

## *The Man with the Big Whiskers*

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It was on the evening of September 14th, 1800 and blank. Twilight had already set in, and the streetlamps were just being lighted, when a “solitary” cartman of about my size might have been seen winding his devious way up Sullivan Street on his way to his suburban home. When a little above Bleecker Street, a gentleman in Quaker garb, who was standing upon the sidewalk, beckoned him to haul up alongside the curbstone.

“Friend,” said he, “hast thee anything special on hand for the morrow?”

“Nothing, either special or in expectation.”

“Then I would like to engage thyself and another of thy profession for the day—that is, by the day, and for the whole day. Dost thou understand me?”

“I think I do; you wish to employ two cartmen for the whole day?”

“Thee hast hit it exactly; what will be thy charge for the whole day? The work will be easy, both for thyself and horse.”

“Five dollars is the usual price by the day, providing the work is not too hard.”

“Thee mayest consider thyself engaged at that price, and also thy associate. Thee and thy friend will please call at No. 20 Grove Street at precisely 5 o’clock tomorrow morning. Thee will please be punctual, for it is on business of the utmost importance that thy service are wanted.”

“All right; I will be on hand, with an associate, at the time and place named.”

Continuing my way home, I met Jim Moore, with whom I was slightly acquainted. Informing him of the job I had on hand, he very readily agreed to go with me and take the chances.

The next morning we backed up in front of No. 20 Grove Street at the appointed hour. The old Quaker—I will call him old, although he was not more than twenty-eight or thirty years of age, having been so much among old pictures I had acquired the habit of calling nearly everything I saw or handled old—the old Quaker soon came to the door, and pleasantly remarked:

“My good friend, admire thy punctuality muchly. Thee hast hit the nail on the head to a moment.”

“Yes, sir; I always look upon punctuality in business matters as one of the cardinal virtues,” I replied.

“I am much rejoiced to hear thee talk of virtue so understandingly. It is one of the great principles that I most admire; and now thee and thy companion will please to go to work and load thy carts with as much haste as thy strength and activity will permit. I have several most excellent reasons for getting my goods out of this earthly tabernacle as soon as possible.”

We then set to work and loaded our carts with the best and most costly furniture contained in the two parlors.

Just as we had finished loading, a gentleman passed us on the run, and soon disappeared round the next corner. I should not have noticed him particularly, only that he sported the most enormous pair of black whiskers that I had ever seen attached to a human countenance.

Having now properly tied and secured our loads, I notified the old Quaker that we were now ready for a start.

“Thee will please bear in mind that this is to be a strictly *secret* expedition—that thee art engaged by the day—and that no questions [are] to be asked or answered. Thee will now select thine own line of march, but let thy course be as *devious* as possible, so that thou meetest me at the Jersey City Ferry at precisely eight o’clock.”

We then started off upon our “devious” way, going up this street and down that, and finally arrived at the ferry just as the eight o’clock boat was ready to start.

The old Quaker was standing by the side of the gate, and the very moment he discovered us shouted: “Drive straight on board the boat—hurry up on the double quick; your ferriage is paid.”

Just as we had fairly arrived on board, a cab came rattling down Courtland Street at a furious rate, and stopped directly in front of the gate. A gentleman bounded out at a single leap, and without stopping to pay fare, rushed down the bridge and jumped on board at the risk of falling into the river. Stopping for a moment to pick up some loose papers that had fallen out of the side-pocket of his coat when he sprang on board, he hurriedly disappeared into the ladies’ cabin. *It was the man with the big whiskers.*

On landing upon the Jersey Shore the old Quaker motioned us to follow him, which we did, until he halted in front of a dining saloon.

“*Thee and thou,*” said he, addressing my companion, “are to be mine guests for the remainder of the day. I have here ordered refreshments for the inner man, for three persons, to be in readiness at half-past eight o’clock this morning. Although we toil not, our poor, weak, frail and dying bodies crave and require nourishment; let us now enter herein and partake of such entertainment as mine host hath provided for us.”

We all entered in and partook of a plentiful breakfast, including all the delicacies of the season, and after that a little *strong water* “to warm the stomach and keep off the chills and fever,” as the old Quaker remarked.

We then continued our line of march up Bergen Hill, thence down the Hoboken Road, until we came to an open lot near the old arsenal, where we came to a dead stop under a large tree.

“Thee and thine will tarry here until my return,” said the old Quaker. “Thy dinner will be served thee here at two o’clock precisely.”

