



"Not a bit! You won't come to harm. I'll see you through and give you money afterwards."

"I'll have to go you. What am I to do?"

"Change clothes with me!"

The tramp was staggered at this suggestion, but he consented, though he vainly tried to get Lawrence to untell the scheme.

"The only trouble is," said Lawrence, "I don't know where we can do this."

"Well, I do," replied his companion, and he forthwith led the way to a deserted room where they speedily exchanged garments. Mr. Drane put on the rags again with some revolt, but he was confident in the success of his scheme, and that he would win.

When they stepped out again into the street he asked the tramp where he had gone when he first took the clothes from the Adams Hotel.

"Oh," he said, "I played in great luck, and I'll be all right if you get me out of this affair with a little money in hand. You see, I pranced around town for the day, and the next day I fell in with an old sweetheart of mine. She used to live in Buffalo, and she was poor enough then, but she was through a some time ago she went through a mock marriage that afterwards turned out to be binding."

The tramp paused and laughed gleefully.

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Mr. Drane, eagerly. "What then?"

"Why, you see, the fellow she married was thundering rich, and he went off and got killed just after the ceremony."

and left all his money to her. Now, haw! haw! And then, you know, I told her that I had got rich, too. I made a good bluff at it with your money and your clothes and she believed me. So we got married that very day."

"You married her?" gasped Lawrence.

"Yep. Married her as fast and hard as a person could tie the knot. We went up to New Haven and the ceremony was performed there. As you see, it was over I left her to come down to New York, and she was a fine racket on your money, you know, tell me, you know, my rich wife is waiting for me, I suppose, in the Denver Hotel where I left her. You just put me in the way of getting to New Haven and I'll be hunk and don't you forget it."

Lawrence was overwhelmed with amazement. He felt rather than saw the inconsistencies of the story, but it was circumstantial enough to alarm him.

"What?" his Bessie, so good and pure, marry this fellow so suddenly, and yet remain in New York, go to court with Mrs. Bowers—it was impossible on the face of it. And yet—He would have pursued the inquiry further, but that he feared to arouse the tramp's suspicions. So they walked on talking of other things until they came to Jenkins' Retreat.

"Now I'm going to work a big scheme here," said Mr. Drane, "and you just keep your head and don't get frightened a bit and remember that whatever happens I'll take care of you. I'm rich enough, as you know."

"Hurry away, cully, I'm wild yet," responded the tramp.

Mr. Drane rang the bell. The door was opened at once by an attendant whom Lawrence had not seen before.

"Tell Mr. Jenkins a friend would like to see him," said Lawrence, winking mysteriously at the attendant.

The wink was understood, and both men were admitted. The door once closed, Mr. Drane whispered excitedly to the attendant.

"It's Lawrence Drane! You'd better grab him, 'cause he's very violent at times."

The attendant struck a bell and instantly two other men came into the hall, seized the tramp, bound his arms to his sides with a rope and hurried him to a back room. He protested vigorously, declared that he had been entrapped, and all that, but his cries made matters worse for him. Presently the attendant returned and asked Mr. Drane about the capture. Lawrence told an imaginative yarn with as low a dialect as he could muster, and wound up by demanding the reward.

"We can't give you the whole reward to-night," was the reply. "The five hundred dollars offered by Mr. Drane's friends is not in our control, but you may have the fifty dollars offered by the Retreat, and if you will call to-morrow afternoon I have no doubt that you can collect the rest."

Lawrence reflected that fifty dollars was a pretty good price to pay a man for capturing himself, and that he was lucky to ever get that. The money was promptly turned over to him and he left the Retreat after inquiring particularly as to the hour when he should call again.

"It's a pretty hard trick on that fellow," he thought, "but he deserves it, and I will keep my word and see him safely out. And of course I'll return the reward."

With all the speed he had he hurried to a Bowery clothing store, bought a cheap but decent suit, and then took the first available train for New Haven.

CHAPTER IX.

