

A DEBT OF HATE

BY A.H. SURREY

"Slick Paddy" Pat Hartigan had sometimes been called; number 89 he had been called for the last 6 months. A cold bleak desolate day, exactly mirroring his own feelings, had seen him enter Wandsworth prison. A sunny delightful June morning saw him emerge from that great forbidding building and again the outside appearance was reflected in his heart.

At 24 the future lay before him and he smiled at his past follies and resolved to forget them. A sound meal was his first need and not being entirely penniless he got a cheap but substantial one as only a man accustomed to living at the minimum daily expenditure can procure one.

With a heart light as air he quitted the tiny restaurant and blithely humming a tune he made his way down East to the region he knew so well. On his journey a resolve was strengthening in his mind. He determined that the squalid alleys and back streets should see him no more. His old associates and partners in iniquity should be forever buried in the past.

As he entered his old lodgings he met a man in the passage, a man with a shrunken rat-like face and hunched shoulders; a man who, when he saw Pat, hastened to meet him with outstretched hand. The Irishman calmly surveyed the ugly brute from head to foot and put his hands in his pockets.

"Say don't you know me 'Slick'" the fellow piped in a shrill voice.

Yes, Pat knew "Ferret" Martin, one of his old accomplices. The two had planned many a crime together and the thought made Pat sick, full as he was of his new resolution.

"I did, but don't want to in the future, thanks." was the cold response.

A scowl darkened the fellow's features; a twisted contortion of his wrinkled face displayed a set of hideous yellow fangs in his mouth making him look like a wolf at bay.

"Say don't treat an old pal like that" he said in a piteous whine, and then lowering his voice to a hoarse whisper, "How'd you like a dead easy job; not the slightest chance of being nabbed. Simple as pie. What d'you say to it?"

"I say, " said Pat in an ominous tone, "that if you're not outside that door in a brace of shakes, I'll chuck you out on your dirty neck."

The small eyes flashed a glance of malevolent hate. "Orlright," he retorted, "I said there wasn't no risk. Still, " backing towards the street door, "if you're not man enough to do the job, I'll 'ave all the goods. He! He!"

Pat had never had his manhood reproached before in his life and his Irish blood fairly boiled to think that this under-sized little demon should thus taunt him. He strode forward and seized the grinning little

savage by his neck and the seat of his slacks and propelled him out of the door with such force that he literally flew into the middle of the narrow street and lay spread-eagled on the ground.

Only one spectator was the witness of this little scene, a trivial incident in that locality. This person was a broad-shouldered middle-aged fellow who walked with his head down and whose observations were made out of the corners of his eyes. He was cheaply dressed in the garb of a captain of the Mercantile Marines. His make-up was superb, but a particularly close observer might have noticed that there was no seaman-like roll in his gait. A gleam of humour flashed in his deep-set eyes for a moment but no outward sign of merriment was visible on his full red face, and without taking any particular notice of the unfortunate in the roadway, he passed on.

Pat made his way up to the little room which he had occupied some six months ago. It did not take him long to gather his few belongings. Packing them neatly in a bundle he left the room and no farewell sigh was forced from his lips at the parting.

Nobody was about when he came down stairs. On the bottom step he hesitated. His first experience of the difficulty of being honest assailed him. He owed the landlady a fortnight's rent, a sum amounting to 10/6. How easy to quietly walk out with no one the wiser! To pay the debt he owed would nearly exhaust all the money he possessed in the world. He pulled out a dirty bank note and gazed at it longingly. At least that was honestly earned he thought. Then a peculiar thing met his eye: He noticed the number; it was A.898989. He reflected his convict's number had been 89. He meant to part with this reminder of the past and consider the bonds that held him to this old life as irrevocably severed.

He descended to the landlady's quarters down in the basement. She was at home and delighted to see him, though when she saw his bundle and noted that he was ready to depart, she was surprised that he had not departed without her knowledge. Pat settled up his bill, and although it nearly broke his purse it did not nearly break his heart.

