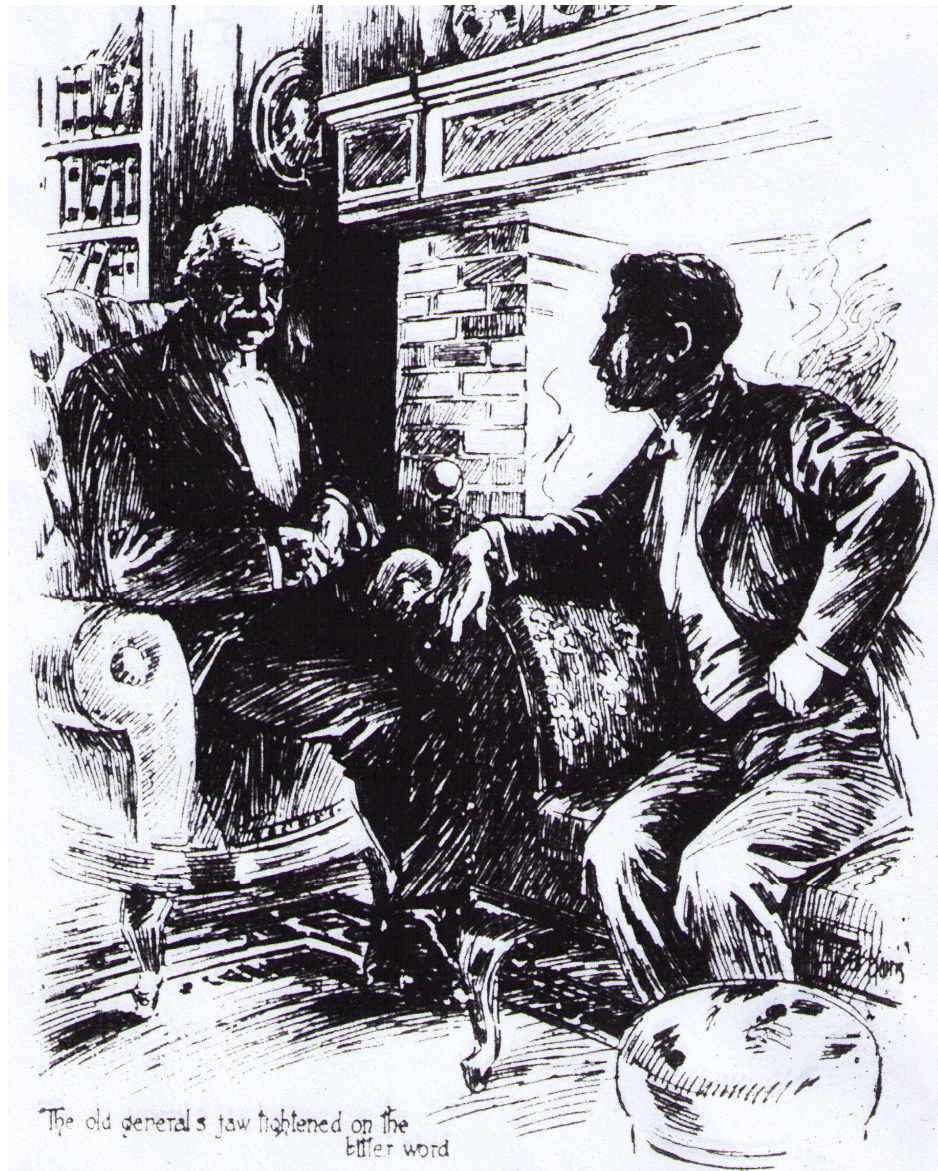


The Corrector of Destinies

Being Tales of Randolph Mason as Related by
His Private Secretary, Courtland Parks

The Interrupted Exile

By Melville Davisson Post



When the invitations to Emily Cruger's wedding at her father's country place on the Hudson arrived, everyone knew what was going to happen—and it did happen: Horses were unharnessed, motor cars were ordered back into their garages, and we went up in the day coaches of a railroad special with a flurry of snow driving against the windows.

