

VENETIAN DAY By JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

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His name was Rawson—William Rawson. I met him first back in 1904, when I was a reporter on the New York Evening Recorder, and I liked him from the start because he was what we seldom see nowadays, a restful sort of person without being by any means dull. It was a year since he had left the Detective Bureau, at the age of forty, with a competence of \$2,500 a year—enough, he has always maintained, for any sane man to live on comfortably, even in New York, unless, as he put it, he indulges in such expensive luxuries as a wife or a motor car.

holding a piece of ice cream in his hand, the which was promptly upset and its contents scattered over the rear breast of my clamhammer coat. His apologies were as profuse as if he were really to blame for the incident, and in spite of my assurances that I preferred my ice cream that way he insisted upon accompanying me to the cloak room, where we made such amends to my unfortunate garment as were possible under the circumstances.

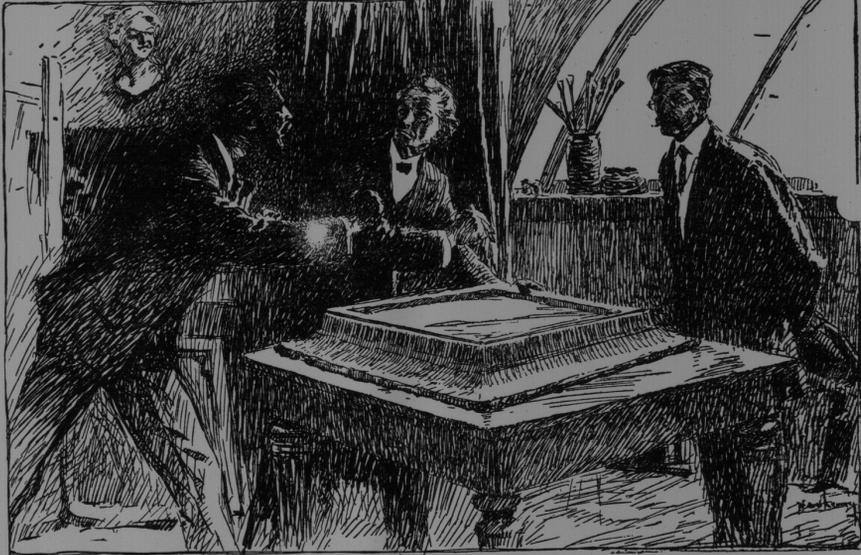
We made our way through the mass of private viewers and soon found ourselves standing before No. 809—"A Venetian Day." It was properly skid—that is to say, if it is ever proper to elevate the audience to celestial heights. Frankly I do not know very much about painting. My art education has been sadly neglected but it did not require a second glance from even my untutored eye to see that No. 809 was not, as the gamins put it, so very much.

"A perfect gem, do you?" said I. "Have you ever been to Venice?" "No," said I, "but I've seen pictures of the place, and this is the only one I've seen that didn't make me want to go there."

"Oh, yes, indeed," he replied. "I have seen you frequently in the criminal courts." "Well, you mustn't judge me by that," I laughed. "I've been there always as a reporter, you know."

"Always on the right side of the bar," he said with a smile. "But as I have said, I am going to make amends for this unfortunate ruin of your coat. You wouldn't mind a good story, would you?" "That's what I'm trying to get," said I.

"Well, inside of a month you'll have it," he said. "My name is Rawson," he went on, "and I don't mind telling you that I am not here as an art critic, but in my capacity as an instrument of the law."



"Stop!" cried Waters, grasping Rawson by the arm.

"Give us a picture of your own painting, Jenkins," said the editor, "of the human canvases—a living picture, as it were. If any of the people there are out of drawing, badly composed or indifferently painted, say so—you needn't use real names, of course, but draw them so vividly that the public will recognize them."

"Yes, he has," said Rawson drily. "He has sold three canvases in the last two years, skied ones too, to a certain distinguished millionaire, for gratifyingly large sums, sums that enable him to use handbags and electric cars whenever he wants them, and to rig up a studio that is one of the finest in town. Ever been there?"

"I must confess that the function bored me a trifle, for I knew very few of the people present, and I found some difficulty in getting into the skin of the thing, until by an odd chance I was backed by the surging crowd into a man

Waters seated himself suddenly in a chair and appeared to be on the verge of collapse. Twice he tried to speak, but the words would not come, and he sat gazing after Rawson.

"Now what is that hidden, mysterious value?" said Rawson, "a value that has escaped every eye in the custom house, every eye among the critics of the recent exhibition who roared it, and every eye even of the hanging committee who asked it?"

"Do you mean to imply that I—?" began Waters, rising and walking the floor in great agitation.

"Sit down and hear me out, Mr. Waters," said Rawson. "I mean to imply nothing. I am merely stating facts. The Venetian disappeared. Suspicion pointed in many directions, but the prevailing impression seemed to be that certain persons employed in the Academy had been bribed to secure that priceless possession and turn it over to certain agents of a certain American collector—let us say, for the sake of argument, Mr. Robert Herron. You remember the affair, no doubt?"

I gazed at it with the bold and critical eye of a connoisseur

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