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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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In A Dead Man's Shoes

by Harold
Markham



"The hangman tugged on his legs with fiendish energy."

"OYEZ, oyez, oyez! Let all manner of persons keep silence while judgment of death is passing upon the prisoner at the bar upon pain of imprisonment—God save the King!"

A tense shudder of anticipation ran round the court of the Old Bailey, the one person utterly unmoved besides the usher and the judge being the young man who stood erect in the herb-strewn dock.

"James Barnaby O'Dale," the voice of the old judge came thin but clear through the thick atmosphere of the court, "have you aught to say

why judgment of death should not be passed upon you, according to law?"

In the silence that followed row upon row of pale faces and questioning eyes were turned upon the good-looking young highwayman. At last he spoke.

"I' faith, my Lord," he replied, jauntily, "I don't think I'll be troubling ye with any remarks on that score. All the world knows I'm a master at my profession. Faith, wasn't it I held up Seven String Ned himself the night after he stopped Davy Garrick's coach and stripped

the jolly player down to his very shoe-buckles? Nay, my Lord, you'll swing me whatever I say and so I'll make no argument against it; but there's three favors I'd be asking with your kind permission."

His Lordship nodded gravely, and people edged closer to hear what the condemned man would say.

"First, then," young O'Dale began, "I ask for a reasonably sober hangman who'll know his business; secondly, for speech with a certain wench who may ask to see me when I'm taken back to the cells; and, thirdly"—his eyes roved mischievously round the court—"that my old friend Jacob Larkyn do come and see me turned off. I believe he's in court. Jacob, you put up the money for that poor devil of a lawyer who never had a dog's chance to keep my windpipe out of the halter—and I thank you for that—and other things. See ye again at Tyburn, Jacob!"

The judge's clerk had already invested his master with the black cap and the lips of the ordinary were framing their "Amen."

"You shall be taken back to the prison from whence you came," quavered the tired old voice, "and from there to a place of public execution . . . by the neck till your body be dead; and may God have mercy on your soul!"

The parson said his "Amen;" Jim O'Dale bowed ironically to him, and then to the bench, and turned as a warder touched him meaningly on the shoulder.

JACOB LARKYN had been in court and had certainly every intention of seeing the execution. It would have been unlike Jacob to deny himself that crowning pleasure.

He strolled meditatively down Fleet street and turned into the old Cock Tavern, where he sank into a dark corner to ruminate his triumph over a bottle of tawny port.

The little inkeeper of Kensington had much on which to congratulate himself. He had not only cleared a determined rival out of his path but, in doing so, had also paved the way surely toward winning over the subject of their rivalry.

Poor Barbara Challis—pretty Barbara Challis! Her interview with Jim O'Dale in the condemned hole would be her last sight of him; soon she would be out of mourning and ready to listen to the generous friend who had paid for such legal advice as the custom of the time allowed. That had been a master stroke, Jacob told himself between sips of his wine; it had looked positively Christian and had yet been so absolutely safe. The lawyer's fee had been well within his means and the evidence against O'Dale so damning that the entire four inns of court mustered on his side could not have saved him from the rope. Yes, it had been a princely inspiration! None would now suspect that Jacob Larkyn, proven friend of the accused, had been the one to peach on him and guide the Bow Street runners by night to the bedroom where he lay sleeping the sleep of a man who believed himself safe in friendly hands. No, not even if O'Dale suspected—and Jacob half believed he had done so—and voiced his suspicions to Barbara would there be the least atom of proof against the friend who had betrayed him while purporting to be the Good Samaritan of his uttermost need!

THERE was no court of criminal appeal in the days of King George III and executions took place as soon after the trial as the necessary arrangements could be made. By between 4 and 5 in the morning Jacob was in his place, close to the scaffold, and by 6 o'clock he was hemmed in by as villainous a mob as ever offended eye, ear and nose at once. They beguiled the time with

drink and obscene songs, with fighting and filching; but their doings were lost on the ugly, undersized man in the drab coat who stood motionless through the hours before the great black framework whereon the handsome form of Jim O'Dale was soon to swing.

At last, to an accompaniment of coarse cheering, the black cart was seen pushing its way through the crowd, occupied only by the driver, the clergyman and the condemned.

Jacob tiptoed and licked his lips.

It would soon be over now. Soon he would be free to start, unimpeded, on a clear course toward marriage with pretty Barbara Challis!

O'Dale was sitting upright, a rose in his mouth, bowing from side to side as the rogues in the street fought to get closer and acclaim their fellow-rogue in the cart.

Handsome and debonair as usual! Curse his good looks! They were really the foundation of Jacob's hatred. He hated O'Dale for his slim, straight figure that seemed specially made for the fine velvet clothes; for his immaculately powdered hair and his regular features; but most of all for his dainty, almost effeminate hands and feet.

