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reading. The twenty-fourth part of it is out to-day."

He chattered on, and his talk was about the desperate and decorative heroism of the Wild West. Peter Musk, such was his name, was a hero worshipper, a lover of the adventurous, and an assiduous reader of that type of romance which too hasty critics dismiss contemptuously as "dreadfuls." Packed away behind the bright cretonne curtains that hid his book-shelves were many hundreds of these stories, each of which had gone to the creation of the atmosphere in which Peter lived.

"And what has my Peter been doing all this long time?" asked Amber.

Peter set the cups and smiled, a little mysteriously.

"The old life," he said, "my studies, my birds, a little needlework—life runs very smoothly to a broken man an' a humble student of life."

He smiled again, as at a secret thought.

Amber was neither piqued nor amused by the little man's mystery, but regarded him with affectionate interest.

Peter was ever a dreamer. He dreamt of heroic matters such as rescuing grey-eyed damsels from tall villains in evening dress. These villains smoked cigarettes and sneered at the distress of their victims, until Peter came along and, with one well-directed blow, struck the sallow scoundrels to the earth.

Peter was in height some four feet eleven inches, and stoutish. He wore big, round, steel-rimmed glasses, and had a false tooth—a possession which ordinarily checks the pugilistically inclined, and can reasonably serve as an excellent excuse for prudent inaction in moments when the finger of heroism beckons frantically.

Peter moreover led forlorn hopes; stormed (in amour of an impervious character) breached fortresses under flights of arrows; planted tattered flags, shot-riddled, on bristling ramparts; and between whiles, in calmer spirit, was martyred for his country's sake, in certain little warlike expeditions in Central Africa.

Being by nature of an orderly disposition, he brought something of the method of his life into his dreams.

Thus, he charged at the head of his men, between 19, Redcow Court, and the fish-shop, in the morning, when he went to buy his breakfast haddock. He was martyred between the Borough and the Marshalsea Recreation Grounds, when he took a walk; was borne to a soldier's grave, amidst national lamentations, on the return journey, and did most of his rescuing after business hours.

Many years ago Peter had been a clerk in a city warehouse; a quiet respectable man, given to gardening. One day money was missing from the cashier's desk, and Peter was suspected. He was hypnotized by the charge, allowed himself to be led off to the police station without protest, listened as a man in a dream to the recital of the evidence against him—beautifully circumstantial evidence it was—and went down from the dock not fully realizing that a grey-haired old gentleman on the bench had awarded him six months' hard labour, in a calm unemotional voice.

Peter had served four months of his sentence when the real thief was detected, and confessed to his earlier crime. Peter's employers were shocked; they were good, honest, Christian people, and the managing director of the company was—as he told Peter afterwards—so distressed that he nearly put off his annual holiday to the Engadine.

The firm did a handsome thing, for they pensioned Peter on, paying him no less than 25s. a week, and Peter went to the Borough, because he had eccentric views, one of which was that he carried about him the taint of his conviction.

He came to be almost proud of his unique experience, boasted a little I fear, and earned an undeserved reputation in criminal circles. He was pointed out as he strolled forth in the cool of summer evenings, as a man who had burgled a bank, as What's-his-name, the celebrated forger. He was greatly respected.

"How did you get on?" Amber was thinking of the little man's many lovable qualities when the question was addressed to him.

"Me—oh, about the same, my Peter," he said with a smile.

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