

41
STORIES
BY
O. HENRY

Selected and with an Introduction by
Burton Raffel

and with a New Afterword by
Laura Furman



SIGNET CLASSICS

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O. Henry, the pen name of William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. Young Porter went to work in a drugstore at age fifteen. Later he traveled to Texas to work on a ranch and spent ten years in Austin, where he married, worked as a bank teller, and purchased a weekly newspaper, *The Rolling Stone*. But the paper failed, and in 1894, Porter was accused of embezzling bank funds. Eventually, he fled to Honduras and returned only in 1897 to be with his dying wife. Committed to a federal penitentiary in Ohio, he began writing under the name O. Henry. Following his release in 1901, he lived in New York City. A prolific writer, often turning out a story a week, he kept his real identity a secret as his fame grew. His first book, *Cabbages and Kings*, appeared in 1904 and was followed by thirteen other collections. His stories, which have been translated and read all over the world, are so popular that they have never gone out of print.

Burton Raffel has taught English, classics, and comparative literature at universities in the United States, Israel, and Canada. He is the author of such acclaimed translations as *Beowulf*; *The Essential Horace: Odes, Epodes, Epistles and Satires*; *The Complete Poetry and Prose of Chairil Anwar*; *Poems from the Old English*; and *The Annotated Milton*; as well as several critical studies, including *Introduction to Poetry* and *The Forked Tongue: A Study of the Translation Process*.

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Introduction

Born in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1862, William Sydney Porter was the son of a neurotic, large self-trained doctor and a tubercular mother, of good family. His maternal grandfather had been a successful newspaper editor; his mother had a degree from a women's college. His mother died of tuberculosis when he was three, and his paternal grandmother—and especially his father's sister—raised the boy. His father drifted into drinking, worked at a perpetual-motion machine, and died in 1886, as much out of contact with the world at large as with his son.

His grandmother was a firm, outspoken woman who, after her husband's death, ran a boardinghouse. His aunt ran a small private school where Porter got what education he received; she also pushed him to read and to read well. "I did more reading between my thirteenth and nineteenth years than I have done in all the years since," he noted, "and my taste at that time was much better than it is now, for I used to read nothing but the classics.... I never have time to read now. I did all my reading before I was twenty."

At age 15, he was apprenticed as a pharmacist in a drug store owned and operated by a paternal uncle, and his formal schooling was over. At age 19, he was a licensed pharmacist; within a year, showing signs of the tuberculosis that had killed his mother, he was sent to a sheep and cattle ranch in southwest Texas where outdoor life might arrest the disease. After working on the ranch for two years, he moved to Austin, Texas, worked at assorted jobs, and in 1887 married the daughter of a successful Austin businessman. He had always been interested in drawing and sketching; now he secured a reasonably well-paying post as a draftsman in the Texas Land Office and began to raise a family. His first child, a son, died a few hours after birth; his second child, a daughter, survived her father. His wife became ill with tuberculosis, Porter lost his drafting post, took a job as a bank teller, and tried to establish himself as a humorist, writing both for the *Houston Post* and also buying a printing press and the rights to a small scandal sheet, promptly renamed *The Rolling Stone*. It was an eight-page affair for which he wrote most of the material and did the typesetting and printing, simultaneously keeping his bank post. The magazine did not flourish: Porter slid into a life of dissolution and illicit borrowing from various bank accounts. His father-in-law repaid his embezzlement, and a jury acquitted him of criminal charges, but the Federal bank examiners moved for a new trial. The *Rolling Stone* died in 1895, Porter was rearrested in 1896, and promptly fled, first to New Orleans and then to Honduras. He stayed two years. Roughly a year later, learning that his wife was near death, he returned. She died a few months afterward; the next year, 1898, he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to five years in the penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio, where he, in fact, served over three years.

Jail was deeply traumatic for him, though he received favorable treatment as a pharmacist and was given reasonable freedom to continue writing. No one knows exactly how or why he transformed himself, in those years, into what became his internationally celebrated pen name, O. Henry, nor do anyone know precisely what (if anything) the pseudonym is supposed to mean. Clearly, the important thing is that it is a pseudonym. The use of the name O. Henry was a way of separating himself from much of the reality he had no inclination to deal with. His letters to his small daughter never revealed why he was away from home or, indeed, where he was, but the letters he wrote to his in-laws indicated a keen awareness of prison conditions. Though fellow prisoners urged him to write on such topics, he

neither did nor would. "I will forget that I ever breathed behind these walls," he affirmed even before his discharge. His personal disguise, equally clearly, melted into the many disguises and transformations of his fiction, in which from the start nothing was ever exactly what it seemed to be and the laws of causation scarcely seem to hold. Secrets are magical charms in the world of his fiction, as after his release from prison the secret of his criminal conviction became a potentially destructive spell that had to be forever contained.

O. Henry drew on his own life and the lives of his fellow prisoners in the stories he wrote in those prison years and afterward. But he also taught himself how to transform mundane materials into magical fiction—an art he practiced, thereafter, with immense and quite conscious aplomb. In a restaurant one day, Irvin Cobb, himself a humorist, asked O. Henry how he developed his plots, where on earth he found them all. "Oh, everywhere," O. Henry is reported to have answered. "There are stories in everything." He then picked up the menu and, glancing at it, declared, "There's a story in this." And he improvised the plot of "Springtime à la Carte," perfectly typical of the best of his tales.