Jacob, otherwise insignificant, was the possessor of big, gnarled hands and stubby, broad feet—the feet of a plebeian, such as would have been no other in the finest, most expensive of shoes. It had been those slim aristocratic feet of O'Dale's that, almost more than his looks and manner, had given him the suggestion of breeding which had carried pretty Barbara off hers the moment she saw him and caused her to break her tentative betrothal to plain Jacob Larkyn.

O'Dale was aware of his looks and proud of them. Even now, as the cart drew up at the scaffold, he gave evidence of the fact; for he had managed to change his dress since being condemned and was resplend-

ent in a scarlet coat, lace ruffles, white silk breeches and stockings, and highly polished shoes with buckles of curiously wrought gold.

The ordinary got down as the cart was drawn under the noose, and some semblance of a hush was made in the crowd, expectant of the thrill of a dying speech.

O'Dale bowed gallantly to some ladies in a window opposite, then north, south, east and west. They did not hurry over a hanging in those days. The executioner waited patiently for him, rope in hand.

"Good people!" began the highwayman, pitching his voice clearly. "I'm sorry to cheat ye of a speech; but 'faith, barkers and rapier come handier to me than my mother tongue and therefore I must. But there's one I would have a word with before my friend here serves me with his particular fashion in collar. Jacob, my buck, come forward. I have a word to speak and a last bequest to make ye. Tut, man, don't hang back in that ashamed way—come out, my little Jacob, and show yourself!"

With a grim smile that he hoped would be accepted as a friendly one Jacob stepped forward.

"Dear friend," Jim went on, "you have done much for poor O'Dale in the matter of his late trial and present appointment with Tyburn Tree, and he appreciates it, believe me. Jacob, I have a little gift to make you—one you will be liking, I fancy—these gold buckles and my last pair of shoes. Take them and wear them, Jacob, in memory of what you did for 'Captain' Jim O'Dale!"

The hangman made a gesture as if to speak. O'Dale turned on him.

"Tut, Mister Ketch—I know the clothes I'm turned off in are yours by right of law or customs or both, but you shalln't deny my friend here this trifle! On my life, if you do, I'll take off my coat before I hang and throw it to the mob—and you'll

see it is a rare fine coat, Ketch, my buck—not one to let slip through an honest hangman's fingers, hey? There, that's settled!" he added as the hangman nodded a grudging assent; and, taking off his lace stock, gave his neck to the halter and his arms ready to be tied.

Jacob stood back, clenching his teeth, while the final preparations were made. A dead silence now reigned. . . .

The hangman gave a signal to the driver. The cart moved off with a sharp jolt and the rope was jerked tight, quivering under the condemned man's weight.

For a minute or so he struggled violently, his body twisting and his feet threshing the air. Then he swung gently from side to side, bending and stretching his knees slowly. Then, with what seemed like a final reaction to the strangling noose, his whole body stiffened into rigidity—one last violent convulsion, and it hung motionless. Were his sufferings so quickly over?

No! To the disgust of the watching multitude the wretched man's struggles recommenced with even greater violence: the legs kicked out, as if striving to find ground whereon to plant the twinkling feet; the breast heaved; the features under the white cap swelled till it looked like a grotesque plaster mask of its wearer. Could this really be the handsome, nonchalant Jim O'Dale?

The hangman hesitated, then ran below the scaffold, and, catching those struggling legs round the knees, tugged on them with fiendish energy. A bestial tussle between him and his victim followed and was met with groans, cat-calls and hissing from the crowd.

O'Dale's struggles subsided; the hangman gave a final jerk to his legs and let him go. He swung motionless, like the man-shaped pendulum of some gruesome clock. A little from side to side he swung, then

turned slowly round, this way and that, his knees slightly drawn up and one foot a little above the other.

Jim O'Dale was out of misery at last.

HAVING feasted his eyes on the highwayman's death agonies, Jacob would have made off; but the press of the mob was too close for him and there was nothing left but to wait patiently for the cutting down. For half an hour the body of his once-handsome rival swung in the breeze before his eyes; then the hangman mounted the scaffold and with a couple of slices of his knife severed the rope and let it drop limply to the ground.

The mob pressed closer, those in front eager to chaffer with the executioner for portions of the rope, greatly prized in those days as mascots; and thus was Jacob thrust right forward till he stood within a couple of paces of the corpse of the man he had betrayed.

He looked down at it and for the first time was a little ashamed of what he had done: this limp thing had once been a laughing, rollicking young fellow, whom, at times, even his hatred could not prevent him from admiring—whom he had envied even as he hated him—the apple of pretty Barbara's eye. He, Jacob Larkyn, was responsible that life was now extinct—he had done a thing that no power on earth could undo. It had seemed just and desirable at the time, but now he was ashamed.

