

"The Man Who Did Things Twice"



# The Black Cat

**JUNE**

**1905**

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**5**  
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**THE SHORTSTORY PUBLISHING CO.,** 144 HIGH ST., BOSTON, MASS.  
and 10 Norfolk Street, Strand, London, W. C.

Vol. X., No. 9. Whole No. 117. Copyright, 1905, by The Shortstory Publishing Co.

## The Man Who Did Things Twice.\*

BY DON MARK LEMON.



**F** commanding figure and soldierly bearing, with deep-set gray eyes, hollow, cadaverous cheeks, and moustache and hair an intense blue black, his singular personality alone had anywhere and at all times attracted special attention to the man; but coupled with this distinguished personage, and singling him out as remarkable in the highest degree, was the fact that he lived in duplicate.

Thus — if on Monday he arose early, breakfasted on coffee, toast, and eggs, afterwards retired to his rooms to occupy himself until noon at his desk; then, after partaking of lunch, quit his rooms to ramble about the city, giving alms to the old blind organwoman, going up and down particular streets and through particular quarters, thence back to his hotel, to his dinner, to his desk after dinner, and finally to bed — on Tuesday he would go through precisely the same régime; arising early, breakfasting on coffee, toast, and eggs; afterwards retiring to his desk, thence to lunch, to his rambles up and down those particular streets and through those particular quarters that he had visited on Monday, giving alms to the old blind organwoman; thence back to his hotel, to dinner, to his desk and papers; finally to bed.

On Wednesday he perhaps would spend the day quite differently, arising late, going out on horseback for the entire day, attending the theatre at night, and to bed at midnight or later; but howsoever he spent Wednesday, Thursday — or the day following — was sure to be a repetition down to the smallest detail.

Friday would see commenced a new series of action for Saturday to duplicate.

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\* The writer of this story received a cash prize of \$100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending October 12, 1904.

He was the echo — as it were — of himself, and a consummate echo at that, for time and time again he had been watched to see whether he would not make some mistake or fail in his series of duplication, but whenever it was possible for an act to be duplicated he never had been known to fail in its duplication; and, indeed, he had grown so shrewd in the matter that he never did on one day what could not reasonably be duplicated upon the next — if that succeeding day was to be a duplication of the preceding one, and not the beginning of a new series of action.

That this man should deliberately go about living as if his soul were a stereoscope, and life, to be appreciated, must be like the stereoscopic picture, double, was generally considered an astonishing thing; and, besides, it seemed such a reprehensible waste of energy, time, and money.

To fall from his horse upon a Wednesday at a particular crossing, bruising his body and spraining his wrist, was bad enough; but to repeat the accident at that particular crossing upon the following day was a pure waste of energy. To lose a half-hour on Friday by coming down to the depot too early was perhaps an error of calculation; but to repeat the action on the following Saturday was a waste of time. To visit his tailor on Monday and order a new suit of clothing was nothing reprehensible; but to drop in on the following day at precisely the same minute and order a similar suit of clothing could be nothing less than a waste of money.

It was this trait of duplicating all his expenditures that had first attracted attention to the man's singular character. And, indeed, one who coolly and voluntarily paid all his bills twice over was certain, sooner or later, to have minute notice taken of himself and his comings and goings.

Not only was Henry Hobart's character remarkable, but it had an element of danger as well. Any enemy could have committed a series of duplicate crimes or misdemeanors about the city of Weston and The Man Who Did Things Twice would have come under instant suspicion as the guilty party. But evidently Henry Hobart was without enemies; one might add, without friends. His was the best known face, but he the least known man, in the cultured little city of Weston. Not that his character was such

as to repel the advance of friendship, but simply that he drew around perhaps a gentle and kindly nature, an almost impenetrable cloak of reserve.

It may have been that the man's mind was divided, one half acting normally and consistently, whilst the other half drove him each alternate day to imitate his conduct of the preceding day, as a little impish boy imitates the actions of one going before him in the street. Or perhaps he was merely eccentric. But there seemed something more than eccentricity in his conduct when, upon a certain Saturday, he deliberately returned and allowed a vicious dog to bite him in the manner that it had bit him some twenty-four hours before. Such conduct could arise from nothing less than methodical madness.

Living his own life in his own reserved way, cultured and studious, troubling no one, offending none; doubly liberal in his expenditures and never pressed for means, steadfast in his chosen eccentricity—if such it were—and in his face and manner no questioning doubt of himself, perhaps in time Henry Hobart had been accepted like any other man, the curious had ceased to be curious, and his mysterious character, without any further or deeper scrutiny, had become one of the mysteries of human life, had not the man been suddenly struck down as by an invisible hand and the appalling mystery of his death heightened tenfold the mystery of his life.

On a Tuesday morning, at fifteen minutes of ten o'clock, an attendant was summoned by the call-bell to room Sixty-Three of the Sumner House, and upon obeying the call found Henry Hobart struggling in the throes of a strange and unnatural death.

