

Job Quigley's Lesson
by Judge Clark

“Beg pardon, sir; but you’ve dropped your pocketbook.”

Job Quigley clapped both hands *on* his pantaloons pockets, and then thrust them both *in*.

“N-no, I haven’t,” he stammered excitedly, as his dexter fist reappeared with the article in question tight in its grasp; “but, confound it, if you didn’t frighten me!”

“I thought *this* might be yours,” said the first speaker, a serious looking young man in secondhand mourning, with crepe on his hat, and a dilapidated carpet-bag in his hand.

Job could have bit his tongue off as his eye fell on a plethoric looking wallet, which the stranger stood ready to deliver had he said the word, or rather if he had *not* said it so quickly.

“I was almost certain it was yours,” the serious young man resumed. “I saw it just after you passed, and such things are not apt to lie long here.”

“I tell you it an’t mine,” Job surlily growled, out of humor with himself, and, of course, with everybody else.

“It’s a serious loss to somebody,” mused the other, as he opened the pocketbook and displayed a roll of greenbacks with figures on the corners that made his listener’s eyes water.

“Well, *you’re* in luck anyhow,” the latter curtly answered, and was about to pass on.

“Of course, I must endeavor to find the true owner,” answered the other; “but it happens most unfortunately, that I am just setting out in answer to a distant summons to the bedside of a dying mother. (He winked his eyes very hard, but his grief was too deep for tears.)

Mastering his emotion, he continued:

“I feel, however, as though I could confide in you. You have the appearance of an honest man; besides, had you been otherwise, you would certainly have claimed this property as your own.”

“Of course I would,” was the gruff response, followed by the mental query, “Why the deuce *didn’t* I?”

“If I trust you with this treasure, will you give me your solemn promise to spare no effort to discover the owner?”

“Eh? What?” exclaimed Job, picking up his ears, and checking, with a jerk, his movement of departure.

“If I place the money in your hands, for I must leave it with somebody, will you pledge me your word to keep it safely, and restore it, as soon as practicable, to the person to whom it belongs?”

“Certainly,” answered Job, tempering his language to avoid giving offence to the young man’s feelings.

“Of course, for the return of a sum so considerable, a handsome reward will be given; and while I should have asked for nothing for myself, I should have felt justified nevertheless in accepting a reasonable gratuity to be distributed among the many objects of charity daily falling in my way.”

“Preacher, I suppose?” Job ventured to inquire.

“Traveling missionary,” replied the serious young man; meditatively adding:

“On the whole, I think it no more than fair, to insist, as a condition of intrusting to another the performance of a duty to be so liberally rewarded, upon receiving some portion of that reward in advance. As already intimated, I seek nothing for myself; but I do not feel at liberty to forgo an opportunity, so providentially cast in my way, of adding to my little stock for the relief of the distresses of others.”

“How much might you be willin’ to take?” was the cautious inquiry.

“I think fifty dollars would not be unreasonable.”

“Lookee here, stranger”—and Job’s voice became as persuasive as when he stood behind his own counter at Debbysville—“the fact is I haven’t got but twenty dollars about me. I’ve deposited the rest of my money with the landlord where I’m stoppin’, and that’s a long shot from here.”

“The sum you name is nothing.”

“I dunno; twenty dollars will go a good ways in charity matters.”

“Well, give me the twenty, and when you get the reward you may remit the balance to the address which I shall give you.”

The bargain was closed. Job handed over the XX, and, with trembling hand, received the object of his wishes, together with a card on which the stranger had written his address, and the two went their several ways.

Job Quigley, it is time to inform the reader, was a thrifty grocer in an interior village. He was considered a sharp man at home, up to the tricks of the trade, and of not *more* than average honesty. He was in no sense a vicious man, but was a man of easy virtue. As long as there was no temptation to do wrong, or the risk of discovery was great, he was a pattern of uprightness. Under opposite circumstances, we have already had some insight as to his character.

Job sought the first opportunity of privately scrutinizing his prize. It turned out of greater value than he had anticipated. There was rising twenty-five hundred dollars, and not a scrap of writing, or an indication of any kind, affording the slightest clue to its owner.

Job's integrity stood a poor chance under the circumstances. The temptation was very great, and the chances of detection exceedingly small. Indeed, he had had but one purpose from the beginning, and that was to keep the money and say nothing about it.

Evening came, and as he walked down Broadway, a flaming play-bill headed "THE FORTY THIEVES" attracted his notice. He had a taste for the theatricals, and the name of the piece striking his fancy, he concluded to see it. He didn't get to New York often, and for once felt that he could afford to do the handsome thing by himself.

He had no money with him but that in the newly found pocketbook, from which he selected the smallest bill he could find, and going up to the office called for a ticket, which he received with his change. He was making his way to the entrance, when a hand was laid on his shoulder.

Turning about, he found himself face to face with a keen-looking, middle-aged man, plainly but genteelly dressed, by whom he was thus accosted:

"Where did you get the bill you just now passed at the office?"

Heavens! Could it be the owner of the lost pocketbook? Job was struck dumb; his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth.

"You must come with me," added the stranger; "the more quietly the better;" and passing his arm through Job's, he led him away without being observed by the crowd, and calling a coach, assisted him in, and took a seat by his side. The driver received his direction, and set off at a pace which left Job little time to collect his thoughts.

When the coach stopped he was handed out, and led through a door, over which was a brilliant light, into a room in which a man in blue uniform sat at a desk behind a railing, while several others, in the same garb, stood or lounged about in various attitudes in which people do nothing.

Although from a rural district, Job wasn't so green as not to have a suspicion of where he was. He knew the police uniform, and knew there were such things as station houses.

His blood ran cold at the thought. The money in his pocket might be identified as the proceeds of some robbery, or worse, as the property of some murdered man. The very idea gave him a choking sensation.

"What's the charge against this man?" inquired the officer at the desk.

"I saw him pass a counterfeit bill at Niblo's," answered the keen looking man—"one of a new and dangerous issue—and on being questioned, he gave no satisfactory answer.

“Have you searched his person?”

“Not yet.”

“Let it be done at once.”

Job was “*gone through*” with professional expedition.

One of the first things brought to light was the fatal pocketbook. It was quickly opened, and the roll of bills examined.

“Every one counterfeit, and all of the same issue,” said the officer. “The case is a very clear one. No honest man would be found with such a quantity of base, and no good money upon him. Lock him up for the night.”

Job essayed to speak, but his tongue refused its office, and in another moment the clang of an iron door, and the harsh grating of a key in the lock, told him he was the inmate of a prisoner’s cell.

On a bare, hard bench, he passed a night of solemn reflection. He was not guilty of the crime laid to his charge, for he had passed the bill in ignorance of its character, but had he not meditated *another* crime, equally heinous, he would never have been accused of this. And there, in that miserable dungeon, Job thought out a lesson he had never learned before: *It is never safe even to contemplate doing evil.*

In the morning he was arraigned before the judge, amid a crowd of debased and abandoned wretches, from whose contact he shrank with horror.

He was able, by this time, to give an intelligible explanation of the circumstances against him; and when the landlord with whom he stopped, and several friends who knew him came forward in his behalf, he was released on redeeming the bad bill, with an admonition hereafter to trust in serious strangers less, and read the newspapers *more*.

The New York Ledger, June 12, 1869