"Good-bye, Ma!" said Pat, just a little sorrowfully. Mrs. Barnden was the kindest soul he had ever met. Ever ready to give credit to a down-and-out, never yet had she been honestly acted by.

"Good-bye, Paddy, " she said smilingly, when he had told her of his resolution, and then seriously, "Do you know, I'm really glad you're going?"

"Yes, I suppose so." he replied a little doubtfully, somewhat taken aback with this reception from Ma of all persons.

"Oh! don't mean I shall to be rid of you, " said the good dame, seeing Pat had taken her words to heart, "I'm glad for your own sake. Out of this den you'll be able to live honestly at least. A man who has to live here, never has a chance to go straight."

"Sure was Pat's quick response, "then why the devil do you stay here?"

Ma Barnden smiled a sad little smile and answered slowly, "I'm satisfied here, if not with the place itself I am with the people. And then, you never know, perhaps the Lord himself made it my duty to stay here. Heaven knows there's enough poverty round about for all the charity in Christendom, and I'm content to do my little bit to make their lives a little brighter."

Pat was struck by her simple piousness. He had never realised that this homely woman with her frank jovial countenance, a woman who took in washing for a living, was in reality a messenger to hope and cheer to those denizens of the slums, and indeed one of God's own angels.

He left the house plunged in meditation, trying to evolve a course for the future. A man passed him on the pavement, and their shoulders brushed. Pat glanced up with casual interest. He glimpsed the other flash a side-long look at him from the corner of his eye; it was the man in the mariner's garb.

Pat quickened his steps, the while a vague alarm was entering his heart. He recognised those deep grey eyes. Only one person he had ever seen had such steely orbs and that person was Detective-Inspector Merrisfield of Scotland Yard, the same person who had been responsible for his previous arrest, when he came up on a charge of house-breaking.

"I wonder," he muttered to himself, "sure enough, that was that 'tec, but was he watching me, and if so what the devil for?"

Then conscious of his own immunity from transgression, he squared his broad shoulders and walking with firm tread and head erect, he never once looked back behind him.

Pat Hartigan found new lodgings and in a much more congenial neighbourhood. The fare was plain and much to his liking, and then landlady pleasant and highly respectable. He slept late the next morning and his awakening was both an auspicious and disconcerting start for his first day of freedom.

He opened his eyes and his senses reasserted themselves in a flash as a thunderous rapping sounded on the door.

"Enter, Caesar, " he called cheerfully.

The door was punched open none to gently and there entered a plainly dressed red-faced stockily built man with deep-set, piercing grey eyes. Behind him came a police constable.

"What thedo you want with me?" roared Paddy, furiously when he recognised the first comer, that this man should so dog his footsteps.

"Silence," snapped the detective, "Patrick Hartigan, it is my duty to arrest you for the murder of Mrs. Barnden."

"Pwhat the daviil are you blathering about?" Pat was out of bed in a twinkling. "Murdering Ma, who me?" he said dazedly, "Why only yesterday afternoon I left her alive and well. D'ya mean to say she's murdered?"

"I do, and I mean to say that you're arrested on suspicion of having caused that murder." replied the inspector tersely. "Come now, be quick and dress and come quietly or we'll use force, I can tell you."

Paddy's brain seemed to be whirling round at a amazing rate. Nevertheless, he dressed quickly and turning to the inspector: "I suppose you'll let me have some breakfast?" he said looking at him with the light of battle in his eyes.

"Time to see about that when we get to the station" was the gruff response, "Ready?"

Pat jammed on his hat with a show of vehemence and scowled darkly when the officer produced a pair of handcuffs and put them on his wrists. But he kept silent.

The journey to the police-station was real torture to the Irishman. The steel upon his arms at once shamed and maddened him. Their destination was reached at last, and after the handcuffs were removed, he was taken to a cell. However, he was served with a frugal breakfast on the inspector's recommendation.

