

From the Cosmopolitan Art Journal  
*The Stolen Miniature;*  
OR WHAT HAPPENED BY “GOING TO COURT”

All was bustle in the house of Jacob [Fitzsimmons]. His ward, the beautiful Louise, was in tears, and old Jacob was mumbling over some pretty hard words for a civilian.

‘May the scoundrel be burnt!’ he exclaimed. ‘This, Louise, is what comes of your having anything to do with these scalawags, whose pallets hav’nt color enough to paint their own sins!’ said the old fellow as he strode up and down the parlor. ‘I had nothing to do with the artist,’ said Louise, ‘except to watch his work closely, and to give especial directions for the restoration of the back-ground of the group.’ ‘Well, well. I know it; but after all, you did talk freely to the rascal—you gave him a chance to talk—you finally showed him the locket, and—and now ‘tis gone; and there is an end of it,’ responded Jacob. Louise said nothing, but gave way to her tears.—‘There, my dear, don’t cry,’ said the somewhat tender-hearted old man; ‘I shall hunt up the rascal, depend on it, and bring him justice—the rogue, the impudent puppy!’ And with this Jacob strode out of the room, took his carriage, and was soon down street, in close converse with ‘Old Hays,’ that once terror of all ‘light-fingered’ sons of ‘adverse circumstances.’

Old Jack Hays was a genius in his way. No mere talent could have scanned heaven and earth, and the human heart, as he did—it was the intuition of genius for his profession which moved him and gave him such success. Was a murder committed? Jack Hays was placed on the ‘scent,’ which, no matter how faint, he was sure to follow into hot quarters, and eventually to drag the blood-stained wretch into court. Or a forger to be discovered? The ‘old fox’ was sure of his game. Or a burglar to be entrapped? Hays was the fearless officer for the emergency. His name [etched] in police annals along with that of Vidocq—a very Nemesis of terror and retribution to evil-doers. Were he now alive, the Burdell mystery would soon find its solution.

Jacob Fitzsimmons felt easier as he drove home, for ‘Old Hays would smell out the varlet,’ he said.

And he guessed truly. A few days afterward, Jacob and his ward were ‘duly summoned before the Recorder to appear against Lefranc Bitellou, charged with theft of one gold-cased [miniature] on ivory, abstracted from the parlor of said Fitzsimmons, on Tuesday, the 10th inst.’ Jacob laughed heartily at the prospect of convicting the rogue; but Louise shrank from appearing in court against the poor artist, who, she knew, must have been sorely tempted to have taken the miniature. She recalled his gentlemanly address, his fine appreciation of his art, his [exquisite] skill in restoring the old group from the faded miniature; and she found it hard, very hard, to believe that he had actually *stolen* the miniature of herself, which her good uncle Jacob prized so highly. But there was no putting off the subpoena; and so the carriage whirled the old gentleman and his niece away ‘to court.’

‘Call in the accused!’ said the Judge, as the witnesses appeared. Lefranc was led in, having spent the night in the Tombs. He looked pale indeed, and was very weak; but old Jacob was not to be moved by compassion. ‘That’s the rogue!’ he exclaimed. ‘And is this the miniature? Said Old Hays. ‘It is—I swear to it!’ said Jacob. Louise did not speak. That pale face sent a sense of pain

through her heart, and she would have given ten times the piece of the precious painting if the artist could be dismissed. There Lefranc stood, with downcast eyes, which plainly said he had never before been arraigned as a culprit. Old Hays was at his side, as cold and hard faced as the Tombs, whose very outlines seemed to be reproduced in his features.

Louise could see no more. Her eyes filled with tears and she sank into a chair for support. The Recorder ordered the witnesses to be qualified; but Lefranc spoke up; 'I confess the theft—I took the miniature—that is all.' There was that in his bearing which showed plainly it was not a case of theft for the value of the thing. The Recorder was not the man to allow such a case to pass without investigation, and proceeded to question the artist upon the motive which prompted him to take the ivory. He simply replied, 'I should have returned it again the next day after I took it; but was too ill to paint;' and refused to answer further questions. But the Recorder was not to be foiled. Old Hays was sworn and testified that he found Lefranc in his studio, stretched out upon an old lounge, sick with the fever—that the miniature lay open upon the stand before the easel—that on the easel was a face half done, which he believed was a copy of the [miniature]—that Lefranc pleaded not to be arrested, for that his illness had prevented him from restoring the picture—that he was not to be fooled by any such representations, and had seen him safely in the [Tombs], the previous night.

The Recorder looked straight at Louise. She arose calmly, looked the prisoner in the face; and, turning to the Judge, said: 'I believe him, sir, that he *did* mean to return the miniature; and I will forgive him if he will [return] to me the half finished face which he has.' Old Jacob was astonished. 'What!' he exclaimed, 'let the rascal go! Never!' But Louise, with [an] unusual degree of decision, said: 'Uncle, would you punish that poor man, who has already lain in a cell all night, and who now restores to us our own?' She laid her hand upon his arm. 'Why, my dear, this is strange. I will let him go if you say so; but I tell you he is a rogue—how dared he to steal *your* picture?'