The Man Who Did Things Twice, half-dressed, standing in the centre of his outer room, was battling with the invisible air about him for breath, or, as the attendant put it later, "Like he was fightin' with something that weren't there."

The hotel was aroused, Doctor Thiel was hastily summoned from his office on the next floor, and everything was done that science could suggest or despair persuade, yet in less than ten minutes Henry Hobart lay dead on the floor, within his stilled brain hidden the profound mystery of his life, and still echoing in the death

room his one strangled cry ere death sealed his blue lips —  
*To-morrow!*

It was a strange case, a questionable case, a frightful case, but beyond all it proved a baffling case, for the police came, removed the body to the morgue, intimating death by poison or other foul play, and examined the rooms and overhauled the possessions of the dead man, but who the deceased was, who his kindred or what his former residence, or the cause of his death, they could not discover. The scholarly tomes that filled his shelves bore no signatures or bookmarks, and private papers of any kind there were none. The autopsy made the same day — afternoon — upon the body of the deceased failed to discover any poison, and Doctor Thiel's belief that the man had been strangled seemed without support, as no foreign substance or growth of any kind was found in the windpipe or air passages.

Nevertheless, Doctor Thiel was firm and blunt: "The man was strangled," he maintained. "Make the best of that, gentlemen, and then go to your dinners."

One thing only seemed certain, one thing only was undisputed, — The Man Who Did Things Twice, with severed windpipe and autopsy-marred body, would not duplicate his own death upon the morrow. He had come to his death on a Tuesday, a Tuesday with which — had he lived — he would have begun a new course of action to be duplicated on Wednesday. But he had died, and now for once The Man Who Did Things Twice would fail in his eccentricity. Perhaps for that his spirit would be troubled.

Next morning, while the attendant who had been first on the death scene of the previous day was holding forth at length on the tragedy with certain servant-cronics, the call-bell suddenly rang and the hand of the call dial spun around and pointed to number Sixty-Three.

The man hastened to obey the summons, not noticing that the hands of the hall clock pointed to fifteen minutes of ten, nor delaying to recollect what guest occupied room Sixty-Three. The tragedy of the preceding day had been the event of his life, and he had not as yet descended to the trifles of his daily routine.

As he tapped briskly at the door of room Sixty-Three and put his hand upon the knob to enter, it suddenly came over him that

he had done precisely such a thing before. That at about that time of some other morning he had been summoned by the call-bell to room Sixty-Three—had knocked, turned the knob, entered—and——a loud cry, a shout thick with horror, broke from the man's lips, and he reeled back into the hallway.

There before him, in the centre of the fateful room, half-dressed, battling with the invisible air, with blue lips and protruding eyes, stood The Man Who Did Things Twice.

The ominous, ghostly hush that followed the frightened attendant's cry was quickly broken by the hurry of many feet, and soon again the hotel was aroused and again Doctor Thiel bent over the prostrate and dying Henry Hobart.

Outside and distantly could be heard the clang of the fire-bells, but in the room of death all was sudden silence, all were hushed by the frightful, ghostly thought that the scene before them had been enacted before—the dying man with his discolored face and struggling hands, the physician bending over him, the alarmed, pitying faces of the gathered guests, and the frightened servants huddled in the background. *And the man must die — die as he had died!*

They looked on, and waited. Then the end came, and Doctor Thiel, arising, said, "He is dead!" He had uttered those words once before and under like conditions. And the guests and the servants spoke together in horrified whispers, as they had done before; then the assembly broke up and the hallway was cleared, as before!

There was something immeasurably painful about it all, to live a thing over in that frightful way, to be, as it were, mere puppets at a show, and one day to be to another day as a reflection in a mirror.

For a time those who had witnessed both tragedies seemed to live in a kind of trance, and moved about and whispered together like beings in a dream; but finally the natural reasserted itself, and then curiosity seized them.

What was the meaning of it? Henry Hobart had died and his body had been mutilated by the surgeon's knife. How, then, had he died a second time and his body shown no marks of the knife? Had they been deceived by a ghost? No: there in room Sixty-

Three lay the dead man — flesh and blood — and seven blocks away, resting on a marble slab, with the water dripping continually on it, lay the other body of Henry Hobart — The Man Who Did Things Twice.

A sudden doubt came into the mind of Doctor Thiel, a misgiving that frightened him. Was that other body — that autopsy-marred body — still resting quietly on its slab at the morgue? Or —

Hastily quitting the hotel, he hurried towards the morgue, and suddenly came up against an insurmountable blank wall of mystery. The morgue was a heap of charred ruin and smoldering, steaming ashes, and if the autopsy-marred body of Henry Hobart had been lying on its slab during the period of the fire, then it had been totally consumed, and that other body up at the hotel was that of a second Henry Hobart; but, if the autopsy-marred body of Henry Hobart had *not* been lying quietly on its slab during the raging of the fire, then, in God's name, who and what was he who had died up at the Sunner House that morning?

