

THE Masquerader

By KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON,
Author of "The Circle," Etc.

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CHAPTER VII (Continued.)

Later the two men passed Loder's bedroom, where the final preparations had been completed, into the sitting room. Loder, dressed in faultless evening dress, his hair was carefully brushed, his eyes were fitted him perfectly, his glance, critical or casual, he turned upon the man who had mounted the stairs and entered the rooms earlier in the evening. Chilcote's manner of dress and poise of the head seemed descended upon him with the Christmas clothes. He came into the room and passed to the desk.

"I have no private papers," he said, "I have nothing to lock up. Everything stands as it is. A woman of Robins comes in the mornings to clean and light the fire; otherwise you must shift for yourself. No one will disturb you. Quiet, dead sleep is about the one thing you can expect."

Chilcote, half halting in the doorway, made an attempt to laugh. Of late he was noticeably more depressed. In Loder's well worn, brushed tweed suit he felt strands of his own personality, bereft for moment of the familiar accessories which the wheel of conventionality compels him to wear. He stood unpleasantly conscious of himself, unable to place his sensations even in thought. He glanced at the fire, at the table, at the chair on which he had thrown his overcoat before entering the room. At the sight of the coat his face brightened, the aimless look in his eyes gave an exclamation of relief.

"By Jove!" he said. "I clean forgot!" Loder looked round. "The rings?" He crossed to the coat and thrust his hand into the pocket. "The duplicates arrived only this afternoon—the nick of time, eh?" He spoke as his fingers searched busily. "Oh, of any kind came as a boon. I slowly followed him, and as he was brought to light he leaned forward interestedly.

"I told you, one is the copy of an emerald ring, the other a plain band plain gold band like a wedding ring." Chilcote laughed as he placed the rings side by side on his table. "I could think of nothing else that would be wide and not ostentatious. You know how I detest diamonds touched the rings. 'You have a taste,' he said. 'Let's see if we serve their purpose.'" He picked up and carried them to the lamp. Chilcote followed him. "That was a little wound," he said, his curiosity speaking as Loder extended his hand. "How did you come by it?" "Oh, I smiled. 'It's a memento,' he said.

"Of levancy?" "Quite the reverse." He looked at his hand, then glanced back at Chilcote. "No," he repeated, with unusual impulse of confidence. "It reminds me that I am not exactly that I have been fooled like a man."

"That implies a woman?" "Yes." Again Loder looked at the ring in his finger. "I seldom recall the day it's so absolutely past. But I like to remember it tonight. I want you to know that I've been through the fire. It's a sort of guarantee."

Chilcote made a hasty gesture, but Loder interrupted him.

"I know you trust me. But you're taking me a risky post. I want you to know that women are out of my line—out of it."

"My dear chap—"

Loder went on without heeding Chilcote's remark. "Eight years ago, in Santalare, he said, 'a little place between Lima and Pistoria—a mere village of houses wedged between two regular cities of old Italy crumpled away under flowers and sunshine. Nothing to suggest the present except the occasional passing of a train round the base of one of the hills. I had literally stumbled upon the place on a long tramp south from the coast and had been tempted into staying at the little inn. The night after my arrival something unusual occurred. There was an accident to the carriage at the point where it skirted the edge of the village."

"There was a small excitement. All the inhabitants were anxious to help me take my share. As a matter of fact, the smash was not disastrous. The passengers were hurt and frightened, but nobody was killed."

"I passed and looked at his companion, but seeing him interested, went

dog."

"Of course, that first speech ought to have enlightened me, but it didn't. I only saw the smile and heard the voice. I knew nothing of whether they were deep or shallow. So I found the man and found the dog. The first expression of gratitude, the other didn't. I extended him with enormous difficulty from the wreck of the luggage van, and this was how he marked his appreciation. He held out his hand and nodded toward the seat."

Chilcote glanced up. "So that's the explanation?"

"Yes. I tried to conceal the thing when I restored the dog, but I was bleeding abominably and I failed. Then the whole business was changed. It was I who needed seeing to, my new friend insisted; I who should be looked after and not she. She forgot the dog in the newer interest of my wounded finger. The maid, who was practically unhurt, was sent on to engage rooms at the little inn, and she and I followed slowly."

