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## An Averted Tragedy.

"It's good to be home again!"

The speaker, Edward Harold, an officer of the new army, had recently returned from abroad. Now, at the hour of six, on the last evening in November, he was seated in his cosy Guildford street den, his gaze travelling slowly and lovingly over all the familiar trifles on wall and floor and shelf.

Opposite him, lounging with due appreciation of ease in a roomy morocco-covered chair, was Hereford Ware.

Had Ware been asked as he sat there whether he had a trouble in the wide world, he would have laughed a negative. Partner in a substantial city house, possessed of perfect health, and looking straight out on promise of a prosperous future, he could by no effort have imagined himself a victim of the trouble parasite. To Ware life was a very pleasant thing.

He looked over now at the figure in the chair opposite, and smiled.

"Seen your sister, Doris, since landing?" he asked, in a tone that conveyed more than the words.

"Yes, old fellow. I was at her place for an hour this morning."

"You know?" Ware said, questioningly. "That you have offered her marriage?"

Ware knit his brows. The other's tone was not congratulatory.

"Well?" he said, as if demanding something unspoken. He had looked for the welcome of a brother.

"To tell you the truth, I had always hoped that you were not a marrying man," came from Harold quietly.

"Is there any reason why I should not marry?"

Ware spoke in the protesting tone of one who feels hurt.

"To be quite candid, old friend, I think there is."

"What?"

"Your abominable temper. It is not an ordinary, common, or garden bad temper. It is a cyclone."

"What absolute piffle!" Ware commented, pushing away a bronze paper-weight on the table by which he sat, and aimlessly taking up an old Spanish dagger. He added, "However bad my temper, I am not likely to vent it on a woman."

Harold looked keenly from under his brows into his companion's eyes.

"You are just as likely to vent it on your nearest and dearest as upon a stranger," he affirmed. Then, reminiscently: "Great Scott! What a whirlwind there is while it lasts!"

"As a fact you are passively opposing me," Ware said, jabbing with the dagger at the paper-weight.

"Here! Don't break that weapon! I value it. If you were to say that I am actively opposing you, I would admit the truth of it. I cannot consent to Doris becoming your wife. You are the slave of a devil, and unfit for marriage. Man, have you ever thought that more than once you have been perilously near murder?"

"No, I don't trouble to think any such nonsense. And, as for your saying that I shall not marry Doris, your consent will not be asked."

"She has promised me not to marry without it."

Ware was on his feet now. Unthinkingly, the dagger was clenched in his right hand.

"With or without your consent, I shall marry her."

"We shall see. Oh, do take a look in the mirror! Your face should be sketched for a penny dreadful!"

"Confound you!" growled Ware, his chest heaving.

"Illustration showing the disappointed villian! Poor Doris!"

Ware raised his hand to strike the table again, but at the scornful laugh that came from Harold he strode forward, and, uttering an inarticulate cry, brought the weapon down upon Harold's left side.

The stricken man fell.

In the silence of the curtained room Ware stood motionless, his face still distorted, his eyes staring fixedly at the body lying on the rug by the hearth, the extended and prone body, with clawed fingers dug into that on which it lay.

Ware's eyes moved. Now they rested on the cross-hilted blade in his right hand. Hand and blade were reddened with a

something that dripped and oozed clammy from between the fingers. The character of the gaze changed; it had been that of rage, its newer self seemed one of blended incredulity and horror, and with the change there came from his throat a whimper, hysterical, and awful in its abandonment to weakness.

He flung the dagger from him with a shudder of loathing, just as a man might fling off a poison-fanged reptile, and stepped back from the body. He was not thinking. Men so placed never think. Their mental state is a chaos of irrelevant trifles. Then something focussed his attention—a sound outside the room.

Ware was breathing noiselessly through parted lips. His limbs were tense. For ten seconds he waited. The sound was not repeated. Ware's left hand touched the wall switch, and the room went black. He moved on tip-toe to the door; trembling lips refusing to obey command of will. There came a slow movement of the handle until fully turned, a moment's listening, the opening of the door, its silent closing, a lightning glance up and down the stairways; and then Ware passed to the hall.

No one there. The hall door wide. A stream of people passing. As yet, not a glance within. Four persons suddenly made a block as they wished each other good-bye. Ware stepped between the group and the house wall, and so came out unseen.

Now he himself was one of the stream, unnoticed in his conventional dark suit and commonplace hat. He moved on through street after street, his one idea that safety lay in distance. Then, at a moment, he condemned his folly, and sped as quickly as might be until he came to an unlighted house in a quiet thoroughfare, and let himself in with a latch-key.