Left alone Pat was given ample time for reflection. The thought of Mrs. Barnden's death appalled him even more than his own precarious position. He wondered if they were telling him lies for some deep motive. Then he fell to pondering over his predicament, and wondered how they had run him to earth so quickly. Then he thought of Martin, and his face grew white and grim.

"The dirty hound!" he muttered, "Faith, the perishing coyote, the - the - - " Words failed him and he clenched his big hands. His were fists which had administered many a knock-out blow way back in Kilonmel, where they scrapped for the sheer love of fighting. "If I had that thieving, murderous skunk here now, I'd..." he opened and closed his hands with terrible strength and this dumb eloquence boded no good for the object of his thoughts.

His recriminations were abruptly ended by the entrance of Merrisfield. The officer calmly seated on the bench beside the prisoner, and fixing him with his steely glance, said slowly: "I know you didn't murder her, but appearances are against you. You're not above a bit of pinching now and then, but you're too white to murder anyone."

"Sure inspector, an you're right." Pat thrilled with pleasure at the words of the police officer, and his eyes showed his gratitude. "But d'you know who did do it?"

"How about that rat-faced thing you chucked out in the gutter. Eh?" he asked suddenly.

"Holy smoke! If you guess that much why the daviil don't you collar him?" was Pat's excited query.

"You may be sure he's a marked man." said Merrisfield grimly. We'll get him when we want him, but just now he's in his stronghold and first of all we've got to fix the guilt on him and as yet we haven't a clue. Not a single shred of evidence."

Pat visualised his meeting with Martin and recalled his words about a coup he proposed to bring off. He told the inspector this briefly.

"Go on" said the other, "I want to know why you went there at all and what you did in the house."

He related everything and when he had finished the detective's eyes gleamed.

"How did you pay the bill?" he asked abruptly.

A light of recollection burst upon Pat. "I've got it." he cried, "With a ten-bob note and a tanner and I know the number of the note. If Ma was murdered, sure enough they'd have robbed her as well, and the murderer will have the note on him."

"Sure." was the Yard man's reply, "What was the number?"

"A.898989, and there was a red ink smudge just underneath it." said Pat triumphantly.

"And how did you remember that?" The sleuth's faculties, sharpened by years of experience, were mistrustful at the other's obvious alibi.

"Why," snapped Pat, "Because when I was in chokey my number was 89."

"Good enough," said the inspector, rising to go; then at the door: "Wait in patience, I'm going to try to nab Martin."

Half an hour later, the inspector, arrayed in his sailor's costume, was traversing the streets of the East end. He passed the door of the unfortunate woman's house and at the sight of one of his men on guard there, he smiled and paused. "I guess if my disguise can be penetrated, Williams is the man to do it. I wonder."

Chuckling inwardly he approached the house and in the passage his way was barred by the man in blue.

"Port your helm a point or two you lubber, you're fouling my bowsprit" he greeted breezily.

"No admittance here." was the non-committal answer of the policeman.

"Thunder!" roared the bogus sea captain, "D'you know I be captain Tremayne of the Kittiwake, you big stiff, and I want...?"

"I don't care if you're Oliver Cromwell's ghost," replied the constable carelessly, "And if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head, I'll run you in for using obscene language."

The Captain stamped away, apparently furious, but really delighted.

"Williams is a good man," he mused, "though I don't know whether I ought to reprimand him for not recognising me, or compliment myself on my get-up."

At the corner of the street, a loungee crossed to him, a man whose face seemed to be bathed in perpetual gloom, and for all the world they were old ship-mates as they walked arm-in-arm along the street. But their conversation was not a nautical dialogue.

"He's in the pub, yonder and just about drunk." said Merrisfield's companion, a man of the name of Lestrade.

The detective grinned. "When he's properly drunk we'll try to wangle a confession out of him" he returned.

A queer look flashed in the other's eyes, but he said nothing.

