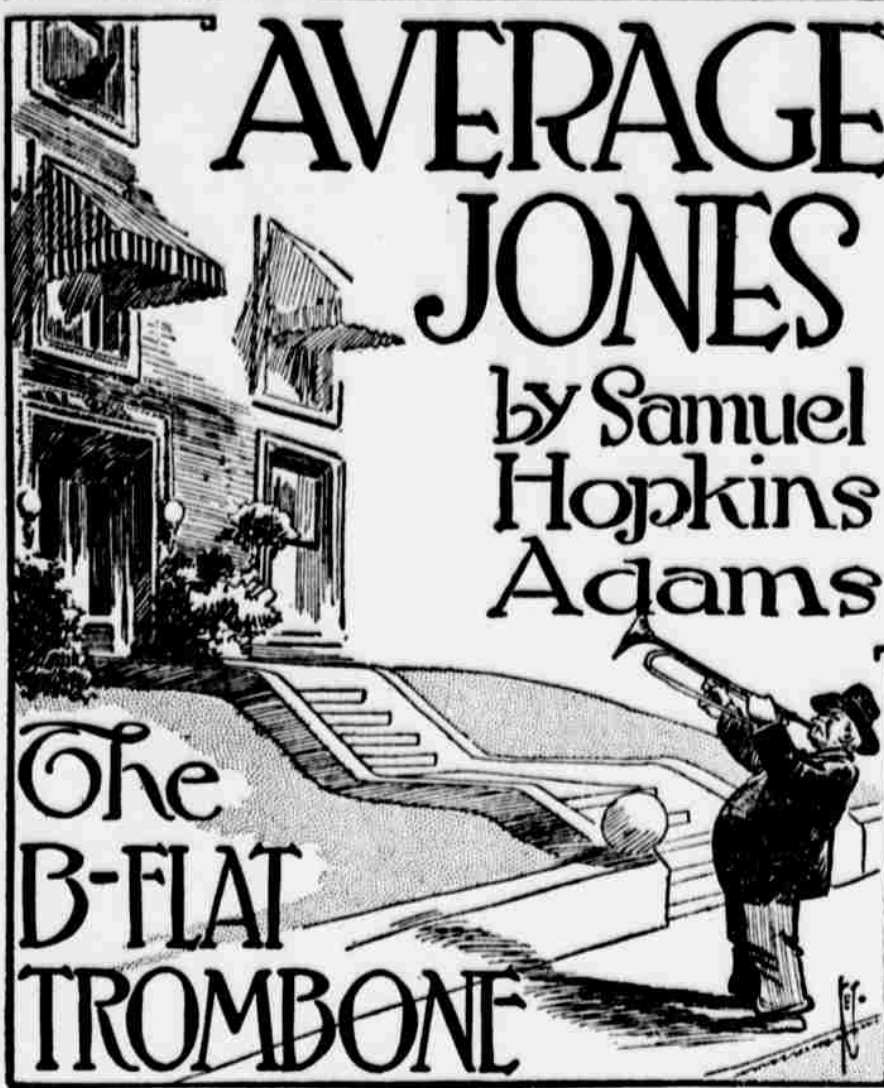


AVERAGE JONES

by Samuel Hopkins Adams



When Mr. A. V. R. E. Jones—Average Jones, his friends called him—complained that he had a craving to take part in the dynamic activities of life...

a part in the greater drama of the metropolis. The party of the second part was the Honorable William Linder.

Mr. Linder sat at five p. m., of an early summer day, behind lock and bolt. The third floor front room of his ornate mansion on Brooklyn's park slope was dedicated to peaceful thought.

Below, in Kennard street, a solitary musician plodded. His pretzel-shaped brass rested against his shoulder. His upward glance encountered the prominent feet in the third-story window of the Linder mansion, and rested.

Love of music was not one of the Honorable William Linder's attributes. An irascible temper was. The master of the mansion leaped from his restful chair. Where his feet had ornamented the coping his face now appeared.

