

# THE FATAL REQUEST OR FOUND OUT

By A. L. Harris Author of "Mine Own Familiar Friend," etc.  
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## CHAPTER II—Continued.

Mr. Burritt's face became flushed, and he started to his feet with the haste and hot indignation which would have done credit to one of half his years. "James!" he cried, with passion, "is this the way you speak?—is this the way you treat your old friend? Does the fidelity of half a life time count for nothing? Why, even your name has been preserved in inviolable secrecy, and at this very moment not one single soul, besides myself, is aware of the object of my journey, or of the identity of the individual I have come to meet!—and this is all you have to say to me! I had better return home at once, without more delay!"

He was evidently much moved, and the other man could not but recognize that the emotion he betrayed was genuine. So he, too, rose from his seat and, catching Mr. Burritt by the arm, said, "My dear fellow, don't misunderstand me! Surely you did not take me seriously just now. It is not that I doubted you for a moment, Silas; but—" He passed his hand over his eyes, as though to clear away something which obstructed his vision. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he continued: "I only landed in the old country this morning, and it has brought it all back again—all the shame and sorrow, all the suffering and remorse—it seems as fresh as though—as though it had all happened yesterday, instead of twenty years ago. I cannot but realize the fact that, in spite of all my wealth—honestly earned, too, every penny of it, I swear—I am a pariah, an outcast. No, don't interrupt me. I tell you—with a bitter, merciless laugh—"I feel more like a returned convict than anything else." "James!" exclaimed Mr. Burritt, "you shock me! you grieve me more than I can say! I—"

His friend interrupted him. "You!"

gether. Mr. Burritt passed out first; his companion lingered behind him. As he did so, his brief assumption of cheerfulness fell from him; his face changed and darkened, and the whole expression altered.

"All dead but one," he whispered to himself—"and that one—" The sentence was left unfinished.

## CHAPTER III.

### Midnight Reflections.

Mr. Burritt passed a very restless night. Perhaps his dinner had disagreed with him. More probably it was the result of the agitation and excitement caused by the meeting with the old friend he had not seen for so many years. At any rate, whatever the cause, there was no doubt as to the effect; for he found it impossible to sleep, or to do anything but toss from side to side, as hour after hour wearily wore itself away. By some peculiar action of the brain, he also found himself compelled to review all the past scenes of his life, and mentally, step by step, retrace the path he had trodden during those fifty years or so, which went to make up the sum of his existence on this planet.

At last, in despair, he rose, and going to the window, looked out upon the night. It was a very moonlight night—too much so, in fact. There was something almost weird and ghastly in its effect. So he dropped the blind with a crash, and went back to bed again, hoping that, this time, he might be able to sleep.

But it was the same thing over again. Only this time his thoughts concentrated themselves upon his family and his home life. He remembered, with a sense of remorse, that he had been a little—only a little—irritable at breakfast that morning, and that he had spoken rather sharply

Mr. Burritt was getting sleepy at last. No doubt it was something which he had eaten at dinner that had upset his digestion and filled his mind with all these morbid fancies. There was nothing like indigestion for making one see everything in a bad light.

Then he slept, and as he slept he dreamed a dream.

He thought he was lying on the edge of a precipice—a precipice which went sheer down many hundreds of feet. But although he occupied such a dangerous position he felt no uneasiness at first, only a little gentle surprise as to what he was doing there, and a little wonder as to what was going to happen.

Then a hand came up and out of the abyss and grasped him, drawing him nearer and nearer to the giddy verge of the precipice, and he felt himself dragged slowly but surely to destruction. In vain he clutched at the grass and stones and projections of the cliff; he was still drawn on, until, at last, he was poised upon the very edge and could look down into the depths of the chasm beneath. For a few seconds—during which he seemed to experience a lifetime of agony—he remained in that awful position. Then he felt himself falling—falling from an immeasurable height—and woke!