At precisely two o’clock he returned, bringing with him a nice, clean, new basket, containing a cold roasted chicken, accompanied by numerous other fixings, and *a small bottle of genuine old cognac*.

Having appeased our appetites with the good things provided, and warmed our stomachs with a drop of the cognac, we rested upon our oars, awaiting further orders, for we had pledged ourselves to not ask any questions.

We remained in entire ignorance of our future movements until about four o’clock, when the old Quaker broke silence by remarking that “After due consideration of the situation I have changed my whole order of battle; we shall not return to the wicked and God-forsaken city until the shades of night have fallen upon the noble Hudson, and the city lamps have been lighted. This change of programme will entitle each of thee to an extra dollar for thy day’s work.”

At about seven o’clock the order was given to strike tents and march down to the Hoboken Ferry. When we arrived there we found the old Quaker standing near the gate, apparently impatient at the slowness of our movements. He informed us that our ferriage had been paid, and bade us hurry on board the boat.

While we were driving down the bridge to the boat, a gentleman rushed past us, went on board, and hurriedly descended the steps that led into the engineer’s room. *It was the man with the big whiskers*.

“Well, Jim,” said I to my companion after the boat had got fairly underway, “what do you think of our Quaker employer and the adventures of the day thus far?”

“Why,” said he, “I guess that our Quaker friend is all right, *but a little queer* at times; and as for the other adventures, I rather like them.”

“He may possibly be all right,” I replied; “but right or wrong, Quaker or devil, not a thing goes off our carts until he has forked over the full amount of cartage due us. I have had a little experience in such matters before today, and I am fully satisfied in my own mind that there is a screw loose somewhere.”

“Do as you please,” replied Jim, “but I still think that the Quaker is all right, though a little mysterious.”

As the boat was entering the slip the old Quaker came up to me and said: “Thee will keep a bright lookout and follow me up the left hand side of Canal Street until thou seest me stop, at which point thee and thy companion will back up in a convenient position for unloading.”

We followed on as directed until the old Quaker came to a dead stop in front of a shoe store near Hudson Street, where we backed up and began to make preparations for unloading. Much to my

surprise, the first thing I noticed on reaching the sidewalk was the man with the big whiskers coming up the street from the ferry. As he approached, he stopped, and putting up his hand to the left side of his mouth, in a low but emphatic tone of voice, exclaimed:

“Don’t take a thing off your carts until your cartage has been paid,” and then moved rapidly on toward Broadway.

Thinks I to myself, “The crisis is approaching,” but I kept mum.

I immediately turned around, and addressing the old Quaker, said:

“I suppose, sir, that we have now arrived at the end of our day’s journey. I don’t say that there is anything wrong intended us, but it is a part of our duty to protect ourselves. Our cartage is now due us, and must be paid before your goods can be delivered.”

“Do I look a knave that thee shouldst doubt mine honesty? Have I not entertained thee all this long day like a gentleman, and thee questions mine ability to pay thee?”

“As matters now stand, we have our suspicions, and not without cause. You are an entire stranger to us, and will have us at your mercy the moment your goods leave our carts. Our demand is just twelve dollars, and the quickest way for you to remove all our doubts will be to pay it. We are now ready and willing to unload your goods, but our cartage *must* be paid before we untie a rope.”

“Well it matters but little to me whether I pay thee now, or twenty minutes hence. Here’s thy money, all in good Chemical Bank bills; but it grieveth me sadly to have my honesty doubted. Now, the sooner these goods are removed out of sight of the curious and prying public the better I shall like it. Thee will pass them down into this basement, where there are two robust men waiting to receive them and pack them away. Use all possible dispatch, and when they are properly disposed of we will all go up to Friend N.H.’s, and partake of a few of his noble Prince’s Bay oysters; *but it grieveth me sadly to have mine honesty doubted.*”

[The “N.H.” here alluded to was Nicholas Houghwout [sic], the man who about forty years ago first introduced the *cheap* oyster system into New York. In a short time thereafter oysters on the “Canal Street plan” were sold all over the city, and “N.H.” was soon forgotten.]

Just then a flaunting, gayly-dressed lady, heavily veiled, made her appearance upon the scene. Throwing back her veil for an instant, she exposed to public view a face of surpassing loveliness and beauty—then addressing herself to our Quaker employer, she in a very unladylike manner thus exclaimed:

“Bully for you, Ned!—I guess that we have got things all right now—your becoming Quaker disguise has deceived that self-conceited, red-whiskered young detective to a nicety.”

