

another look at its chance possessor. He was staring steadfastly at the card I had just read, now and then shaking his head in an undecided way. In a moment, however, he seemed to reach a decision. From a shelf he took a small oblong morocco-covered box—a jewel-case, apparently—and in to it put some object which he slipped from under the counter. I could not see what it was, but had very little doubt about it. He wrapped and sealed the box, and it was his action in addressing the parcel that interested me most, for he obviously copied the address from the card that had dropped with the finger from the coat.

"Presently he came out, package in hand, and made his way, with me in his wake, to a District Messenger office in the next block. I only stopped to make sure that he left the parcel there for delivery, and then started for your house. I determined to be here before the package and to recover my property by making a direct appeal to your magnanimity. While one could not think of putting himself, even in a small way, into the hands of the pawnbroker, with a gentleman there could be no question of the result. And yet, when I had ascended your steps and was about to ring, I was seized with a qualm of diffidence and confusion. What excuse could I make for intruding upon a gentleman on such an errand. Could I say, "Mr. Wilkinson, my name is Blackall. There is a finger coming to you by special messenger which belongs to me!" Clearly not.

"I thought of several elaborate and round-about ways of introducing the subject, but none of them appealed to me as quite adequate. I had arrived at no conclusion when a uniformed messenger appeared at the foot of the steps, evidently looking for the number on the transom. Instinctively I drew back into the shade. I was standing in the vestibule between the outer and inner doors, and the cross-light from the gas in your hall and the electric light outside made a triangle of shadow in which I was invisible to the boy, while his every motion was plain to me. He took from beneath his coat a small oblong package. That decided me upon an instant plan of action. My soft hat I doubled and thrust into a pocket. The lad came leisurely up the steps, his attention fixed upon the address on the parcel, making sure that he had the right house. Calmly I stepped forth, bareheaded, partially closing the outer door. The boy looked up and said: "Mr. Wilkinson?" "Correct," I answered, eagerly extending my hand for the coveted parcel. With it I was handed a receipt book and asked to sign. Of course, there was no help for it, and forgery was added to my list of offences.

"In a short half-hour I was safe in my lodgings, free to unwrap the article that had caused me so much anxiety and effort. Imagine my consternation when, on opening the case, I found instead of the object of my search, a pearl necklace. For some time I sat and stared at it, as ridiculously confused as a clown in a Christmas pantomime. The case was, apparently, the one I had seen Isaacson use, but the contents! Surely pawnbrokers did not keep pearl necklaces lying loose under their counters. And, if they did, they would scarcely send them off at random to addresses accidentally found in pledged articles of clothing. The more I thought of it the more unaccountable it seemed. Certainly there was but one thing to do. I had got into deep waters and needed an experienced hand and head to get me out. I went at once to a private detective

whom I knew and made a clean breast of the matter. I assured him that it was hardly less important than the necklace should be restored, with some reasonable excuse, to the rightful owner than that my lost finger should be recovered. He agreed to attend promptly to both matters. And he has." Mr. Blackall bowed in the direction of the detective, who returned the compliment and said:

"Fact is, Mr. Wilkinson, I was looking up the case from Mr. Blackall's end when you called on me last night, and when you told me your story this morning I, of course, made my own deductions. The two mysteries just dovetailed into each other you see, so that I had an easy job for my money. And now let me restore to you gentlemen the missing articles, which, I dare say, you would neither of you care to exchange again."

The detective smiled, and produced from nowhere in particular two jewel-cases. They were much alike and were marked with the name of the same jeweler.

"Well, Mr. Wilkinson," said Mr. Blackall, "glad to have met you, but sorry to have caused you so much inconvenience. I trust you appreciate my delicate position and the overpowering considerations which prevailed upon me to do a dishonorable thing." He offered his hand, which Mr. Wilkinson did not appear to see.

"You will excuse me, Mr. Blackall," he said, with dignity, "if, before I commit myself to complete acquiescence, I request some explanation of the manner in which this strange—er—article—came into your possession."

