

Making Up For It

My family never intended that I should follow the stage as a profession. They considered themselves above it, though for what reason I could not clearly understand, seeing that the position and comforts they enjoyed were derived from a fortune amassed by my father, who was himself an actor. He died when I was very young, but the talent which he possessed was supposed to have descended to me.

There is no doubt nature intended me for a “mummer.” The thousand impudent mocking antics of boyhood increased as I grew to man’s estate. I used to “take off,” as it is called, everybody and everything to perfection, from the popular tragedian of the day to Punch and Judy; not a novelty, from a street-cry to a new tenor, escaped me; and it was the generally-expressed opinion among my acquaintances that I was only fit for the stage, and should do no good at anything else.

Yet my elder brothers and sisters—great people in their own circle—would not hear of it; so I was eventually installed as a junior clerk in a Government office. Here, however, my propensities soon brought me to grief. Sundry overheard derisive imitations of my chiefs, mingled with impromptu war-dances with ruler-and-desk accompaniments, performed during office-hours, to the immense delight of my fellow-clerks of my own age, chiefly brought about this result. Reprimand followed reprimand, until finally it was politely intimated that my resignation would be acceptable. This was duly sent in, amidst a great storm in my family.

Now, from what I may call the first of my latch-key days, I had contracted many theatrical friendships to which my well-known name was a certain passport. I was free of nearly all the theatres, before and behind the scenes, and many a time, for the fun of the thing, assisted in a piece requiring a multitude for a row, or other demonstration.

Private theatricals, of course, were my hobby; and, in the association for the encouragement of this amusement to which I belonged, I was a leading star.

Thus, when my retirement from office begot so much indignation at home, I retaliated by indulging in my long pent-up wish to join the brotherhood of the “sock and buskin.” There was no difficulty about my doing so. The knowledge of my determination, once circulated in the profession, several engagements readily offered themselves, and two in the metropolis, when I should have served a fair apprenticeship in the country.

At it, then, I went, *con amore*, and very hard work did I find it. Still the love was there, and I hope the ability. I played a round of the most ridiculously opposite characters, from very old men down to very young ones; from grim warriors to the tenderest of lovers; from weird witches to a dragon in an extravaganza; in short, I served my time, and in due course achieved a sufficiently prominent rank in my profession.

It must be admitted that a theatrical company in the country does not offer to a man of any refinement a very large field for the acquisition of desirable friendships; yet I had formed one in the person of a young fellow of really good family, who had taken to the stage, under not dissimilar circumstances to mine. In fact, we were rather alike in stature and person generally, so

much so that the manager of the Swellboro' circuit took advantage of this resemblance and played the *Comedy of Errors* for many nights with great success, the parts of the two Dromios of course being cast to me and Richard Hallerton.

A mutual understanding had existed between us from the first time we met, and for several years we laid our plans so as to be engaged as much as possible at the same theatre, during which time we grew more and more appreciative of each other, and a really very warm and hearty friendship was the result.

He, poor fellow, never made much way in the art. His health failed him frequently; more than this, he married and had a family, and having broken entirely with his own people through his adoption of the stage as a profession, it was as much as he could manage to keep things going. I was not quite so badly off for private resources; moreover, I earned a larger salary, which enabled me not unfrequently to be of service to him. At the close of a particularly arduous season I returned to the familiar locality of Swellboro'. This time, however, as a visitor to that fashionable watering-place to recruit my health, give my razors a holiday, and study one or two new and important parts. My friend Richard Hallerton was there as usual, slaving away in the old groove, and had sunk, I am sorry to say, into a third-rate actor.