"That walk impressed me. There was an attractive mistiness of atmosphere in the warm night, a sensation more than attractive in being made much of by a woman of one's own class and country after five years' wandering."

"I laughed with a touch of irony."

"But I won't take up your time with details. You know the progress of an ordinary love affair. Throw in a few more flowers and a little more sunshine than is usual, a man who is practically a hermit and a woman who knows the world by heart and you have the whole thing."

"She insisted on staying in Santalare for three days in order to keep my finger bandaged. She ended by staying three weeks in the hope of mending up my life."

"On coming to the hotel she had given no name, and in our first explanations to each other she led me to conclude her an unmarried girl. It was at the end of the three weeks that I learned that she was not a free agent, as I had innocently imagined, but possessed a husband whom she had left ill with malaria at Florence or Rome."

"The news disconcerted me, and I took no pains to hide it. After that the end came abruptly. In her eyes I had become a fool with middle class principles; in my eyes—But there is no need for that. She left Santalare the same night in a great confusion of trunks and hatboxes, and next morning I strapped on my knapsack and turned my face to the south."

"And women don't count ever after?" Chilcote smiled, beguiled out of himself.

Loder laughed. "That's what I've been trying to convey. Once bitten, twice shy?" He laughed again and slipped the two rings over his finger with an air of finality.

"Now, shall I start? This is the latchkey?" He drew a key from the pocket of Chilcote's evening clothes. "When I get to Grosvenor square I am to find your home, go straight in, mount the stairs and there on my right hand will be the door of your—I mean my own—private rooms. I think I've got it by heart. I feel inspired. I feel that I can't go wrong." He handed the two remaining rings to Chilcote and picked up the overcoat.

"I'll stick on till I get a wire," he said. "Then I'll come back and we'll reverse again." He slipped on the coat and moved back toward the table. Now that the decisive moment had come it embarrassed him. Scarcely knowing how to bring it to an end, he held out his hand.

Chilcote took it, paling a little. "I'll be all right," he said, with a sudden return of nervousness. "I'll be all right! And I've made it plain about—about the remuneration? A hundred a week, besides all expenses."

Loder smiled again. "My pay? Oh, yes, you've made it clear as day. Shall we say good night now?"

"Yes. Good night."

There was a strange, distant note in Chilcote's voice, but the other did not pretend to hear it. He pressed the hand he was holding, though the cold dampness of it repelled him.

"Good night," he said again.

"Good night."

They stood for a moment awkwardly looking at each other, then Loder quietly disengaged his hand, crossed the room and passed through the door.

Chilcote, left standing alone in the middle of the room, listened while the last sound of the other's footsteps was audible on the uncarpeted stairs. Then, with a furtive, hurried gesture, he caught up the crown shaded lamp and passed into Loder's bedroom.

CHAPTER VIII.

To all men come portentous moments, difficult moments, triumphant moments. Loder had had his examples of all three, but no moment in his career ever equaled in strangeness of sensation that in which, dressed in another man's clothes, he fitted the latchkey for the first time into the door of the other man's house.

The act was quietly done. The key fitted the lock smoothly, and his fingers turned it without hesitation, though his heart, usually extremely steady, beat sharply for a second. The

small loomed massive and somber, despite the modernity of electric lights. It was darkly and expensively decorated in black and brown; a fringe of wrought bronze, representing peacocks with outspread tails, ornamented the walls; the banisters, were of heavy ironwork, and the somewhat formidable fireplace was of the same dark metal.

Loder looked about him, then advanced, his heart again beating quickly as his hand touched the cold banister and he began his ascent of the stairs. But at each step his confidence strengthened, his feet became more firm until, at the head of the stairs, as if to disprove his assurance, his pulses played him false once more. This time to a more serious time. From the farther end of a well lighted corridor a maid was coming straight in his direction.

For one short second all things seemed to whiz about him; the certainty of detection overpowered his mind. The indisputable knowledge that he was John Loder and no other, despite all armor of effrontery and dress, so dominated him that all other considerations shrunk before it. It wanted but one word, one simple word of denunciation, and the whole scheme was shattered. In the dismay of the moment he almost wished that the word might be spoken and the suspense ended.

But the maid came on in silence, and so incredible was the silence that Loder moved onward too. He came within a yard of her, and still she did not speak. Then, as he passed her, she drew back respectfully against the wall.

