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## "THE HAND OF FATE"

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### I.

HE stood beside the low stone wall of Central Park, looking at a bench in the sandy border of the sidewalk there, with his straw hat on the back of his head, and his hands deep in his trousers' pockets. It was nearly midnight, and he was tempted by a dozen aches in his back and legs to accept the invitation of the empty seat. He declined it when he remembered the night-sticks of the policemen. He would be safer from them in the bushes which showed on the other side of the wall.

He put his hand on top of it, and vaulted into the shadows. But the level of the Park proved to be at least three feet below that of the street; he came down on his heels with a jolt that cracked his jaws together, and he fell back in a sitting posture against the foot of the wall, with a grunt. It seemed the final betrayal of fate. He gave up the struggle. He stretched his legs out painfully before him, put his hat on his knees, and fluttered out a sigh that was half of relief for the ease of sitting, and half of dejection for his misfortunes.

It was the last day of his first week in New York. He was a college graduate, newly outfitted for life with a liberal education. He had turned to newspaper work as the proper trade for his tools. And he had learned that midsummer was the dead season in the newspaper offices, and that college graduates were a glut on the market.

One managing editor, to whom he had brought a letter of introduction, had offered to buy a news-story from him whenever he might have one to sell. The others had returned answer to him, through their office-boys, that there were no vacancies in their staffs. In these circumstances, it had seemed unwise to go back to his Brooklyn lodging-house to waste the night in unconsciousness of a whole city full of possible news-stories. It was better to look for the trail of one.

He had walked from Newspaper Row up Broadway to Fifth Avenue, and up Fifth Avenue to the Park, desperately stalking his game; and he had not struck the "scent" of any item that could possibly be sold. He had come to the conclusion that he did not know the haunts and lairs of his prey; that he would not recognize a news-story, anyway, if one passed him on the flag-stones; that, in the mysterious language of the editor, he had not the "nose," in fact.

He shut his eyes on a burning dryness in them. . . . Yes, he was a failure. . . . He would go back to his native city, and study law.

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He was awakened by he did not know what; but he was tenderly raising his head from his shoulder on a cramped neck, when he heard the scrape of a foot on the gravel above him. A white bundle came down through the darkness to drop into the grass