

The Soup That Talked.*

BY DON MARK LEMON.



I was right here in this restaurant that it happened. I'll remember it long after I forget my debts. I was sitting over there at that table in that end seat, while across there at that other table was a man with a big, ugly scar on his forehead and only one eye.

Well, I saw him look up suddenly with a start of recognition, and then he ducked his head and sort of hid his face in his beard, and just then a meek, smiling little man, in a gray tweed suit, hung up his hat and sat down opposite the one-eyed man.

He put on his glasses, tucked a napkin under his chin, and, taking the bill-of-fare from between the vinegar and ketchup bottles, studied it like it were a chess-board, and he was about to make a difficult move.

The girl came and stood by his chair. "I guess I'll take a little soup," he ordered, smiling over the top rims of his glasses.

The girl brought the soup, a glass of water and a piece of butter, and got his order for roast beef, rare, vegetables and tea; then she went back to the kitchen and the little man, the one-eyed chap and myself were left alone with our three plates of soup.

It was what is called alphabet soup — that thin, clear soup, with little noodle or cracker letters in it. The students that eat here call it A B C chowder. The letters swell after they're in the soup, but even then they aren't a third of an inch long. It always strikes me as a sort of humorous soup.

Well, the little man was about to begin on his plate, when the one-eyed chap across from him accidentally brushed his fork off the table to the floor, and in stooping to get it, kicked it farther under the table. As the little man pushed back his chair and groped for the fork, obliging like, I saw the one-eyed fellow

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quickly pass his hand over the other's plate of soup, as if he were dropping something into it.

The little man recovered the fork, returned it to his neighbor, and taking up his spoon, was about to begin eating, when his hand was suddenly stayed, and his face turned kind of gray, as if he saw a ghost in his plate.

Another instant he looked up with his eyes sticking out like a frog's behind his glasses, and yelled, "Poisoned!"

The one-eyed chap jumped as if some one had flung a noose about his neck, seized his hat and rushed into the street.

"Hallo!" I cried, "what's wrong?"

The little man, with his spoon in his hand and his napkin tucked under his chin, stared from me to the vacant seat, and then back to his soup. "*Poisoned!*" he repeated.

I got up and looked over his shoulder into his soup. By George! if eight of those little noodle letters hadn't arranged themselves this way

P O I S O N E D

The little chap looked at me slyly. "Do you imagine the cook did it for a joke?" he asked.

"The cook!" I exclaimed, noticing a blue sediment in the soup that wasn't in mine. "Oh, yes, certainly! very likely! *You blamed idiot!*"

He gave me a hurt look.

"You blamed idiot!" I repeated. "I saw that one-eyed man drop something into your plate when you got his fork, and it is only because these little cracker letters happened, one time in a million, to form the word *poisoned* that you aren't a dead man! Why! It's a miracle—nothing short of providential that you're alive."

I called the proprietor, explained the circumstances, and had the soup taken to a chemist. The blue sediment was the deadliest, swiftest poison known.

It isn't every punch in your meal ticket that causes a plate of soup to talk and saves a man's life.