The strain, so astonishingly short, had been immense, but with its slackening came a strong reaction. The expected humiliation seethed suddenly to a desire to dare fate. Pausing quickly, he turned and called the woman back.

The spot where he had halted was vividly bright, the ceiling light being had been immense, but with its slackening came a strong reaction. The expected humiliation seethed suddenly to a desire to dare fate. Pausing quickly, he turned and called the woman back.

Loder bore his scrutiny without flinching, directly above his head, and as she came toward him he raised his face deliberately and waited.

She looked at him without surprise or interest. "Yes, sir," she said.

"Is your mistress in?" he asked. He could think of no other question, but it served his purpose as a test of his voice.

Still the woman showed no surprise. "She's not in, sir," she answered. "But she's expected in half an hour."

"In half an hour? All right. That's all I wanted." With a movement of decision Loder walked back to the stair head, turned to the right and opened the door of Chilcote's rooms.

The door opened on a short, wide passage. On one side stood the study, on the other the bed, bath and dressing rooms. With a blind sense of knowledge and unfamiliarity, bred of much description on Chilcote's part, he put his hand on the study door and, still exalted by the omen of his first success, turned the handle.

Inside the room there was frelight and lamplight and a studios air of peace. The realization of this and a sudden return of nervousness. "I'll be all right! And I've made it plain about—about the remuneration? A hundred a week, besides all expenses."

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"You haven't quite grasped me yet, I can see. I'm a man of moods, you know. Up to the present you've seen my back side, my jaded side, but I have quite another when I care to show it. I'm a sort of Jekyll and Hyde affair." Again he laughed, and Greening echoed the sound diffidently. "Chilcote had evidently discouraged familiarity."

Loder eyed him with abrupt understanding. He recognized the loneliness in the anxious, conciliatory manner.

"You're tired," he said kindly. "Go to bed. I've got some thinking to do. Good night." He held out his hand.

Greening took it, still half distrustful of this fresh side of so complex a man.

"Good night, sir," he said. "Tomorrow, if you approve, I shall go on with my notes. I hope you will have a restful night."

For a second Loder's eyebrows went up, but he recovered himself instantly. "Ah, thanks, Greening," he said.

"Thanks. I think your hope will be fulfilled."

He watched the little secretary move slyly and apologetically to the door, then he walked to the fire and, resting his elbows on the mantelpiece, he took his face in his hands.

For a space he stood absolutely quiet, then his hands dropped to his sides, and he turned slowly round. In that short space he had balanced things and found his bearings. The slight nervousness shown in his brusque sentences and overconfident manner faded out, and he faced facts steadily.

With the return of his calmness he took a long survey of the room. His glance brightened appreciatively as it traveled from the walls lined with well bound books to the lamps regulated to the proper light, from the lamps to the desk fitted with every requirement. Nothing was lacking. All he had once possessed, all he had since dreamed of, was here, but on a greater scale. To enjoy the luxuries of life a man must go long without them. Loder had lived severely—so severely that until three weeks ago he had believed himself exempt from the temptations of humanity. Then the voice of the world had spoken, and within him another voice had answered with a tone so clamorous and insistent that it had outcried his surprised and incredulous wonder at its existence and its claims. That had been the voice of suppressed ambition, and now as he stood in the new atmosphere a newer voice lifted itself. The joy of material things rose suddenly, overbalancing the last remnant of the philosophy he had reared. He saw all things in a fresh light—the soft carpets, the soft lights, the numberless pleasant, unnecessary things that color the passing hours, escape and oil the wheels of life. This was power—power made manifest. The choice bindings of one's books, the quiet harmony of one's surroundings, the gratifying deference of one's dependents—these were the visible, the outward signs, the thing she had forgotten.

Crossing the room slowly, he lifted and looked at the different papers on the desk. They had a substantial feeling, an importance, an air of value. They were like the solemn keys to so many vexed problems. Beside the papers were a heap of letters neatly arranged and as yet unopened. He turned them over one by one. They were all thick and interesting to look at. He smiled as he recalled his own scanty mail—envelopes long and bulky or narrow and thin, unwelcome manuscripts or very welcome checks. Having sorted the letters, he hesitated. It was his life task to open them, but he had never in his life opened an envelope addressed to another man.