His family had increased, as was to be expected, and with it his normal state of impecuniosity. This became more than usually apparent after our first meeting was over, and we had entered somewhat into domestic affairs. It appeared that he had been laid up for three months shortly before this time, consequently his salary had been stopped; and he had fallen fearfully into arrears with his landlord. Credit to a certain extent he had no difficulty in obtaining, as he was especially a favorite among all who knew him, for his good-nature and kind-heartedness, and seemed to be as permanently a part of the theatre as its chandelier or act-drop. There was no chance of poor Dick Hallerton running away, and no one feared that their pockets would eventually suffer. He had a hopeful, I may even say a graceful, manner of getting over the importunities of creditors when they became pressing. Indeed, truth to tell, he was one of those curious anomalies which are only to be met with in connection with the stage. Thoroughly gentlemanlike, somewhat good-looking, with a pleasant voice and manner, he gave you the idea in private life of being a man who would of necessity look well on the stage—a “jeune premier” born and bred. But, alas and alas! once with the foot-lights between himself and an audience, the whole bearing of the man seemed to change. It was not that he lacked confidence—stage fright had long since disappeared—yet somehow or other his voice did not tell; he lost the entire grace of his bearing, and, despite great skill in his make-up, his face had no expression; and certainly altogether to my thinking, even fond of him as I was, he was one of the worst actors I ever saw.

This fact struck me more forcibly than it had ever done before on going in front the first night after my arrival in Swellboro.' We had spent the afternoon together in the full enjoyment of each other's society. I went with him to his dressing-room door, and then took my seat to see part of the performance.

They were doing a new piece in which I had gained some reputation in town, and tempting offers had been made by the manager for me to “star” in the part at Swellboro' for a week or two. This, however, was not my policy; and I had resisted all his overtures. Dick consequently had retained

his *rôle*; and I was a little curious to see what he would do with it. As it was a favorite part of mine, my adverse criticism of his performance may possibly be attributed to the proverbial jealousy of the profession; I don't think it was. However, be this as it may, my honest opinion is that, at the aforesaid dressing-room door, I left an accomplished and refined gentleman. When the curtain rose upon the comedy, I saw before me, in one word, a mere puppet, possessing not two ideas about the part he was playing. The only thing he did not fail in was his accurate get-up, so wonderfully like mine that had those been the days of photography it would have been scarcely possible to distinguish one from the other, had we both been taken in the same position.

It was on walking home that night that poor Hallerton disclosed to me the real state of his finances, and touched me to the quick by the unobtrusive and earnestly-pathetic appeal he made to me for help. "Ah, my poor friend!" thought I, "if you could only speak in that way upon the stage you would very soon be able to do without my assistance, or that of anyone else." The result of our conference was that I promised him what he required; but, as I knew I should be occupied the whole of the following day, I arranged to bring him the money (£30) to the theatre the next evening.

He resided in a lonely, out-of-the way suburb—gaps of open country, interspersed with patches of brick-fields, heralding the erection of more tenements, intervened between it and the town, which was now gradually outgrowing itself. We shook hands at the top of a road, still almost rural, and which led across the fields to the three or four houses, in one of which he lived. We parted with a hearty goodnight; he in better spirits, as he said, than he had been for months; but for myself—well I was not particularly elated; I felt that this kind of life could not last for him, poor fellow! And a foreboding of evil crept over me, mingled with a curious speculative regret at the mysterious cause which seemed to operate so pertinaciously against his success as an actor.

"I'll tell you what it is, Jack. I must have that money; there's no mistake about it. You've been a promising, and a promising, until I'm pretty nigh sick of the word. It seems as if you'd remembered what they used to tell ye at school, though I 'spects you hadn't much o' your larning from there—that some promises are made like pie-crust, only to be broken."

"Don't I say you shall have it next week? and I can't do more. You can't get blood out of a stone. Next week the Lancashire Spring Handicap comes off. I've had a first-rate tip; I've got my money on; and I am safe to pull off a pretty round sum—when I'll pay all your—calls at once."