"What a hideous dream," he thought. "How weird—how awful—how real! I would rather lie awake the whole night through than dream just such another. I wonder what the time is?"

He felt for his watch and the matches, and struck a light. Just half past three—no more. As he restored the articles again to their places, he thought he heard faint sounds of movement in the next room.

"Evidently I am not the only restless person," he said to himself as he lay down again. "I have a companion in misfortune. To-morrow morning we shall be able to compare experiences. Suppose I were to knock at the wall and speak to him? But then I might disturb someone else and alarm them. That would never do. I expect it must have been the cucumber that gave me the nightmare. I hope I shan't have another such dream; if I do, I'll never touch cucumber any more as long as I live." His eyes closed, and in a few moments his deep and regular breathing showed that he had again fallen asleep.

And again he dreamt, and the dream was as follows:

He was lying in his bed, or at least, so he thought, and, after a while, it seemed to him that it became very hard and narrow, so that he had no room to move in it. It was also very dark. He tried to turn over upon his side, but found, as in the other dream that he could stir neither hand nor foot. And what appeared to him a long time, he began to hear sounds over his head. Sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, and at the same time he began to experience a difficulty in breathing. And still the sound went on—the sound of some one hammering—of some one hammering nails—

The sound of some one hammering nails into a coffin!

And with that, all at once, the awful truth broke upon him. He was dead, and they were nailing him up in his coffin—dead!

His heart stopped beating as he grasped the full horror of the situation.

They were burying him alive! Oh, horrible!—horrible!

In vain he tried to burst the bonds of the insensibility in which he was held. In vain he made frenzied efforts to cry aloud. The most frantic endeavors were unavailing. He was unable to utter a sound or produce the smallest movement. Then it seemed as though some one were trying to raise the lid of the coffin. There was a faint, creaking sound—a faint glimmer of light was perceptible overhead. It increased and widened! Oh, joy! He was saved—saved! The coffin-lid was raised little by little—higher and higher—in another moment he should be free!

It was done. He saw a face bending over him—a familiar face—the face of an old friend. Already he hailed him in his heart as his benefactor, his deliverer. Then—what were those words he heard? Words he had heard before—when was it?

"You can ruin me whenever you please, but now you are in my power!"

The lid was clapped down again, leaving him in utter darkness. The hammering began again. He made one last tremendous effort and woke.

Woke to find himself sitting bolt upright, with the perspiration streaming from him. Woke to find the man, whose voice even now seemed to ring in his ears as he bent over the open coffin, standing beside his bed, in the faint, grey light of morning.

"What brings you here?" gasped Mr. Burritt, as soon as he had realized the fact that the terrible ordeal he had just passed through was only a dream.

"I couldn't sleep," was the response, "and I couldn't lie still any longer, so I came to see whether you were awake."

(To be continued.)

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## CHAPTER III—Continued.

Mr. Burritt was puzzled and expressed as much by his looks. Why on earth did the man come stealing into his room in that strange, uncomfortable manner, and at that hour, and for no apparent purpose?

His friend seemed to read what was passing in his mind. "I am sorry if I have disturbed you," he said, slowly, "but I could not bear my own thoughts any longer, and so I—" He turned to leave the room.

Mr. Burritt followed him with his eyes. He still seemed to him to be part of his dream—his strange, horrible dream.