The beer house was a rendezvous of loafers and criminals, beetle-browed ruffians all.

The two new-comers excited no alarm in their dress, and they pushed their way to the bar. Martin was there, sure enough, quaffing raw spirit with such a reckless air that one, well versed in the study of the human beings of that district, could see plainly that he had had a good haul on his latest villanous exploit.

Merrisfield was an actor to his finger tips and was quickly talking with Martin.

"Souse me scuppers!" he said jovially, you musta knocked a millionaire over the mast-head."

"Yep, capt." said the disgusting little ruffian, "something like that." and he grimaced horribly. Merriesfield quickly ordered a glass of ale for himself and one for his friend and also a tumbler of rum for the other. The scoundrel's eyes sparkled but he looked at the seaman doubtfully.

"Say, capt!" he said, "don't you like rum?"

"Sure enough," was Merrisfield's prompt response, "but you see on the briny we get enough to swab down decks with, and its a real treat to get a deluscious, foaming head on your beer. You never see a glass of ale at sea." and he drank his glass. with evident relish. The others did likewise, and Merrisfield ordered them to be replenished. He drew Martin over to a small table in a comparatively secluded part of the saloon. The three sat down and Martin glanced furtively at them both.

"Say, what's the game?" he questioned dubiously.

"Sall right matey. " reassured the skipper, "you sail to leeward and ship a drop of what I'm going to spill."

He finished his glass and leaned forward.

"You musta got a full cargo your last port?" he queried.

The drunk besotted brain grasped his meaning.

"O, I got a quid or two." he rejoined off-handedly.

"Say, what d'ya say to a clear thousand quidlets?" shot out the inspector suddenly after a moment's pause.

An avaricious gleam blazed in the small eyes.

"Gosh I'd do a lot." The face contorted terribly. "What d'you want done?"

"I want a man whose game is to put someone's lights out." was the police officer's grim answer.

"Savvy?"

"Hum, I guessed that," replied the other, "it's worth a good deal to do that though; not a penny under a thousand quid." he added with a cunning leer.

"I want a man whose got guts." shortly replied the sham sailor, "though I might say that if you act by us there's not the faintest chance of being collared."

"Yep, I guess I should want a clear get-away." said Martin.

Merrisfield put his face close to the other's. "D'you ever do anyone in before?" he asked.

The beady eyes opposite him were full of sullen fire.

"That's telling." replied the miscreant sharply.

"You needn't be squeamish," contemptuously replied Merrisfield, "We've done the job before dozens of times. But this time we want someone whose not known around about the place. That's why I'm offering you the chance of clearing an easy thousand. You just tell us about your little job and if we're satisfied that you're our man, there's your fortune made."

"I guess that's a fair proposition, pardner," put in Lestrade, "We only want to see the colour of your liver. Personally, I don't think you've got the pluck to knock spots off a tame guinea-pig." He said this banteringly, but his tone was forced and his eyes were hard as steel. Merrisfield cursed him for not acting naturally.

"Then open your lugs and I'll tell you about an old bean I did in once." said the coarse brute with a sudden resolution., tempted by the alluring prospect painted by the inspector. Merrisfield bit his lip hard. Things were not panning out as he had anticipated. He had hoped to get a confession from him of the murder of Mrs. Barnden, and now he was going to hear something totally different, something concerning the murder of a man, perhaps in a different part of the country.

"About three years ago," said Martin in a hissing whisper, "I got wind of a cushy job st Oxford. I tramped there and one night I shinned over the wall and opened a window on the ground floor. Everything was quiet and in about ten minutes I had collected as much as I could carry. I picked the lock of a cabinet and found some whisky in a decanter. Like a blamed fool I took a nip and then another and pretty soon I had emptied the bottle. I suppose I wasn't as careful after that, but anyhow, a military looking old josser suddenly popped 'is 'ead round the door and threatened to drill daylight through me. I chucked the decanter at 'im and knocked the gun out of 'is 'and and then we 'ad a of a scrap. It was danged lucky for me that 'e was an old topper, an' that there wasn't anybody else in the place at the time. I managed to grab a fancy dagger off the wall over the mantle-piece, and then he rushed at me again. I shoved a chair over in front of 'im and 'e went down with a bang. I didn't give 'im the time to get up and go for me again. I just dropped on top of 'im and stuck the knife through 'is gizzard a few times."

