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THE POISONED BOOTS

By H. M. EGBERT

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I SUSPECTED Louise Carey from the first; but in that I was no different from the farmer's neighbors. John Carey had married a second time, late in life, when his three sons were growing up to manhood. Jim, the eldest, was twenty; Frank, eighteen; Leonard, the youngest, fourteen.

John Carey was rich, and Louise Brand had been a poor girl in the city when the elderly man, making a business trip there, saw her working as a stenographer in the lawyer's office. The courtship was brief, and they were married three weeks after their first meeting.

John Carey had been a close-fisted man, but a good neighbor and had been generally esteemed. He fell under the rule of his young wife. His sons resented the stranger's presence in the home. Quarrels between father and sons ensued. There was a bad one a week before the farmer's death. He changed his will, leaving everything to his wife, with reversion to Leonard, the youngest, the only one who cared for his stepmother. Between the two a devoted attachment sprang up.

The motive for murdering John Carey? Fear lest he should change his will again. Three days later Carey came in from the field, where he had been binding, in high spirits. He had his supper, pulled off his boots, complained of feeling ill, and lay down on the lounge. Nobody else was in the room. When his wife entered, an hour later, he was dead, his lower limbs and body terribly swollen.

It was like snake poison; the experts said the condition of the body resembled that of a man who had been struck by a rattler. But there was no rattler in the house, though they were plentiful in the field. If Carey had been killed by a snake, the poison would have taken effect before he entered his home.

John Carey was buried, and the few whispers on the part of the neighbors died away. Jim and Frank had left the house at the time of the quarrel. They started suit, alleging undue influence. They had removed their personal effects, including some clothing, the property of their father. Close-fisted like him, they did not see the sense of leaving his effects to Louise; and she offered no objection.

It was just a month later that the second death occurred. Jim Carey had gone to the stepmother's house to talk things over with her. Louise Carey was a sensible woman and had volunteered to come to a settlement. According to her story, they had practically reached an agreement. She had given her stepson tea, and he had complained that his father's boots hurt him and pulled them off. A few moments later he began to complain. She ran to the telephone and summoned the doctor, recognizing the same symptoms as those of which her husband had died. Before the doctor arrived, Jim was dead, and dreadfully swollen.

The boots? They were a pair of high, farmers' boots, and John Carey had worn them for nearly a year before his death. If there was poison in the boots, it would have taken effect long before. Jim had worn them during his four-mile tramp from where he lived to his stepmother's house. It was suspected that she had a store of poison, which she had secretly administered. The police ransacked the house from roof to cellar, but could find nothing. It was then that I was called in.

Universally suspected, universally shunned, Mrs. Carey lived a wretched life. The little boys had begun to call out after her in the street. She would have left the house but for Leonard, who believed in her, and to whom she was passionately devoted. I resided in the village, assumed the guise of an intending purchaser of real estate, and in that capacity I visited the Carey farm, to talk over the price. Mrs. Carey was willing to sell, after the trouble had been cleared up. She struck me as a sensible woman, and I had my doubts as to her culpability.

The farmer's boots had been thrown away in the attic, with the rest of his clothing. I found an opportunity, by going to the house when Mrs. Carey was away, to look at them. It did occur to me that there might be some snake venom in them, but I reassured myself that this was not the case. Besides, as most people know, snake venom acts as a toxic agent only when introduced through an abrasion. Swallowed, it is harmless. And it seemed improbable in the extreme that, even if there were poison in the boots, there would have been an abrasion of the foot of each of the two men exactly where the poison would be free to enter.

And, again, rattlesnakes, for all

their reputation, only inflict a maximum of discomfort, not death. I think the number of cases of fatal rattlesnake poisoning is less than a dozen. It would have been impossible for the men to have died in so short a time.

Quite by accident, however, I learned that a circus had passed through the village six months before. Among its attractions had been a Hindu snake charmer, who had amused and astonished the people until the circus passed, to be soon forgotten. I learned that Mrs. Carey had attended the circus with Leonard, and had been seen to speak to the man.

This looked bad. After all, if it was snake poison, Mrs. Carey was the only person with a motive to kill. I withdrew my favorable opinion. I watched her more narrowly.

I had actually invested \$200 in an option on the property. This gave me plenty of opportunity to visit there. I was at the farm one afternoon when Leonard came out of the house; and I saw the woman's face blanch. "Leonard!" she gasped. "Your father's boots!"

I looked and saw that the boy was wearing the identical boots which the two men had worn before their death. They were much too large for him, but they came up toward the knee, and were very serviceable for harvest work.