Up went the brass to his lips again. The nasal stairway which leads up to the chorus of "Egypt" rose in rasping wallfolliness. It culminated in an excessive, unendurable, brazen shriek—and the Honorable William Linder experienced upon the undefended rear of his person the most violent kick of a lifetime not always devoted to the arts of peace.

Along with several million other readers, Average Jones followed the Linder "bomb outrage" through the scandalized headlines of the local press. The perpetrator, declared the excited journals, had been skillful. No clue was left. The explosion had taken care of that. The police hung tenaciously to the theory that the musician was involved, chiefly because they had nothing else to hang to.

Got back to it they did with such absorption that when the group broke up, several hours later, Average Jones was committed, by plan and rote, to the new and hopeful adventure of life. What time the Honorable William Linder mated his designs on the mayoralty, Average Jones sat in a suite of offices in Astor court, a location which Waldemar had advised as being central, expensive and inspirational of confidence.

He found a changed Jones; much thinner and "finer" than when, eight weeks before, he had embarked on his new career, at the newspaper owner's instance.

"There'll be no more music, ma'am," promised the young man, laughing, as she went out to answer the door-bell.

"You have found the work interesting, I take it," remarked the visitor.

"I haven't thought or dreamed of anything for a month but this infernal bomb explosion. It makes Linder's nomination certain. Persecution. Attempted assassination. He becomes a near-martyr."

"You expected to find Mr. Ransom here? Mr. Ransom, the gentleman who employed you to play in the street in Brooklyn?"

Mr. Schlichting made large and expansive gestures. "It is a pleasure to play for such a gent," he said warily.

"Where the fat gentleman told you to stop and fell out of the window?"

"A look of fear overspread the worn and innocent face. 'I don't go there no more. The police, they take me.'"

"Not to play? Are you sure?"

"Yes, No, I mean I'm going to Harlem to hear some music. Thirty-fourth's the nearest station, isn't it? Thanks. So long."

"Now, what kind of a tune is he on the track of, I wonder?" he mused.

"Three Hundred East One Hundredth street," said he, slamming the book shut again.

An old lady came to the door. She was sleek and placid, round and comfortable. She did not seem to belong in that house at all.

"An advertisement for a trombone player inserted from this house, ma'am?" he inquired.

"His name was Telford, wasn't it?" said Average Jones strategically.

"Might be," said the old lady, who had evidently formed no favorable impression of her ex-logger.

"I do not notice nothing. I play my B-flat trombone."

"The next thing," said Average Jones, "is to find out where that big easy chair went from here. Can you help me there?"

"It's all true that he said," she confirmed.

"The old lady shook her head. 'All I can do is to tell you the nearby truckman.'"

Canvasses of the local trucking industry brought to light the conveyor of that elegant article of furniture.

"It comes to this," drawled Average Jones intently, looking the employee between his vacuous eyes.

"I can play the B-flat trombone louder as any man in the business," asserted Schlichting with proud conviction.

"But what gets me," pursued Average Jones, "is the purpose of the signal. Whom was it for?"

"I don't know nothing," said the other complacently. "I only know how to play the B-flat trombone louder as any man in the world."

Average Jones paid him a lump sum,

dismissed him and returned to the Cosmo club, there to ponder the problem.

"Hello, Average. Haven't seen you at a Saturday special night since you started your hobby?"

"Freak concert. Waldemar is at our table. Come and join us."

"Conversation at the round-table was general and lively that evening, and not until the port came on—the prideful club part, served only on special occasions and in wonderful, delicate glasses—did Average Jones get an opportunity to speak to Waldemar aside."

"I've been looking into that Linder matter a little. You spoke of an old scandal in Linder's career. What was the husband's name?"

"Why, yes, I believe it was. 'Well, it's only a chance; but if I can get one dark point cleared up—'

"What was his business?"

"Government employment, I think. 'In the—er—scientific line, perhaps'" drawled Jones.