We were met at the little station shed by a row of closed carriages, jolted off to a village church and packed into tight little pews. There, if one were really an old and dear friend of the family and had known the bride since she was a tow-headed little girl in fluffy frocks, he berated old General Cruger as though he were a pick-pocket, vilified Emily and damned the institution of marriage. Then we were whisked away in the snow-covered carriages to Cliffcourt and luncheon. But, first, we piled our rubbers in an ante room by the porte-cochere, passed in review before the old general, kissed the tips of Emily's gloved fingers, quoted to the groom the appropriate remark of Solomon, and then girded our loins to fight for a place by the General's fleshpots.

Fortune sat me down at luncheon opposite a man at whom I was very glad to have a look. Vague whisperings had linked his name with Emily Cruger's for many a long day. He had proceeded with his plans to win here with the deliberation of a Japanese field marshal. But women are not to be taken with a chain of forts. The man was carrying on his face a courteous unconcern, but the enamel of it was set over savage lines.

Gossip had it that his plans for the housing of this wife were already carried out; the land for a mile farther up the Hudson had become the splendid, formal gardens of a French estate, the rising walls of the chateau loomed, a line of gray, on the bluff above the river. The great Oriental was making ready while he waited.

I had no opportunity to speak with him. Mrs. Chenley Gaynor, with a niece on the block, had him at her right. The practical old dowager was in every slave-market.

Any mother would have feared so dangerous a man, but not so Mrs. Chenley Gaynor. This freebooter was the richest on the seas, he had sacks of doubloons packed to the gunwale of his brig. What mattered it if the dearest illusion of a maid walked the plank with two gold pieces bound tight over its eyelids, provided one got a country estate, a town house and perhaps a yacht? Mammon was the only god who was never sleeping or on a journey. The man hovered a bit about the debutante, praising her charms, but he did not want her, that was clear. He nursed a hurt with his hand on his cutlass.

I was glad that the old general was independent and the man Emily Cruger had chosen well enough to do. This brown wolf would be a fearful beast, prowling at one's door.

We depleted the larder to its last pate, got into our rubbers and proceeded to embark in our covered carriages. We trod upon one another's toes, jammed our elbows into our neighbors, and apologized sweetly for it; but underneath, I fear, we were ravening wolves. The tragedy of a country wedding in a May blizzard, twenty miles from New York!

The women all had been carted away, and I was entering a carriage after the last man when a servant ran out and said the general greatly wished me to remain. The servant took me to a guest chamber where I found a glass of whisky, a hot bath and a dinner jacket. Meanwhile night descended and I joined the old general below stairs. We dined in rather desolate splendor under the lamps after that we smoked by a little smoldering twig fire in the library

overlooking the river. Then it was that I discovered why he wished me to remain.

"Courtlandt," he began, "you sat opposite a curious person today at luncheon. What do you think of him? "

"Well," I said, "If one were lacking names, I think he might be safely called a wolf."

He took my answer with a slow nodding of the head; then he walked over to the window and stood looking out at the snow driving up the dim river.

"Emily loves this place," he said. "I am glad I saved it to her; but it was like the story in the Russian fairy book, I tossed the wolf everything else for it."

Then he came back to the fire and sat down in his leather chair with his feet stretched out to the fender.

"I will keep your name 'wolf,' Courtlandt," he said; "I like it better than the one his father gave him. I am glad Emily is well out of his way, God bless her. I used to shudder when I saw the beast at her heels. It does not matter so much when a man is devoured, he takes that chance in the forest; but the nursery tale of little Red Riding Hood is full of heartaches. I used to see in fancy this wolf in my smoking jacket by the fire in this chair here. I have barred him out from my little Red Riding Hood; but I await the destiny of the helpless old grandmother."

He reached out his arm, moved some papers on the library table, uncovering a legal document in its blue, stiff wrapper. "I have got to sign this for him," he went on, "and then blow on my fingers to warm them I suppose. The place here is deeded to Emily, and this property is all I have left."

He took up the paper and handed it over to me. I read it carefully through. It was a first mortgage on certain coal lands and mines of the Pittsburg vein in what is known as the Fairmont region, securing a two hundred-thousand-dollar issue of bonds. It was made by the Cruger Coal company to the Exington Trust company as trustee.

