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Saint Mary's Beacon

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Washington City and Potomac Railroad Company.

Time Table—In Effect Monday, 9.30 A. M., October 5, 1896.

Table with columns for STATIONS—South, A. M., STATIONS—North, and P. M. listing various stations and departure/arrival times.

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OF BALTIMORE CITY. For the Sale of Tobacco, Grain, Wool. Farm Produce Generally. S. E. Corner Pratt & Charles Streets.

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HIS NEW YEAR'S CALL.

The holidays had not brought Tom Burnham relaxation. The winter evening's sun had set drearily, and in the last rays of the fading daylight a pile of "copy" was to be seen on his battered desk. He was not in the humor to attack it. The Egerton safe-robbery, the most mysterious affair within his experience, and which had baffled all the detectives in town, as well as his two sharpest reporters, was troubling him.

The story was a very simple one. About a fortnight ago a large package of money had been taken from the safe of Egerton & Co., the sugar merchants. It was clearly not a burglary, because the safe was found intact. The old clerk, Jennings, had come down one morning and found the money gone. Some one must have abstracted it in broad daylight the afternoon before, and yet no person connected with the establishment could remember that the safe was left open for an instant. Old Mr. Edgerton, who was the last to leave, was sure that everything was secure when he locked up the premises and gave the key to the porter. The latter was out of the range of suspicion, as he did not know the combination, and would not have understood, under any circumstance, the method of operating it.

Tom Burnham was one of the earliest of newspaper detectives who have achieved such distinction since Mr. Belch hunted down Chastine Cox in Boston. Tom had several extraordinary successes in ferreting out crime on his own hook; but here he was altogether baffled. With a sigh he lighted his gas and glanced over his desk. The pile of "local copy" which confronted him he pushed aside, deciding to turn it over to his assistant, Slater, who would arrive presently, and Tom took up and fumbled over, with listless attention, half a dozen books that had been left for review. A little volume in blue and gold arrested his eye—a collection of poems by Miss Daisy Henderson. The verses were exceedingly graceful and pretty, but just now the editor was in a bilious and disagreeable mood.

"Why on earth do women waste their time and worry the public trying to write poetry?" said Tom, angrily, scanning the pages here and there. "Miss Daisy Henderson! I suppose she is the daughter of Daniel Webster Henderson, the rich lawyer on Three Hundred and Fourth Street, and no doubt she thinks this twaddle equal to Jean Ingelow or Mary Robinson. By Jove! I'll open her eyes!" Mr. Burnham took up his pencil and seized a sheet of paper to write a review of the fragile little production. He was an old hand at "noticing books" without reading them, and could polish off a work in five or six volumes, which had cost the author half a lifetime of labor and research, in about forty-five minutes.

He had scarcely begun to say that "the plethora of bad poetry in the literary market did not seem to deter rash aspirants from fresh attempts," when the door opened and a very handsome and stylishly dressed young man entered, whom he recognized as Mr. Lionel Watson, the junior member of the firm of Edgerton & Co. Mr. Watson was slight, elegant and winning. He was attired loudly, after the English manner, and wore a single eye-glass, and had cultivated a very pretty English accent. Tom did not fancy him a great deal, being a good American himself and detesting artificial people of all kinds; but he was glad to see Mr. Watson just now, as he wished to talk over the old subject of the robbery once more.

Mr. Watson, however, could throw no new light on the situation. He thought, on the whole, that Burnham had better give the inquiry up. "The loss is heavy, but I fancy we can stand it. Perhaps it falls a little harder on me than it otherwise would; at least just at this time, because, you know, I am going to be married shortly."

"Indeed," said Tom, languidly. "Yes; to Miss Daisy Henderson, the daughter of old Henderson, the lawyer, you know, in Three Hundred and Fourth Street. I dare say you've heard of her—a charming girl. Our wedding trip will be cut down, I'm afraid; but unless we meet with another loss at the office, I sha'n't have to quite come to bread and cheese, I hope."

"There is no possibility of another loss, I suppose," said Tom. "You will scarcely keep large amounts in the safe after your late experience."

"We can't avoid it altogether. We expect a heavy payment in about a week from now, and as it will occur after banking hours, of course we shall be obliged to keep the money in the safe. Next Wednesday afternoon is the time. But there is no danger from burglars, you know. The question is"—and Mr. Watson lowered his voice and smiled very meaningfully—"have we a thief in the office?"

"I see you have hit upon a theory."

"Well, they tell me I'm a pretty sharp fellow, and I believe I have shown some shrewdness once or twice. This is all confidential, Burnham, of course. I don't mind saying that I have my suspicions about who did that last job. If it was not old Jennings, then I am no conjurer."

"Impossible!" said Tom, shocked. "He is too old, and there has never been a stain on his character. I would as soon suspect my own father. Nothing would make me believe that that good old man would touch a dime that did not belong to him. He has served your house thirty years, and long before you entered it, Mr. Watson."

"True enough; but my experience teaches me that they are the most dangerous class. I may be wrong in my surmise; but think over the case, and you will see the probability that I am right. I must go now. Think over it, my dear fellow—think over it."

