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Jacqueline of Golden River

by Victor Rousseau

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JACQUELINE! JACQUELINE!

Paul Hewlett, loitering at night in Madison square, New York, is approached by an Eskimo dog. He follows the dog to a gambling house and meets the animal's mistress coming out with a large amount of money. She is beautiful and in distress and he follows her. After protecting her from two assailants he takes her in charge.

CHAPTER I—Continued.

—2—

When the taxicab deposited us in front of the house I glanced hastily up and down the road. There was another cab at the east end of the street, but I could not discern if it were approaching me or stationary. I opened the front door quickly and admitted my companion, then preceded her up the uncarpeted stairs to my little apartment on the top floor.

As I opened the door of my apartment the dog pushed past me. Again I had forgotten it; but it had not forgotten its mistress.

"Till tomorrow, mademoiselle," I said. "And won't you tell me your name?"

"Jacqueline," she answered. "And yours?"

"Paul," I said.

"Au revoir, Monsieur Paul, then, and take my gratitude with you for your goodness."

I let her hand fall and hurried down the stairs, confused and choking, for there was a wedding ring upon her finger

CHAPTER II.

Back in the Room.

The situation had become more preposterous than ever. Two hours before it would have been unimaginable; one hour ago I had merely been offering aid to a young woman in distress; now she was occupying my rooms and I was hurrying along Tenth street, careless as to my destination and feeling as though the whole world was crumbling about my head because she wore a wedding ring.

As I passed up the street the taxicab which I had seen at the east end came rapidly toward me. It passed, and I stopped and looked after it. I was certain that it slackened speed outside the door of the old building, but again it went on quickly until it was lost to view in the distance.

Had I given the pursuers a clue by my reappearance?

I watched for a few moments longer, but the vehicle did not return and I dismissed the idea as folly. After all, New York was a civilized city, and I could be sure of the girl's safety behind the street door lock and that of my apartment door. So I refused to yield to the impulse to go back and assure myself that she was all right. I must find a hotel and get a good night's sleep.

As I went on new thoughts began to press on my imagination. The tale about the father, the assumed ignorance of the conventions—how much could be believed?

Had she not probably left her husband in some Canadian city and come to New York to enjoy her holiday in her own fashion? Could she innocently have adventured to Daly's door and actually have succeeded in gaining admission?

Perhaps she was worse than I was even now imagining!

Perhaps, if I had not left her—perhaps, if I turned back— I clenched my fists and hurried on. I would not give rein to the thoughts that were making my heart bound like a runaway horse.

I had turned up Fifth avenue and had reached Twelfth or Thirteenth street when I thought I heard the patter of the Eskimo dog's feet behind me. I spun around, startled, but there was only the long stretch of pavement. I had resumed my course when I was sure I heard the pattering again. And again I saw nothing.

A moment later I was hurrying back toward the apartment house. My nerves had suddenly become unstrung. I felt sure now that some imminent danger was threatening Jacqueline. I could not bear the suspense of waiting till morning.

And as I ran I thought I heard the patter of the dog's feet, pacing mine.

I was rounding the corner of Tenth street now, and again the folly of my behavior struck home to me. I stopped and tried to think. Was it some instinct that was taking me back, or was it the remembrance of Jacqueline's beauty? Was it, not the desire to see her, to ask her about the ring?

I had actually swung around when I heard the ghostly patter of the feet again close at my side. I made my decision in that instant and hurried swiftly on my course back toward the apartment house.

When at last I found my door my hands were trembling so that I could hardly fit the key into the lock.

I bounded up the stairs. But on the top story I had to pause to get my breath, and then I dared not enter. I listened outside. There was no sound from within.

The two rooms that I occupied were separated only by a curtain, which fell short a foot from the floor and was slung on a wooden pole, disclosing two feet between the top of it and the ceiling. The rooms were thus actually one, and even that might have been called small, for the bed in the rear room was not a dozen paces from the door.

I listened for the breathing of the sleeping girl. If I could hear her breathe, I thought I would go quietly away and find a hotel in which to sleep. I listened minute after minute, but I could not hear a sound.

At last I put my mouth to the keyhole and spoke to her. "Jacqueline," I called. There was no answer.

Then a little louder: "Jacqueline!"

And then quite loudly: "Jacqueline!"