"Why, that's all right, mom," he answered. "They'll come in handy out in the field. Why, mom, I've had these on for nearly two hours, and if there was poison in them I guess I'd have felt it before now."

"Take them off!" screamed Mrs. Carey. And yet, agitated though she was, there was no sound of guilty knowledge in her voice, only of fear.

"I wish I'd buried the things," she sobbed wildly. "If it hadn't been for your father and brother having worn them, folks wouldn't accuse me of having killed them."

Leonard ran to her and put his arms about her. "Why, mom, folks are liars, that's all," he said. He clenched his fists. "Just let me see the man who says you are a murderess!" he cried. "And, mom," he added, "I'll take them off right away."

He sat down in the sun and pulled off the boots. Then, carrying them in his hand, he ran in his stocking feet back into the house.

I saw the tension on Mrs. Carey's face. Presently Leonard came back, wearing a pair of ordinary boots. He looked very sober and paler than before. He came rather unsteadily up to his mother.

"I don't feel well, mom," he gasped, and fell at her feet. Mrs. Carey screamed wildly, and I carried the boy into the house and called the doctor.

The doctor arrived in half an hour and diagnosed the case as hopeless. By that time Leonard's legs were swollen to three times their size, and he was black below the waist. But I refused to accept the verdict.

Mrs. Carey and I worked over him all that day. It was a desperate effort to keep him awake, and we could not walk him on his swollen feet. But we punched and struck him, and pulled up his drooping eyelids. We struck him and pushed him from side to side, trundling him about the room. Somehow we managed to prevent the coma of death from developing that night, and by morning the boy was better.

The doctor, who called expecting him to be dead, was amazed. The next day was a critical one, but by nightfall Leonard was able to go to sleep, and by the next morning the swelling had gone down a little and he was on the way to recovery. Then, only, did I think of the boots.

The story had spread through the village, and warrant for Mrs. Carey's arrest had already been issued. It was I who confronted the constable at the door with my evidence. For I had slashed the boots to pieces and discovered the mystery.

In the left boot was nothing. But in the right boot, set near the ankle, was a tiny snake fang, with a portion of the venom sack attached to it. It had been thrust out with such violence that it had penetrated the leather and carried this minute portion of the poison sack with it.

It was set downward at such an angle that it would not abrade the skin when the boot was put on, but must inevitably do so when it was pulled off.

The explanation was an obvious one, and it cleared Mrs. Carey, who now resides, with Frank and Leonard, on the old place, esteemed by everyone. The deadly poison was identified with that of the Indian hooded cobra. The snake had escaped from the charmer and had struck at the farmer's leg, without his knowledge. The fang, remaining in the tough leather, had done no injury until John Carey pulled off his boots. Then it had killed him.

Bouquets for Judges

Bouquet of flowers and scented herbs are given, every morning in the summer, to judges hearing cases in London's central criminal court. This is a survival from the days when the courts were made unhealthy by evil-doers from the underground cells.

THE HAPPY HOME

By MARGARET BRUCE

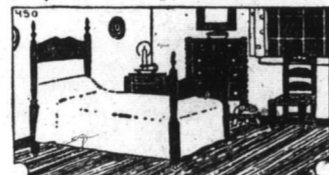
WNU Service

Rugs From Old Rags

I don't know of anything in all our modern home-decorating that does us more credit than our revival of early American furniture, textiles, utensils, and quaint household devices of all sorts. What could be less appropriate for us than ornate reproductions of the various French periods, say? And what could be more appropriate than the solid colonial pieces in mahogany or maple, the hand-woven bedspreads, the rush-seated chairs, pewter dishes and candlesticks, odd little footstools, door knockers, and fireplace implements that we have inherited from our own forefathers? These things belong to us—they are ours!

Among the loveliest of these legacies from the past is the rag rug in its various guises. There isn't anything more attractive or more in keeping with our genuine or reproduced secretaries, four-poster beds, little sewing tables, lift-leaf or pie-crust tables, mahogany or gilt-framed colonial mirrors, than this simple floor covering that speaks of the pioneer days when every American housewife utilized each scrap of cloth left from the family wardrobe.

To my mind, the so-called "hit or miss" pattern is the most satisfactory for rugs of large size. These are made of strips of every color and pattern.



with an occasional stripe of solid color or run through to give a sense of solidity. These rugs are made now by many domestic factories, where the old colors and treatment are successfully copied. They are inexpensive as well, and have the added virtue of being washable.

