

## CHAPTER XXII

### UNMASKED

Quintus Fogerty was as unlike the typical detective as one could imagine. Small in size, slight and boyish, his years could not readily be determined by the ordinary observer. His face was deeply furrowed and lined, yet a few paces away it seemed the face of a boy of eighteen. His cold gray eyes were persistently staring but conveyed no inkling of his thoughts. His brick-red hair was as unkempt as if it had never known a comb, yet the attire of the great detective was as fastidiously neat as if he had dressed for an important social function. Taken altogether there was something mistrustful and uncanny about Fogerty's looks, and his habit of eternally puffing cigarettes rendered his companionship unpleasant. Yet of the man's professional ability there was no doubt; Mr. Merrick and Arthur Weldon had had occasion to employ him before, with results that justified their faith in him.

The detective greeted the young ladies with polite bows, supplemented by an aimless compliment on the neatness of their office.

"Never would have recognized it as a newspaper sanctum," said he in his thin, piping voice. "No litter, no stale pipes lying about, no cursing and quarreling, no excitement whatever. The editorial room is the index to the workshop; I'll see if the mechanical department is kept as

neatly."

He opened the door to the back room, passed through and closed it softly behind him. Mr. Merrick made a dive for the door and followed Fogerty.

"What's the verdict, Arthur?" asked Louise curiously.

"Why, I--I believe the verdict isn't rendered yet," he hastily replied, and followed Mr. Merrick into the pressroom.

"Now, then," cried Patsy, grabbing the major firmly, "you'll not stir a step, sir, until you tell us the news!"

"What news, Patricia?" Inquired the old gentleman blandly.

"Who was Thursday Smith?"

"The identical individual he is now," said the Major.

"Don't prevaricate, sir! Who was he? What did he do? What is his right name?"

"Is it because you are especially interested in this man, my dear, or are ye simply consumed with feminine curiosity?"

"Be good, Daddy! Tell us all about it," said Patsy coaxingly.

"The man Thursday, then, was likely enough the brother of Robinson Crusoe's man Friday."

"Major, you're trifling!"

"Or mayhap an ex-president of the United States, or forby the senator from Oklahoma. Belike he was once minister to Borneo, an' came home in a hurry an' forgot who he was. But John Merrick will be wanting me."

He escaped and opened the door. Then, with his hand on the knob, he turned and added:

"Why don't ye come in, me journalistic investigators, and see the fun for yerselves? I suspect there's an item in store for ye."

Then he went in, and they took the hint and entered the pressroom in a fluttering group. Fogerty stood with his hands in his pockets intently watching the Dwyer girls set type, while at his elbow Mr. Merrick was explaining in a casual voice how many "m's" were required to make a newspaper column. In another part of the long room Arthur Weldon was leaning over a table containing the half-empty forms, as if critically examining them. Smith, arrayed in overalls and jumper, was cleaning and oiling the big press.

"A daily newspaper," said the major, loudly, as he held up a warning

finger to the bevy of nieces, behind whom Hetty's pale face appeared, "means a daily grind for all concerned in it. There's no vacation for the paper, no hyphens, no skipping a day or two if it has a bad cold; it's the tyrant that leads its slaves by the nose, metaphorically, and has no conscience. Just as regularly as the world rolls 'round the press rolls out the newspaper, and human life or death makes little difference to either of the revolutionists."

While he spoke the Major led the way across the room to the stereotyping plant, which brought his party to a position near the press. Smith glanced at them and went on with his work. It was not unusual to have the pressroom thus invaded.

Presently Fogerty strolled over, smoking his eternal cigarette, and stood watching the pressman, as if interested in the oiling of the complicated machine. Smith, feeling himself under observation, glanced up again in an unconcerned way, and as he faced the detective Fogerty gave a cleverly assumed start and exclaimed:

"Good God!"

Instantly Thursday Smith straightened up and looked at the man questioningly. Fogerty stretched out his hand and said, as if in wonder:

"Why, Melville, old man, what are you doing here? We wondered what had become of you, all these months. Shake hands, my boy! I'm glad I've

found you."

Smith leaned against the press and stared at him with dilated eyes.

Everyone in the room was regarding the scene with intense but repressed excitement.