Then, out of the silence, hammering on my eardrums, burst the loud ticking of the little alarm clock that I had left on the mantel of the bedroom. I heard that, and it must have been ticking minutes before the sound reached me; perhaps if I waited a little longer I should hear her breathing.

I took the key of the apartment from my pocket at last and fitted it noiselessly into the lock. I stood there, trembling and irresolute. I dared not turn the key.

Once more I ventured:

"Jacqueline! Jacqueline!"

There was not the smallest answering stir within. And so, with shaking fingers, I turned the key.

The room was completely dark, except for a little patch of light high up on the bedroom wall, which came through the hole the workmen had made when they began demolishing

The Scene Stamped Itself Upon My Brain.

the building. I hesitated a moment, then I drew a match from my pocket and rubbed it softly into a flame against my trousers leg.

I reached up to the gas shove the table, turned it on and lit the incandescent mantle, lowering the light immediately. But even then there was no sound.

The oppressive stillness was not that of solitude. She must be awake; she must be listening in terror.

I went toward the curtains and when I spoke I heard the words come through my lips in a voice that I could not recognize as mine.

"Jacqueline?" I whispered. "It is Paul, your friend. Are you safe, Jacqueline?"

Now I saw, under the curtains, what looked like the body of a very small animal. It might have been a woolly dog or a black lambkin, and it was lying perfectly still.

I pulled aside the curtains and stood between them, and the scene stamped itself upon my brain as clear as a photographic print forever.

The woolly beast was the fur cap of a dead man who lay across the floor of the little room. There was a tiny hole in his breast, over the heart, from which a little blood had flowed. The wound had pierced the heart and death had evidently been instantaneous.

It was the man whom I had seen staring at us across Herald square.

Beside the window Jacqueline crouched, and at her feet lay the Eskimo dog, watching me silently. In her hand she held a tiny, daggerlike knife, with a chin, red-stained blade. Her gray eyes, black in the gaslight, stared into mine, and there was neither fear nor recognition in them. She was fully dressed, and the bed had not been occupied.

I flung myself at her feet. I took the weapon from her hand. "Jacqueline!" I cried in terror. I raised her hands to my lips and caressed them.

She seemed quite unresponsive.

"Jacqueline," I cried, "you are not hurt? Thank God you are not hurt. What has happened?"

"I don't know," she answered. "I don't know where I am."

"Jacqueline, dear," I said, "will you not try to think? I am Paul—your friend Paul. Do you not remember me?"

"No, monsieur," she sighed.

"But, then, how did you come here Jacqueline?" I asked.

"I do not know," she answered. And, a moment later, "I do not know, Paul."

That encouraged me a little. Evidently she remembered what I had just said to her.

There was something more to be said, though it was hard.

"Jacqueline, who—was—that?"

"Who?" she inquired, looking at me with the same patient, wistful gaze.

"That man, Jacqueline. That dead man."

"What dead man, Paul?"

She was staring straight at the body, and at that moment I realized that she not only did not remember, but did not even see it.

The shock which she had received, supervening upon the nervous state in which she had been when I encountered her, had produced one of those mental inhibitions in which the mind, to save the reason, obliterates temporarily not only all memory of the past but also all present sights and sounds which may serve to recall it.

I saw that it was useless to say anything more upon this subject.

"You are very tired, Jacqueline?" I asked.

"Yes, monsieur," she answered, leaning back against my arm.

"And you would like to sleep?"

"Yes, monsieur."

I raised her in my arms and laid her on the bed, telling her to close her eyes and sleep. She was asleep almost immediately after her head rested upon the pillow.

I watched her for a while until I heard a distant clock strike three. This recalled me to the dangers of our situation. I struck a match and lit the gas in the bedroom. But the yellow glare was so ghastly and intolerable that I turned it down.

And then I set about the tasks before me.

CHAPTER III.

Covering the Tracks.

There was a fire escape running up to the floor of that room on the outside of the house. I say that it would be possible by standing on a chair to swing myself up to the hole in the wall and reach down to the iron stairs up which, I assumed, the dead man had crept after I had given him the hint of Jacqueline's abode by emerging from the front door.

I raised the dead man in my arms, looking apprehensively toward the bed. I was afraid Jacqueline would awaken, but she slept in heavy peace, undisturbed by the harsh creaking of the sagging floor beneath its double burden. I put the fur cap on the grotesque, nodding dead head, and, pushing a chair toward the wall with my foot, mounted it and managed with a great effort to squeeze through the hole, pulling up the body with me as I did so.