"They used to show that experiment in the laboratory," said Bertram. "You must have had just the accurate amount of liquid in the glass, Average. Move back, you lunatic, it's dripping all over you."

"The liquor dribbled down into his lap. He kept his fascinated gaze fixed on the shattered glass. Bertram dabbed at him with a napkin."

"Doesn't matter. Excuse me. Good-night."

"Leaving his surprised companions, he took hat and cane and caught a Third avenue car. By the time he had reached Brooklyn bridge he had his campaign mapped out. It all depended upon the opening question. Average Jones decided to hit out and hit quick."

"At the house near the navy yard he learned that his man was out. So he sat upon the front steps while one of the highest-priced wines in New York dried into his knees. Shortly before

"He listened from out there." The musician pointed to the other room.

"'No!'" said Average Jones, as the other stretched out a hopeful hand.

"'He liked it—'Egypt,'" said the German wistfully. "He said: 'Bravo! Encore! Bis!'" Sometimes nine, sometimes ten times over I play it, the chorus."

"'And then he sent you home?'"

"'Then sometimes something goes 'sping-g-g-g-g' like that in the back room. Then he comes out and I may go home.'"

"'Um—m.'" muttered Average Jones disinterestedly. "When did you begin to play in the street?"

"After a long time. He take me away to Brooklyn and tell me, 'When you see the feet in the window you play hard!'"

"'The next thing,'" said Average Jones, "is to find out where that big easy chair went from here. Can you help me there?"

"'I do not notice nothing. I play my B-flat trombone.'"

"'Did you ever notice a big easy chair here?'"

"'I don't care,'" he said. "Come inside."

"At the end of an hour's talk Arbuthnot, alias Ransom, agreed to everything that Average Jones proposed."

"'Mind you,'" he said, "I don't promise I won't kill him later. But meantime it'll be some satisfaction to put him down and out politically. You can find me here any time you want me. You say you'll see Linder tomorrow?"

Thousands have. Thousands will be. They're Laying for You.

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Can Protect You Against Them.

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The Ad of Average Jones.

eleven a shuffling figure paused at the steps, feeling for a key.

"Mr. Arbuthnot, otherwise Ransom?" said Average Jones blandly.

"The man's chin jerked back. His jaw dropped.

"Would you like to hire another B-flat trombonist?" pursued the young man.

"Who are you?" gasped the other.

"What do you want?"

"I want to know," drawled Average Jones, "how—er—you planted the glass bulb—er—the sulphuric acid bulb, you know—in the chair that you sent—er—to the Honorable William Linder, so that—er—it wouldn't be shattered by anything but the middle C of a B-flat trombone?"

The man sat down weakly and bowed his face in his hands. Presently he looked up.

"I don't care," he said. "Come inside."

At the end of an hour's talk Arbuthnot, alias Ransom, agreed to everything that Average Jones proposed.

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"Tomorrow," said Average Jones. "Look in the next day's papers for the result."

Setting his telephone receiver down, the Honorable William Linder lost himself in conjecture. He had just given an appointment to his tried and true, but quite impersonal enemy, Mr. Horace Waldemar.

"What can Waldemar want of me?" ran his thoughts. "And who is this friend, Jones, that he's bringing?

"If the charge were in a chair, in the cushion of an easy chair, we'll say, on the third floor of a house in Brooklyn—"

The Honorable William Linder sat down again. He sat heavily.

"The problem would be somewhat different. Of course, it would be easy to arrange that the first person to sit down in the chair would, by his own weight, blow himself up. But the first person might not be the right person, you know. Do you still follow me?"

"Jones? Jones! Jones!?" He tried it in three different accents, without extracting any particular meaning therefrom. Nothing much in the political game," he decided.

"It was with a mingling of guffness and dignity that he greeted Mr. Waldemar an hour later, and turned to meet Average Jones' steady gaze and mildly-inquiring smile.

"Do you—er—know anything of submarine mines, Mr. Linder?" drawled the visitor.