"Yes, you've got your money on; my money you mean; and half a dozen other people's money. What business has a chap like you to go betting? you know nothing at all about horses—how should you? And you gets taken in, and taken in, and loses enough a'most every year to keep a large family. You think you are very knowing about your 'tips,' and stables, and good things; but if it warn't for what you earns in the the-a-ter, through having your head on the right way for that sort of work, you'd have been lagged long ago. When I lent you the tin you promised you'd never go into another o' them betting-houses for a year; and three weeks afterward, didn't I see you a-coming out o' Lington's with a mug on you more like an undertaker's than a—"

"Now, you'd best shut up. I don't want no more o' your—sermons here. When I want to hear that kind o' game, I can go round the corner. You mind your own—"

This edifying conversation, to which I had been an involuntary listener, was here brought to a conclusion by the shrill sound of the prompter's whistle, and the noise and bustle ensuing upon a change of scene.

I had arrived at the theatre, according to my arrangement with Hallerton, during the progress of the performance. He happened then to be on the stage, and I strolled down to the O. P. wing. It was while waiting there, as it chanced all alone, that I heard what passed on the other side of the flat against which I was leaning. I paid no attention to this dialogue at the time, and it was only subsequent occurrences which invested it with anything like interest for me.

When Hallerton came off at the conclusion of the scene, as he did by the entrance where I was standing, we walked away together up to the back of the stage. Nearly everybody was now engaged close down to the front—that is, in technical language, before the first grooves—and we were left by ourselves.

“Here are the notes, dear old boy!” said I, handing him the crisp little packet. “Don't say a word about thanks; I am only too glad that it has pleased the Fates to make me able to help you. I hope it will put you straight for a time; at any rate, don't bother yourself by thinking how or when you are going to pay me: if the time ever comes when you are able to do so (and for your sake I hope that it is not far off), all well and good; but, for the present, pray take it without anything like a thought for the future.”

Hallerton was touched evidently by what I said, murmuring many earnest thanks as he squeezed my hand in reply. We were soon interrupted by the call-boy's well-known words, “You are called, Mr. Hallerton,” upon which he walked hastily down to the entrance, there to await his cue. As I turned slowly to follow him, one of the carpenters, shirt-sleeved and white-capped, emerged from a door in the set scene, close to which Dick and myself had held our short interview.

This trivial circumstance did not impress me at the moment, and I only set it down here as a slight thread thrown out to be taken up at the proper time, as bearing rather importantly upon the fabric of my story. When the performance was over for that night, the lights nearly all put out, the auditorium covered with the long dangling canvas, the stage cleared of its scenery, and only now occupied by the night fireman, who was lazily dragging the snake-like water-pipes across the boards, I idly lingered to take my friend's arm as far as his road and mine lay together.

He had been engaged in the last scene of the last piece, and almost everyone had left the theatre by the time we emerged from the stage-door into the dark, drizzling night. A carpenter, putting on his coat and hat, with his back toward us, was the only person in the hall as we passed out. The weather was uncomfortable in the extreme—one of those soft, greasy nights when you made, as the saying goes, two steps backward for every one forward.

Indeed it was so bad that Hallerton would not allow me to walk to the corner of the road where we had parted the previous evening, saying, “It will be awfully muddy out of the town, and so dark that you will hardly find your way back.”

I did not press my company on him, for the prospect was not inviting; it was very late, the people at my hotel seemed to be all in bed; so my proffered glass of grog was rejected by Hallerton, and we parted at the door-steps of the inn. Poor fellow! I little thought, as I saw him disappear into the darkness, that we should meet no more!

An earnest conversation in the coffee-room the following morning between a waiter and one of the guests of the hotel, a few words of which I caught, arrested my attention, and when the man began to serve my breakfast I said, "What was that I heard you talking about to that gentleman? What was it you said had been found in a brick-field?"

"Oh, haven't you heard, Sir? terrible thing! only just discovered! Body found this morning out in the brick-fields, near the road leading to them new houses—mean little place, you know. A good many gents from the theatre lodges out there. Beg your pardon, Sir, not gents o' your standing—I don't mean that. They tell me this was one of them; he that used to play the first young men—Hallerton, I think they called him—"

"Hallerton!" exclaimed I, springing from my seat. "What do you mean, man? what do you say? Mr. Hallerton found in the brick-fields?"

"Yes, Sir; murdered—dead."