"You see, Courtlandt," the old gentleman went on by way of explanation, "I am the Cruger Coal company—president and all, with a few friendly dummies to make the corporation valid. I owe this wolf two hundred thousand dollars. He agrees to take the bond issue for the debt. He might as well take a deed for the property. It is worth perhaps forty thousand dollars more than that; but he will get it in the end for the debt. A deed direct to him would be a little bold just now, a bit like exacting smart money, punitive damages for the loss of Emily. "

He leaned over, got a little flaming twig from the fire, and relighted his burned-out cigar with it. Then he went on.

"There is a fragment of unbelievable history about that debt, Courtlandt, manufactured with the greatest care by this wolf. Three years ago, when I knew only the exterior of the man, he came to me and said that the Midland and Tidewater railroad wished to borrow about half a million dollars, and that he was exceedingly anxious to assist it to obtain the money; that the banks in New York were short because of the recent January payment of dividends, but he was advised that the Granite Mountain Insurance Company at Montpelier had a lot of idle money. He was not acquainted with the officers of this company, but some one had told him that I was born in Montpelier and that my cousin, Senator Lapman, was president of the company. Perhaps I would give him a letter of introduction. I gave him a letter, saying that he was known to me

and that he was a man of large financial relations, in fact, a rather friendly letter.

"Business in New England is on a rather higher plane than one finds it here. One's word goes further. When one's father and grandfather are known, the value of what one says is also known. Well, this wolf took his railroad man up there, presented his letter and got the loan for him, pledging his word for the soundness of the securities and, by strong inference, pledging my word too. The insurance company paid out four hundred thousand dollars, and took the bonds of the railroad for one half-million of dollars.

"Three months later the railroad went into the hands of a receiver, was sold, brought merely the value of the receiver's certificates, which the court had issued to cover its operating expenses, and the bonds were, of course, worthless.

"Senator Lapman came to me and I went at once to the wolf. I told him that the Granite mountain officials had relied on his word and mine, that he had guaranteed the security in person before the board, and it must now be made good. He replied that I was quite right, he would make it wholly good, but that he would have to borrow the money, as he had not so much to his credit. He asked me to wait while he went across the street to his bank. In a few moments he returned, said the bank would loan him the money on his personal note, but that, to keep within its rules, the note would require two names on it. He could put his office boy on, he said, but if I would indorse it, the transaction would appear rather better.

"I knew that he was perfectly good for that sum, as good as the sub-treasury, and I at once said that I would comply with his request.

We went together to the bank, an officer made out a note, he signed it and passed it to me. I noticed that it was in the form of a joint note but I remembered that banks often preferred obligations in that form and I did not hesitate to sign it. Then, at his request, the bank delivered the money to me and I went at once to Montpelier and adjusted the matter with the insurance company. I forgot the incident then, but remembered how honorable the wolf was."

The old general's jaw tightened on the bitter word. He broke the cigar in his fingers and threw the pieces into the fire.

"One morning, after Emily's cards were out, I got a letter from the bank, calling my attention to this note and saying it must be paid. I was dumbfounded. I had supposed that the wolf had paid it long before. I went instantly to his office in New York. He met me, with a face as cold as a stone, said that he had paid individually the interest on our note for several years, that he had used his good offices with the bank to get all the time for me that he could, that the bank refused to carry the paper any longer and we must arrange to pay it. In the greatest surprise I recalled the occurrence to his memory in minute detail. He replied composedly that I was quite mistaken, he was no more responsible to the insurance company than I; neither of us had been legally bound, but both had felt morally obliged to make good the loss, and so a joint note had been executed and the money paid to me. I surely remembered that.

"I turned around without another word and went to my solicitor. He examined the note at the bank, questioned the cashier, and advised me that the bank would certainly sue on the note and that I should have to pay my half of it. I was horribly disturbed. I did not know where to get two hundred thousand dollars. Every thing I possessed would hardly bring that sum under the hammer, besides I wanted to give this place to Emily.