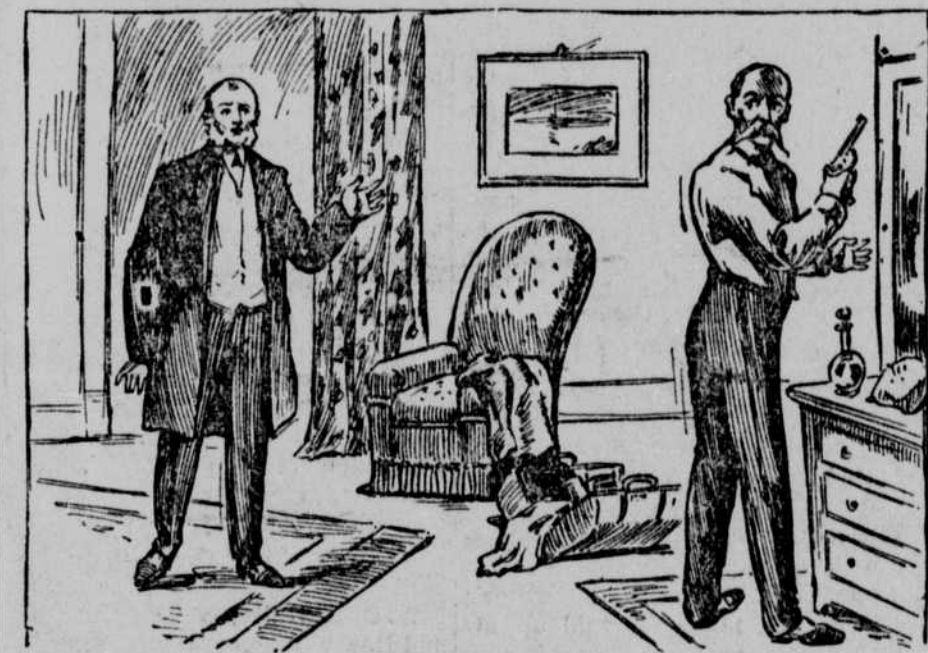
Then, as the other man reached the door, and passing through it, closed it behind him, he gave a gasp of relief. The next moment he had crossed the floor and turned the key in the lock.

"I could have sworn I had locked it before," he said to himself. "At any rate there shall be no mistake this time," as he shot the bolt to make matters doubly sure.

## CHAPTER IV.

"The Secret Lies Between Us Two." Next morning Mr. Silas Burritt, and his friend, whose incognito is still preserved, were seated at breakfast together.

In the clear light of day, in the presence of the most appetizing viands, the former gentleman found his mind completely divested of all those gloomy and distrustful thoughts and suspicions which had caused him so much disquietude previously, to say nothing of having ruined his night's rest. It was astonishing what a widely different view he took of the matter as he discussed this early meal. His heart warmed anew toward his old friend, who sat facing him, and who also appeared to more advantage under these more cheerful circumstances.



"Good Heavens! What are you doing?"

"It is quite understood that you return with me and stop at least one night," he remarked, genially. "In fact, there is no escape for you, as I have already dispatched a telegram to let them know at home that I am bringing a friend back with me."

"You are very good, Silas," was the reply, "and for one night, at least, I will accept your hospitality."

"And you must come and stay with us while you are looking about for a house—make us your headquarters, you know. I've no doubt that the two girls, yours and mine, will be bosom friends in less than no time; and as for my boy Ted, he'll be head over heels in love your daughter—if she's anything like your description—before we know where we are. Ha, ha! I shouldn't be a bit surprised—the young dog!" and his father laughed aloud, delighted in his own perspicacity. "By the way, Jim," relapsing into a more serious vein, "that would not be a half bad idea—your girl and my boy—eh?"

The other looked at him intently. "You mean it?" he asked.

"Mean it? Of course I do. Why not?"

"In spite of—of everything that has gone before?"

"Good heavens, man! what has the past got to do with your innocent daughter? That would be visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children with a vengeance."

The other man looked at his friend, and his habitually stern face softened. "You are very generous," he said; "more generous than I have a right to expect."

"Come, come," answered Mr. Burritt, "don't talk like that, for heaven's sake; don't let us begin it all over again. Your secret—such as it is—and this is the last allusion I intend to make, or allow you to make, to it—lies between us two; which is the same thing as saying that it is perfectly safe."

Then, more for the sake of giving the conversation a more cheerful turn, than for any other reason, he said:

"I think you made some remark last night to the effect that you had made a large fortune. If so, I am sincerely glad to hear it."

