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No. 232

SUICIDES

A Play in One Act

BY

PRESTON GIBSON

Adapted with permission of publisher from a
Short Story

BY

LEONARD MERRICK

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Price 25 Cents

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SUICIDES

PLACE.—New York City.

TIME.—Present. Fall. Late afternoon.

SCENE: *Rather poorly furnished apartment with a large window at center in back; a door at L. 3. There is a table and chair at R. 1, with a lamp on it. There are a few inferior pictures on the wall, and the whole gives the appearance of untidiness. It suggests the home of a man whose wife is most careless about domestic affairs, and who is probably thinking more of her own bonnet than as to whether there are inches of dust on the furniture. Lights out.*

CAST: JIM FERGUSON.
HENRY BLYTHE.

'AT RISE: *The curtain rises slowly and discloses the apartment, which is in utter darkness save for the light which comes in through the window at center from the moon, for it is a beautiful clear moonlight night, crisp and cold. There is a gas fixture in the center, a heavy gas fixture. Hanging from this, at the end of a short rope, which is attached firmly around his neck, is a man. He hangs motionless as if dead, and is clearly outlined against the window at center. His head has fallen down against his chest and his whole body is limp and corpse-like. A hand*

is seen to appear on the window sill, then the shoulders and finally the head of a man. He looks into the room, but can see nothing on account of the darkness. He puts his foot over the window sill. It is apparent that the apartment is on the first floor, and on the street. He steps into the room. He has in his hand a small piece of rope. He gropes his way forward and strikes the body. He recoils in horror, and the body swings to and fro like the pendulum of a great clock. The man gropes with his hands and again feels the body. Great beads of cold sweat stand out on his forehead as he feels and discovers that it is a man who has hanged himself. He quickly strikes a match and holds it up looking at the figure of the hanged man. The match goes out, he picks up a chair, which has fallen over on the floor in front of the hanging body. It is evident that this chair is the one from which the unfortunate man jumped after tying the rope to the gas fixture and placing it carefully and firmly around his neck. He stands the chair on its feet, goes up on it, takes out a knife, and begins to saw the rope. He finally cuts same and lets the unfortunate man down into the chair on which he has just been standing. He loosens the rope about the man's throat, and the man begins to breathe, the body, however, kept perfectly inert. The man begins to reflect that it is his duty to inform the police of the discovery, but as he had come in through the window, he asks himself how he should account for his presence on the scene. Just as he is considering this, he sees the stir of life. As if, by miracle, the man groans.

JIM. Courage, my poor fellow, have courage! you are all right! You are coming around! Evidently you didn't jump far enough to break your

neck! So your wind was shut off just a little, that's all! You'll be all right in a few minutes. (*The man breathes more comfortably.*) That's it, buck up now, you're coming around all right! I suppose if you stayed there very much longer though you would have cashed in. (*The man, opens his eyes and looks about him.*)

HENRY. Where am I?

JIM. I don't know where you are, but I know that you would have hanged yourself if I hadn't arrived just in time to save your life! (*Henry sitting up in the chair, and now feeling normal again, suddenly strikes out and gives JIM a terrific punch in the chest.*)

HENRY. You damned meddlesome fellow, what infernal cheek you have! So you have cut me down, you idiot! By what right did you poke your nose into my affairs? What concern was it of yours, if you please, whether I hanged myself or not? Never in my life have I met with such a piece of presumption!

JIM. Well, that beats anything I have ever heard, but, of course, you aren't yourself! Bye and bye you will thank me!

HENRY. Bye and bye I shall punch you in the eye, just as soon as I am feeling better! What have you done to my collar, too! I declare you have played the devil with me! Who are you, and what are you doing here anyhow? You are a trespasser! Perhaps a thief! I shall have you arrested!

JIM. Come, come; if your misfortunes are more than you can stand, I am sorry that I was obliged to save you, but, after all, there is no need to make such a lot of trouble about it! You know you can hang yourself another day!

HENRY. And why should I be put to the trouble twice? Do you figure yourself that it is agreeable to hang? I passed a very bad time I can tell you!

If you had been through it, you would not talk so lightly about another day! The more I think of your interference, the more it vexes me! My! How dark it is! Light a lamp! Light a lamp!

JIM. I don't know where it is!

HENRY. Over there on the table! Don't keep me sitting here in the dark! The least you can do now is to make me as comfortable as you can!

JIM. All right, here it is! (*Strikes a match, lights up amber. The lights reveal JIM. Rather nice looking man of about 35 years, dressed in a conventional sack suit. The light also reveals HENRY, who is a man of about 50 years, gray hair, rather a discontented face, and a huge bristling mustache. He is dressed in a cutaway coat that is quite shiny, having only one button remaining on the front and one on the back. On the table is a silk hat, which is of a vintage of 1890, and has been rubbed more the wrong way than the right. He wears a red flower in his buttonhole. The light also reveals a small coil of rope, which lies near HENRY'S feet.*)

HENRY. (*Looking at rope.*) What is that?