Then I felt with my foot for the little platform at the top of the iron stairs outside, found it, and dropped. Afterward I dragged the dreadful burden down from the hole.

I carried the dead man all the way down the fire escape, clinging and straining against the rotting, rusting bars.

At the back of the house was a little vacant space, filled with heaps of debris from the demolished portions of the building and with refuse which had been dumped there by tenants who had left, and had never been removed. This yard was separated only by a rotting fence with a single wooden rail from a small blind alley.

I took up my burden and placed it at the end of the alley, covering it roughly with some old burlap bags which lay there. I thought it safe to assume that the police would look upon the dead man as the victim of some footpad.

Hewlett plans to protect Jacqueline from the consequences of what he believes is her deed and to take her to her home.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Unlucky Thirteen.

A correspondent suggests that the origin of the "unlucky thirteen" superstition is to be found in the casting lots by Haman to discover a "lucky day" for the destruction of the Jews. The 13th was certainly a most unfortunate selection in this case, and the story was so popular in the middle ages that it may really have given rise to the superstition.

Wonder of Plant Life.

A species of the acacia tree attains a height of about eight feet. When full grown it closes its leaves together in coils each day at sunset. Thus settled it will flutter violently if touched, and if the branches are shaken the tree will emit a nauseating odor. The natives call it the "angry tree."

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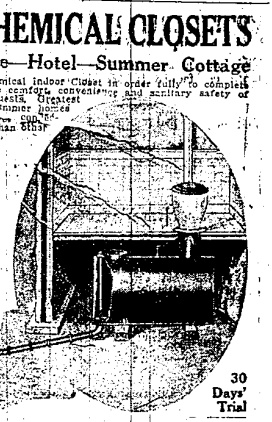

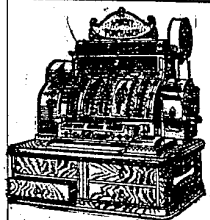

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Trinidad Lizard Farm.

On the island of Trinidad there is today a veritable lizard farm which has all the equipment for the successful breeding of these none too numerous members of the reptile family which are now known to be indispensable to the sugar planters. In addition to this enterprise a wider search is being made for foods to help increase the world's sugar output.

Mystifying "Ads."

A city advertisement was headed: "Two sisters want washing." So do a good many brothers. Another advertisement was: "Wanted—a boy to sandpaper."

Dependent on Language.

Many thoughts are so dependent upon the language in which they are clothed that they would lose half their beauty if otherwise expressed.—Ruskin.

Poison Bottle Warning.

To distinguish bottles containing poisons in the dark a sandpaper band to encircle them with an opening for their labels has been invented.

Strengthening Timber.

According to English scientists, electricity passed through timber when freshly cut makes it more resistant against decay and fungous growth.

"Locket" Eyeglasses.

Eyeglasses for which a British patent has been granted can be folded when idle to resemble a locket and worn on a chain as an ornament.

Be Glad.

If you see a man or woman successful, be glad of it. Don't waste time belittling his success. Use your force trying to equal it.

Daily Thought.

A man's own observation, what he finds good of, and what he finds hurt of, is the best physic to preserve health.—Bacon.

Useful Though Unwed.

The modern view is that a woman is not necessarily a failure because her life has been Miss-spent.—Boston Transcript.

Kerosene Kink.

It has been proved that if lamps and heaters in which kerosene is used as fuel are kept scrupulously clean, there will be a decided saving of oil; also, there will be an equal pleasing absence of the disagreeable odor that so often accompanies the burning of kerosene.

Rusty Steel.

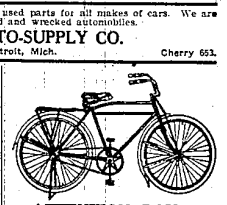
To clean rusty steel, oil well the rusty parts and set aside in this state for two or three days. Then wipe dry with clean rags and polish with emery or pumice stone. When very rusty and a high polish is desired rub the article with a little slack lime.

Advice From a Great Man.

Phillips Brooks once said that it is just as presumptuous to think that you can do nothing as it is to think that you can do everything. Try to "steer a middle course" between the two.

Daily Thought.

There is no better ballast for keeping the mind steady on its keel and saving it from all risk of crankiness than business.—Lowell.



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