"MRS. L. DRANE."

As the train began its rumbling journey into the night Mr. Drane felt a wild exultation. He was escaping from the scenes of the utmost misery he had ever experienced, and he was going to see the most adorable girl in the world. One more he thought of it the more the tramp's story about his marriage appeared to be absolute fiction—and yet, the fellow had been so confident, so unshakingly pleased with his prospect! And Bessie had said that she lived in Buffalo. Was she deceiving him, and Mrs. Bowers, too? It was all very strange. Why had he not taken the precaution to learn the tramp's real name? Had he gone and married Bessie under the name of Drane?

Lawrence shivered until he recalled that the tramp had known Bessie in childhood and therefore could not pass himself to her under a false name. This was some comfort, but as he puzzled over the situation he began to doubt whether he had done wisely in running away from his Kansas City friends who had come to New York to find him. Undoubtedly, however, they would have declared that the story of his adventures was the figment of a disordered brain.

So, with perplexities and doubts his exultation gave way to anxiety, and even the prospect of seeing Bessie again failed to relieve his mind of trouble.

It was long past midnight when he reached New Haven. A cab took him to the Beaver House, where he was denied admission because all rooms were taken. Leaving an application for the first vacancy, he found accommodations elsewhere, a sleepy watchman, grumbling immediately, showing him to a tiny chamber on the top floor. When he came down stairs in the morning to pay his bill the clerk politely requested him to register, a formality he would comply with, and with a determination, formed in a flash, to sail under true colors, he wrote his name and address with a bold, legible hand. Then he stood before the window, apparently gazing idly into the street, really absorbed in formulating a plan of action. Just as Mr. Drane was registering a shrewd-looking young man with a note-book in one hand and a pencil in the other entered the office. He waited until Lawrence had withdrawn from the counter and then began industriously to copy the name and address from the big book. The clerk greeted him pleasantly.

"Well, Jimmy, what's the news to-day?"

"Read the Evening Dispatch and find out," was the smart reply.

This brilliant reporter had done service for opening the conversation between the clerk and the shrewd young man daily for many months, and it is probably so serving still. There is nothing like having a witty retort that is warranted not to wear out.

The young man copied rapidly down the page until he came to the last page. Then he paused and scanned an instant, after which he wrote "Lawrence Drane, Kansas City, Mo., No. 344, p.d." very slowly, and turned about slyly to scrutinize the broad back of the gentleman at the window.

"Any thing up, Jimmy?" asked the clerk, observing this action.

Jimmy winked and nodded mysteriously, and began to search among the newspapers lying on the writing table. Presently he found a New York paper of the day before and turned to the account of Mr. Drane's escape and the reward offered for his capture.

"I thought so," he said, with a triumphant grin, while the clerk looked on in undisguised curiosity. Jimmy gave him no comfort. Instead, he heightened the clerk's emotion by sitting down where he could see Mr. Drane's face and scanning the paper again with frequent glances upward for comparison.

"Mustache gone and clothes different," he muttered; "but it must be the man. I wonder whether he'll become violent and murder me if I speak to him. Perhaps I can inveigle him to a police station."

While Jimmy was still debating what to do to "scoop" the boys on a big piece of news and gain a whopping reward, Lawrence decided upon his own course and started to leave the hotel. Jimmy was on his feet instantly and intercepted him.

"Mr. Drane, I believe?" he said, interrogatively.

"Yes," replied Lawrence, with a start of surprise.

"Lawrence Drane, of Kansas City?" continued Jimmy.

"Yes; what can I do for you?"

"I want to ask you some questions about the condition of affairs in the West," said Jimmy, glibly, "the crops, you know, farm mortgages and their effect on industry, and all that sort of thing. If you're going out I will walk along with you so as not to waste your time."

Jimmy opened the door invitingly, intensely relieved that the escaped maniac should show no signs of violence, but Lawrence held back.

"Why do you ask these things?" he inquired.

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