And that showy apparition departed. Tom Burnham, however, did not think over it—he was too angry. He took up Miss Henderson's poems again, now with a renewed reason to be severe. And, in truth, he did write the article he had threatened—a slashing review, in which he so applied his knack of sarcasm and ridicule that the young lady's poor little volume was, as he expressed it, made mincemeat of. Then it came Slater, and Burnham, turning over the charge of the office to him, went to the theatre.

New Year's Day arrived, and Tom, although no great society man, had some calls to make. There was Colonel Blodgett, his employer, proprietor of the Planet; Mr. Peters, the business manager; Tom's aunt, Mrs. Tulliver; and Judge Periwinkle, his kind friend, who had done much for him—all these were to be called on. About three o'clock in the afternoon Tom found himself in Three Hundred and Fourth Street, where Judge Periwinkle lived, and the locality brought to mind the book of poems. Tom had read the article in the next day's paper, and could not but laugh at the merciless style in which he had cut up the book. "I'll wager a trifle that we'll have no more trash from that young poetess for some time," he thought, as he rang Judge Periwinkle's bell. He was shown into the parlor, having given his card to the servant, and he met some gentlemen just leaving. Here were several

young ladies, and one older, in the room as Tom made his appearance, and he was at once transfixed at the sight of a singularly beautiful girl, who stood in the centre of the group with her large dark eyes fixed on him steadily, and with a grave surprise. Indeed, they all appeared somewhat astonished and embarrassed.

"This is Mr. Burnham, the editor of the Planet," said the elderly lady, holding his card. Tom acknowledged his identity, and he observed his questioner smiling a little and biting her lip. "We have heard of you," she went on; "particularly as a literary critic. Your review of Miss Daisy Henderson's poems has excited a great deal of remark."

"I was pretty severe, I am afraid," said Tom, laughing; "but I was, perhaps, not altogether in good humor on the evening I wrote that criticism. To tell the truth, I just glanced over the book."

"Permit me to introduce you to these young ladies: Miss Harper, Miss Wilson, and this"—she indicated the tall, handsome girl—"is Miss Daisy Henderson."

Tom never could tell how he felt. He turned violently red, and his heart sprang into his throat. Evidently there was some mistake. He began to perceive the room was a strange one.

"Pray, where am I?" he gasped. "Is not this Judge Periwinkle's?" "Judge Periwinkle lives next door. This is Mr. D. W. Henderson's."

He had, in his abstraction, got into the wrong house. He began staggering back with some dim purpose of taking flight without another word. But at this point Miss Daisy Henderson came forward, a little, and said: "Mr. Burnham has evidently made a mistake, but I hope he will consider that he has paid papa the call. We have all heard of him, as every one has. As for the notice of my foolish little poems, of course"—and her lips trembled a little—"I know that it is an editor's duty to tell the public the truth, and they were very bad. It was a painful shock to me to learn the truth so plainly, but the effect will be beneficial, because I shall not write again. I am not silly enough to be angry with Mr. Burnham."

Tom's "duty to the public!" He had not read a whole page in the book. He had just singled out a stanza here and there for sacrifice, at the same time knowing in his heart that the verses were sweet, womanly and clever. He stood the picture of shame, confusion and remorse. He would like to have died there and then.

He tried to stammer some sort of apology and explanation, and endeavored to be allowed to go; but Miss Henderson smiled, and seeing his distress, said pleadingly that she hoped he would remain and have some refreshments, as she had something particular to ask him—some advice—and her papa, who would be down presently, would be delighted to meet him.

So Tom, fearful of giving fresh offense, and in truth captivated by her beauty, yielded, and after drinking a glass of champagne, sat down beside Miss Henderson on the sofa, and heard her tell, in her pretty demure way, her story. It was to the effect that she had written a novel. Poetry she was now convinced—and more than ever since reading Tom's profound analysis of the little volume—she had no talent for; but would he just glance over her novel—she had tried so hard to make it interesting—and give his candid opinion!

He undertook the office gladly, of course, and then they fell to chatting of other things, and to chance let fall a word about her approaching marriage to Mr. Watson. Her face clouded lightly as she touched upon the topic, and Tom wondered whether she was altogether happy over the prospect.

So he withdrew, after a little conversation with Mr. Henderson, who came in, and late that afternoon, Tom alone in his room at

the office, looked over the manuscript of the novel and was very much pleased with it. The very next day he called once more and returned the book, and as Miss Henderson was delighted with his criticisms, they had a long talk. She grew almost confidential, and when, by some chance, the name of Mr. Watson came up again, her lovely face grew sad and thoughtful, and Tom felt surer than ever that she was doubtful of the venture she was about to make. She said, indeed, that Mr. Watson was so fond of speculations, that she sometimes, besides, he seemed so much worried, and she knew that the suspense in which he lived, over the large interests he had always at stake, was injuring his health.

This reminded Tom of the recent robbery and of the heavy payment to be made to Egerton & Co. on Wednesday afternoon. He had a presentiment that there would be another attempt to rob the firm, and he had also formed a certain theory. One of his reporters had brought him in some information about the porter employed by the house. This man had once been in prison for stealing—it was a case of burglary, in fact.