And "perfectly typical" is an unusually appropriate term for the hundreds of stories that poured from his pen. No writer of equivalent stature, with the possible exception of Anton Chekhov, has ever written so distinctly to formula, and Chekhov did not write that way for his entire creative life but only at the start. O. Henry's beginning was his end: It is almost impossible to tell from internal evidence when a particular story was written, nor is there any significant difference in quality. There are good stories and bad ones, and there are superb stories, throughout his work. His many published collections, similarly, are a chronological jumble, for it simply does not matter in what book a story occurs, any more than it matters when it was written. At one point, under contract with a New York newspaper, the *World*, he turned out a story a week for the paper's Sunday edition and kept it up for thirty months and over one hundred stories. The results were neither better nor worse than during any other period of the roughly nine years after he left jail. O. Henry made his own conditions: the pressure to write, to publish, to succeed did not come from signing a contract.

He rapidly became famous, and he began to earn large sums of money. The *World* paid him \$100 a week, a sum probably equal to ten times that amount today. He lived well but almost as anonymously as the way he hid himself behind his literary name. He was deathly afraid of meeting someone from the penitentiary, of being found out, of being exposed as William Sydney Porter, bank embezzler and convict. *Cabbages and Kings*, his first collection, came out in 1904, and was well received. The *Four Million* (i.e., the four million residents of New York City at that time), published in 1906, made him famous. From that day to this, his works have never been out of print. Book after book rolled in print; even after his death in 1910, there were stories enough for four more volumes, plus, in 1920 and then in 1936, still further gleanings, largely of very early material.

It was a literally killing pace, and O. Henry had begun to feel the effects and to slow down by about 1907. He had also managed to marry for a second time, to a childhood sweetheart and spinster who was close to forty and temperamentally about as unsuited to him as he was unsuited to marriage itself. His daughter lived with them briefly, but the marriage fell apart: by 1909 the second Mrs. Porter had gone home to mother, the young Miss Porter had been sent off to school, and O. Henry, weary, and always in debt, was desperately trying to recoup. As always he wrote, and he schemed; fortune beckoned, and he looked the other way while plunging still further into debt and imminent physical collapse, drinking too much, living too high, and yet perpetually hopeful, perpetually dreaming, planning, scrambling. He took money for a novel that was never written and wrote a failed music

comedy instead. He took \$500 for the dramatic rights to "A Retrieved Reformation," instead of writing the play himself, as the producer had wanted. Alias Jimmy Valentine was a tremendous hit, earning more than \$100,000 in royalties by the time its first run ended. He drank more and more, wrote less and less, unwilling to admit that the tuberculosis that had killed his mother and his first wife, and which three decades earlier had threatened him, had now caught up to him and was eating his life away. He died sordidly, suffering simultaneously from tuberculosis, diabetes, and an advanced stage of cirrhosis of the liver.

It would be hard to put it better than Jesse F. Knight has done in a little-known journal, *The Romantist*:

O. Henry realized that Romance is not in a specific locale. Romance is not inherent anywhere. Rather, it is within ourselves.... It is how we view life which determines Romance; not life itself.... One of O. Henry's most remarkable achievements was his successful blending of Romanticism and the modern industrial, urban city. O. Henry brought Romanticism squarely into the 20th century.

The realists of his time, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser, tried in the differing ways to confront their world. O. Henry had no great interest in confrontation: what he primarily wanted, and what he created in his fiction, was escape. And yet as Mr. Knight suggests, it is not so simple and straightforward, for one could write a good part of a social history of New York City in the first decade of the twentieth century from his stories alone. Poverty is everywhere, and misery and death, too. The heroine of "The Furnished Room" has killed herself in poverty and desperation. The hero kills himself, too, once he learns what has happened to her. The hero of "Brickdust Row" discovers, to his horror, what the city can do to young women and then discovers that without having known it, he is what we would today call a slumlord. "It's too late, I tell you," he exclaims at the end, realizing that the girl he would like to love has been too badly affected. "It's too late. It's too late. It's too late." At the end of "An Unfinished Story" not here reprinted, the narrator dreams himself in heaven, being interrogated by an angelic policeman. Is he one of the prosperous lot standing nearby?

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Why," said he, "they are the men who hired working-girls, and paid 'em five or six dollars a week to live on. Are you one of the bunch?"

"Not on your immortality," said I. "I'm only a fellow that set fire to an orphan asylum, and murdered a blind man for his pennies."