"Yes," was the indifferent reply; "I am, comparatively speaking, what you would call a wealthy man, and my daughter will be an heiress in her way."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Mr. Burritt heartily; "and at the same time—not that I wish to boast—I may

also say that I have not done badly myself. I have made my pile, too—not such a large one as yours, probably, but at any rate, I have the satisfaction of knowing that, if anything should happen to me—this with an accession of seriousness—"I should leave my family well provided for. I have had my ups and downs as well as others; but I have no fear of the future."

He spoke these last words quite confidently, unconscious of the ignorance and rashness of the assertion.

"By the way," he continued, after a while, "are you a bad sleeper, as a rule, or was last night an exception, as in my own case?"

"It was no exception, unfortunately, for me," was the answer. "I am a wretched sleeper, and last night was worse than usual. At the same time—with an air of restraint or awkwardness—"I had no business to disturb you in the way I did."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Burritt carelessly, forgetting the very different light in which the affair had appeared to him at the time of its occurrence. "Though you gave me rather a start at the moment, on waking up suddenly as I did, and from a very bad dream."

"I thought you seemed rather restless and uneasy in your sleep," was the reply.

"Insomnia is one of the greatest curses I know, though, as a rule, I do not suffer much from it myself. But if, like Macbeth, you have murdered sleep, you are much to be pitied."

The other man started at the ill-sounding word. "Murdered!" he exclaimed; "I beg your pardon," he muttered, somewhat confusedly. "I did not take your meaning at first; in fact, I have almost forgotten my Shakespeare."

"I beg yours," said Mr. Burritt; "the quotation was most inapt. I had also forgotten for the moment, that it was to the murder of Duncan that Mac-

beth referred—the assassination of the poor old man in his sleep."

Later on in the day, just before starting to the station, Mr. Burritt, on looking at his watch, noticed that it had stopped. Then he remembered that he had forgotten to bring his watch key, and had, consequently, been obliged to omit the ceremony of winding it up the night before. It occurred to him that his friend, who was packing his portmanteau in the next room, might be able to supply the deficiency.

He left his own room and knocked at the door of the one adjoining. But the occupant of the apartment, whom he heard moving about within, apparently did not hear the knock, so, after waiting a few seconds, he turned the handle and entered.

The other was standing in front of the dressing table and had his back to the door, so that his reflections were reflected in the mirror. He was dressed, all but his coat, and was carefully examining some article which caught the light as he turned it over in his hand. He wheeled round suddenly, with a quick frown, on hearing the sound of the opening of the door and Mr. Burritt's involuntary exclamation of alarm when he saw how his friend was employed.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing with that thing?"

"My dear fellow," said the other, regarding his composure instantaneously, "what on earth are you making such a fuss about? Did you never see a revolver before?"

"Of course I have," answered Mr. Burritt, somewhat indignantly. "But there, for goodness sake, put the thing down. I hate to see you trifling with it in that way. It gives me the cold shivers."

"You alarm yourself unnecessarily. I assure you I have not the slightest intention of blowing my brains out. Why on earth should I? I was merely examining the thing to see that it was all right."

"But—but," stammered Mr. Burritt, far from reassured, "you don't mean to say that you are in the habit of carrying firearms about with you?"

"My dear fellow," mimicked the other, "I don't merely say it, I do it."

"But why?" was the question.

"Why?" he replied. "In case of emergencies. You never know when you may need it, and I should never think of traveling without something of the sort."

"You mean to say," persisted Mr.

Burritt, "that you carry it about your person?"

The other nodded. "Look here!" he said. "I've lived a rough sort of life in a wild part of the world, for the last twenty years. I've seen men shot down by my side, in a refreshment saloon, more than once, and more than once had a narrow escape from a similar fate myself. In fact"—sinking his voice—"I don't mind owing to you that on one occasion I have killed my man—in self-defense mind," he added, hastily, seeing the look of horror which, for a moment, overspread his friend's face. "In self-defense," he repeated, with emphasis, "and with the odds three to one. Where should I have been then but for my revolver? As it was, I cleared the world of at least one ruffian."