The oval or round braided rag rugs are beautiful indeed, especially in the small bedside or hall sizes, and in the rich dark variegated colors that look so well in the living room that follows the old ideas. A good many modern women are collecting their own old rags, as did their great-grandmothers, and having them woven to order in some of the weaving studios throughout the East; but unless these materials are well preserved, the rug is not apt to last as long. For home weaving, it is better to use unbleached muslin dyed to the exact shades desired. One color generally predominates, to harmonize with the hangings of the room where the rug is to lie.

On Time to the Minute

One day recently I sat in the corridor of a large hotel, waiting for a friend. Near me, standing easily against the paneled wall, was a graceful young woman who was evidently waiting also. She was charmingly dressed, well groomed and un-hurried. It was about 5:20 in the afternoon. Ten minutes later a crisp young business man walked down the corridor, glancing from right to left. Then, his face lighting up, he came toward her.

"By George, Bess, you're right on time to the minute. I never knew a girl before who didn't keep a chap waiting half an hour or more. How do you do it?"

The girl laughed. "Why, you're the one who is on time to the minute," she declared. "I was ten minutes ahead of time! You see, I know how tiresome it is to stand waiting for someone to keep an appointment, especially when you are one of the sort who is always punctual—and I know you are. It's just as easy to be a little early as a little late, and people can depend on you." Then, as they moved away, she added, a little shyly:

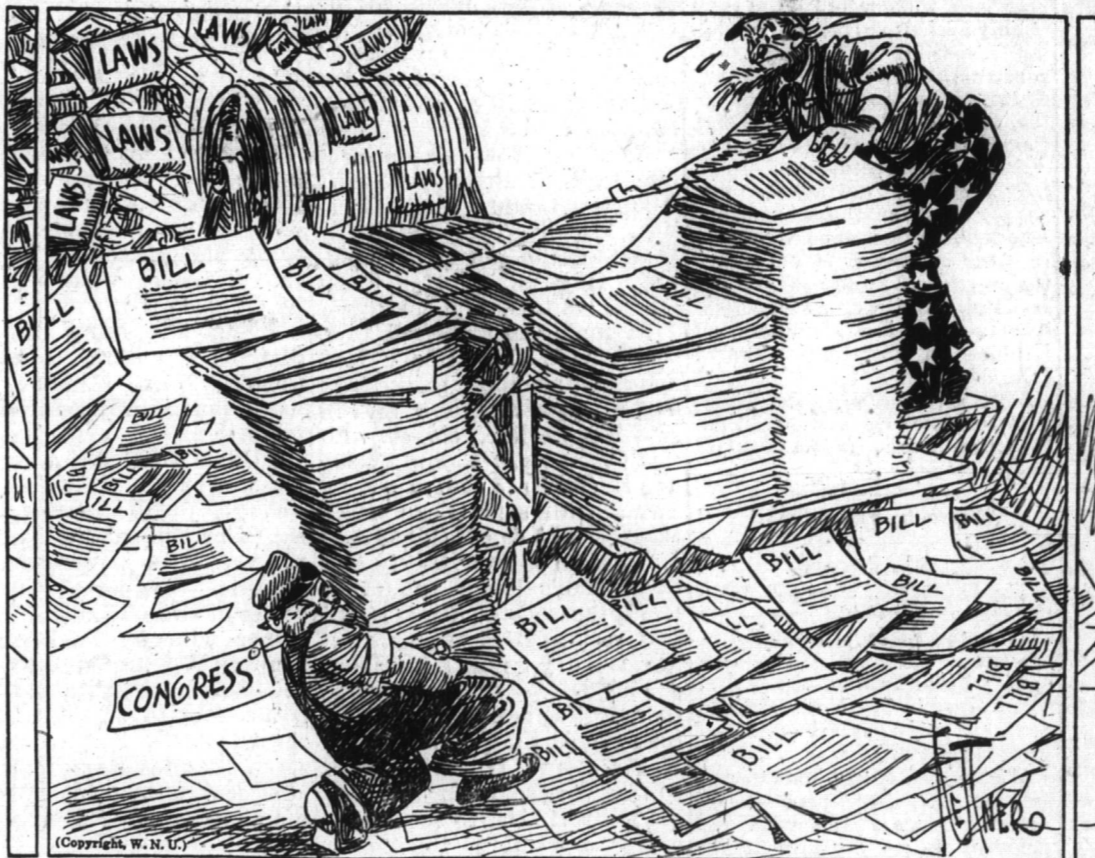
"I'm in training to have breakfast and dinner on time to the minute—some day. You'll see!"