That deft, wry combination of pain and humor is a special and rare accomplishment. To quote Mr. Knight again, the "pain he undoubtedly felt became one of his greatest assets as he projected it through his fiction. He often poked good-natured fun at human follies, but it is a gentle irony born of affection, out of love for the human race. His humor ... is not corrosive.... [Overall] there is about his fiction a sense of gaiety and lightness, comparable to a Viennese waltz." He cannot keep himself from seeing, somehow, that evil exists, and often triumphs—and not only in cities. "The Caballero Way" is powerful evidence that O. Henry did not unduly romanticize human nature wherever he found it. But one of the major tools he wielded, in fashioning the many forms of escape that he wove so artfully, was humor. He poked fun; he made puns, some of them as outrageous as any execrable pun ever concocted. In "Masters of Arts," not here reprinted, a con man reproaches an unwilling artist:

partner. “ ‘Now, sonny,’ he said with gentle grimness, ‘you and me will have an Art to Art talk.’ ” In “Springtime à la Carte,” the story mentioned earlier as having been spun out of a glance at a restaurant menu, a novel by Charles Reade that O. Henry liked is referred to as “the best non-selling book of the month.” In “Seats of the Haughty,” not here reprinted, a con man “hustles away with a kind of Swiss movement toward a jewelry store.” He can get almost as verbally playful as James Joyce, though in a very different cause. “ ‘It’s part of my business,’ ” says a character in “The Man Higher Up,” not here reprinted; “ ‘to play up to the ruffles when I want to make a riffle as Raffles. ’Tis loves that makes the bit go ‘round’ ”—referring, in this last atrocious pun, to the bit with which the burglar bores his way into his chosen victim’s premises.

This kind of wordplay, to be sure, is the farthest thing from the hack work of which O. Henry is so freely accused. It is true that he wrote a great deal and that he never, so far as is known, revised. He also wrote with great art and with immense zest, which are not qualities associated with hack work. There is sentimentality in much of O. Henry (as there is, it must be noted, in much of Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and even Stephen Crane), but there is far more artistic discipline and vivid love of craft than some of his critics are prepared to admit. “The club of realism,” a marvelously apt phrase from “The Caliph, Cupid and the Clock,” ought not to be wielded against O. Henry: He was trying to do something very different, and doing it, much of the time, superlatively well.

Nor is O. Henry the flighty, fundamentally unserious writer he is sometimes made out to be. (Nor more are Strauss waltzes flighty. They are neither Bach-like nor Brahms-like, but they do not purport to be. Do we reproach a beautiful dog for not being a beautiful horse, or a handsome boy for not being a dashing man?) There is intense seriousness in his stories, even intense seriousness about the craft he practiced so secretively. “The art of narrative,” declares the narrator in “The Phonograph and the Graft,” not here reprinted, “consists in concealing from your audience everything it wants to know until after you expose your favorite opinions on topics foreign to the subject. A good story is like a bitter pill with the sugar coating inside of it.” In “Springtime à la Carte,” again, he begins with a short one-sentence paragraph, “It was a day in March,” and then goes on, brilliantly:

Never, never begin a story this way when you write one. No opening could possibly be worse. It is unimaginative, flat dry, and likely to consist of mere wind. But in this instance it is allowable. For the following paragraph, which should have inaugurated the narrative, is too wildly extravagant and preposterous to be flaunted in the face of the reader without preparation.

This is the art which, proclaiming artlessness, neatly conceals art. We are all no more than common men together, O. Henry keeps insisting, but what common man could have written phrases like “Women are the natural enemies of clocks,” “We are grown stiff with the ramrod of convention down our backs,” or “Women do not read the love stories in the magazines.... The love stories are read by fiddle cigar drummers and little ten-year-old girls”? What common man could say of a commemorative statue standing in New York City traffic that “the great General must feel, unless his nerves are iron, that rapid transit gloria mundi”? Or could gloriously destroy one of the most famous schoolbook phrases in all of Latin literature and then redeem the farce with as deft a bit of social comment as could possibly be written?

I’m mindful of Mr. Julius Caesar’s account of ‘em where he says: “*Omnia Gallia in tres partes divisa est*”; which is the same as to say, “We will need all of our gall in devising means to tree the three parties.” I hated to make a show of education; but I was disinclined to be overdone in syntax by a member of an Indian, a member of a race to which we owe nothing except the land on which the United States

situated.

What common man could dispose of female do-gooders one minute, saying of a cabman's horse "that he was stuffed with oats until one of those old ladies who leave their dishes unwashed at home and go about having expressmen arrested, would have smiled—yes, smiled—to have seen him," and then, the next minute, declare that a character "found in altruism more pleasure than his riches, his station and all the grosser sweets of life had given him?"

O. Henry, at his best, is both brilliant and wise, both serious and funny. He mixes and he pours, and his concoctions, though brewed according to formula, are nevertheless daz zlingly potent at their best for the formula is unique, it is his alone, and it is framed out of materials as true as much of what goes into the heaviest, most ponderous tomes. Art does not have to be dull, to be effective; the artist does not have to be a bore, to be real. O. Henry is many things, and like all good artists, he is sometimes contradictory, complex mixture of many different things, but he is almost never boring—and certainly not in any of the stories here spread out for your enlightenment, instruction, and entertainment.

—BURTON RAFFEL

The Social Triangle

At the stroke of six Ikey Snigglefritz laid down his goose. Ikey was a tailor's apprentice. Are the tailors' apprentices nowadays?