“You may bet your life on that, my lovely Sue—with two such sharp and compliant confederates as I have with me the Devil himself could not detect my strategy. But we have had a curious day of it, I can assure you.”

Replacing her veil the lady passed on, saying that she would return again in a few minutes.

Thinks I to myself again the plot begins to thicken, but I said nothing.

The lady passed on amid the crowd, and was soon out of sight.

Just then the man with the big whiskers again made his appearance, and, tapping me gently on the shoulder, said:

“Hold on, cartman!—don’t untie a single cord until I so order it. I am Deputy Sheriff, and I now seize all the goods contained on these two carts, by virtue of a chattel mortgage.”

“The devil you do!” shouted the now enraged Quaker; “hands off, sir! these goods belong to me, sir,” and rushing at the officer with an unsheathed dagger in his hand, he continued in a more subdued tone of voice: “If thee would see the color and thickness of thine own blood, thee will continue thy interference in mine affairs: if not, thee had better pass on about thy business.”

The next moment the officer had the sham Quaker by the throat; the dagger glittered in the gaslight for an instant, then went whizzing among the limbs of a tree overhead and landed upon the awning in front of the next store.

“Villain! and so it seems that thou would add murder to the long list of thy other rare accomplishments; but not quite yet. You think, no doubt, that you have been playing a sharp, deep game, but your badly assumed Quaker disguise had not deceived me for a single moment. I now take pleasure in informing you that I am a detective as well as a deputy sheriff, and I at once arrest you, Edward Johnson, on a warrant for grand larceny.”

Then placing a revolver within two inches of his head, the detective continued: “And now manifest the least attempt at resistance and I’ll tunnel a hole through your wicked brains in less time than it would take a hungry rat to go through a Limburger cheese.”

“That’s not my name, sir; thee hast entirely mistaken thy man, sir; but if thee will loosen thy iron grasp upon my throat and let thy servant depart his way in peace, I will freely forgive thee for thy unintentional mistake.”

“Perhaps not; perhaps I have; anyhow, I’ll take upon myself the responsibility of holding you by that name. I very seldom mistake my man. Besides, a person with as many *aliases* attached to his name as you have seldom knows himself what his *real* name is.”

Tightening his grasp upon the prisoner’s throat the detective quietly restored the revolver to its usual hiding place, and then taking a small torpedo out of his vest pocket dashed it furiously

upon the sidewalk. The instant it exploded two men sprang from behind an awning post, and rapidly approached the spot where we were standing.

“Officers, take this man, Edward Johnson, immediately to the city prison, and tell the keeper to confine him securely in criminal’s cell No. 27—and by the way, should Mr. Justice Bloodgood happen to be still in his office, tell him that I will be on hand with my witnesses at precisely ten o’clock tomorrow morning.”

“And now, Mr. Quaker Johnson,” continued the provoking detective, “I hope that thee will enjoy ‘a good night’s rest’ at thy new lodgings; and mayst thee have many pleasant dreams, and may they all be about that *self-conceited young detective and his red whiskers*.”

As the trio moved off, the poor crest-fallen Quaker turned back his head for a moment, and with a most woe-begone look upon his countenance, exclaimed, “Well, damn my eyes! If New York ain’t a queer place.”

The detective, now addressing his discourse to us, said: “Well, cartmen, we have had quite a stirring time of it today, but we are not quite through with it yet. It was my intention to have made this seizure the very moment that you left the boat, but I did not want to see you cheated out of your cartage. You will now please drive these goods down to the Sheriff’s store, at No. 25 Ann Street, by doing which you will each add a dollar and a half to your day’s work.”

We accordingly drove down to the store as directed, and there found two men in waiting to help us unload. Just as we had got everything nicely housed big whiskers again made his appearance.

“Well, cartman, I see that you are already unloaded; now step up to the desk, and I will settle with you”—which he did. “We will now go over to my old friend Windust’s, and have a bit of supper together before we part.”

We went over to Windust’s, as directed, hooked and tied our horses, and went in. The deputy was sitting alone by the side of a marble-top table, and the moment he saw us enter he beckoned us to come and take seats beside him, which we did.

“Now,” said he to me, “what shall we have for supper? Don’t be afraid to ask for anything that you may desire.”

“A good nice hot mutton chop is about as good as anything that I can think of for a late supper.”

“All right. Waiter!”

“Here, sir! What’s the order, sir?”