Mr. Blackall smiled. "Certainly, my dear sir—but I thought I had made myself plain in the matter. Have I not?" He addressed the detective, who shook his head.

"Then I shall be glad to do so. You will recall that I pleaded guilty to two thefts yesterday. The first article stolen was the finger. I had long coveted such a finger, and when the chance came to acquire one I was not strong enough to resist the temptation. So I stole it."

Mr. Wilkinson shuddered. He had a momentary vision of a young girl going about in search of the third finger of her left hand.

"Whose was it?" he asked involuntarily.

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Mr. Blackall, "Bad lot, I dare say, but as pretty a subject for dissection as I ever saw."

Dissection! Mr. Wilkinson breathed more freely. An incubus of horror was lifted from his brain, and he was relieved to feel nothing more than a mild disgust.

"Ah," he said, "you are——"

"A student of surgery—didn't I say?" replied Mr. Blackall. Recently I have been making a special study of the structure of the hand. Yesterday, in the dissecting room I happened upon this finger—a very remarkable specimen. You will readily notice the peculiar form of the tendon; it is double." He drew the finger from the jewel-case and by means of his thumb and forefinger manipulated the tendon so that the member moved unpleasantly. "There are," he continued, complacently, "so far as I know, extremely few cases of this kind on record. I can hardly tell you what an attraction it had for me. I resolved, before communicating my discovery to the demonstrator, to take it home with me, and spend the night with it. Instead of which, Mr. Wilkinson," he continued—and here he and the detective both smiled—"it was you who——"

"Yes," said Mr. Wilkinson, "I certainly did."

GOING HOME.

I tread each mountain waste austere,
I pass dark pinelands, hill by hill;
Each tardy sunrise brings me near,
Each lonely sunset nearer still.

Sing low, my heart, of other lands
And suns we may have loved or known;
This silent North, it understands,
And asks but little of its own!

So where the homeland twilight broods
Above the slopes of dusky pine,
Teach me your silence, solitudes;
Your reticence, grey hills, be mine!

Whether all loveliness it lies,
Or but a lone waste scarred and torn,
How shall I know? For 'neath these
And in these valleys I was born!



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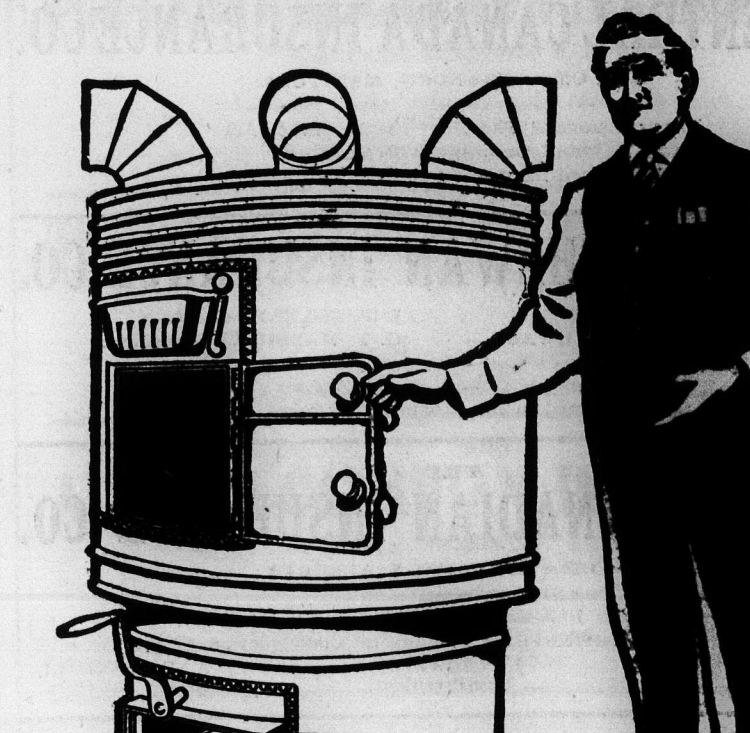
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