At any rate, Ikey toiled and snipped and basted and pressed and patched and sponged all day in the steamy fetor of a tailor-shop. But when work was done Ikey hitched his wagon to such stars as his firmament let shine.

It was Saturday night, and the boss laid twelve begrimed and begrudged dollars in his hand. Ikey dabbled discreetly in water, donned coat, hat and collar with its frazzled tie, and chalcedony pin, and set forth in pursuit of his ideals.

For each of us, when our day's work is done, must seek our ideal, whether it be love or pinochle or lobster à la Newburg, or the sweet silence of the musty bookshelves.

Behold Ikey as he ambles up the street beneath the roaring "El" between the rows of reeking sweatshops. Pallid, stooping, insignificant, squalid, doomed to exist forever in penury of body and mind, yet, as he swings his cheap cane and projects the noisome inhalations from his cigarette you perceive that he nurtures in his narrow bosom the bacillus of society.

Ikey's legs carried him to and into that famous place of entertainment known as the Café Maginnis—famous because it was the rendezvous of Billy McMahan, the greatest man, the most wonderful man, Ikey thought, that the world had ever produced.

Billy McMahan was the district leader. Upon him the Tiger purred, and his hand held manna to scatter. Now, as Ikey entered, McMahan stood, flushed and triumphant and mighty, the centre of a huzzaing concourse of his lieutenants and constituents. It seems there had been an election; a signal victory had been won; the city had been swept back into line by a resistless besom of ballots.

Ikey slunk along the bar and gazed, breath-quickenened, at his idol.

How magnificent was Billy McMahan, with his great, smooth, laughing face; his gray eye, shrewd as a chicken hawk's; his diamond ring, his voice like a bugle call, his prince's air, his plump and active roll of money, his clarion call to friend and comrade—oh, what a king of men he was! How he obscured his lieutenants, though they themselves loomed large and serious, blue of chin and important of mien, with hands buried deep in the pockets of their short overcoats! But Billy—oh, what small avail are words to paint for you his glory as seen by Ikey Snigglefritz!

The Café Maginnis rang to the note of victory. The white-coated bartenders threw themselves feathery upon bottle, cork and glass. From a score of clear Havanas the air received its paradoxical clouds. The leal and the hopeful shook Billy McMahan's hand. And there was born suddenly in the worshipful soul of Ikey Snigglefritz an audacious, thrilling impulse.

He stepped forward into the little cleared space in which majesty moved, and held out his hand.

Billy McMahan grasped it unhesitatingly, shook it and smiled.

Made mad now by the gods who were about to destroy him, Ikey threw away his scabbard and

charged upon Olympus.

“Have a drink with me, Billy,” he said familiarly, “you and your friends?”

“Don’t mind if I do, old man,” said the great leader, “just to keep the ball rolling.”

The last spark of Ikey’s reason fled.

“Wine,” he called to the bartender, waving a trembling hand.

The corks of three bottles were drawn; the champagne bubbled in the long row of glasses set up on the bar. Billy McMahan took his and nodded, with his beaming smile at Ikey. The lieutenants and satellites took theirs and growled “Here’s to you.” Ikey took his nectar in delirium. All drank.

Ikey threw his week’s wages in a crumpled roll upon the bar.

“C’rect,” said the bartender, smoothing the twelve one-dollar notes. The crowd surged around Billy McMahan again. Some one was telling how Brannigan fixed ’em over in the Eleventh. Ikey leaned against the bar a while, and then went out.

He went down Hester Street and up Chrystie, and down Delancey to where he lived. And there his women folk, a bibulous mother and three dingy sisters, pounced upon him for his wages. And at his confession they shrieked and objurgated him in the pithy rhetoric of the locality.

But even as they plucked at him and struck him Ikey remained in his ecstatic trance of joy. His head was in the clouds; the star was drawing his wagon. Compared with what he had achieved the loss of his wages and the bray of women’s tongues were slight affairs.

He had shaken the hand of Billy McMahan.

Billy McMahan had a wife, and upon her visiting cards was engraved the name “Mrs. William Darragh McMahan.” And there was a certain vexation attendant upon these cards; for, small as they were, there were houses in which they could not be inserted. Billy McMahan was a dictator in politics, a four-walled tower in business, a mogul, dread, loved and obeyed among his own people. He was growing rich; the daily papers had a dozen men on his trail to chronicle his every word of wisdom; he had been honored in caricature holding the Tiger cringing in leash.

But the heart of Billy was sometimes sore within him. There was a race of men from which he stood apart but that he viewed with the eye of Moses looking over into the promised land. He, too, had ideals, even as had Ikey Snigglefritz; and sometimes, hopeless of attaining them, his own soul’s success was as dust and ashes in his mouth. And Mrs. William Darragh McMahan wore a look of discontent upon her plump but pretty face, and the very rustle of her silks seemed a sigh.

There was a brave and conspicuous assemblage in the dining saloon of a noted hostelry where Fashion loves to display her charms. At one table sat Billy McMahan and his wife. Mostly silent they were, but the accessories they enjoyed little needed the indorsement of speech. Mrs. McMahan’s diamonds were outshone by few in the room. The waiter bore the costliest brands of wine to the table. In evening dress, with an expression of gloom upon his smooth and massive countenance, you would look in vain for a more striking figure than Billy’s.