"What's wrong, Harold?" continued Fogerty, as if hurt by the other's hesitation to acknowledge their acquaintance. "You haven't forgotten me, have you? I'm McCormick, you know, and you and I have had many a good time together in the past."

Smith passed his hand across his forehead with a dazed gesture.

"What name did you call me, sir?" he asked.

"Melville; Harold Melville, of East Sixty-sixth street. I'm sure I'm right. There can't be two like you in the world, you know."

Thursday Smith stepped down from the platform and with a staggering gait walked to a stool, on which he weakly sank. He wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead and looked at Fogerty with a half frightened air.

"And you--are--McCormick?" he faltered.

"Of course."

Smith stared a moment and then shook his head.

"It's no use," he said despairingly; "I can't recall a single memory of either Harold Melville or--or his friend McCormick. Pardon me, sir; I must confess my mind is absolutely blank concerning all my life previous to the last two years. Until this moment I--I could not recall my own name."

"H'm," muttered Fogerty; "you recall it now, don't you?"

"No. You tell me my name is Melville, and you seem to recognize me as a man whom you once knew. I accept your statement in good faith, but I cannot corroborate it from my own knowledge."

"That's queer," retorted Fogerty, his cold eyes fixed upon the man's face.

"Let me explain, please," said Smith, and related his curious experience in practically the same words he had employed when confiding it to Mr. Merrick. "I had hoped," he concluded, "that if ever I met one who knew me formerly, or heard my right name mentioned, my memory would come back to me; but in this I am sorely disappointed. Did you know me well, sir?"

"Pretty well," answered the detective, after a slight hesitation.

"Then tell me something about myself. Tell me who I was."

"Here--in public?" asked Fogerty, with a suggestive glance at the spectators, who had involuntarily crowded nearer.

Smith flushed, but gazed firmly into the faces surrounding him.

"Why not?" he returned. "These young ladies and Mr. Merrick accepted me without knowledge of my antecedents. They are entitled to as full an explanation as--as I am."

"You place me, Melville, in a rather embarrassing position," declared Fogerty. "This is a queer case--the queerest in all my experience. Better let me post you in a private interview."

Smith trembled a bit, from nervousness; but he persisted in his demand.

"These people are entitled to the truth," said he. "Tell us frankly all you know about me, and do not mince words--whatever the truth may be."

"Oh, it's not so bad," announced the detective, with a shrug; "or at least it wouldn't be in New York, among your old aristocratic haunts. But here, in a quiet country town, among these generous and simple-hearted folks who have befriended you, the thing is rather difficult to say."

"Say it!" commanded Smith.

"I will. Many New Yorkers remember the firm of Melville & Ford, the cleverest pair of confidence men who ever undertook to fleece the wealthy lambs of the metropolis."

"Confidence men!" gasped Smith, in a voice of horror.

"Yes, putting it mildly. You were both jolly good fellows and made a host of friends. You were well-groomed, rode in automobiles, frequented good clubs and had a stunning establishment on Sixty-sixth street where you entertained lavishly. You could afford to, for there was where you fleeced your victims. But it wasn't so very bad, as I said. You chose the wealthy sons of the super-rich, who were glad to know such popular men-about-town as Harold Melville and Edgar Ford. When one set of innocents had been so thoroughly trimmed that they compared notes and began to avoid you, you had only to pick up another bunch of lambs, for New York contains many distinct flocks of the species. As they could afford to lose, none of them ever complained to the police, although the Central Office had an eye on you and knew your methods perfectly.

"Finally you made a mistake--or rather Ford did, for he was not as clever as you were. He brought an imitation millionaire to your house; a fellow who was putting up a brazen front on the smallest sort of a roll. You won his money and he denounced you, getting away with a pack of



marked cards for evidence. At this you both took fright and decided on a hasty retreat. Gathering together your plunder--which was a royal sum, I'm convinced--you and Ford jumped into a motor car and--vanished from New York.

"The balance of your history I base on premise. Ford has been located in Chicago, where, with an ample supply of money, he is repeating his New York operations; but Harold Melville has never been heard of until this day. I think the true explanation is easily arrived at. Goaded by cupidity--and perhaps envy of your superior talents--Ford took advantage of the situation and, finding the automobile speeding along a deserted road, knocked you on the head, tumbled you out of the car, and made off with your combined winnings. The blow had the effect--not so uncommon as you think--of destroying your recollection of your past life, and you have for two years been wandering in total ignorance of what caused your affliction."