Lefranc rose up to his full height, and his face gleamed in its whiteness. 'Sir!' said he, 'I am no thief if I did take that miniature. Neither you nor any other person shall repeat the charge after I say I am no thief!' His eyes gleamed like stars, and all around felt that there was truth in his words. 'Lady,' continued Lefranc, 'I have deserved this by my misconduct; I thank you sincerely for your kindness and forbearance—I promise to restore you the picture as you command.' A said expression grew into his face, as he said this, which the deeply stirred heart of Louise did not fail to respond to with a sigh.

The case was dismissed. Louise commanded her Uncle to pay the costs, in her usual way of giving orders: 'Uncle, I shall be *unhappy* if that poor man is permitted to suffer any more for this; and with another look of wonder at his ward, Old Jacob arranged all with Old Hays and the Court, and Lefranc was released from the dock. He bowed coldly, and passed out.

'The papers' did not report the affair, [since] Louise herself asked the reporter to forbear mentioning it. How could they refuse when she asked?

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## CHAPTER II.

How that calm, pale face haunted the heart of the maiden! A woman's soul has many depths in it, which are only stirred by mysterious impulse. Few of the sex guess the power that is within them, until circumstances awaken it, and move them to feeling. [Then,] what mountain too high for them to scale—what valley too deep for them to span, in the pursuit of the realization of their hopes, or in the effort to confirm or dissipate their fear? Louise Welland was no creature of an hour. If the centre of a [fashionable] coterie—the [cynosure] of the Avenues, she yet was a noble woman, having a heart open to novel impulses, and a mind susceptible of much accomplishment. Conventionalism might compel her actions to certain formula; but the hours which found her alone, or in the society of her really noble old uncle, when the heart spoke out in its truthfulness, showed how much there was in her nature of kindness, and charity and love for what was worthy and good.

It was not strange, then, that the face of Lefranc haunted her. There was suffering there, tenderness there, endurance there, nobility there: his voice was ringing as the chiming of silver bells—his words were exquisitely chosen, and dropped into the stream of conversation like music—his hand was skilled in his profession, for how well it had executed the commission to restore the old family group—his dress was genteel, if it was worn and darned and carefully preserved. These, her *pity* threw into form, and her sympathy nourished them until the face of the artist would not leave her. A month had passed since he promised to restore the half finished face, yet it did not come; was he, then, going to betray his word? Her heart said 'No,' most firmly; for Lefranc, to her vision, was the impersonation of honor. Poor, deluded woman!

'Was he suffering—ill?' she said to herself. The thought had haunted her long: and Louise was not the timid creature to shrink from investigation. She had no other interest in him than to save him from suffering, if it were possible—she would make it her duty to hunt him up—and then she would know why the picture was not returned according to promise. Such were the reasons which led her to the studio, one day, when Uncle Jacob was gone to his farm up the river. Dressed in simple attire, as if on an errand of mercy, she sallied out, and, after a long time, found the house, in the upper rooms of which, Hays said the artist's studio was. She ascended, and on the fifth floor, saw, by the dim light, 'Lefranc Bitellou, Artist,' written over the door at the end of the long hall. She knocked lightly, yet no answer. Again, and a louder knock. The door was softly opened, and a woman asked Louise in. There lay Lefranc, on the old lounge spoken of by Old Hays—there the stand of colors and the easel, and on it the unfinished picture. 'He is very ill,' said the woman[,] 'and has been so for a month or more; but God is merciful; I know he will not take my dear brother from me!' This was said in low words. The sufferer moaned, and the two women were at his side in a moment.

'Valine,' his low voice said; 'is it dark?'

'No, my brother, it is yet day-time. You have slept but two hours since the doctor left.'

'Give me a drink, darling; then draw the curtain, and move the picture where I can see it.'

Louise grew pale and flushed by turns; her heart beat more wildly than it had done; her breath grew hot and her steps unsteady—so powerless was she before that sick man, who lay there with

unclosed eyes, and a face so [pallid] and wan that an infant would have known the Angel of Death had passed very near. Why *should* she be so moved?

Valine drew aside the curtain from the darkened window, then placed the easel at the foot of the bed. The invalid slowly unclosed his eyes, and Louise stood there before him bathed in tears!

‘Louise!’

‘Lefranc!’

She bent down and kissed the white [forehead]—she laid her [hand] in his—a radiance shot over his face like the thrill of morning over the East—his eyes closed, and his lips murmured words too faint to hear. Valine looked on in wonder, for a moment; and then came and leaned upon the neck of Louise and wept.

What would old Jacob Fitzsimmons have said, had he looked in upon the trio?

