

The Truth at Last
by Judge Clark

“Here, Bryson,” said Mr. Roscoe to one of his clerks, handing him a roll of greenbacks, “go down to the bank and pay our acceptance in favor of Tare & Trett; and mind,”—glancing at his watch— “you’ve no time to lose.”

George Bryson took the money, threw on his overcoat, and was off like a shot.

He had scarcely turned the corner, when a sudden grasp on his arm brought him to a halt. Wheeling around quickly—a man with a lot of money in his pocket is excusable for being a little nervous in these days of daylight robberies—he was glad to find his interceptor was only his fellow-clerk Ellis Ward.

“Here’s a go!” panted the latter, out of breath. “Plush & Co., of Boston, just gone to smash—heavily indebted too our house! Mr. Roscoe says you must take the next Boston train, see his lawyers there—here’s their card—and have everything done to save as much as possible. Here, give me the money you were taking to the bank and I’ll go in your place, for you’ve barely time to catch the cars.”

George handed over the roll of notes, and was about to hasten off, when Ellis Ward again caught his arm.

“You’ll need something for expenses,” said Ellis, taking several bills from the roll and thrusting them into George’s hand. “I’ve enough about me to make it up at the bank. Good-by! —don’t stop a moment.”

Bryson hailed the first street-car for the dépôt, and was in the nick of time for the Eastern train.

When Mr. Roscoe reached his office next morning he found Mr. Tare, senior of the house of Tare & Trett, waiting his arrival.

“Good morning, Mr. Tare,” was Mr. Roscoe’s hearty greeting.

“Good morning, sir,” returned Mr. Tare, by no means heartily.

Mr. Roscoe was a merchant prince, as proud as Mr. Dombey. He was disposed to be condescendingly polite to Mr. Tare, for Tare & Trett were good customers. But Mr. Tare’s coolness had such a refrigerative influence on Mr. Roscoe that he at once turned into a pillar of ice.

“What can I do for you, sir?” he asked, in his most freezing manner.

Little Mr. Tare fired up.

“Pay that acceptance you suffered to go to protest yesterday!” he exclaimed, jumping up like a limber-jack, and flourishing a paper within an inch of Mr. Roscoe’s nose.

Mr. Roscoe put on his eye-glasses, took the document, glanced it over, and turning his back on Mr. Tare, told the office-boy to call Mr. Bryson.

“Please, sir,” said the boy, returning in a moment, “Mr. Bryson hasn’t been in this morning.”

Mr. Roscoe consulted his watch. He exacted strict punctuality from his clerks. Bryson should have been at his post an hour ago.

“I sent the money to the bank in time to meet your draft yesterday,” said Mr. Roscoe, not in the least disconcerted; “the messenger, it seems, failed to obey instructions. A day’s delay, I trust, has caused you no serious inconvenience.”

And sitting down he drew a check, and handing it to Mr. Tare, bowed him out in a manner which said plainly: “This closes our account.”

Telegrams were sent in every direction minutely describing George Bryson, the absconding clerk, who had robbed his employer of ten thousand dollars, and offering a large reward for his apprehension.

The result was that poor George, while on his way to the office of Mr. Roscoe’s Boston lawyers that morning, was seized by a couple of detectives, handcuffed, dragged aboard a departing train, and carried back to confront his angry employer and the law’s demands, without waiting for a requisition from the governor.

The facts against him were very plain. Mr. Roscoe had given his ten thousand dollars to pay the draft of Tare & Trett. He had not paid it, but instead of going to the bank, had taken the evening train to Boston. The story of Plush & Co.’s failure was a myth; and, to crown all, some of the identical money Mr. Roscoe had delivered to him was found upon him when arrested. The prisoner’s account of what had passed between himself and Ellis Ward, was flatly denied by the latter, and we all know for how little an accused man’s word goes in such cases.

Bryson was speedily tried and convicted. No different result could have been expected. Even Ellen Payne, who had long before secretly plighted her troth to George, believed him guilty; and when the prison doors closed upon him as a convict, there was none left to pity.

Once, twice, thrice, and even oftener, if rumor spoke truly, Ellen had refused Ellis Ward’s hand. It was only when people began to hint that she still felt a lingering attachment toward her convict

lover, that she resolved to confute the calumny by accepting the offer of the previously rejected suitor.

It was late on the eve of the day fixed for the wedding of Ellen Payne and Ellis Ward, when, as the latter was wending his way, for the last time, to his bachelor lodgings, his arm was grasped much as he had seized that of George Bryson when the latter was on his road to the bank, and much in the same manner he turned nervously about.

A pale, haggard face confronted him. Its owner was poorly clad. The rags that covered him seemed to cling as to the form of a skeleton. But the fingers whose gripe was on Ellis Ward's arm, were like clasps of steel. At the moment the two changed to be opposite the entrance of one of the city parks, where the gas-light fell full on the features of the stranger.

Ellis Ward started. He was in the grasp of the man he had ruined. It was George Bryson on whose face he looked.

"I must speak to you," said Bryson, dragging his prisoner to a secluded seat under some trees. "I have just escaped from the prison to which your villainy consigned me."

"And you are aware, of course," the other answered, "that it is in my power, by a word, to send you back."

"You and I both know," hissed Bryson in his companion's ear, "that it is you, not I, who should wear the convict's garb."

"Of course, you do not mean your conduct as a threat," Ellis Ward replied, "for you are aware I have but to utter a single cry to bring the police upon you; but pray be good enough to say for what purpose you have sought me thus."

"To prevent your marriage with Ellen Payne; to save her from the power of a villain."

Ellis Ward laughed.

"You *shall* not marry her!" exclaimed Bryson, no longer heedful to control his voice.

"*Shall* not?" sneered Ellis Ward. "Permit me to end this ridiculous scene. Tomorrow Miss Payne will be my wife, and you will be sent back to drink the cup of your degradation to the very dregs. But ere you go, I cannot forbear the satisfaction of taunting you to your face with the completeness of my revenge. I loved Ellen Payne first. You came between us, and left me hopeless. I resolved to be avenged upon you both. I kept the money for the theft of which you wear a felon's name; and when, tomorrow, I wed Ellen Payne, whom I now hate as bitterly as yourself, my vengeance is satisfied!"

“Fiend! monster!” shouted George Bryson, springing like a tiger at the other’s throat.

“Police! police!” cried Ellis Ward, till the tightening fingers of his enemy choked his utterance.

There was a rush of men with clubs, whose brass buttons gleamed in the gas-light.

“I give this man into custody!” gasped Ward, as soon as he was rescued.

“I think we must take you *both* from what I have just overheard,” said a gray-haired old detective, emerging from a clump of bushes in the rear.

The upshot was that the wedding didn’t come off, and George Bryson received a full and free pardon of the crime which he had not committed, while its real author was sent to serve out—not the unexpired part of George’s imprisonment, but a full term of his own.

George and Ellen have made up, and everything bids fair to come out right between them.

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