Four tables away sat alone a tall, slender man, about thirty, with thoughtful, melancholy eyes, a Va

Dyke beard and peculiarly white, thin hands. He was dining on filet mignon, dry toast and apollinari. That man was Cortlandt Van Duyckink, a man worth eighty millions, who inherited and held a sacred seat in the exclusive inner circle of society.

Billy McMahan spoke to no one around him, because he knew no one. Van Duyckink kept his eyes on his plate because he knew that every one present was hungry to catch his. He could bestow knighthood and prestige by a nod, and he was chary of creating a too extensive nobility.

And then Billy McMahan conceived and accomplished the most startling and audacious act of his life. He rose deliberately and walked over to Cortlandt Van Duyckink's table and held out his hand.

"Say, Mr. Van Duyckink," he said, "I've heard you was talking about starting some reforms among the poor people down in my district. I'm McMahan, you know. Say, now, if that's straight I'll do all I can to help you. And what I says goes in that neck of the woods, don't it? Oh, say, I rather guess you does."

Van Duyckink's rather somber eyes lighted up. He rose to his lank height and grasped Billy McMahan's hand.

"Thank you, Mr. McMahan," he said, in his deep, serious tones. "I have been thinking of doing some work of that sort. I shall be glad of your assistance. It pleases me to have become acquainted with you."

Billy walked back to his seat. His shoulder was tingling from the accolade bestowed by royalty. A hundred eyes were now turned upon him in envy and new admiration. Mrs. William Darragh McMahan trembled with ecstasy, so that her diamonds smote the eye almost with pain. And now it was apparent that at many tables there were those who suddenly remembered that they enjoyed Billy McMahan's acquaintance. He saw smiles and bows about him. He became enveloped in the aura of dizzy greatness. His campaign coolness deserted him.

"Wine for that gang!" he commanded the waiter, pointing with his finger. "Wine over there. Wine to those three gents by that green bush. Tell 'em it's on me. D—n it! Wine for everybody!"

The waiter ventured to whisper that it was perhaps inexpedient to carry out the order, in consideration of the dignity of the house and its custom.

"All right," said Billy, "if it's against the rules. I wonder if 'twould do to send my friend Van Duyckink a bottle? No? Well, it'll flow all right at the caffy to-night, just the same. It'll be rubber boots for anybody who comes in there any time up to 2 A.M."

Billy McMahan was happy.

He had shaken the hand of Cortlandt Van Duyckink.

The big pale-gray auto with its shining metal work looked out of place moving slowly among the push carts and trash-heaps on the lower east side. So did Cortlandt Van Duyckink, with his aristocratic face and white, thin hands, as he steered carefully between the groups of ragged, scurrying youngsters in the streets. And so did Miss Constance Schuyler, with her dim, ascetic beauty, seated at his side.

"Oh, Cortlandt," she breathed, "isn't it sad that human beings have to live in such wretchedness and poverty? And you—how noble it is of you to think of them, to give your time and money to improve

their condition!”

Van Duyckink turned his solemn eyes upon her.

“It is little,” he said, sadly, “that I can do. The question is a large one, and belongs to society. But even individual effort is not thrown away. Look, Constance! On this street I have arranged to build soup kitchens, where no one who is hungry will be turned away. And down this other street are the old buildings that I shall cause to be torn down and there erect others in place of those death-traps of filth and disease.”

Down Delancey slowly crept the pale-gray auto. Away from it toddled coveys of wondering, tangled-haired, bare footed, unwashed children. It stopped before a crazy brick structure, foul and awry.

Van Duyckink alighted to examine at a better perspective one of the leaning walls. Down the steps of the building came a young man who seemed to epitomize its degradation, squalor and infelicity—narrow-chested, pale, unsavory young man, puffing at a cigarette.

Obeying a sudden impulse, Van Duyckink stepped out and warmly grasped the hand of what seemed to him a living rebuke.

“I want to know you people,” he said, sincerely. “I am going to help you as much as I can. We shall be friends.”

As the auto crept carefully away Cortlandt Van Duyckink felt an unaccustomed glow about his heart. He was near to being a happy man.

He had shaken the hand of Ikey Snigglefritz.

Tobin's Palm

Tobin and me, the two of us, went down to Coney one day, for there was four dollars between us, and Tobin had need of distractions. For there was Katie Mahorner, his sweetheart, of County Sligo, long since she started for America three months before with two hundred dollars, her own savings, and one hundred dollars from the sale of Tobin's inherited estate, a fine cottage and pig on the Bog Shannaug. And since the letter that Tobin got saying that she had started to come to him not a bit of news had he heard or seen of Katie Mahorner. Tobin advertised in the papers, but nothing could be found of the colleen.

So, to Coney me and Tobin went, thinking that a turn at the chutes and the smell of the popcorn might raise the heart in his bosom. But Tobin was a hard-headed man, and the sadness stuck in his skin. He ground his teeth at the crying balloons; he cursed the moving pictures; and, though he would drink whenever asked, he scorned Punch and Judy, and was for licking the tintype men as they came.