As if shod with silent shoes he went through the hall, and up the stairs, entered a sleeping chamber, lighted the gas at one burner, and rapidly changed some of his clothing. When he emerged from the room he was wearing a smoking jacket and slippers.

His actions were not negligible trifles; they might determine all his future.

"At home, Mrs. Jarvis?" he called, his voice unmodulated.

"Goodness me! Is that you, sir? I hope you haven't been ringing. As you said you felt tired and was going to have a lay down, I didn't like to disturb you. I've been out to do some marketing, and have only just got back. It's the girl's half-day off, you know."

"It doesn't matter. I guessed you were out," Ware said.

"I'll put your dinner on at once, sir."

Ware was almost exultant now. They had no proof. No one had seen him enter that house in Guildford street. No one had seen him leave. His landlady would swear that he had kept his room, and he had every needful excuse for continuing in it, one being a ramping, maddening headache that brought red hatred—a madness that impelled to murder.

He shuddered as if the dread word had been spoken. The unalterable, foul truth that he had done bloody murder was driving its talons into his heart. He breathed the name "Harold," and its utterance carried him back through younger manhood and early youth, to boyhood, when he had loved, and fought, and planned deeds of innocent mischief with another such happy lad as himself.

A knock at his room door.

Ware arrested his breathing. Then said feebly:

"Come in."

His old landlady opened the door.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for disturbing you. Didn't know you were in bed," she explained, and went on: "Mr Russell has called. Shall I say you can't see him?"

"No. Ask him to come up."

It was the desperation of a man with his back to the wall that had made him speak. Russell—Russell the cynical, who had contemptuously spoken of his outbursts of temper as "bad form." The fellow was a spy. He was just the man to suspect, and verify his suspicions, and then quietly give him away to the police. Well, he should find the verifying no easy matter.

"Hallo! You're in sick bay, I see. What's the matter, old chap?" Russell had come in. He was a tall man

spare, and smoothly shaven, with eyes that were full of scoffing—no, not full, for behind the scoffing lay pity.

"Sick headache," returned Ware.

"That's bad! Been in bed all day?" "Been lying on the bed pretty well since I felt it this morning, but I crawled downstairs to dinner."

"Well, you don't need to be in this funeral gloom."

Russell, as he spoke, turned the gas higher. At the moment he was to Ware the entirety of that hatred, suspicious world which had to be confronted and baffled.

"A good nose bleeding would relieve the headache," Russell said.

"My nose never bleeds," Ware resumed, as if to dismiss the absurdity.

"Have you had any accident to shock your nervous system?"

"No."

"Sorry to have pestered you with questions. I thought that the red stain on your shirt-sleeve might be due to one or the other."

Ware felt his throat throb. He had not noticed any stain. Oh, a trap! Russell knew of Harold's murder, and had been leading up to this.

"It has been there for a week past," Ware lied savagely.

Russell raised his brows.

"You are getting economical over your laundry," he remarked drily.

Ware set up, and drew his lips back.

By an effort he controlled his tongue. Only his eyes spoke.

"Perhaps you would rather I went?" said the other.

"Suit yourself over that."

"Very well, I will go."

When the house door had slammed, Ware condemned himself for a blunderer.

Russell could not know of Harold's death, or he would have spoken of it. Why, he would have been full of the news.

The minutes dragged. There came an imperious summons at the house door. Ware clutched the bed clothing, and held himself tense. Voices, steps, the turning of the door handle—and then—Russell himself stood there, his eyes dilated, his face full of horror, and questioning.

"Do you what they are saying?" came from him hoarsely. "Our chum, Harold, is dead! Foully murdered in his own room!"

"But it mayn't be true, you know. What makes you think it is?"

Ware's weak and peculiarly inept remark came in a hollow voice. He was shivering.

"Everyone loved him," said Russell, as if he had not heard. "The man who saved your life at Mons! Why, he was almost as your brother!"

Ware writhed on his couch. When his face grew grim, and his eyes ablaze as he gained the floor and confronted Russell.

"I did it!" he said. "I did it, and God knows, if ten thousand years suffering would undo it, I would pay the price."

"What are you about?" as Ware made for a cabinet.

"I'm going to shoot myself."

"Oh, you fool of fools! You pierce the heart of your best friend, and think to make amends by committing another murder. The first evil has been done. If the law proves you guilty you must die as it shall appoint. The consequence of your being proved guilty would be life-long shame to your relatives. Do you never think of consequences to others. Ware, when you are possessed by the devil?"

