from Paris, the people of Gisors learned the truth. Isidore had hailed the conveyance a mile out of town, had paid his fare out of his purse of gold, and, traveling all night, had reached Paris in the morning; and had got off and disappeared in the streets of the great city as though it were the most natural place in the world for a man in a white, spotless suit of duck.

"The authorities tried their best, but they could get no further trace of the boy. Weeks passed on and nothing occurred to shed the slightest light upon the mystery.

"I was then the youngest physician in town, and I happened to be the only person stirring in the street early one Fall morning. As I entered the market place, I suddenly saw a curious dark-gray figure, in its gait and carriage more like a baboon than a man, come staggering around a distant corner. It fell even as I saw it, and I hurried forward. Reaching the inanimate form, I tried to lift it. It was a man sunk in the depths of a profound alcoholic stupor, with an empty brandy bottle clutched in his hand; but it was some time before I realized that the bloated, swollen, bruised, besmirched face belonged to Isidore. The beautiful white duck suit was a hideous skeleton, of filthy rags; and the whole creature, dress and person, was a mass of filth, soilage, and disfigurement, marked with every stain and spot that can be left on a man by the inexpressible foulness of a great city's lowest slums. I called for help and got him home to his

mother's. He was washed, healed, fed, and set upright again, and given another chance to behave himself. He had nothing with him—absolutely nothing of all his gold and silver—except the freedom of the town, no longer in its silver casket, but tucked away, dirty itself, in a dirtier pocket.

"We suspected, however, that he had some small portion of his money hidden somewhere outside the city limits, for when, a few days afterward, he escaped from his mother's vigilance and got outside the town, he came back shortly, drunk, and with money enough in his pocket to get still more drunk—in fact, to go on such a spree as no mortal man had ever gone on in the streets of Gisors. A month later he repeated this performance, and breaking of windows was the smallest irregularity he committed. This occurred again from time to time, until the city officials, having exhausted all the minor punishments they could bestow on him, ordered him to leave the town. It was then that Isidore marched into the council chamber and produced the freedom of the town that had been given him with his prize of propriety—and asked the municipality of Gisors what action it proposed to take in the matter.

"He remained the town drunkard until he died," concluded the little doctor, getting down off the parapet of the bridge; "and when I closed his eyes the town paid my bill."

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