"Hub?" returned the Honorable William Linder, startled.

"Submarine mines," explained the other. "Mines—in—the—sea, if you wish words of one syllable."

The lids of the Honorable Linder contracted.

"You're in the wrong joint," he said. "This ain't the Naval college."

"Thank you. A submarine is a very ingenious affair. I've recently been reading somewhat extensively on the subject. The main charge is some high explosive, usually of the dynamite type. Above it is a small jar of sulphuric acid. Teeth, working on levers, surround this jar. The levers project outside the mine. When a ship strikes the mine, one or more of the levers are pressed in. The teeth crush the jar. The sulphuric acid drops upon the main charge and explodes it. Do you follow me?"

"I'll follow you as far as the front door," said the politician balefully. He rose.

"If the charge were in a chair, in the cushion of an easy chair, we'll say, on the third floor of a house in Brooklyn—"

The Honorable William Linder sat down again. He sat heavily.

"The problem would be somewhat different. Of course, it would be easy to arrange that the first person to sit down in the chair would, by his own weight, blow himself up. But the first person might not be the right person, you know. Do you still follow me?"

The Honorable William Linder made a remark like a fish.

"Now, we have, if you will forgive my professional method," continued Average Jones, "a chair sent to a gentleman of prominence from an anonymous source. In this chair is a charge of high explosive and above it a glass bulb containing sulphuric acid. The bulb, we will assume, is so safeguarded as to resist any ordinary shock of moving. But when this gentleman, sitting at ease in his chair, is noticed by a trombonist, placed for that purpose in the street below—"

"The Dutch horn-player!" cried the politician. "Then it was him; and I'll—"

"Only an innocent fool," interrupted Average Jones, in his turn. "He had no comprehension of what he was doing. He didn't understand that the vibrator from his trombone on one particular note of the slide up the scale—as in the chorus of 'Egypt'—would shiver that glass and set off the charge. All that he knew was to play the B-flat trombone and take his pay."

"His pay?" The question leaped to the politician's lips. "Who paid him?"

"A man named—er—Arbuthnot?" drawled Average Jones.

Linder's eyes did not drop, but a film seemed to be drawn over them.

"You once knew—er—a Mrs. Arbuthnot?"

"The thick shoulders quivered a little.

"Her husband—her widower—is in Brooklyn. Shall I push the argument any further to convince you that you'd better drop out of the mayoralty race?"

Linder recovered himself a little.

"What kind of a game are you ringing in on me?" he demanded.

"Don't you think," suggested Average Jones sweetly, "that considered as news, this—"

Linder caught the word out of his mouth. "News!" he roared. "Even your dirty paper, Waldemar, wouldn't rake that kind of muck up after ten years. It'd be a boomerang. You'll have to put up a stronger line of blackmail and bluff than that."

"Blackmail is perhaps the correct word technically," admitted the newspaper owner, "but bluff—there you go wrong. You've forgotten one thing; that Arbuthnot's arrest and confession would make the whole story news. We stand ready to arrest Arbuthnot, and he stands ready to confess."

There was a long, tense minute of silence. Then—

"What do you want?" The straight-to-the-point question was an admission of defeat.

"Your announcement of withdrawal. I'd rather print that than the Arbuthnot story."

There was a long silence. Finally the Honorable William Linder dropped his hand on the table, palm up.

"You win," he declared curtly. "Did you dope this out, young fellow?"

"Yes."

"Well, you've put me in the Down-and-Out club, all right. And I'm just curious enough to want to know how you did it."

"By abstaining," returned Average Jones cryptically, "from the best wine that ever came out of the Cosmic club cellar."

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Heard on the Train. First Man (with magazine)—What a tremendous number of stories Penley Norris turns out.

Second Man—Does he! They say he uses an incubator to hatch his plots.

In the Matrimonial Mart. "Ever lost anything in speculation, old man?"

"Yes; I spent considerable time speculating on my chances of winning an heiress and lost."