"Great powers!" I went on, hardly able to understand his words. "Speak out, explain yourself. Why, he was my dearest friend! I only parted from him at this door late last night."

"Yes, Sir; that's what they say. He was alone as he crossed the brick-fields, leastways, not quite alone neither; he'd got one companion, at any rate, one too many for him, poor fellow," continued the waiter, and how much more to the same purpose I know not—he had said enough to take all thoughts of breakfast away from me.

I interrupted him, as may be imagined, by an earnest demand for his authority for the name of the unfortunate man, at the same time begging for all details, which were only too readily supplied, in such a circumstantial manner as left little doubt of their truth. Yes, poor Richard Hallerton had been found, as the waiter said, brutally murdered; his body and the ground near him bearing strong evidences of a struggle.

The chief cause of death appeared to have been a heavy blow dealt by some weighty instrument at the side of his head; but there were marks also of strangulation, his neck-cloth being twisted, as if it had been used as a noose. A bunch of keys and a few coppers were all that was found upon him, but his pockets had been evidently rifled, for they were nearly every one of them turned inside out. Robbery obviously had been the object of the assassin; but it was urged by those who knew Richard and his circumstances that the villain could have obtained but a poor reward for his desperate deed. I, of course, alone knew of the two ten and the two five pound notes that I had given my friend only a few hours before. The commotion, horror, and excitement which prevailed in the town can be easily imagined, as may also my feelings.

Everything possible under the circumstances was done. The police were set on the alert, and by the evening they had gained something like a clue to the discovery of the murderer, but it consisted merely in the absence from his post of the master-carpenter of the theatre.

It turned out that this man had only recently been taken on to the establishment. He had the reputation of being a very clever stage machinist and contriver of trap effects, but he did not bear the best of characters; indeed it was well known that he had lost several good berths through his dangerous carelessness, having been the cause by it of many a sad accident in pantomime time. Moreover, he was a drunkard, given to gambling and betting, and frequently had “stood in,” as the slang goes, in diverse petty and discreditable card-playing transactions.

Within the last month the discovery of something of this kind obliged him suddenly to leave a large northern metropolis.

His known ability in his calling, however, was sufficient to gain for him an engagement at Swellboro’, the liberal management there being ever ready, as the bills frequently stated, to procure the best available talent, “regardless of expense.” It now appeared that this man had never been seen or heard of at his lodgings since he left the theatre on the night of Hallerton’s murder, and the stage-door-keeper stated that he was the last person to leave the place. A description of him, and an offer of a large reward for his apprehension, was sent all over the kingdom. The efficiency of the detective service in those days had not reached its present pitch of excellence, and many months elapsed before the fellow was taken, which fact was not made known to me until a considerable time after.

As may be imagined, I had long ere that returned to the metropolis, and the affair, even in Swellboro’, had passed off as a nine-days’ wonder. The man was arraigned, however, upon the charge of murder, but the evidence for the prosecution utterly broke down. Indeed, there was *none* save the suspicious circumstance of his mysterious disappearance at the time of the tragedy. This he accounted for easily by an assertion that he got drunk; and in one of his habitual fits of recklessness went straight off to some race-meeting in the midland counties, whither, he asserted, he walked. He utterly denied the charge; and the long time which had elapsed before he was apprehended rendered the authorities lukewarm in endeavoring to obtain any minor details that might have been used against him. Slight suspicion was all he had to contend with; and country justices did not even deem it a case for a jury; so the fellow was once more let loose upon the world.

Thus all hope of clearing up the mystery ended. I had told every thing I knew at the inquest; and when the circumstances under which I and my poor friend had parted are remembered, it will be evident that the murder could not have been laid to anyone’s charge without further proof, the obtaining of which seemed impossible. I threw a certain light upon the motive for the deed, but as I could not give the numbers of the notes, that went for nothing.

