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The Missing Amulet

(A STORY OF PARIS.)

By KATE A. SIMPSON

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It was 8 o'clock on a bleak December evening, and Laurence Burke sat in his study, a blazing fire in the grate, a fragrant pipe in his mouth, feeling just as comfortable as a good dinner in the immediate past, a good conscience in the immediate present, and a comfortable "saddle-bag" armchair can make a man.

There was no particular reason why he should be ruminating over bygone times, but his thoughts were busy with the days when he, Julian Leveson, and Claude St. John had been the closest of chums in the school days. Those were jolly times, the kind of span in a lifetime that knits hearts together, when they shared many a boyish prank. Then came the dividing line when their three paths lay apart, and in spite of vows of eternal friendship they had drifted into widely different grooves.

Laurence Burke had become a doctor, had developed no striking cleverness, was in no wise a "specialist," but had fulfilled his destiny by stepping into his uncle's shoes as a country practitioner.

Julian Leveson had come into an enormous fortune, had traveled and seen the world, but in these days he had lost sight of his friends. He had written at intervals for several years from various gay centers, and had said he was going to winter in Paris, have a final fling, then come home and settle down. For two years his friends had heard nothing more of him. Dark stories were about that large sum of money had been drawn from his bank immediately on his arrival in the gay city, but his lawyers had had no communication with him. Of relatives he had none save a distant cousin and heir, who had tried vainly to sift a rumor of his death, but Julian's fate and affairs were shrouded in a thick, impenetrable veil of mystery.

Claude St. John had been a great athlete at school, and still kept his muscles in order by boxing and wrestling. His chosen profession was the bar, and here he was doing well until a serious illness cut short his run of luck, an illness which—

was just starting for home, and so a fitting person to carry the dying man's message. My guide gave me no opportunity for further inquiries, but as she lifted along in front of me, I fancied that every now and again a heavy sob shook her slender frame.

"At last we passed before one of those massive double doors, still so common in Paris, and Mademoiselle Maretta's slim white fingers raised the heavy latch, and opening wide the gloomy portal, she bade me enter. The door was slammed behind us, and the echo rang high and higher, enough to awaken the dead! Surely no echoes were ever so thoroughly at home in human habitation before. There was something almost ghostly in their cadence as they sobbed and died away up the wide staircase.

"In grim darkness I followed my guide; her knees seemed trembling beneath her frail weight, and ever and anon I heard a stifled sob. That she was weeping bitterly for the man whose tender fingers clasped closely over my own she led me on and on through the black silence. Foolish, tender woman's heart, weeping thus passionately over the sorrows of the dying Englishman! At last we came to a stand.

"This is the door," she whispered. "M'sieur will go in; he will comfort his dying countryman—and, forgive—forgive poor Maretta!" Her burning lips were pressed upon my hand in the darkness with a passionate kiss, and I felt myself gently pushed across the threshold.

"Still darkness! Was the dying Englishman then consigned to eternal darkness already? I made a step forward, and suddenly—a hand fiercely gripped my throat, whilst another was laid over my mouth.

"I had not met a good boxer for nothing, Laurence, and I struck out, a swift, driving blow, straight from the shoulder. My clenched hand struck a solid body, and there was the sound of a heavy fall!

"I had barely time to recover breath, no time to collect my scattered senses, or grasp the situation, when with a wild, piercing cry through the darkness, a cry that made my very blood run cold, another figure flung itself upon me. A thin, little figure this—of no great weight I could tell, as I received the cat-like spring right on my chest. There was a brief tussle, some fierce muttered French oaths, then the moon came suddenly from behind a cloud, and shone through the high latticed window. I caught the gleam of two bloodshot eyes and the white glimmer of steel.

"That ray of moonlight saved my life. I sprang aside and received the blow which was aimed at my heart in my right arm, where, if it please you, old fellow, you may to-morrow dress what is still a very ugly flesh wound. The touch of the steel maddened me, and roused to fury, I seized my assailant by the throat. He was small, though wiry; my fierce grasp must have wrung the life from his miserable little body, as, after holding him for one brief moment in a grip of iron, I flung him away from me into the darkness. Then I turned and fled.

"So this was the plot! It was a cleverly laid trap, and I, like a fool, had fallen bang into it. I was evidently destined to play the part of 'dying Englishman' myself; but not yet, friend St. John; not yet!