In this dilemma the bank again notified me that the note would be reduced to judgment if not paid within thirty days, but added that if I would execute a mortgage on my coal property, of which it seems to have had an exact statement, it could place the bonds for my share of the note, and, as the wolf stood ready to pay his share in cash, the matter could be settled. I agreed to this plan because it left me free to convey this place to Emily for her marriage portion. I have since learned that this wolf, Myron Gates, takes these bonds."

The old man paused a moment, removed his eyeglasses and laid them on the table; then he went on, "I have also learned that the whole thing, from its inception, was a plan of Gates to get me into his power. He, in fact, owned the worthless securities which were transferred to the Granite Mountain Insurance company. He it was who got the four hundred thousand dollars; he it was who directed the bank to make out a joint note while I waited for him in his office; the delivery of the cash to me was a part of the scheme, that the officers of the bank could testify that the loan was for me. He got the two hundred thousand dollars which I must pay back to the bank."

He arose and began to walk up and down the library. "There was a time," he continued, "when one could call out such a creature and make him stand up before a pistol for an act like this. The custom had its value, which we forget now. When blood-letting was the penalty, sneaking cads kept their tongues tucked back of their teeth and their fingers out of other men's pockets. The law has disarmed the gentlemen, but left the viper his fangs. You are wondering now, Courtlandt, why this man was here at the wedding luncheon; but Emily knows nothing of all this."

"Now, my dear wedding guest," he said, smiling over the whisky, "I am up to the point where 'the ship went down like lead,' and am

come to the explanation of your marooning. I have no source of income now but an inadequate little pension. I cannot live on it anywhere in America without my poverty being patent to Emily and her friends. I must get out of the country. I have thought about some little village in Southern France where one could have, at slight cost, the necessities of life, a servant and sunshine. I remembered that you had been over there for some time with Randolph Mason and would know about it. "

"General Cruger," I said, "before we discuss exile, let us see if Myron Gates cannot be got at in some way. The wolf might be forced to disgorge this money; perhaps we could find a way to scorch him somewhere with a firebrand. It seems to me a duty of a rather superior sort to pour a pot of pitch on the head of such a devil's imp."

He shook his head somewhat hopelessly at that. "Do not get a wrong impression of me, Courtlandt," he said, "I should like to pack coals under the beast if I could; I do not fear him. I have no refinements of false conscience against meeting his treachery with steel traps set in the leaves of his den, but even the discussion of such a thing is idle. I have gone over it more than once with the best attorneys in the city, and they saw no hope in a suit. It would be my word against his but to support his word would be my letter of introduction, the joint note, the evidence of the bank officers that the money was paid to me personally—these things would convince a jury of candlestick makers and the like. One firm of lawyers on upper Nassau thought I was lying even to them about it."

"But, General," I said, "Randolph Mason is not the usual practitioner of New York. Permit me to talk the matter over with him. Something may come of it. "

His manner did not conceal how lacking he thought the result would be, but he was courteously obliged. "Certainly, Courtlandt," he replied. "I shall be greatly in your debt for thinking of the matter, but I fear we shall come back in the end to a counting of centimes, and the problem of a cheap little inn, with a roast fowl now and then and wine of the country."

I had no opportunity to consult with Randolph Mason until the evening of the following day. I went into the room and sitting down in the chair before the table, made my excuses for interrupting his coffee and told General Cruger's story."

"Mr. Mason," I said, "this is a great injury to a very helpless man. How is this mortgage to be avoided? "

He answered me with a listless unconcern, still looking after the departing Pietro. "It is not to be avoided," he said. "Let the man sign it and pay his debt to the bank."

I caught helplessly at the last straw floating out from my disastrous shipwreck. "What then?" I said.

"What then?" he repeated, with the same indolent indifference. "Why, then, there will be another day tomorrow." And he went out of the room and up to his bedchamber, where the silent Pietro made ready for his eccentric master.

I had a long talk that night with Pietro. He had a cousin in Polliano, a village about a league from Genoa, where the Mediterranean makes a little sunny pocket. The place, he thought, ran with General Cruger's dream of the Riviera, the bay was paved with topaz, the far-off back of the sea wine-red, as in the days of Homer, the air soft as down—only the natives were not to be desired. They were picturesque enough for a theatric eye, but they were very

dirty, very stout liars, and all sons of the forty thieves. His cousin, Guido, was no better than the worst of them, but he kept a very comfortable inn, if the fleas in it were only dead. His wife, Gabriella, had once been in the service of the old Marquis Ferretti at Genoa and knew how to serve a gentleman.