He stood uncertain, weighing them in his hand. Then all at once a look of attention and surprise crossed his face, and he raised his head. Some one had unmistakably passed outside the door which Greening had left ajar.

There was a moment of apparent doubt, then a stir of skirts, a quick, uncertain knock, and the intruder entered.

For a couple of seconds she stood in the doorway; then as Loder made no effort to speak she moved into the room. She had apparently not just returned from some entertainment, for, though she had drawn off her long gloves, she was still wearing an evening-check of lace and fur.

That she was Chilcote's wife Loder instinctively realized the moment she entered the room. By a disconcerting confusion of ideas was all that followed the knowledge. He stood by the desk, silent and awkward, trying to fit his expectations to his knowledge.

Then, faced by the hopelessness of the task, he turned abruptly and looked at her again.

She had taken off her cloak and was standing by the fire. The compulsion of moving through life alone had set its seal upon her in a certain self-possession, a certain confidence of pose, yet her figure as Loder then saw it, was backgrounded by the dark books and gowned in pale blue, had a suggestion of youthfulness that seemed a contrast. The reminiscence of Chilcote's epithets "cold" and "unsympathetic" came back to him with something like astonishment. He felt no uncertainty, no dread of discovery and humiliation in her presence as he had felt in the maid's, yet there was something in her face that made him indistinctly more uncomfortable, a look he could find no name for, a friendliness that studiously covered another feeling, whether question, distrust or actual dislike he could not say. With a strange sensation of awkwardness he sorted Chilcote's letters, waiting for her to speak.

As if divining his thought she turned toward him. "I'm afraid I rather intrude," she said. "If you are busy—"

His sense of courtesy was touched.

He regarded her with a high opinion of woman, and the words shook up an echo of the old sentiment.

"Don't think that," he said hastily. "I was only looking through my letters. You mustn't rate yourself below letters." He was conscious that his tone was hurried, that his words were a little jagged, but Eve did not appear to notice. Unlike Greening, she took the new manner without surprise. She had known Chilcote for six years.

"I dined with the Fraides tonight," she said. "Mr. Fraide sent you a message."

Unconsciously Loder's face. There was humor in the thought of a message to him from the great Fraide. To hide his amusement he wheeled one of the big lounge chairs forward.

"Indeed," he said. "Won't you sit down?"

They were near together now, and he saw her face more fully. Again he was taken aback. Chilcote had spoken of her as successful and intelligent, but never as beautiful. Yet her beauty was a rare and uncommon fact. Her hair was black—not a glossy black, but the dusky black that is softer than any brown—her eyes were large and of a peculiarly pure blue, and her eyelashes were black, beautifully curved and of remarkable thickness.

"Won't you sit down?" he said again, cutting short his thoughts with some confusion.

"Thank you." She gravely accepted the proffered chair. But he saw that without any ostentation she drew her skirts aside as she passed him. The action displeased him unaccountably.

"Well," he said shortly, "what had Fraide to say?" He walked to the mantelpiece with his customary movement and stood watching her. The instinct toward hiding his face had left him. Her instant and uninterested acceptance of him almost nettled him. His own half contemptuous impression of Chilcote came to him unpleasantly and with it the first desire to assert his own individuality. Stung by the conflicting emotions, he felt in Chilcote's pockets for something to smoke.

Eve saw and interpreted the action. "Are these your cigarettes?" She leaned toward a small table and took up a box made of lizard skin.

"Thanks." He took the box from her, and as it passed from one to the other he saw her glance at his rings. The glance was momentary. Her lips parted to express question or surprise, then closed again without comment. More than any spoken words the incident showed him the gulf that separated husband and wife.

"Well," he said again, "what about Fraide?"

At his words she sat straighter and looked at him more directly, as if bracing herself to a task.

"Mr. Fraide is—is as interested as ever in you," she began.

"Or in you?" Loder made the interruption precisely as he felt Chilcote would have made it. Then instantly he wished the words back.

Eve's warm skin colored more deeply. For a second the inscrutable underlying expression that puzzled him showed in her eyes, then she sank back into a corner of the chair.

"Why do you make such a point of sneering at my friends?" she asked quietly. "I overlook it when you are nervous." She halted slightly on the word. "But you are not nervous tonight."