"To say I ran downstairs is to put it too mildly. One wild downward bound in that grim black darkness would more properly describe my descent. It must have been lusty that led me, for the place was dark as Erebus, but almost before I had realized what had happened I was out in the street once more! There was no sign of Maretta, no sound of her long-drawn sobs; only afterward did it recur to my mind that a dim red light was shining at the open hall door. Had she perchance put it there to guide me or only to guide my would-be murderers?

"It was more than two hours before I regained my hotel, and then, to my great surprise, I found that night, I flung myself on my bed. With morning light, however, I was awake and on the alert. The gendarmes were communicated with and heard my story.

"Could I show them the place? Sacre! If monsieur would point out the locality the arm of the law was at his service—his insult should speedily be avenged!"

"But that was all very well. I was a stranger and knew nothing of the 'byways and hedges.' The 'arm of the law' was evidently possessed of no 'finger-point' wherewith to point out the way.

"After roaming all day through slums and streets, with two stolid, surly gendarmes at my heels, I gave it up in despair. To what purpose to continue the search? I had almost been the victim of a clever and gruesome plot, but I had escaped without injury to life or limb, but the cut on my arm, though I discovered afterward that my watch and chain had been wrenched off in the scuffle.

"Did the person who made the attack see monsieur first? queried the little 'public guardian,' with a grin as he surveyed my tall proportions with a most flattering expression of countenance.

"See me? I ejaculated. 'I trow not. The place was dark as Erebus!'

"Parbleu! It was as we thought, he returned, with a palpable wink at his companion. They did not know monsieur's size or muscle. Monsieur is as good as two ordinary men in a fight! And 'monsieur' mentally thanked heaven that he had been better than the two villains who attacked him.

"But the amulet?" queried Burke, eagerly, glancing to where it still glistened and sparkled in the lamplight. 'I thought you were going to tell me that in the dying Englishman you had found Julian.'

"No; but the strangest part of my story is still to come.

"After a fruitless day spent with the police I returned to the hotel. I had made up my mind to start for England early next day. 'La Belle Paris' had no further charms for me. I dined, and then, feeling quite disinclined for theater or opera, I took my hat, lighted a cigar and strolled out into the silent, starry night. Mind, Burke, I am not telling you a story of long ago, and where perchance facts may have become confused and recollection grown hazy; I am telling you what happened to me only last week.

"It was a perfect, starlit night, and I wandered on till I came to the silent, swiftly-flowing river. There I paused, and, leaning my arms on the parapet, I lazily watched the reflection of the moon on the still bosom of the Seine. I had no fear of further adventures; I was on my guard now, and besides, was in a much-frequented spot.

"The sound of a sob at my elbow roused me from my thoughts, and, turning quickly, I saw—close beside me—that same slight, black-robed figure of the night before.

"Ah! I said, fiercely, drawing a swift breath. 'So you dare—so Mademoiselle Maretta dares—to come near me again!'

"She threw back her head and looked at me with anguished, imploring eyes. I assure you, Burke, that even at that moment, though I knew her for the false, treacherous thing she was, still I realized that it

OUT OF THE ORDINARY.

It is said to be almost impossible to stink a modern battleship constructed on the best models.

A vanilla bean kept in the sugar box imparts a delicious flavor to sugar. The French do this.

The soil of Egypt at the present day is tilted by exactly the same kind of plow that was used five thousand years ago.

A missionary paper says that 8,000 Bibles distributed among the Chinese were used by them for the manufacture of fire-crackers.

The Supreme Court of Tennessee has decided that "no workhouse, city, county or State can have a right to whip prisoners therein."

The game of whist originated in England. It is believed to have developed from the older game of triumph, or trump, which was played as early as 1530.

The last great war of the world, that between Russia and Turkey, cost altogether \$190,000,000 and 180,000 lives, of which Russia paid \$133,000,000 and 110,000 lives.

The French postoffice department has excluded all newspapers from its mails for the reason that they can be opened without much chance of detection.

Of the 60,000 population of Palestine, 43,000 are Hebrews, 9,000 are Christians and 8,000 are Mohammedans, who, although numerically in the minority, are in authority.

Turkish women do not come in control of their private fortunes until after marriage. After that they can dispose of one-third of it without the husband's consent.

In one New York election district, the thirty-third of the Twenty-first Assembly, there are only five voters, and the cost of primaries and election is \$20, or \$50 a voter.

A planter in St. Thomas parish, near Charleston, S. C., has achieved a very notable success in silk culture, his annual income from this source amounting to from \$2,000 to \$3,000.

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