“Three hot mutton chops and three glasses of iced claret. About how long shall we have to wait for them?”

“About six minutes and a half, sir;” and away scampered the waiter to give the order.

“And now, Mr. Deputy,” I queried, “while we are waiting for our mutton chops, suppose that you enlighten us a little in regard to the causes that have produced the grand explosion which we all have this night witnessed?”

“Certainly; but the story in detail would be a long one. In brief, it is something like this: Two years ago Charles Marshall was clerking it on a \$2,000 salary, and had \$1,000 in bank. Susan Martin was one of Madame Armand’s handsome milliner girls, and had nothing but the clothes on her back. They met each other at a public ball—loved, wooed and wedded. Then went to keeping house—and everything nice—loved each other, almost to death, for a while. Finally wife got a touch of high life on the brain—ran husband in debt for jewelry and fine clothes—husband protested against wife’s extravagance—Sue got mad and ran off with Ned Johnson, the noted blackleg. Finally bill came in for \$500 shawl—money all gone—creditor impatient for amount of bill—husband had to give him chattel mortgage on parlor furniture to satisfy him. Then husband called to the country to see sick sister—wife informs blackleg of the fact—wife and blackleg put their heads together and lay plan for stealing mortgaged furniture—was then employed to work up the case—got on trail for the first time last evening—saw you loading at the door this morning—intended to stop you before you got out of the city—was delayed in getting papers made out, and as you very well know was just one minute too late. But here comes our chops, all smoking hot—you both know what has taken place since.”

“Gentlemen—here, sirs!” exclaimed the chattering waiter, “time’s just up to a second—here’s the mutton chops all red hot and the claret all cold as ice.”

We then set to with a zest and dispatched our supper in silence. On rising from the table the [deputy] turned toward me and inquiringly said: “Do you know the name and address of the cartman who has been associated with you today?”

“I know his name and the place where he stands, but I am not very intimately acquainted with him.”

“All right—that will do—now please give me your name, number and stand. I may *possibly* have to call upon you in relation to this affair, but I think not.”

I then handed him my card. He gave it a hasty glance, and then holding it up near the gaslight slowly read aloud:

J. S. LYON.  
FURNITURE CART NO. 2,489.  
Stand.  
Corner Broadway and Houston Street.

Putting the card into his pocket he keenly scrutinized my person for a moment, and then inquired:

“Mr. Lyon, may I make bold to inquire what part of the country you hail from?”

“Certainly—I am a Jersey Blue all over.”

“Did you, at any period of your life, ever reside in the beautiful village of Orange?”

“It was there that I served my apprenticeship.”

“At what trade, if I may presume to ask?”

“Well, I believe they used to call it shoemaking; at any rate the work consisted of sewing, pegging and pasting little bits of leather together.”

“With whom did you serve your time, please?”

“With old Tom Condit, as they used to call him, and a rum old fellow he was too.”

“Were you ever acquainted with a lad they used to call Gus Baldwin?”

“Oh, yes—certainly. He was one of my shopmates, and was generally known as the *laziest* boy in the village; but he turned up a trump after all. Gus is now an officer in the U.S. Navy, and is off with Captain Wilkes on his exploring expedition.”

“Did you know Tim Waldron—the boy who always worked with a book before him?”

“Of course I did. Tim is now head teacher in one of our city high schools, and bound to make his mark in the world, if he lives.”

“Well, once more. Do you recollect Will Harrison, who worked in the same shop, and whom the other boys used to call Baby-face, because he couldn’t raise a beard?”

“Well, if I didn’t, I don’t know who should. Will was the handsomest boy in the village—full of fun, and always playing his tricks on the other boys, but kind and good-natured to a fault. And oh, dear me, how I should like to see him again!”

“Well, take a good look! My name is William Harrison—sometimes called Bill Harrison, the *sharp detective*. Do you discover any resemblance between me and the baby-faced boy of fifteen years ago?”

“Not a bit. Why, sir, there is no more resemblance between *you* and *our* Will of fifteen years ago than there is between a lion’s mane and an old Thomas cat’s whiskers.”

“Perhaps not—but we shall see. There are more strange things transpiring in this city every day than are even dreamed of by many persons who call themselves *smart*.”



“I know very well that this is a strange world, and that New York is what the sham Quaker called it, a *queer* place; but you can’t fool me by palming upon me those huge whiskers as being part and parcel of my old baby-faced shopmate.”