"Then, disgrace or not, it shall be the police station."

Ware dressed himself rapidly, and passed down stairs, leaving the other to follow. The guilty man strode along, ignoring his companion. When he arrived at a near police station he swung into the charge room, and made for the desk.

"I give myself up for the murder of Edward Harold, at the house in Guildford street," he said harshly.

A momentary question flashed from the inspector's eyes to those of Russell, and was unseen by Ware. The other nodded.

"Oh, I see," commented the officer, eyeing Ware curiously. "Sit down if you please," he added sternly.

"And now, sir."

The inspector was speaking. Someone touched Ware on the shoulder. He rose, and was conducted to a cell.

He had been alone some twenty minutes when the cell door was re-opened, and there came in a tall man, wearing dark glasses.

"Mr Russell asked me to see what could be done in the matter, the new-comer said."

Ware made no response.

"I understand that you have accused yourself. Hence, there are only two pleadings: provocation, or justifiable homicide."

"Plead—if plead you must—that I am possessed of a devil, and have made no effort to cast him out. Say that no punishment man can mete out is bad enough for me. Tell them that I slew a man

whom I loved more than brother loves brother."

The man in the glasses turned away his head. His right hand was clenched.

"We live in strange times," he said, "and juries have strange views. Should they deem it expedient that you live, will you bear the punishment of life patiently?"

Ware groaned.

"Yes—until the end," he answered.

"Will you, for his sake, take this fiend by the throat, and cast him from you? Will you vow that no matter what the real or fancied affront you will never again raise your hand against a friend?"

"As there is a God in Heaven, I swear!"

The prisoner sat with his head bowed low upon his hands.

"Ware—dear old chum—look up!"

A hoarse throat cry. The scaled man had gained his feet. His vision took in—not the dark glasses—but the kindly and humid eyes of his life-long friend, his bronzed, smoothly shaven face working with emotion.

"What does it mean?"

"That it might have been, but that it is not. Oh, Ware, Ware, you have been perilously near the awful reality before this—that dreadful reality which nothing could undo. We wished to tear the scales from your eyes; to make you see the abyss on whose very verge you stood; so we tricked you by goading a sore place, and laying a stage dagger ready to your hand. The inspector here was in the plot. Do you forgive us?"

Forgive! Forgive having the clouds of horror rolled back. Forgive being offered the chance of leading an unstained life! Forgive the hope of love, and unbroken friendship!

Ware held out his trembling hands.

## THE BUTTER PRICE.

(By "Spectator").

There's no one more abused just now Than he who feeds and milks the cow Each evening and at break of day, To keep the hungry wolf away.

The city dwellers' voice is heard, Describing as complete absurd, The profit that the farmer takes, For all the butter-fat he makes.

The people are all out in arms, About the profits made on farms, And many are the taunts and jeers About the landed profiteers.

They say it's like the farmer tricks To trade away at two and six, The stuff that once he used to sell, And so it caused a little flutter.

When two and sixpence for their butter Was offered to the sons who toil, So late and early on the soil, When Massey heard the earnest cries

About the sudden butter rise, A new committee came on view To sift the matter through and through;

To equalize the price per pound Six hundred thousand soon was found, And now the price is two and three, Some sixpence less than it would be

If that indomitable will Of our progressive Premier Bill Had failed to recognise the humour In which the frugal town consumer

Reviewed, in desolation utter, The price per pound of factory butter, And still the sturdy farmers count, No matter how the prices mount,

No matter how consumers scoff, Producers get no better off. The plow he used to buy one day

For eighteen pounds from Reid & Gray, Now costs him thrice that humble figure, And more if he requires a digger.

His comprehension it astounds How things go up by leaps and bounds. The fertilisers that he needs, And lime and agricultural seeds,

And all else that the farmer buys Is ever, ever, on the rise. 'Tis hard to realise the life

Of Mr Farmer and his wife, And little children, as a rule, Before and after going to school,

Working out in the byre and field To extract the season's butter yield. The folk in rosy walks of life

But seldom realise the strife Of farmers' toiling girls and boys, Removed from all the scenes and joys

Which cheer the hearts of those we meet Each day upon the city street. But still the fact comes still more clear,

That those who toil throughout the year, Who know not holiday or rest, Should come to be repaid the best.

His overtime's not too well paid, If farmer, wife, and son, and maid, Who work from when the lark first calls, Till when at night the darkness falls,

Seven days a week the whole year round, Receive their two and six per pound.

The Poles and Soviet Russia have ratified the Peace Treaty signed at Riga.