It is true, I then remembered the conversation which I heard between two men respecting the payment of a debt, one of whom was doubtless the fellow in question. This, however, I could not swear to, for I had never seen him. Strong, also, as was the likelihood of this same man being the rascal who had emerged from the scene-door just after I had given Hallerton the money, and who

probably *saw* me do so, it proved nothing, for I could not identify that man with the one who had been pressed for payment in the conversation referred to. Again, had it been possible for me to do all this, it would have been no evidence.

So, as I have said, the sad event died out of men's minds, and passed away into one of those many undiscovered murders, only half, perhaps, of which number are ever heard of at all—ever heard of, at least, as murders.

Not so, however, was it to my mind—not to me was it the mere removal of a poor country player from this world's stage. The mimic drama had not lost much, but I had lost an affectionate and true-hearted friend; and it was not likely I should return from my trip to Swellboro' the same man I had been. Anything like forgetfulness of his loss, and the sad manner of it, were out of the question.

Mingled with the sorrow that hung over me from this period of my life was a strong desire to bring the murderer to justice. There seemed to be no way by which I could accomplish this; yet, despite my misgivings, an inward conviction often intruded itself upon me that I should some day or other prove the instrument of retribution. The money I had given Hallerton was doubtless the cause indirectly of his death; and I never abandoned the hope that, as through an act of mine he had lost his life, so also by me would his death be avenged.

A sound, an odor in the air, a word, a relic of a dress, who has not felt the influence of any or one of such trifles, in recalling a whole train of thought and circumstance long since passed and gone? All is brought back vividly before us, and we feel as if we were again going through the time and condition; knowing, nevertheless, that it has happened before, yet feeling that it must rather have been in another world, or in our dreams, that we were chief movers in the scene.

I first realized this mysterious kind of feeling some nine months after the events just recorded had happened, and while I was fulfilling an engagement at a large northern town.

In making my arrangements with the manager, it was decided that I should go through a round of my principal parts, one of which was the identical *rôle* which poor Hallerton had been playing at Swellboro' at the time I recorded a criticism on his acting. I had not appeared in it since, but when the name of the piece was mentioned, the sensations hinted at above crept over me in all their subtle influence.

I would willingly have escaped from playing it altogether, and even made a feeble effort to get out of it; but the manager calculated on its being one of his trump cards, and refused to listen to any proposal for its withdrawal.

Moreover, it was settled that I was to open my engagement with it. The piece had been frequently done at the Ferrarspool Theatre, and as my presence in my original part was the only novelty, no full rehearsal was considered necessary—an hour or two's coaching of those concerned in my principal scenes being all that was requisite. Indeed, there was no time for more, as I was prevented by various arrangements from reaching Ferrarspool until within a few hours of the rising of the curtain.

I went straight to my dressing room at the theatre, and long before there was any occasion for it I made my dresser prepare everything for me. Somehow, I was unusually nervous; I had never played before this audience; and though conscious of being quite safe as to my success, I experienced a certain disquiet which was inexplicable.

The public are apt to imagine that a successful veteran of the stage can know nothing of such discomfort; but they are quite wrong. I think I am safe in saying that, among all our best actors, there is no commoner sensation than nervousness, especially on the occasion of “first appearances,” or in new parts.

Still, my present state was hardly warranted by the surrounding circumstances. The piece in question was a modern comedy, the dress that of twenty years ago. Tight gaiter-fitting trousers with straps, showing only the tip and heel of a varnished Wellington-boot, frock-coat with close-made sleeves buttoned at the wrist, where the shirt-cuff overlapped them; while a high black-satin stock, with a gorgeous display of it adorned by pins and chains to match, backed up an open-fronted white waistcoat, with a thin ridge of a crimson under one just peeping out between the satin and the jean. A small sharp-pointed upright shirt-collar, a clean-shaven chin and upper lip, with the mutton-chop whisker then in vogue, a rather long head of hair, parted very much on one side, and highly suggestive of the barber’s block, formed an appropriate apex to this relic of the dark ages of morning costume.

Such was the dress which I noticed at the time Hallerton had so rigidly copied from mine, and which made our personal resemblance more absurd perhaps than it had ever been before.