He looked down at her with an engaged man's entranced face, and I had to turn away from the foolish vapidity of his smile. But I wondered, as I sat there and watched twitching, impatient men stand first on one foot and then the other, look at their watches, and gnash their teeth, obviously waiting for their later, if not better halves, why women cannot get the habit of being on time—to the minute.

(Copyright.)

OUR COMIC SECTION

Going Full Speed



THE FEATHERHEADS

Fanny Gives Strong Interference



PETTY THINGS



Helen—"And I became furious when he persisted in kissing me and locking my hands." Belle—"Why get angry over such petty things?"

Sure Sign

"Helen," said Mr. Hill, "I think that bashful boy friend of yours is out on the porch trying to make a call."

"Why, father," exclaimed Helen, "I didn't hear anyone ring."

"Neither did I," acknowledged dad. "But I hear his knees knocking together."

Reason for a Reputation

"How did Thompson get the reputation of being a dog fancier?"

"Whenever he sees a pup that is particularly ugly he refers to it as a beauty."

Phrased Unfortunately

Rev. William Collins, to whom the Liberal church of Denver has just given the title of "Bishop of Righteous Hell," said at a Denver tea:

"Our idea is that the Modernists are wrong in trying to abolish Hell, for Hell serves a righteous purpose in keeping a great many people straight."

"Righteous Hell—Do you see? The phrase perhaps will appear confusing to some. Perhaps like the old lady's compliment, it is unfortunately worded. The old lady said, you know:

"I did enjoy your sermon so much, sir. It was like water to a drowning man."

Tagged Again

"I asked a policeman, like you told me."

"Well?"

"He said I was on the wrong side of the street, so I left the car there and walked over."

Poor Henry

Mrs. Peck (after they had retired)—Henry, why do you feign sleep when I want to talk to you?

Henry—I am not feigning sleep, my dear, but I fail would sleep.

FUNCTION OF THE LID



Reggie—"And the rude fellow referred to my hat as a lid, Miss Sharpe." Miss Sharpe—"Well, a lid is usually found covering a hollow receptacle you know, Mr. Sharpe."

The Limit

"He has a mean disposition, hasn't he?"

"I should say so. He's the kind of a man who'll rake in a jack-pot on a bluff, and then, after he's stacked up the chips will spread out four hearts and a spade for everybody to look at."—Detroit Free Press.

Slight Mistake

"I won't throw any more callers out of my daughter's parlor."

"What happened?"

"The girl next door had come over to show her new knickerbockers."

Scraps of Humor



THE EXCEPTION

The young woman was shown round the ship by a mate. She saw everything, including the cabins, the stokehold, and the saloons. At last they came to the bridge, where the captain was standing.

"Ah, so that's the captain," remarked the visitor. "He's the man whose word is law while you're at sea, isn't he?"

"No, madam, not this time," said the mate. "You see, the wife's coming with him on this trip."—Edinburgh Scotsman.

RIGHT DIRECTION



She (under spell of vernal moon)—Let's sit on the step and talk.

He (under same spell)—That's a step in the right direction, I'd say.

No Need to Hurry

"Judge," requested the prisoner at the bar, "I'd like to start serving my sentence right away, so I'll have it over quicker."

"No hurry, my boy," replied the judge genially. "It's going to be a life sentence."—American Legion Monthly.

Bad Outlook

"This is a knotty case. Eight women on the jury."

"And the woman you defend?"

"Is accused of stealing another woman's cook."

"What's worrying you?"

"I'm afraid they'll hang my client."

Kill the Dog

Harold—There's the handkerchief you dropped last night, dear. I slept with it under my pillow and I've kissed it a thousand times.

Alice—That isn't my handkerchief. That's little Fido's sweater.

Correct Conclusion

"Black chile, does you all know what deceit am?"

"Suttinly I does, Beelzebub."

"Den what is it?"

"Well, when I leans ova an' heahs somethin' rip, I knows dat's de seat."

A Sad Mistake

Wilkes—So the bridegroom didn't show up at the wedding?

Crandall—No; they forgot to send him an invitation.

Question

"Dolly's all right if you know how to take her."

"Well, I'm taking her in a taxi, is that the proper way?"

A PRETTY PICKLE



Old Maid Sour Pickle—Look at those disgusting Sweet Pickles!

Her Opinion

Angry Girl to Druggist—This vanishing cream is a fake.

Druggist—How come?

Furious Female—I've used it on my nose every night for two weeks, and it's just as long as it ever was!

No Sign of a Breakdown

Disgusted Parent—How much longer do you expect me to go on supporting you?

Stoild Son—Well, father, you know you are in the pink of condition.