Loder, to his great humiliation, reddened. Except for an occasional outburst on the part of Mrs. Robins, his characteristic, he had not merited a woman's displeasure for years.

"The sneer was unintentional," he said.

For the first time Eve showed a personal interest. She looked at him in a puzzled way. "If your apology was meant," she said hesitatingly, "I should be glad to accept it."

Loder, uncertain of how to take the words, moved back to the desk. He carried an unlighted cigarette between his fingers.

There was an interval in which neither spoke. Then at last, conscious of its awkwardness, Eve rose. With one hand on the back of her chair she looked at him.

"Mr. Fraide thinks it's such a pity that"—she stopped to choose her words—"that you should lose hold on things—lose interest in things—as you are doing. He has been thinking a good deal about you in the last three weeks, ever since the day of your illness in the house, and it seems to him"—again she broke off, watching Loder's avert

shake of your restlessness that your health might improve. He thinks that the present crisis would be"—she hesitated—"would give you a tremendous opportunity. Your trade interests, bound up as they are with Persia, would give any opinion you might hold a double weight." Almost unconsciously a touch of warmth crept into her words.

"Mr. Fraide talked very seriously about the beginning of your career. He said that if only the spirit of your first days could come back"—Her tone grew quicker, as though she feared ridicule in Loder's silence. "He asked me to use my influence. I know that I have little—none, perhaps—but I couldn't tell him that, and so—so I promised."

"And have kept the promise?" Loder spoke at random. Her manner and her words had both affected him. There was a sensation of unreality in his brain.

"Yes," she answered. "I always want to do—what I can."

As she spoke a sudden realization of the effort she was making struck upon him, and with it his scorn of Chilcote rose in renewed force.

"My intention"—he began, turning to her. Then the futility of any declaration silenced him. "I shall think over what you say," he added after a minute's wait. "I suppose I can't say more than that."

Their eyes met and she smiled a little.

"I don't believe I expected as much," she said. "I think I'll go now. You have been wonderfully patient." Again she smiled slightly, at the same time extending her hand. The gesture was quite friendly, but in Loder's eyes it held relief as well as friendliness, and when their hands met he noticed that her fingers barely brushed his.

He picked up her cloak and carried it across the room. As he held the door open he laid it quietly across her arm.

"I'll think over what you've said," he repeated.

Again she glanced at him as if suspecting sarcasm. Then, partly reassured, she paused. "You will always despise your opportunities, and I suppose I shall always envy them," she said. "That's the way with men and women. Good night." With another faint smile she passed out into the corridor.

Loder waited until he heard the outer door close, then he crossed the room thoughtfully and dropped into the chair she had vacated. He sat for a time looking at the hand her fingers had touched. Then he lifted his head with a characteristic movement.

"By Jove," he said aloud, "how cordially she detests him!"

CHAPTER IX.

Loder slept soundly and dreamlessly in Chilcote's canopy bed. To him the big room, with its severe magnificence, suggested nothing of the gloom and solitude that it held in its owner's eyes. The ponderous furniture, the high ceiling, the heavy curtains, unchanged since the days of Chilcote's grandfather, all hinted at a far reaching ownership that stirred him. The ownership was mythical in his regard and the possessions a mirage, but they filled the day and surely sufficient for the day.

That was his frame of mind as he opened his eyes on the following morning and lay appreciative of his comfort, of the softness of his couch, even of the light that filtered through the curtain slits, suggestive of a world recreated. With day all things seemed possible to a healthy man. He stretched his arms luxuriously, delighting in the glossy smoothness of the sheets.

What was it Chilcote had said? Better live for a day than exist for a life time. That was true, and life had begun. At thirty-six he was to know it for the first time.

He smiled, but without irony. Man is at his best at thirty-six, he mused. He has retained his enthusiasms and shed his exuberances; he has learned what to pick up and what to pass by; he no longer imagines that to drain a cup one must taste the dregs. He closed his eyes and stretched again not his arms only, but his whole body. The pleasure of his mental state in sitting up in bed, he pressed the electric bell.

Chilcote's new valet responded.

"Pull those curtains, Renwick," he said. "What's the time?" He had passed the ordeal of Renwick's eyes the night before.

The man was slow, even a little stupid. He drew back the curtains carefully, then looked at the small clock on the dressing table. "Eight o'clock, sir. I didn't expect the bell so early, sir."