The diabolical scoundrel cooly finished a glass of rank spirit at one gulp and surveyed his listeners to see what impression he had made.

Merrisfield felt his blood surging within him, but hemaintained mastery of himself. Lestrade was leaning forward, his face ashy grey and his teeth clenched.

"Say," he hisses, "do you happen to know the name of that chap?"

"Wall, I don't know for sure," drawled Martin, "but on some of the stuff that I managed to pinch it had the name of J. Lestrade."

Merrisfield sat speechless; not so his companion. Fixing the self-confessed murderer with burning eyes, he said slowly and deliberately, in a voice with trembled with suppressed fury: "John Lestrade was my father, accept this from his son." His hand shot up, a steel blue service revolver gleamed in the faint light of the drinking saloon, and then it spat fire; one, twice, thrice.

The range was deadly. The weapon was no more than a foot from Martin's head and he dropped from his seat covered in blood. Silence fell upon everybody. Merrisfield was stunned. Lestrade sat as if he was carved in marble. The other company were attentive to the little drama for an instant and then resumed conversations as if nothing out of the ordinary had occured. Such happenings were not unusual in the vicinity. The inspector spoke at last.

"Good God man you must be mad," he gasped out. "Why the thunder didn't you stay your hand/ He's have swung for it without that."

Lestrade laughed an unearthly laugh and getting to his feet, drew his fellow officer towards the bar. "We'll have a drink on the strength of it." he said jerkily with a reckless light shining in his eyes.

Merrisfield humoured him and they drank, one with air of a man with a task well done, the other with trepidation and uncertainty as to the future.

"I guess we'll get out of here and find some blue coats to see to Martin." grunted Merrisfield. His companion nodded and plunged his hand in his pocket to pay their bill. He pulled out a dirty grimy ten-shilling note. Merrisfield's teeth met with a snap and he only half stifled the ejaculation the sight of that note brought to his lips. The note was identical with the one described by Pat Hartigan. He said nothing, however, but grasping the other's arm tightly they marched out into the street meeting with no opposition from anyone. The crime had not attracted any undue notice. The river was handy and at night=fall the proprietor of the drinking haunt would no doubt dispose of the body by that means.

In a deserted street Merrisfield turned on his fellow officer fiercely "Where the blazes did you get that ten-bob note?" he said hoarsely, "I know it was got off the dead body of Mrs. Barnden yesterday evening. Come on, out with it."

Lestrade's face was livid with fury. "D'you want to know?" he almost screamed, "well I did get it off her body. I did the old woman in. I went to her to ask her where her measly son was. Martin's her precious son. She knew I wanted to kill him and wouldn't tell me. I got mad and hit her over the head with a billet of wood. I must have been daft to have took her money, but I did. And now go and do your worst, but I swear you shant take me alive." Thrusting Merrisfield aside a revolver flashed upwards and a report followed. He fell forward on his face. Merrisfield was appalled by this double tragedy and relieved to see a police constable hastening up.

Quickly making known his identity and that of Lestrade, they got him into the nearest house and the policeman went for the ambulance.

Lestrade was not dead and feebly beckoned to Merrisfield.

"Good-bye Merrisfield," he muttered huskily, "I'm pegging out. See that that Irish chap doesn't suffer for the old woman's death. I'm sorry I killed her. Now I've avenged my old dad's murder, I'm content to die." Merrisfield took his hand; he felt that he could do no less. A few minutes afterwards Lestrade was dead.

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