So I gets him down a side way on a board walk where the attractions were some less violent. At a little six by eight stall Tobin halts, with a more human look in his eye.

“ ‘Tis here,” says he, “I will be diverted. I'll have the palm of me hand investigated by the wonderful palmist of the Nile, and see if what is to be will be.”

Tobin was a believer in signs and the unnatural in nature. He possessed illegal convictions in his mind along the subjects of black cats, lucky numbers, and the weather predictions in the papers.

We went into the enchanted chicken coop, which was fixed mysterious with red cloth and pictures of hands with lines crossing 'em like a railroad centre. The sign over the door says it is Madame Zozo, the Egyptian Palmist. There was a fat woman inside in a red jumper with pothooks and beastly embroidered upon it. Tobin gives her ten cents and extends one of his hands. She lifts Tobin's hand, which is own brother to the hoof of a drayhorse, and examines it to see whether 'tis a stone in the foot or a cast shoe he has come for.

“Man,” says this Madame Zozo, “the line of your fate shows—”

“ ‘Tis not me foot at all,” says Tobin, interrupting. “Sure, 'tis no beauty, but ye hold the palm of me hand.”

“The line shows,” says the Madame, “that ye've not arrived at your time of life without bad luck. And there's more to come. The mount of Venus—or is that a stone bruise?—shows that ye've been in love. There's been trouble in your life on account of your sweetheart.”

“ ‘Tis Katie Mahorner she has references with,” whispers Tobin to me in a loud voice to one side.

“I see,” says the palmist, “a great deal of sorrow and tribulation with one whom ye cannot forget. I see the lines of designation point to the letter K and the letter M in her name.”

“Whist!” says Tobin to me; “do ye hear that?”

“Look out,” goes on the palmist, “for a dark man and a light woman; for they'll both bring ye trouble. Ye'll make a voyage upon the water very soon, and have a financial loss. I see one line that

brings good luck. There's a man coming into your life who will fetch ye good fortune. Ye'll know him when ye see him by his crooked nose."

"Is his name set down?" asks Tobin. " 'Twill be convenient in the way of greeting when he backs up to dump off the good luck."

"His name," says the palmist, thoughtful looking, "is not spelled out by the lines, but they indicate 'tis a long one, and the letter 'o' should be in it. There's no more to tell. Good-evening. Don't block up the door."

" 'Tis wonderful how she knows," says Tobin as we walk to the pier.

As we squeezed through the gates a nigger man sticks his lighted segar against Tobin's ear, and there is trouble. Tobin hammers his neck, and the women squeal, and by presence of mind I drag the little man out of the way before the police comes. Tobin is always in an ugly mood when enjoying himself.

On the boat going back, when the man calls "Who wants the good-looking waiter?" Tobin tried to plead guilty, feeling the desire to blow the foam off a crock of suds, but when he felt in his pocket he found himself discharged for lack of evidence. Somebody had disturbed his change during the commotion. So we sat, dry, upon the stools, listening to the Dagoes fiddling on deck. If anything Tobin was lower in spirits and less congenial with his misfortunes than when we started.

On a seat against the railing was a young woman dressed suitable for red automobiles, with hair the colour on an unsmoked meerschaum. In passing by Tobin kicks her foot without intentions, and, being polite to ladies when in drink, he tries to give his hat a twist while apologizing. But he knocks it off and the wind carries it overboard.

Tobin came back and sat down, and I began to look out for him, for the man's adversities were becoming frequent. He was apt, when pushed so close by hard luck, to kick the best dressed man he could see, and try to take command of the boat.

Presently Tobin grabs my arm and says, excited: "Jawn," says he, "do ye know what we're doing? We're taking a voyage upon the water."

"There now," says I; "subdue yerself. The boat'll land in ten minutes more."

"Look," says he, "at the light lady upon the bench. And have ye forgotten the nigger man that burned me ear? And isn't the money I had gone—a dollar sixty-five it was?"

I thought he was no more than summing up his catastrophes so as to get violent with good excuse, as men will do, and I tried to make him understand such things was trifles.

"Listen," says Tobin. "Ye've no ear for the gift of prophecy or the miracles of the inspired. What did the palmist lady tell ye out of me hand? 'Tis coming true before your eyes. 'Look out,' says she 'for a dark man and a light woman; they'll bring ye trouble.' Have ye forgot the nigger man, though I got some of it back from me fist? Can ye show me a lighter woman than the blonde lady that was the cause of me hat falling in the water? And where's the dollar sixty-five I had in me vest when we left the shooting gallery?"

The way Tobin put it, it did seem to corroborate the art of prediction, though it looked to me that these accidents could happen to any one at Coney without the implication of palmistry.

Tobin got up and walked around on the deck, looking close at the passengers out of his little red eyes. He asked him the interpretation of his movements. Ye never know what Tobin has in his mind until he begins to carry it out.

“Ye should know,” says he, “I’m working out the salvation promised by the lines in me palm. I’m looking for the crooked-nose man that’s to bring the good luck. ‘Tis all that will save us. Jawn, did ye ever see a straighter-nosed gang of hellions in the days of your life?”