Loder felt reproved, and a pause followed.

"May I bring your cup of tea, sir?"

"No, not just yet. I'll have a bath first."

Renwick showed ponderous uncertainty. "Warn, sir?" he hazarded.

"No, no!"

Still perplexed, the man left the room.

Loder smiled to himself. The chances of discovery in that quarter were not large. He was inclined to think that Chilcote had even overstepped necessity in the matter of his valet's dullness. He breakfasted alone, following Chilcote's habit, and after breakfast found his way to the study.

As he entered Greening rose with the same conciliatory haste that he had shown the night before.

Loder nodded to him. "Early at work?" he said pleasantly.

Continued next week.

FRED STICKLES NEW ASSISTANT POSTMASTER

It is announced that Fred Stickles, second deputy in the county clerk's office, has been appointed assistant postmaster at the Eugene office, to succeed W. A. Kuykendall, who has tendered his resignation, the same to take effect on January 1, 1907. Mr. Stickles is qualified in every way to fill the position. He is young and energetic, and has given entire satisfaction in the clerk's office, where he will be greatly missed. County Clerk Lee has secured a competent man to take his place.

Mr. Kuykendall, who has held the position of assistant postmaster for the past four years, is interested in two Eugene business houses, Yerington & Kuykendall's drug store and the Seattle Produce Company's wholesale commission house—and after the first of the year will devote his entire attention to them.

LOWELL ITEMS.

(Special Correspondence.)

Lowell, Dec. 19.—Wm. Kelsay took a load of the Oregon Central surveyors to Goshen and other points Monday, the 17th. They will take a holiday vacation and may not return until February or March.

Walter Sharpe has laid aside his backboard on the mail route between here and Hazel Dell on account of the condition of the roads and is carrying the mail on horseback.

Mrs. Maggie Cain made a trip to the county seat last week on business. She is figuring on the construction of a new residence early in the spring as she can get the lumber hauled. Clarence McBee is also building a new house and as soon as the roads are in good condition will erect a substantial residence near Rush Island.

Mr. Bingham, forest ranger, was a passenger on Hazel Dell one day last week.

A sick man from the railroad surveying camp passed here Monday last for Eugene under the impression that he had appendicitis.

There will be in Xmas tree at the Rush Island school house Christmas eve.

Burt Kelsay is now going on crutches on account of cutting his knee with an ax while shopping wood.

The river made a sudden rise of several feet last Sunday on account of the snow melting in the mountains.

Mac Crow and Mr. Fletcher started for the gold mines on the North Fork Monday evening. Mr. Fletcher will work in the mines all winter.

GENERAL NEWS TOPICS.

An electric line is being run from Spokane, through Palouse to Lewiston, Idaho, a distance of 146 miles, and work is now being pushed on it.

A big fire at Valdez, Alaska, destroyed the bank, Stella hotel and several other buildings, causing a loss of about \$50,000. It was started by a burglar.

The farmers of Agency Plains, near Bend, Oregon, are preparing a petition to the Oregon legislature, asking for an appropriation of \$80,000 for the purpose of drilling deep wells for water on the plains.

Car shortage in the Palouse country, in Eastern Washington, is so bad that wheat is left to rot on the platforms of the depots and cannot be hauled away.

Sidney Sloan, the Spokane boy murderer, has been declared insane by five physicians.

Advertised Letters.

Eugene, Or., December 19.

Baker, Mrs. James.

Hall, Mrs. Phebe.

Harley, C. M.

Bowers, A.

Bowers, Sam.

Brown, J. Miles.

Cory, Rev. A. T.

Dunn, Miss Mabel.

Davis, John.

Emerson, Miss Phebe.

Forester, Henry.

Gates, R. B.

Hinton, Benj.

Jones, John.

Jordan, R. P.

McCready, Mrs. Annetta.

McGehe, Frank.

Mitchell, John H.

Mix, Geo.

Newton, Olive. (2)

Olsen, May.

Potter, Miss Laura. (2)

Ross, Mrs. J. D.

Stanley, Miss Cate.

J. L. PAGE, P. M.

Newt Bryant, the Franklin merchant, was in the city today.



CASTORIA.
The Kind You Run Always Bought
Bears the
Signature
of
J. H. Stearns