"Here, Master!"

He looked up into a lantern-jawed, masked face.

"A bargain's a bargain, y'know!" grinned the hangman and thrust into his hands a pair of shoes with buckles of curiously wrought gold.

Mechanically his fingers closed on them and he pushed his way through the crowd.

BACK in Fleet Street, Jacob soothed his rather shaken nerves with another bottle at the Cock, slipping out of sight into his old corner and putting down Jim's dying present out of sight. Little by little, as the wine warmed him, he got over the first disgust and horror of the execution and began to look at things from a different viewpoint. What was done was done. He had got his way and was now free to make the running with Barbara.

A rather ghoulish thought came to him; he had heard of dead man's luck, had seen the mob fighting for the rope with which the young highwayman had been strangled. Might there not be luck for him also in this strange present, made to him on the scaffold by the man he had so cunningly sold?

He laughed harshly at the thought, glanced round the little compartment in which he sat, satisfied himself that no one was spying over the top of either partition or round the side, and then quickly changed his rather old shoes for the smart, gold-buckled ones in which O'Dale had been hanged. They were a shade tight for him across the toes, but of softer leather than he was accustomed to, and he decided he could wear them with ease when he had broken them in a little.

He would go straight back to Kensington and try his luck—"dead man's luck"—would be guided by circumstances as they arose. Who knew?—this might be the very turn of luck he needed to win the heart of her for whom he had done that thing.

Kicking his old pair away into the shadows under the table, he paid his shot and walked out into the street.

Like the good man of business he was, Jacob turned into the Blue Boar to see how the house had prospered while he was away at the execution before he strolled on past it to the creeper-covered cottage where

dwelt Barbara Challis; and here the first manifestation of "dead man's luck," as he believed, struck him with its full force as he entered the front door.

"Barbara!" he cried, stopping dead in his tracks.

She halted at the door of his private closet from which she had just come out; halted with parted lips, as if half afraid of him. Then she recovered herself and spoke:

"Jacob—it is all over?"

"Aye, all over. He died like a brave man."

"I knew he would."

The innkeeper went across to the girl, looking for the chance to touch her—to clasp a hand, maybe.

"I did my utmost for him."

"I know, I know. He told me all after the trial . . . we owe you much, Jacob."

He took both her hands, then, and she looked bravely up into his face. She had been crying, it was true; but now tears had given place to a strange glory, the light that illumines a heroine's features in the moment of her trial.

"It was more for you than for him that I did it," said Jacob, quite truthfully. "Come, let us go into my room, Barbara; I have much that I would have you hear."

She yielded to him, let him turn her and guide her gently back through the low, oaken doorway. They sat together on a settee by the fire.

"Yes," Barbara dreamily went on, "we have much to repay you for, Jacob Larkyn—and—and——"

He pressed her hand between both of his.

"Speak not of repayment. Was not the deed its own reward?"

"For you no doubt; but, Jacob, those were Jim's last words to me: 'Forget not all he has done for poor Jim O'Dale and reward him for it.'"

Jacob started violently, and again the feeling of shame passed through him like a knife. This was indeed a reward of good for evil—Devil take it, had he known Jim was such a good fellow he doubted he'd have peached on him so readily! But that was all over and done with and confession would only make matters worse. No, better to accept all these unlooked-for blessings as "dead man's luck" and enjoy them as they came.

Barbara trembled—he could almost believe she shuddered—as he drew her toward him. Then her golden head nestled on his shoulder and the scent of her hair was in his nostrils. . . . 'Gad, but it was marvelous that a woman should console herself so soon! Why, here was the work of months, as he had expected, all done for him in less than an hour! Was there in truth some uncanny, inexplicable magic in a dead man's blessing—in the standing, literally, in a dead man's shoes?

"Jim bade me not mourn for him," said the girl slowly. "He would have none of my wearing black clothes or weeping more than a girl could help—"

"Aye, aye, my dear. He was right."

"—and above all," Barbara went on, "he would have it that I must go to the play this evening—go to the play and relieve my mind utterly of the terrible thing they did to him today."

"The play? So!"

"To Drury Lane, Jacob—Davy Garrick plays *Hamlet* there tonight. It is his last performance of the piece. Jim and I went to his first. Shall we go together, Jacob? It was Jim's last wish."

"Whatever you please, child; so it be for your happiness."

Again she trembled—or maybe shuddered—in his arms.

"Then I would desire to go,

Jacob; yes, I would desire that of all things."

"So be it, then. We go."