Pietro would write to this cousin and drive a bargain for every detail of General Cruger's needs. There was no comfort to be had from waiting, so I picked up a map, a Baedeker, some current fiction on Italy, and, taking the evil-fated mortgage in my pocket, went to Cliffcourt the next morning.

I almost cried when I saw General Cruger, his face was so greatly troubled. He looked white and feeble, an old man in two days. He tried to make a little genial talk at dinner, and get back into his old cheery self. But it was an effort he gave up presently with a rather bitter smile.

"Mr. Parks," he said, when we were again in the library, "Victor Hugo once said that bad fortune always grew worse, and pretended it a quotation from the Sybdlins books. He believed that Destiny, when it seized a man, always hurried him from one disaster to another until it flung him, finally, into the grave. The first blow was not always the one to be wept over. It was the second, the third, that he feared. Well, here is the second. "

He took up a letter from the mantel and drew out the sheets as though he would read it to me then he sat down in his chair still holding the sheets in his fingers.

"I got this letter yesterday from Emily. It was written from the St. Louis as she went out to sea, and brought in by the pilot. "

He stopped a moment and sat staring into the fire, as if caught by some vagrant memory. Then he read the letter.

It was a happy letter, charmingly put, full of tenderness for the old father in his lonely house, carrying little directions to him, little messages which he should deliver, little duties he must perform. He folded the letter and laid it on the table. Then he spoke with the distinctness of one going firmly to his ruin. Italy was now out of the question he must remain and get employment somewhere. But, first, this business with the bank must be concluded. He would go up to the city with me in the morning, execute the mortgage and take up the note. He did not ask me about my conference with Randolph Mason, and so I was spared the recital of that failure.

When the candles burned down, I slept again in the guest-chamber above the library, but no aid came through the gate of dreams. Hope had abandoned this derelict to the seas.

We went into the wolf's bank at ten o'clock the next morning. General Cruger executed the mortgage, and a notary of the bank filled in the prepared acknowledgment below his signature. The bonds were delivered to the secretary of Myron Gates, the money paid by him to General Cruger, who delivered the cash to the bank and got the note stamped "Paid." Then, when the transaction was concluded, we had luncheon at a club and I returned to lower Broadway after having promised General Cruger to meet him for dinner at the Holland.

When I entered the house, Randolph Mason was coming down the stairway. He inquired what business had taken up the morning, and I told him, as bitterly as I could, the sequel to my other story. General Cruger was now penniless, Myron Gates had boarded his galleon and sailed away with its cargo without a shot at his black flag or the hack of a cutlass on his gunwales. He was over the horizon with his loot, the thing was ended.

"Nothing is ended," said Mason, "until it arrives at its adjustment."

"Then," I said, "this is a case for the Court of Final Equity, if it ever sits."

"It is a case for me," he said.

I looked at him in wonder. "A case for you?" I echoed. "You said 'Execute the mortgage and let the man pay the bank. '"

"I did," he replied. "You have followed that direction, I believe."

I did not understand.

"We followed the inevitable," I answered him. "It was the only thing to do. You recognized that yourself. "

"It was the right thing to do," he said, "but not the only thing."

"Why, Mr. Mason," I said, "I asked you 'What then?' and you said there would be another day tomorrow."

"It is here," he answered. "Each day to its own events. The fool confuses his assistant with a multitude of directions. This is to be done now: You will at once hold a meeting of the Cruger Coal company under a call signed by all the members of the company, and as provided by law. Prepare the record of the company in proper form, authorize a mortgage on all the property of the company to the London Trust company of this city, as trustee to secure a loan of two hundred and twenty thousand dollars." These mines, I discover, are easily worth that sum, including the earnings for one year. Some foreign clients of the banking house of Hurst & Solmeyer will pay in cash two hundred thousand dollars for these bonds upon the execution of the mortgage. Let General Cruger take

that sum and hide it somewhere in Europe under his daughter's apron. Bring me the mortgage when it is ready to be signed. "

In the face of all my experience of Randolph Mason, I hazarded an objection.