The wily detective then raised his right hand up to the side of his face, and gently pressing his forefinger against a small invisible spring, fiercely exclaimed: “Presto! begone!” and the next instant the terrible whiskers disappeared from sight, and passed into the land of the invisible.

There was no use in any longer disputing the fact, for there stood the well-remembered features of my baby-faced old shopmate, all unveiled before me—the same soft, fair skin, creased with the same sunny and benignant smile. The recognition was now mutual on both sides, and the friendly greetings most cordial and enthusiastic—indeed, so much so that the whole establishment was soon in a roar of the most boisterous merriment.

“I have been thinking all day,” continued the detective, “that I knew you as an old friend and acquaintance; but, blow me, with all my supposed detective sharpness, I could not *spot* you to a certainty until I saw your name on the cart.”

“By Jove, Will, I never felt so happy in my life as I do at the present moment. Now tell us all about what brought you to the city, how long you have been here, and all about it—that’s a good boy.”

“Well, I have been bumming around the city here for the last ten years as deputy sheriff and detective, having in the meantime acquired a little fame and accumulated a small pile of dollars, which are deposited in a safe place. But it is now getting late, and I have yet some important business to attend to before I can retire to rest. So, good night old shopmate; I will soon call and see you again on your stand.

About a month later, sitting on the tail of my cart one fine morning, intently engaged in poring over the pages of “Milton’s Paradise Lost,” I was suddenly tapped on the shoulder by what appeared to me to be the hand of a big, red-whiskered, Irish hod-carrier, which was soon followed by the kindly salutation of

“Good morning, old shopmate; how are you getting along during these hard times?”

“Why, how’s this? Good morning, baby-face; and pray what’s in the wind now? been *dyeing* your whiskers, I see, oh?”

“No; not *dyeing* but *changing* them for another pair; always keep stowed away in my wardrobe not less than half a dozen pairs of different colors.”

“And how about our old friend, the sham Quaker? what’s become of him?”

“Oh, he’s *all right*; was indicted, tried, found guilty and sent up to the state marble works for four years and six months; but he begged mighty hard to be let off.”

“And how about Charley Marshall and his gay milliner girl?”

“Well, they are *all right, too*. Charley came back the next morning, borrowed \$500 from a friend, redeemed his goods, had them taken home, and him and Sue are living together again as cozily as a pair of billing and cooing turtledoves.”

“Well,” said I, “wonders will never cease. The Quaker was about right when he pronounced New York to be a *queer place*.”

“Yes, New York *is* a queer place, and a *dangerous*; and it is my intention to get out of it as soon as possible. I have just been purchasing a farm out West, and I am going out there to engage in farming. I am getting to be too well known among the ‘roughs’ here in the city. I have already been *shot at twice*; the only chance I have for my life is to emigrate. But I must be again on the move. I am at present engaged in working up a very bad and dangerous case—*dangerous*, because there is a very *wicked* woman in it. Should I happen to escape the next shot fired at me, I will call and see you again in a few days; but at present I have only time to say, Good morning, old shopmate.”

“Good morning, Will; don’t fail to call soon.”

On the evening of that same day at about eight o’clock, a man and woman were seen rapidly approaching each other on the sidewalk, directly under the darkening shadows of the Carlton House, on the corner of Broadway and Leonard Street. As they neared each other, the short, sharp crack of a pistol was distinctly heard by a gentleman who was passing on the opposite side of the street. The man was seen to stagger for a moment, and then fall dead upon the sidewalk, his head pierced by a pistol-ball. The woman passed rapidly down Leonard Street, and suddenly disappeared into a dark, narrow alley near Elm Street. The murdered man proved to be my old shopmate, “the man with the big whiskers.”

On reading a detailed account of this event in the *Herald* next morning I could not help mentally exclaiming, “Well New York *is* a queer place, and—a *wicked!*”

[NOTE.—There are plenty of old New Yorkers yet living who recollect *that fatal night* when a man was shot and killed by a woman just under the shadow of the old Carlton House, about thirty years ago. The woman who was suspected of having committed the crime was arrested and tried for the murder; but, notwithstanding the general evidence was sadly against her, she succeeded in proving a strong *alibi*, and thus saved her neck from the gallows.]

J.S. LYON, Ex-Cartman, No. 2489.  
Boonton, N.J., April, 1871.

*Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, May 15, 1871

*The Plain Dealer* [Cleveland, OH], June 3, 1871—with the subtitle “A Detective Story”