THE play might have been better chosen to suit a man with such a conscience as Jacob Larkyn's that night; the "Players' Scene" with its dramatic emphasis on the Danish King's treachery reawakened all his scruples as to the death of Jim O'Dale. But he shook them off angrily. Where was the use in mooning over what was done and could not be altered? The man was dead, now, and in the hands of the medical students. He was very likely half dissected already. Enough of him, then! Having sinned the sin of David, what was left a sensible man but at least to enjoy the fruits of his misdeed?

At last the final curtain fell.

"Jacob," said Barbara, gently pressing his arm, "would you do one more little thing for me?"

"Ask it, my love, and see!"

"It is that you take me to the stage entrance—I feel Mr. Garrick is my friend, tonight—a better friend than you imagine, Jacob—I beg you take me where we can see him as he leaves the theater and thank him for his wonderful play."

Was it imagination or reality that her voice trembled with a high-pitched, hysterical note as she concluded her sentence? Never mind! He was in the vein to do whatever she asked, that evening; and it was a small thing to lead her to this player and say a few words of thanks.

THERE was a crowd at the stage door, for "little Davy Garrick" was the idol of London in those days and never left without a bodyguard of some fifty or more about his coach, especially since the affair of Seven String Ned who had held him up on a Tuesday and been himself so dramatically robbed the following

Wednesday by the late "Captain" Jim O'Dale.

Jacob and Barbara waited some time, but at last a rustle in the crowd proclaimed the coming of the famous actor. Then Jacob let go of Barbara's hand to shoulder his way forward for the promised speech.

"Mr. Garrick, sir——"

"Sir to you!"

The little player stopped and, smiling genially, looked Jacob up and down from hat to toes.

"Sir, I have come to thank you on behalf of a young lady who is with me for the fine evening's entertainment you have given us. I protest, sir, you are the very first actor of your time, sir, and——"

He paused, somehow disconcerted.

Garrick was still smiling, but his smile had a flicker of grim curiosity in it; he still looked the innkeeper up and down and seemed particularly interested in his feet.

"May I know your name, sir?"

"With pleasure, Mr. Garrick! I am Jacob Larkyn, at your service, sir, keeper of the Blue Boar in Kensington. Ever at your service, Mr. Garrick, sir."

"Ah! Ever at my service? That is good, Mr. Jacob Larkyn—very good indeed!" and he laughed a little harshly. The crowd edged in round them.

"So Mr. Larkyn is ever at this poor player's service, is he?" Garrick went on. "Then perchance he will tell the poor player where he got those fine gold buckles he is now wearing in his shoes—for, egad, I seem to know them passing well, myself!"

A sudden suspicion dawned on Jacob.

"G-gold b-buckles, sir?" he stammered.

"Yes, fellow!" Garrick changed his bantering manner and snapped at him. "My gold buckles that were stolen off the very shoes I was wear-

ing by a rascal called Seven String Ned, less than a month ago!"

"I—I—I got them honest, sir, I'll swear it—they—they were given to me!"

Garrick smiled unkindly. A growl went up from the crowd.

"And by whom, dear Mr. Larkyn—by whom, pray?"

A girl's voice rang out:

"I will tell you, Mr. Garrick!" With flashing eyes and flaming cheeks Barbara Challis faced Jacob. "Seven String Ned was himself robbed by Jim O'Dale whom they hanged this morning. It was Jim O'Dale gave him those buckles as he gave him many more of your things—search the cupboard in his private closet! He was ever the receiver for O'Dale's stolen goods!"

"Barbara! Delilah!" shrieked Jacob, now fully aware of the trap. "She lies—gentlemen all, she lies—she was that damned highwayman's mistress—if there is anything in my closet she put it there herself! I'll swear——"

A hand struck him across the mouth.

"The lie in your own teeth, you dog!" cried a burly citizen. "Boys, I was in court when Jim O'Dale was tried—this man was his friend and paid for the lawyer to defend him—now, boys, will ye see our little Davy Garrick robbed? Will ye see the scoundrels as filched from him escape?"

"No! No!" shrieked Jacob, blood-guiltiness and terror almost depriving him of the power of coherent speech. "Spare me! Mercy! I can explain—explain all!"

"Explain to a jury!" snarled the foremost citizen. "Seize him, boys! To Newgate with the villain!"

A roar of vindictive enthusiasm answered him and a score pairs of hands gripped the innkeeper. As they dragged him away his voice choked in his throat and he saw

visions swirling in the air before him—a red-robed figure behind a desk, one that wore a snow-white peruke and a black cap—the sea of pale, expectant faces, riveted to the dock—the gaunt, bare framework of the

black gallows tree. . . . But last of all, before he fainted and they began to carry him bodily toward Newgate jail, he saw the face of a bereaved girl, flushed and glowing with hatred and with triumph.