"And no one—I mean—"

"No one thought any the worse of me, I assure you. Indeed,"—with a faint smile, the first Mr. Burritt had seen upon his face, lurking for a moment round the corners of his mouth—"I even had a testimonial presented to me by some of the leading citizens of the place, thanking me for ridding them of such a pestilent character as 'Black Jake,' which was the name the villain went by."

Mr. Burritt heard him throughout with astonishment, mingled with a faint sensation of horror. It seemed hard to credit that the calm, middle-aged, well-dressed man before him—his own contemporary—had passed through such an experience as this; and that the hand which he had shaken with so much cordiality had blood upon it!

"Thank God!" he cried, "that we have nothing of this sort in England. There is no shooting people down in refreshment saloons in this country!"

"Perhaps not," was the caustic reply; "but, for all that, it struck me, on looking at the paper this morning, that you had got your own share of most of the crimes going—and plenty of 'Black Jakes,' or their equivalent, too."

"Very likely," said Mr. Burritt, with eyes still fixed on the revolver. "By-the-way, would you mind telling me—is that the same weapon that you used on that occasion you were speaking of—I mean when you shot the other—er—individual?"

"Meaning 'Black Jake'?" Yes, I'm happy to say it is the very same."

Mr. Burritt felt that he somehow regarded the article in question with less favor than ever.

"I suppose there isn't the least likelihood of its going off unexpectedly?" he inquired, diffidently.

"Not unless I pull the trigger," was the careless response, "and I'm not likely to do that, unless you attack me first."

The joke—if joke it were—struck Mr. Burritt as being in singular bad taste.

"I must say," he repeated, with a little perceptible irritation in his manner, "that, in this instance, I don't see the necessity for—"

"Very likely, you don't," interrupted the other, resuming his coat; "but if you had been in the habit of carrying it about your person for as many years as I have, and always been accustomed to sleep with it under your pillow, you would think no more of carrying a revolver than you would an umbrella or a watch."

This remark served to remind Mr. Burritt of his original errand. He therefore explained the reason of his intrusion, and having been accommodated by the loan of the desired article, turned to leave the room again.

He hesitated for a moment on the threshold and cast another glance over his shoulder at his friend, who was doing something to the cherished weapon with a bit of oily rag. The latter looked up and met it.

"You don't really mean, Silas, that you are afraid to trust yourself in my company now that you know I carry a revolver?" he asked, with another sudden frown. "You don't surely—?"

(To be continued.)

### A Cure for Sissies.

One way for college athletes to earn their expenses nowadays is by acting as sort of male governesses, says the Chicago Inter Ocean. Wealthy parents whose young sons are being educated at home by governesses frequently apply to the employment offices of universities for the services of some athlete who can give their boys five or six hours a week of companionship. They are afraid that the education of governesses alone may make their sons "sissified."

A number of athletes paying their own way through the various colleges have such jobs. Three or four mornings a week they go to the boys, romp with them, play ball, and during the winter skate and coast. Usually they are also employed in vacation to stay with the boys at their parents' summer homes. One Northwestern student has held such a position for three years.

### When Charles Lamb Said Grace.

Recently, when Edmund Clarence Stedman was visiting in New England, he was called upon by the head of the house while at dinner to invoke the divine blessing.

"I was rather surprised, and for half a minute sorely tempted," said Mr. Stedman in relating the incident. "Then I rose to the occasion and asked a grace which I remembered."

"But, Mr. Stedman," demanded a young woman of the party eagerly, "to what were you sorely tempted?"

"To do as Charles Lamb did under similar circumstances."

"And that was?"

"He looked about the board and asked in his surprise: 'Is there no clergyman present?' The host shook his head. Then Lamb prayed: 'For this and all other mercies, O Lord, make us truly thankful.'—New York Times.