‘Twas the nine-thirty boat, and we landed and walked up-town through Twenty-second Street, Tobin being without his hat.

On a street comer, standing under a gas-light and looking over the elevated road at the moon, was a man. A long man he was, dressed decent, with a segar between his teeth, and I saw that his nose made two twists from bridge to end, like the wriggle of a snake. Tobin saw it at the same time, and I heard him breathe hard like a horse when you take the saddle off. He went straight up to the man, and I went with him.

“Good-night to ye,” Tobin says to the man. The man takes out a segar and passes the compliment. He is sociable.

“Would ye hand us your name,” asks Tobin, “and let us look at the size of it? It may be our duty to become acquainted with ye.”

“My name,” says the man, polite, “is Friedenhausman—Maximus G. Friedenhausman.”

“ ‘Tis the right length,” says Tobin. “Do you spell it with an ‘o’ anywhere down the stretch of it?”

“I do not,” says the man.

“*Can* ye spell it with an ‘o’?” inquires Tobin, turning anxious.

“If your conscience,” says the man with the nose, “is indisposed toward foreign idioms ye might, please yourself, smuggle the letter into the penultimate syllable.”

“ ‘Tis well,” says Tobin. “Ye’re in the presence of Jawn Malone and Daniel Tobin.”

“ ‘Tis highly appreciated,” says the man, with a bow. “And now since I cannot conceive that ye would hold a spelling bee upon the street corner, will ye name some reasonable excuse for being so large?”

“By the two signs,” answers Tobin, trying to explain, “which ye display according to the reading of the Egyptian palmist from the sole of me hand, ye’ve been nominated to offset with good luck the lines of trouble leading to the nigger man and the blonde lady with her feet crossed in the boat, besides the financial loss of a dollar sixty-five, all so far fulfilled according to Hoyle.”

The man stopped smoking and looked at me.

“Have ye any amendments,” he asks, “to offer to that statement, or are ye one too? I thought by the looks of ye ye might have him in charge.”

“None,” says I to him, “except that as one horseshoe resembles another so are ye the picture of good luck as predicted by the hand of me friend. If not, then the lines of Danny’s hand may have been crossed, I don’t know.”

“There’s two of ye,” says the man with the nose, looking up and down for the sight of a policeman.

“I’ve enjoyed your company immense. Good-night.”

With that he shoves his segar in his mouth and moves across the street, stepping fast. But Tobin sticks close to one side of him and me at the other.

“What!” says he, stopping on the opposite sidewalk and pushing back his hat; “do ye follow me? tell ye,” he says, very loud, “I’m proud to have met ye. But it is my desire to be rid of ye. I am off me home.”

“Do,” says Tobin, leaning against his sleeve. “Do be off to your home. And I will sit at the door of till ye come out in the morning. For the dependence is upon ye to obviate the curse of the nigger man and the blonde lady and the financial loss of the one-sixty-five.”

“ ’Tis a strange hallucination,” says the man, turning to me as a more reasonable lunatic. “Hadn’t ye better get him home?”

“Listen, man,” says I to him. “Daniel Tobin is as sensible as he ever was. Maybe he is a bit deranged on account of having drink enough to disturb but not enough to settle his wits, but he is more than following out the legitimate path of his superstitions and predicaments, which I will explain to you.” With that I relates the facts about the palmist lady and how the finger of suspicion points to him as an instrument of good fortune. “Now, understand,” I concludes, “my position in this riot. I am the friend of me friend Tobin, according to me interpretations. ’Tis easy to be a friend to the prosperous, for it pays; ’tis not hard to be a friend to the poor, for ye get puffed up by gratitude and have your picture printed standing in front of a tenement with a scuttle of coal and an orphan in each hand. But it strains the art of friendship to be true friend to a bom fool. And that’s what I’m doing,” says I, “for, in my opinion, there’s no fortune to be read from the palm of me hand that wasn’t printed there with the handle of a pick. And, though ye’ve got the crookedest nose in New York City, I misdoubt that all the fortune-tellers doing business could milk good luck from ye. But the lines on Danny’s hand pointed to ye fair, and I’ll assist him to experiment with ye until he’s convinced ye’re dry.”

After that the man turns, sudden, to laughing. He leans against a comer and laughs considerably. Then he claps me and Tobin on the backs of us and takes us by an arm apiece.

“ ’Tis my mistake,” says he. “How could I be expecting anything so fine and wonderful to be turning the corner upon me? I came near being found unworthy. Hard by,” says he, “is a café, snug and suitable for the entertainment of idiosyncrasies. Let us go there and have a drink while we discuss the unavailability of the categorical.”

So saying, he marched me and Tobin to the back room of a saloon, and ordered the drinks, and laid the money on the table. He looks at me and Tobin like brothers of his, and we have the segars.

“Ye must know,” says the man of destiny, “that me walk in life is one that is called the literary. To wander abroad be night seeking idiosyncrasies in the masses and truth in the heavens above. When ye came upon me I was in contemplation of the elevated road in conjunction with the chief luminary of the night. The rapid transit is poetry and art: the moon but a tedious, dry body, moving by rote. But these are private opinions, for, in the business of literature, the conditions are reversed. ’Tis me hope to be writing a book to explain the strange things I have discovered in life.”