"My idea is that the fellow is not such an ignoramus as he pretends to be," mused Tom. "He has learned how to operate the combination of the safe, and having a key to the building, easily gets in at night. If I am right I shall catch him in the act."

So Wednesday afternoon he had a private conference with old Mr. Egerton, and laid his plans before him, and borrowed his key. And that evening, about eight o'clock, Tom strolled down Water Street, where the warehouse was located, and went carelessly by the door.

This portion of the city, so busy by day, was now deserted. The lamps were lighted, but it still had a curiously dark and dismal look. Tom walked back, unlocked the front door, entered, locked it again behind him. He felt for his revolver, and then proceeded to the office.

It was a rather small apartment; there was a desk, with a few chairs; a map and some prints hung on the wall; at one end stood a tall old-fashioned clock, and against the wall stood the safe.

Tom sat down now to consider where he should conceal himself. The hands of the clock indicated a few minutes of nine, and the burglar, if he came at all, probably would not appear for several hours yet. The wait would be a long and tedious one.

He sat, with his legs crossed, in a rather dreary reverie. The thought of Miss Daisy Henderson returned. What a beautiful girl! How good, how innocent! And how basely he had wronged her! Well, he would make it up in the criticism he would write of her novel. There was never such a notice given of a book as he would publish; and it should not be a mere puff, either, but the best literary work of which he was capable.

"The world is all wrong," thought poor Tom. "Here she is about to throw herself away on that fellow Watson, who will not appreciate her—who will ill-treat her, perhaps. I can see that he is both fast and a fool. Would she were to be mine!" he sighed. "Awfully slow work, this," and he glanced at the big clock.

He saw the hands now marked a quarter to ten. A whole hour had gone by. He was astounded. He sat staring at the white face of the queer old time piece, when suddenly the minute-hand took a jump of five minutes.

"Extraordinary clock, I declare!" he said, and got up and went over to it. The hands had now ceased to move altogether. He studied them with interest, and finally opened the door. Within he saw, by the light of the gas which had been turned down very low, a man. Tom fell back and drew his revolver.

"Come out," he said, "or I'll fire!" The burglar stepped out with a short, nervous laugh, and it was young Mr. Watson, the junior partner. He was white as death and trembled violently, and being unable to speak, held up his hands. Tom Burnham, as a newspaperman, had been through many experiences, but he had never seen such a picture of abject terror.

"What in Heaven's name are you doing here, Mr. Watson?" he said. "I came here for the same purpose that you did," he answered; "to hunt for the burglar."

"That is strange. Why did you conceal yourself? For, quite an hour ago, have been hidden in the clock turning the hand around, which would not go other otherwise while you stood in the way of the works, in order to deceive me. You are attempting to deceive me, and I suspect that you have already been at the safe."

He went over to that receptacle, and the door yielded to his touch. There was nothing within but the books of the establishment.

"You see," said Tom, "that money paid in this afternoon is gone, and, frankly, Mr. Watson, I believe you have it on your person. Why not make a free disclosure? You have robbed yourself before, and came here tonight to do so again. You have met with heavy losses in speculations and chose this method to make up for them. It is a very old story. I have heard a good deal about you. You have been on the turf and in the stock-market, and have amused yourself in the evenings at the faro-table. Come, speak out; you will find me a friend."

Watson's mouth quivered, and he dropped into a chair and hid his face in his hands. Presently he said: "You are right. I was desperate. I had met with tremendous losses and was ruined. You can understand my feelings, with the prospect of marriage before me! Here is the money I took from the safe to-night."

He drew from his bosom a thick package, and threw it on the desk. "There was a silence of some minutes, and finally Burnham said, 'What do you propose to do?' 'I shall leave the firm and go to some other city. If you do not betray me no one will know anything.'

"And your marriage! That, of course, is at an end, too?" said Tom, emphatically. "Well, I suppose it must be; and perhaps it is just as well, for though Miss Henderson is a beautiful girl, and has many charming qualities, I have been for sometime convinced that we are but little suited to each other. She is a sort of blue-stocking, you know, and spends most of her time reading and writing, while I, I confess here but little sympathy for those pursuits. I can easily break off with her without causing her to suspect anything."

For some time longer they discussed all this, and when they left the building it was quite late. About ten days later Mr. Watson retired suddenly from his firm and went South for his health. Then it came out that his engagement to Miss Daisy Henderson was broken. There is a good deal of surmise and comment, but nobody had an idea of the truth. Tom Burnham hotly kept the secret of everything to himself.

Tom kept up his acquaintances so curiously made, with Miss Henderson, and superintended the publication of her novel, "Rule or Ruin," as it was entitled, there being a great run at that time on all literary titles, and it proved a very brilliant success.

Later she became the editor of a magazine. Sometimes a bit of fine writing comes to us from the far interior, like the following, for example, from the Fort Scott Telegram: "Death, with fleshless knuckles, rapped at the door of Mrs. J. B.—'s soul; and obedient to the inexorable call, the spirit of that loved woman floated up to its Creator, leaving her husband, children, and friends to mourn over the mortal casket."