"But," I said, "the first mortgage is executed. Do you mean that this property is worth enough to secure another mortgage? "

"No," he answered, "I have just said that these mines are worth two hundred and twenty thousand dollars."

"Then," I said, "you mean this loss to fall on Hurst & Solmeyer?"

"No," he said, "Hurst & Solmeyer will make twenty thousand dollars."

"Surely," I said, "you do not mean to date this mortgage before the other one, do you? No notary could be got to certify an incorrect date."

He looked at me a moment." Parks," he said, "I fear that you are beginning to be a fool." Then he came down the steps and went into his private office.

This light breaking suddenly on a supposedly hopeless darkness, confused me, or else I had not put useless questions to Randolph Mason. I should, have known better. Mason's words were never idle, nor were his plans visionary and barren, whether he bid one do a little or a great thing. The story of Naaman and the Prophet was convincing precedent. I did not understand these new instructions and could not point out their intent to General Cruger, but I knew that a pit was being dugged for Myron Gates, and that was light enough.

I explained all this frankly to the old man that evening after dinner at the Holland. I urged him with the logic of the Syrian's servants. If Randolph Mason had bid us build a great, looming trap for the wolf, we should have done it. How much rather than this easy thing which he suggested! I did not comprehend, any more than he, how it could result as Mason said it would. It would take, in my opinion, words and passes, charmed amulets and the laying on of hands to induce any bankers to advance money on a second mortgage when the property involved was worth scarcely the value of the first. Still, Randolph Mason said the bankers would pay over the money, and he knew I would pledge my life on that. I was aware, too, that Solmeyer believed in Mason as the Maid of Israel did in Elisha, and that the firm had made a fortune of six figures through that faith.

I had my way about it in the end. The meeting of the Cruger Coal company was held, the record correctly made, the bonds authorized, and the mortgage prepared in every detail as the law required it. I took it to Randolph Mason when the scrivener had finished. He examined it carefully, called in a notary, dictated the certificate, had the signatures properly affixed, and sent me with it to the bankers. They took it with the bonds and handed General Cruger a draft on the Rothschilds in Paris for two hundred thousand dollars. I walked uptown with the bewildered old man to his club. He was silent for a block of the way, dazed by this incredible fortune. Finally, he put his hand on my arm.

"My dear friend," he said, "I seem to be quite awake, and yet this event is after the manner of dreams or the illusion of some Oriental drug."

He went on slowly a little farther up Broadway. Then he stopped as though taken with a sudden resolution.

"Mr. Parks," he said, "Randolph Mason directed me to go to Europe and hide this money in my daughter's apron. I will go tomorrow on the Baltic. Come down to the ship at eleven and explain this miracle to me. I will run up home now for the luggage."

Then he took a car to his train and I returned to the banking house of Hurst & Solmeyer. I, also, wished an explanation. I walked straight through the building to the private office of the elder banker, and sat down before him at his table.

"Solmeyer," I said, "are you sure that the brick which you have just bought is gold?"

The old man smiled and stroked his long, patriarchal beard.

"Yes, Mr. Parks," he said, "this one is gold. Gates got the brass one."

"Impossible," I replied. "Myron Gates got a mortgage prepared by his own scrivener for the full value of this property. His security is prior to yours. How could his brick be brass? "

The old man's black eyes twinkled in their deep sockets. "Mr. Parks," he said, "you do not know the Prophets. Is it not written 'Who so causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way shall fall himself into his own pit '? "

"The quotation is hopeful," I said, "but into what pit did Myron Gates fall?"

The old banker looked me searchingly in the face. "Randolph Mason said that we were not to tell this thing to any one," (to avoid a charge of notice under the case cited,) "but you are his secretary, and I take it that he has sent you to see if we, ourselves, understand it."

Then he pulled out the drawer of the table and laid before me the mortgage, a copy of the one executed for Myron Gates, a report of the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia, and a copy of the Acts of its Legislature. Each volume was marked with a slip of paper. The banker opened first the volume of Acts.