"What brings you here?"

he sneered, "you are the immaculate citizen—the man without a past! What have you to do with such an one as I?" There was a bitter sarcasm in his tone, a morbid jealousy in his look, Mr. Burritt refused to recognize the presence of either.

"But you will return with me, will you not?" he said, "you will let me introduce you to them and make their acquaintance? Take us on your way, and spend at least one night under my roof."

"You are very good, Silas," said his friend. "Ah, if they were all like you—but you forget there are others who—"

Mr. Burritt interrupted him. "I know what you are going to say and will relieve your mind at once. Of all those—and they were not many, six at the outside—who were intimately acquainted with your past history and, I hesitated a moment, "and that unhappy affair, not one is living besides myself."

"What!" cried the other man, in great excitement, "All dead?"

"All but myself," was the answer. "Thank God for that!" burst from the other's lips. "Will you swear that this is so—that they are indeed all dead who are connected with the past, except yourself?"

Mr. Burritt bent his head in reply. The strain of the interview was beginning to tell upon him, together with the hurried journey, and he felt the need of repose.

"Believe me, Jim," he said, falling back again into the old familiar style of address, "you have nothing to fear. Your secret is safe enough with me—never doubt it." He spoke kindly, even affectionately, but his fatigue was evident, and his friend could not but observe it.

"Silas," he said, "you are worn out. We will continue the subject some other time."

They turned to leave the room to-

when interrogated as to the purpose of his sudden expedition.

Certain of his friend's sayings had grated upon his ear, and caused a chill feeling of dissatisfaction and regret.

"Thank God!" he had said when he heard of the deaths of those others, cut off, more than one of them, before they had attained their proper span.

Mr. Burritt turned uneasily in his bed as he reflected upon this, and remembered that he was the only one left who knew all. The only one his friend had to fear. To fear! Surely that was not the right way to put it? To fear! Could it be possible that his old friend believed that he had caused to fear him? But what had been his own words on the subject?

"You can ruin me, Silas, in the eyes of my child, as well as in those of the world, whenever you please!"

The question was, had he, at the time, really meant what he said? Had he, for an instant, believed him capable of such baseness as this?

If so—good heavens. It was a dreadful thought—would he not have still greater reason to exclaim, "thank God!" when he heard of his death?

He scarcely dared to breathe it to himself, but the idea, having once occurred, clung to him, and refused to be set aside, but returned again and again in spite of his steadfastly rejecting it as unworthy and dishonorable. At the same time he found himself wondering whether his friend, the object of these painful thoughts, who occupied an adjoining room, was also lying awake and indulging in unprofitable reflections. Or perhaps he was more pleasantly employed in thinking of his daughter; anticipating their meeting and picturing her as she would be after five years' separation. Whatever else he might, or might not be, he was evidently an affectionate parent, devoted to this one child,

### The Court's Exceptional Tact.

Postmaster General Payne was describing an old-time Milwaukee judge who had been noted for his kind heart.

"I attended one day," said Mr. Payne, "a session of the court at which this judge presided. The court crier was a very old man; he had served with fidelity for many years, but age was beginning now to tell on him. He fell asleep while I was in the court house, and in a little while he was snoring."

"His snores, of course, disturbed the proceedings of the court. The judge

displayed great tact in interrupting them without embarrassing the crier.

"'Crier Jones,' he said in a loud voice. 'Crier Jones, some one is snoring.'"

"The crier awakened. He started to his feet.

"'Silence!' he exclaimed. 'There must be no snoring in the court room,' and he glared ferociously about him."

There is no strength without sympathy.

All's well that ends according to your own diagram of the finish.

### Many Trees in Books.

It is stated that nine of the most successful recent novels aggregated a sale of 1,500,000 copies, and the paper which these books were printed on was made from pulp for the most part. Now pulp paper means the destruction of many trees in the great forests of the north and probably 5,000 were sacrificed for these novels. It would have been better, the Springfield Republican thinks, to have left 4,999 of the trees standing, and put the other one into a composite modern agony.