During this recital Smith sat with his eyes eagerly fixed upon the speaker's face, dwelling upon every word. At the conclusion of the story he dropped his face in his hands a moment, visibly shuddering. Then again he looked up, and after reading the circle of pitying faces confronting him he bravely met Mr. Merrick's eyes.

"Sir," he said in a voice that faltered in spite of his efforts to render it firm, "you now know who I am. When I first came to you I was a mere irresponsible hobo, a wandering tramp who had adopted the name of

Thursday Smith because he was ignorant of his own, but who had no cause to be ashamed of his manhood. To-day I am discovered in my true guise. As Harold Melville, the disreputable trickster, I am not fit to remain in your employ--to associate with honest men and women. You will forgive my imposition, I think, because you know how thoroughly ignorant I was of the truth; but I will impose upon you no longer. I am sorry, sir, for I have been happy here; but I will go, thanking you for the kindly generosity that prompted you to accept me as I seemed to be, not as I am."

He rose, his face showing evidence of suffering, and bowed gravely. Hetty Hewitt walked over and stood by his side, laying her hand gently upon his arm.

But Thursday Smith did not know John Merrick very well. The little gentleman had silently listened, observing meanwhile the demeanor of the accused, and now he smiled in his pleasant, whimsical way and caught Smith's hand in both his own.

"Man, man!" he cried, "you're misjudging both me and yourself, I don't know this fellow Melville. You don't know him, either. But I do know Thursday Smith, who has won my confidence and by his manly acts, and I'll stand by him through thick and thin!"

"I am Harold Melville--the gambler--the confidence man."

"You're nothing of the sort, you're just Thursday Smith, and no more responsible for Harold Melville than I am."

"Hooray!" exclaimed Patsy Doyle enthusiastically. "Uncle's right, Thursday. You're our friend, and the mainstay of the Millville Daily Tribune. We shall not allow you to desert us just because you've discovered that your--your--ancestor--wasn't quite respectable."

"That's it, exactly," asserted Beth. "It's like hearing a tale of an ancestor, Thursday, or of some member of your family who lived before you. You cannot be responsible, in any way, for another man's wickedness."

"As I look at it," said Louise reflectively, "you are just two years old, Thursday, and innocent of any wrongdoing before that day you first found yourself."

"There's no use our considering Melville at all," added Uncle John cheerfully. "I'm sorry we ever heard of him, except that in one way it clears up a mystery. Thursday Smith, we like you and trust you. Do not doubt yourself because of this tale. I'll vouch for your fairness and integrity. Forget Melville, who has never really existed so far as any of us are concerned; be yourself, and count on our friendship and regard, which Thursday Smith has fairly won."

Hetty was crying softly, her cheek laid against Thursday's sleeve. The

man stood as if turned to stone, but his cheeks were flushed, his eyes sparkling, and his head proudly poised.

Fogerty lighted a fresh cigarette, watching the scene with an imperturbable smile.

Suddenly Smith awoke to life. He half turned, looked wonderingly at Hetty, and then folded her thin form in his arms and pressed a kiss on her forehead.

Fogerty coughed. Uncle John jerked out his handkerchief and blew his nose like a bugle call.

The major's eyes were moist, for the old soldier was sympathetic as a child. But Patsy, a little catch in her voice, impulsively put her arms around the unashamed pair and murmured: "I'm so glad, Hetty! I'm so glad, Thursday! But--dear me--aren't we going to have any paper to-morrow morning?"

That relieved the tension and everybody laughed. Thursday released Hetty and shook Uncle John's hand most gratefully. Then they all wanted to shake hands, and did until it came to Fogerty's turn. But now Smith drew back and looked askance at the detective.

"I do not know you, Mr. McCormick," he said with dignity.

"My name's not McCormick; it's Fogerty," said the other, without malice.

"I was simply testing your memory by claiming to be an old friend.

Personally I never knew Harold Melville, but I'm mighty glad to make

Thursday Smith's acquaintance and will consider it an honor if you'll

shake my hand."

Smith was too happy to refuse. He took Fogerty's hand.