Miles, my loquacious dresser, as he one by one produced these different articles of attire, was good enough to say, “I am glad to see these things in use again, Sir; it is a long time since you played Captain Theodore—more than a year, I think. Did not somebody tell me they were doing this piece at Swellboro’ when Mr. Hallerton was murdered? I heard that this was the last part he played, poor gentleman!—not that he ever *could* play it, though he would *look* it well enough, because he would look exactly like you. I never saw him in it, I am happy to say, but I know just what he would do. I know to a *t* how he’d have spoken those lines beginning ‘Lady Isabel, I swear to you, since we parted in the crush-room that night—’” And then Miles favored me, as was his wont, with a long quotation from my part.

Whether this habit of his had arisen from a latent idea, which he was known to possess, that if he had chosen he could have startled the town by his histrionic powers, or whether it was done as an act of kindness to brush up my memory, I never clearly knew; but certain it was that he never dressed me without quoting some important speech from my *rôle*, whatever it was.

This habit often tickled me, but on the present occasion I was scarcely in the mood to be amused by it; for as the familiar words struck on my ear, the whole fatal miserable time at Swellboro’ came back forcibly, tangibly almost, to my mind.

I had done little more than glance at my cues, feeling pretty safe as to the words, and being glad to avoid their repetition as much as possible. So I stopped Miles rather abruptly; yet as I did so a

certain fascination took possession of me, and I irresistibly thought what a close imitation I could give of Richard in this part if I chose. His voice, his stilted manner, his immobile face, all were at my command.

As I contemplated my make-up, and involuntarily assumed his expression, the likeness in the looking-glass was so startling that I was tempted, to Miles's infinite delight, to give a little imitation of my friend.

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Miles; “perfectly wonderful; it is the most extraordinary thing I ever saw! Do, pray do a bit more of it, Sir; try his exit at the end of the fourth act.” And I was compelled, it seemed to me by some inward motive power, to do as he requested. “Bless my heart, Sir,” he went on, “why don't you give an entertainment like old Mathews did? You would make three times the money if you had it all to yourself. Of all the many imitations I ever saw, this is the finest.”

Even the deep sense of regret I felt for my friend's fate was overruled by my inborn turn for mimicry, and except for the difficulty I have always had in curbing this power, such a proceeding would have appeared heartless in the extreme. But, indeed, I must say I was myself conscious that the imitation was marvelously close; and I continued now, perhaps out of gratification to a sort of vanity, walking up and down the room, repeating the part on and on, until my own voice sounded to myself like Hallerton's, and in my mind's eye I actually saw him, as I had done the night I went into the front at Swellboro'.

A knock at the door, and the words “Overture's on, Sir,” restored me but partially to myself, and do what I would, I could not throw off an irresistible notion which seemed to be gaining upon me, that with a very little tempting I should play the part right through with an imitation of Hallerton.

“Confound it!” I thought, “this will never do;” but the absurdity possessed me, and I walked downstairs to the prompter's call exactly as Hallerton would have done.

Just as I was entering the green-room a carpenter, with a somewhat unsteady gait, was backing out from a recess or scene-dock with a heavy piece of scenery, and at the very moment I was turning into the doorway ran right up against me. I, in not very measured language, cursed him for a blockhead. He turned, with a half-sort of apology on his lips. As he did so the most curious sensation I had ever experienced ran through my brain.

In an instant, strongly impressed as I then was with the recollection of poor Hallerton, I remembered the man's face—the master-carpenter at Swellboro'!—clear, defined, unmistakable, not a doubt of it; yes, the fellow was before me, looking exactly as when he emerged from the scene-door directly after I gave the packet of notes to Richard.

Like a flash of electricity it all passed through my mind; with it, and as rapidly, came an unerving conviction that I stood face to face with Hallerton's murderer!

More rapidly than it is possible to describe, and in the hundredth part of the time it takes me to

tell it, I settled what to do; for not less impressed by me did this man seem than I by him. He grew deadly pale; his eyes, already swollen and bloodshot, now almost started out of his head, as, throwing his hands up into the air, he cried, "My God! a ghost!"