"You will observe," he said, "that the old form of acknowledgment for corporations was changed by this Act, and a new form given, in which the president of the corporation must certify under oath that he is such officer, and authorized to execute such a paper. Now, the scrivener who drew the Gates mortgage used the old form of acknowledgment as he found it in the form books, while our mortgage, you will notice, is executed under the new form of acknowledgment."

"Well," I said, "what important effect can that have? The Gates mortgage is in proper form, there is only a mistake in the certificate of acknowledgment. That does not invalidate the mortgage, nor affect the validity of the bonds. "

For answer the banker opened the volume of reports, and passed it across the table to me, his finger marking the page. It was a decision of the Court of Last Resort in the state where the mortgaged property was situated, holding that such a mortgage, certified under the old form of acknowledgment, could not be admitted to record so as to create a lien on the property, that such an acknowledgment was void, and that spreading such a mortgage, so acknowledged, on the county records did not make it a recorded lien.

The matter was now clear. The Gates mortgage was not a lien. Gates was only a general creditor. The first and only lien on these coal properties was this last mortgage, which was properly acknowledged, and could be admitted to record. The estate pledged

was worth merely the amount of the last mortgage. When it was foreclosed, as it doubtless would be, Hurst & Solmeyer's clients, the innocent foreign holders of the really secured bonds, would be paid in full. Myron Gates would come in after them as a general creditor, but there would be no assets with which to pay his debt. His bonds were, therefore, worthless, his debt worthless. The bank had been paid in cash, the note liquidated; thus the bank was not affected. Hurst & Solmeyer would make twenty thousand dollars. Myron Gates was the only one upon whom the loss would fall. He would be out two hundred thousand dollars.

I understood now why Randolph Mason had merely said, "Let the man execute this mortgage and pay the bank." When he had looked at the legal paper he had instantly seen the old form of acknowledgement and knew that it was void. Myron Gates' draftsman had worked his undoing. It was necessary only to get the money from Gates and pay the note at the bank, so that this valid debt would be liquidated with cash and the bank eliminated from the problem, then create a proper lien to a second creditor and leave Gates to whistle for his money.

The case was simple, eminently practicable, impossible of failure. Myron Gates had set his own trap, dug his own pit. His trap had crushed him, his pit received him, the score was settled with him to the last cent.

I saw, also, why Randolph Mason wished to keep the explanation confined to the fewest possible persons. He did not wish Gates to discover the defect in his mortgage until he attempted to foreclose it, after the first default in the payment of the interest on his bonds, one year after the execution of the mortgage. It would then be too late for any proceedings in insolvency to affect the second mortgage. So he had left the solution a mystery, even to me, and enjoined Hurst & Solmeyer to secrecy. Myron Gates would rest

easy until he began to foreclose, some months, perhaps, after the end of the year. Then he would awake to find his mortgage smoke under him, his bonds rags, his debt vanished.

I closed the book and looked up at the old banker. He sat combing his long white beard with his thin fingers, a cunning, comfortable smile gathering at the corners of his mouth and twinkling softly in his sharp eyes.

"Mr. Parks," he chuckled, "I regret that you do not know the Prophets. There is so apt a comment in the Book of Jeremiah."

I found General Cruger waiting for me on the deck of the Baltic when I arrived. Good fortune had restored his middle age, his step was springy, the muscles of his face firm again, the old light rekindled in his eyes. He put his arm around my shoulder, and we walked to the bow of the steamer. The old man was thrilling like a boy over his anticipated plan. He would join Emily in Paris, they would spin through the great Alps to the Italian lakes and return along the Riviera to Marseilles; but they should live a week, not a day less than a whole week, with Guido at Polianno in the teeth of the fleas, and he would make no bargain with Guido, the Italian should rob him, like a brigand of the first order. In three years they would return.

I made one of the cheering crowd on the pier as the ship went out to sea with tugs barking at her heels.

For the legal principle involved in this story, see Sec. 3 syllabus, *Abney et al. v. Ohio Lumber and Mining Company*, 45 W. Va., 446. "A certificate of acknowledgment of a deed conveying real estate by a corporation, which fails to show that the officer or agent executing it was sworn and deposed to the facts contained in the certificate, as required by section 5, chapter 73, Code, is fatally defective, and does not entitle such deed to be recorded."