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It was late that afternoon ere Louise returned home, and it is needless to say her heart was full of resolves, not the last of which was to reconcile Uncle Jacob with Lefranc; nay, more—to reconcile him to her *love* of the poor artist; nay, it was her purpose to get the old man’s hearty consent to her MARRIAGE with the man whom he had arrested for theft! When a woman wills, she floats over difficulties as easily as a balloon over a mountain. Uncle Jacob was a mountain of prejudice and aristocratic exclusiveness; but Louise had the balloon of her love to buoy her there, for Uncle Jacob swore by his niece—he believed in her ‘before all the preachers’—he gave up not only his house, but his whole heart to the daughter of his only, but long dead sister, whom the maiden of twenty so perfectly resembled. It was not strange then, that Louise counted upon a conquest, thought she well knew what ‘storms and darkness’ awaited the charge.

Alas! poor Louise!

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### CHAPTER III.

SCENE: *Little cottage on the Hudson, buried in shrubbery and overshadowed by old trees—lawn stretching down the pearly creek which soon lost itself in the great river—on the lawn, a maiden and lovely child, two years of age. Hour, evening.*

‘Lefranc, I am very sad at Uncle Jacob’s persistent obstinacy. I have exhausted every means to induce him to come here and make up with you. He is very happy when I visit him, but never mentions your name, nor speaks of our child, nor refers to our home. And if something is not done, he will die in that house of his without ever once seeing our child, or being reconciled to you.’ This Louise said, as if it were a weight upon her heart.

‘I am sorry at it all,’ was the answer; ‘but would you have me compromise myself by making overtures to the man whose taunts are yet ringing in my ears? I have no desire but to have his forgiveness and his respect, for I know I merit both, and I want him to love our boy; but, for all that, I shall *not* go to him, nor enter his doors until he bids me come, in kindness.’ This Lefranc

said earnestly, yet kindly; and Louise well knew his words would govern his ways. It devolved upon her to devise some ways and means for meeting and reconciliation. Uncle Jacob must be enticed, by some art, to that home on the Hudson where Louise had been born, where her mother had died, and where the boy Jacob first saw the light, two years before. Alas! the occasion was not long in offering.

Uncle Jacob paid a visit to [him] up-the-river place every few days. He took the ill-fated steamer Henry Clay, on the day of its disaster, and was on board when the disaster occurred. It happened that the steamer was not a mile distant from the spot where the house of Louise stood. At the moment of disaster Lefranc was out on the hills, sketching elms, and rushed to the scene to offer what aid was possible to the drowning and burning passengers. Fearless as a lion, he was in the water in moment, dragging to the shore the half-drowning victims of that horrible sacrifice. Swimming with a woman and child in his arms, he was seized by an old man, whose head was already sinking below the water, and it was in vain that he tried to release himself from the death-like grasp. The four would have gone down together had not a strong arm relieved him from the woman and child[.] Then, lifting the old man up before him, he pushed his way to shore, and dragged out old Uncle Jacob! Louise and Valine were already there, and together they soon brought up the half-strangled man to his senses. Lefranc continued his exertions in the water, and rescued many who yet live to bless him. Uncle Jacob set up in a moment, beholding the fearful scene. His eyes followed Lefranc and Louise, who waded far out into the stream, to receive the precious burthens which her husband brought to the beach. Ere long, the last victim, struggling for life, was rescued, though many had ceased from their struggles, beneath the blue and treacherous waters. Ah! it was a melancholy sight, indeed, to look upon that scene. No words may paint its horrors, its agonies, its prayers, its tearful thankfulness, its shriek of woe, its meetings and its partings. Angels of mercy, indeed, were those whose arms came to the rescue—whose care caught the spark of life as it was just ready to go out, and blew it into full life again.

Uncle Jacob saw all this, and wept like a child. When all was over, he submitted to be led by Louise and Valine, up the beach and over the lawn to the house. As he approached the door he stopped, and said: ‘Louise, I shall never enter this house of yours until I have your forgiveness and Lefranc’s, for the wrong I have so long done to him: may God bless him [as] he deserves.’

Lefranc was not there to [hear] those words, for he was still among the most tireless in his efforts to gather the dead bodies from the deep. Long after, when he did [come] in, it was to find the old man sweetly sleeping in the family room, and little Jacob nestling down by his side.

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Need we say that the house on the Avenue was closed—that Uncle Jacob gave up his old haunts ‘down town,’ and quartered himself at the cottage with Lefranc? [So] it came to pass, and to this day that family circle is unbroken—happy as it is vouchsafed that any on this earth shall be. Two other children have been added to the idols of the hearth-stone—two loving spirituelle girls.

A picture at the Academy Exhibition, of an old man and three little ones, told not more of the skill of the artist who once stole the miniature of Louise, than of the touching tenderness and love which bound the old and the young together.

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