“Ye will put me in a book,” says Tobin, disgusted; “will ye put me in a book?”

“I will not,” says the man, “for the covers will not hold ye. Not yet. The best I can do is to enjoy myself, for the time is not ripe for destroying the limitations of print. Ye would look fantastic in type. All alone by meself must I drink this cup of joy. But, I thank ye, boys; I am truly grateful.”

“The talk of ye,” says Tobin, blowing through his moustache and pounding the table with his fist, “is an eyesore to me patience. There was good luck promised out of the crook of your nose, but ye bear fruit like the bang of a drum. Ye resemble, with your noise of books, the wind blowing through a crack. Sure, now, I would be thinking the palm of me hand lied but for the coming true of the nigger man and the blonde lady and—”

“Whist!” says the long man; “would ye be led astray by physiognomy? Me nose will do what it can within bounds. Let us have these glasses filled again, for ‘tis good to keep idiosyncrasies well moistened, they being subject to deterioration in a dry moral atmosphere.”

So, the man of literature makes good, to my notion, for he pays, cheerful, for everything, the capitulation of me and Tobin being exhausted by prediction. But Tobin is sore, and drinks quiet, with the red showing in his eye.

By and by we moved out, for ‘twas eleven o’clock, and stands a bit upon the sidewalk. And then the man says he must be going home, and invites me and Tobin to walk that way. We arrives on a side street two blocks away where there is a stretch of brick houses with high stoops and iron fences. The man stops at one of them and looks up at the top windows which he finds dark.

“ ’Tis me humble dwelling,” says he, “and I begin to perceive by the signs that me wife has retired to slumber. Therefore I will venture a bit in the way of hospitality. ’Tis me wish that ye enter the basement room, where we dine, and partake of a reasonable refreshment. There will be some fine cold fowl and cheese and a bottle or two of ale. Ye will be welcome to enter and eat, for I am indebted to ye for diversions.”

The appetite and conscience of me and Tobin was congenial to the proposition, though ’twas sticking hard in Danny’s superstitions to think that a few drinks and a cold lunch should represent the good fortune promised by the palm of his hand.

“Step down the steps,” says the man with the crooked nose, “and I will enter by the door above and let ye in. I will ask the new girl we have in the kitchen,” says he, “to make ye a pot of coffee to drink before ye go. ’Tis fine coffee Katie Mahorner makes for a green girl just landed three months. Step in,” says the man, “and I’ll send her down to ye.”

The Last Leaf

In a little district west of Washington Square the streets have run crazy and broken themselves into small strips called "places." These "places" make strange angles and curves. One street crosses itself time or two. An artist once discovered a valuable possibility in this street. Suppose a collector with a bill for paints, paper and canvas should, in traversing this route, suddenly meet himself coming back without a cent having been paid on account!

So, to quaint old Greenwich Village the art people soon came prowling, hunting for north windows and eighteenth-century gables and Dutch attics and low rents. Then they imported some pewter mug and a chafing dish or two from Sixth Avenue, and became a "colony."

At the top of a squatty, three-story brick Sue and Johnsy had their studio. "Johnsy" was familiar for Joanna. One was from Maine; the other from California. They had met at the table *d'hôte* of an Eighth Street "Delmonico's," and found their tastes in art, chicory salad and bishop sleeves so congenial that the joint studio resulted.

That was in May. In November a cold, unseen stranger, whom the doctors called Pneumonia stalked about the colony, touching one here and there with his icy fingers. Over on the east side the ravager strode boldly, smiting his victims by scores, but his feet trod slowly through the maze of the narrow and moss-grown "places."

Mr. Pneumonia was not what you would call a chivalric old gentleman. A mite of a little woman with blood thinned by California zephyrs was hardly fair game for the red-fisted, short-breathed old duffer. But Johnsy he smote; and she lay, scarcely moving, on her painted iron bedstead, looking through the small Dutch window-panes at the blank side of the next brick house.

One morning the busy doctor invited Sue into the hallway with a shaggy, gray eyebrow.

"She has one chance in—let us say, ten," he said, as he shook down the mercury in his clinical thermometer. "And that chance is for her to want to live. This way people have of lining-up on the side of the undertaker makes the entire phannacœia look silly. Your little lady has made up her mind that she's not going to get well. Has she anything on her mind?"

"She—she wanted to paint the Bay of Naples some day," said Sue.

"Paint?—bosh! Has she anything on her mind worth thinking about twice—a man, for instance?"

"A man?" said Sue, with a jew's-harp twang in her voice. "Is a man worth—but, no, doctor; there's nothing of the kind."

"Well, it is the weakness, then," said the doctor. "I will do all that science, so far as it may filter through my efforts, can accomplish. But whenever my patient begins to count the carriages in her funeral procession I subtract 50 per cent. from the curative power of medicines. If you will get her to ask one question about the new winter styles in cloak sleeves I will promise you a one-in-five chance for her, instead of one in ten."

After the doctor had gone Sue went into the workroom and cried a Japanese napkin to a pulp. The

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