Afterword

This short story is a much shorter version of the original, which was published in two parts in *Pearson's Magazine* in July and August 1907, and included in a collection of thirteen stories, *The Corrector of Destinies: Being tales of Randolph Mason as related by his private secretary, Courtlandt Parks*, published the following year by Edward J. Clode Publisher. In fact it is about 35% shorter. The editor of *The Virginia Enterprise* wanted a story that filled most of one page of his newspaper. To reach that goal, he cut long passages from the original. In the discarded paragraphs Melville Davisson Post fleshed out his characters, revealed the social lives and habits of the rich, described Randolph Masons' eccentricities and much more. They were, in short, some of his best writing.

The following passage from the original illustrates how much was lost in the trimming process. In the newspaper excerpt, Mason's actual examination of the mortgage has been excised, and the reader must assume he looked at it; in the original, Courtlandt Parks, with trepidation, interrupts Mason's lunch to plead the General's case; greatly annoyed Mason scans the mortgage, spots the fatal defect immediately and then issues his puzzling order which will save the General and sink Myron Gates:

I do not know how to give any adequate idea of Randolph Mason at such a time, unless I should say that his attitude was that of menace. I do not mean a mere physical threatening. It was rather as though by tremendous effort he drove his intelligence steadily against some well-nigh impassable barrier. At such a time it was impossible to interrupt him. If one spoke to him, he did not reply; if a hand were laid on his arm, he paid no attention to it. When he finally solved the problem, he would call for Pietro. So the patient Italian

had learned to adjust his household duties to the uncertain movements of the master — dinner on a tray at any hour, or a bath, or the bedroom darkened for a night's rest beginning with the sun over Trinity's steeple.

I kept sharp watch on his regular, monotonous tramping, because I wished to present to him the matter of the night before as early as it might be. I hoped to go quickly back to General Cruger with some clean-cut, brilliant plan that would turn the pockets of Myron Gates inside out. I had thrown the figure of Randolph Mason a bit large before the incredulous old gentleman. I wished to make my representations splendidly good.

At three o'clock the sound of his regular, even step ceased abruptly in the adjoining room. I got up and looked through the half-open door. He stood in the center of the room with his back toward me for full a minute, then the pressure in his figure vanished, his shoulders dropped, he crossed the room quickly to a bookcase, got down a volume of the reports of the King's Bench, marked it with a slip of paper and laid it on the table. Then he sat down in his chair, rang for Pietro and ordered him to bring a little luncheon.

Pietro brought a tray with a chop, a shirred egg and a cup of black coffee. He drank the coffee slowly, resting his elbows on the table in the attitude of one who is very tired. All the muscles in his face were relaxed, even a bit flabby, as though they had been much overstrained. The tremendous nervous energy of the man had withdrawn into its subtlest retreat. He looked

about him with the half-interest of one who has been absent.

I went into the room and sitting down in the chair before the table, made my excuses for interrupting his coffee and told General Cruger's story. I had hardly stated the opening points of the matter before I saw how great an error it was to go to him at such a time. He seemed not to follow what I said, his brain was tired, it would not be disturbed, it declined another problem until it had rested. The very sound of my words seemed to annoy him, as the chatter of a child disturbs one who is tired. When I handed him the mortgage, he looked indolently at the first and last pages of it, whipped through the sheets and thrust it over among the papers of his table. Then he arose and called Pietro, directed him to prepare a hot bath at once, and started to walk out of the room. I rose to make a final effort to get his opinion.

"Mr. Mason," I said, "this is a great injury to a very helpless man. How is this mortgage to be avoided?"

He answered me with a listless unconcern, still looking after the departing Pietro, "It is not to be avoided," he said. "Let the man sign it and pay his debt to the bank.

Unaware how much was stricken, the subscribers to *The Virginia Enterprise* still received an entertaining story they could consume quickly. The Interrupted Exile" appeared on page 11 of *The Virginia Enterprise* on September 27, 1912. The case citation concludes the original story and is boxed in the newspaper version. ■

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