With a tight grasp I seized him by the throat, and brought him on his knees. "You ruffian!" I exclaimed, closely continuing my Hallerton imitation, "you thought you had done for me, did you? but you see I am alive, and strong enough to transport you for life. Be thankful that I did not die, and instantly confess your guilt. I am no ghost, as you shall find. And when you took the money from my pockets in the brick-fields by Swellboro' Common you might well have thought from the blow you dealt me that it was not likely I should trouble you again; but here I am, and you shall pay dearly for your cold-blooded atrocity!"

As I delivered these words in a pompous, theatrical tone, precisely similar to that which I had often heard my old friend use upon the stage when bringing an offender to justice, I pulled the fellow into the green-room, where great commotion was reigning.

"Look at this scoundrel, ladies and gentlemen," I went on. "You all remember how one night last year, at Swellboro', I, Richard Hallerton, was foully robbed and nearly murdered on my way home from the theatre; how for months I lay at death's door, most people supposing I was dead; how, after much care and surgical skill, I recovered, to be here once more among you; and how I swore sooner or later to bring my assassin to justice. Fate this night has helped me, and this villain here shall soon have a pair of handcuffs on him, for it was he to whom I owe all my suffering. Hear him now, ladies and gentlemen, with my hand at his throat, confess that he is the culprit. Admit it, you thief!" said I, shaking the breath nearly out of his body; "as you hope for mercy hereafter, admit it!"

The poor, trembling wretch was from the first moment paralyzed by fear. Also, I could tell, he was slightly the worse for drink; and now, as I forced him to the all-important point, it was with difficulty he could articulate a syllable. Nevertheless he managed to stammer forth, loud enough for all in the room to hear, "Yes, it's true; it's all true; but I didn't go to murder ye; I never meant that; only ye fought so gallus hard, I thought I wouldn't get off clear; but I never meant to murder ye, so help me!"

He was a pitiable sight, and even now scarcely seemed to believe, though my grip was pretty hard on him, that I was not an apparition rather than flesh and blood.

A maudlin condition brought on by drink doubtless favored this opinion, and conducted not a little to the facility with which I extracted his confession. Excited and earnest of purpose as I then was, serious as the issue at stake had also become, I was not unmindful of the mingling with it all of a certain comicality. As I continued my imitative tone in a raised voice, many of the people then in the green-room who had known and acted with Hallerton, possibly in this same piece, seemed as equally skeptical with regard to my substantiality as the malefactor then in my power. At a glance I saw some of the ladies shrink back from me, while one or two of the men looked dazed and confounded.

Prolonging the illusion, therefore, yet a little, a policeman was sent for, and I then and there gave

the carpenter in charge for robbery and attempt to murder. He was consequently taken off by the constable, with his conviction of a resurrection undisturbed.

I had but a short time then for a full explanation of this sensation drama of real life, in which I had been “playing in earnest” behind the scenes. The overture had been twice played, and the audience were beginning to manifest considerable impatience. Little conscious were they how much more exciting and serious a performance had just been enacted in the rear of that green curtain than they would witness upon its rising for their edification.

The result can be pretty well anticipated. I obtained a private interview with the magistrate the following morning, explained all that had taken place, then entered the court in my proper person, together with many brother comedians, to charge the prisoner, upon his own confession, with the murder of Richard Hallerton.

Meanwhile, despite the caution given him at the police-station, the fellow had written a full account of his crime. A remand gave the Swellboro’ police an opportunity of identifying the prisoner as the man they had previously had in custody.

A jury, of course, eventually pronounced him guilty; but recommended him to mercy on the plea of his confession, the way in which it had been brought about, and his solemn assertion that he never intended to commit murder.

Sentence of death was consequently commuted to transportation for life; and thus was my conviction fulfilled that upon me would devolve the onus of clearing up this mystery. It was but a poor satisfaction after all; yet it was the only glimpse I ever had of the “silver lining” to the cloud that has hovered over me ever since the time in which my luckless friend met with his sad fate.

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