JIM. (*Looks at it; walks over and picks it up.*) It looks like a piece of rope!

HENRY. It wasn't here just now!

JIM. It belongs to me!

HENRY. Why did you come in this window with a coil of rope, hey? I should like to understand that! (*Pause. Suddenly.*) You too,—you crept in here to hang yourself! You looked in the window, and you didn't see me, and you thought this place would do as well as any other! The idea of your coming in here to commit suicide, and yet you had the nerve to prevent me!

JIM. Well, you see it was impulse! Just a natural impulse that would come to any one if they saw a man hanging! A natural impulse to get him down and try to save him! You are right, you are

right! I came in here to hang myself because I am the most miserable man in the world, but I was so much affected by your trouble that temporarily I forgot my own!

HENRY. That's a lie! I wasn't suffering! I wasn't conscious when you came in! Well, I want to tell you this, that you have some awfully nice moments coming to you! When you feel yourself drop, I promise you that every hair stands erect on your head and each drop of blood in your veins congeals to a separate icicle! It is true that the drop itself is quick, but the clutch of the rope, as you kick in the air, is much worse; and don't be encouraged by the delusion that the matter is instantaneous! Unless you break your neck you may hang there for half an hour before you finally die, and time mocks you! A second holds the sensation of a quarter of an hour! Tell me why you want to do it? We certainly need not stand on ceremony with each other, hey?

JIM. I decided to kill myself because life is torture!

HENRY. The same with me! A woman, of course?

JIM. Yes, (*sighs*) a woman!

HENRY. Is there no other remedy? Can't you desert her?

JIM. Desert her? I am pining for her!

HENRY. Hey?

JIM. She will not have anything to do with me!

HENRY. You love her?

JIM. Nothing else!

HENRY. I took it for granted you were married! Well, this is curious! You want to die because you cannot get hold of a woman, and I because I cannot get rid of one! Let's talk things over! Give me a cigarette!

JIM. Certainly! (*Pulls out a box; hands cigar-*

ette; HENRY takes one, and JIM takes one, and throws the box away.) My last!

HENRY. Give me a light! (*JIM strikes a match and they light their cigarettes.*) Sit down! (*They seat themselves comfortably, each smoking a cigarette.*) I am sorry that I was so angry, but I suppose I have a bad temper! Of course I know that your interference was well meant! You certainly behaved tactlessly, and I on my side perhaps resented your error with too much warmth. Well, it's finished! Is my cravat straight? You know it surprised me to hear that love can drive a man to such despair! Of course, I have loved too, but nothing to the length of the rope! There are plenty of women in New York, and, if one has no heart, there is always another! Don't misunderstand me! I don't want to in any way dissuade you from committing suicide because I hold that a man's suicide is an intimate matter in which "rescue" is a name given by busybodies to "gross impertinence," but, as you have not begun the job, I feel at liberty to talk to you about it, and I think that you are being rash!

JIM. I have considered it well! There is no alternative, I assure you!

HENRY. I would make another attempt to persuade the lady! I swear I would make another attempt! You aren't a bad looking fellow! What is her objection to you?

JIM. It isn't that she objects to me! On the contrary, she likes me, but she is a woman of high principle! She has a husband who is devoted to her! She will not break his heart!

HENRY. Is she young?

JIM. She is not old enough to know too much, and yet young enough to know too little!

HENRY. Beautiful?

JIM. She has a dimple in her right cheek that

when she smiles, well—(*Gives a long deep sigh and slides down in his chair*).

HENRY. I used to have a weakness for dimples! That's a nice combination! Young! Lovely! I suppose her husband doesn't appreciate her! It's always that way! Now, I,—but, of course, I married foolishly! I married an actress, but if I had it to do over again, I would pick out a seamstress! Actresses are all right for applause, for bouquets, and for little dinners, but not for marriage!

JIM. I don't agree with you in one particular, not one! Your experience may have been unfortunate, but I know lots of actresses that are quite as fine as any women in the world, and the proof of this is the lady that I have just been speaking about is an actress herself!

HENRY. Really, is that so? Would it be indiscreet to ask her name?

JIM. There are things one doesn't tell!

HENRY. Of course, but you have said nothing against the lady! In fact, everything you have said about her has been most complimentary so that—

JIM. That's true! Well, she is Lillian Lee!

HENRY. (*Jumps up quickly from his chair.*)
Hey?

JIM. What ails you?

HENRY. My wife!

JIM. Who?

HENRY. Lillian Lee! She is my wife!

JIM. Your wife? Impossible!

HENRY. Well, I think I ought to know my own wife! I tell you that I am married to her! To Lillian Lee! She is Mrs. Henry Blythe! Lillian Lee is her stage name!

JIM. My God, what have I done?

HENRY. (*Clenching his fists as if he was about to attack JIM.*) So, so, you are her lover!

JIM. She has never encouraged me! Remember

what I have said! You haven't any grounds for jealousy, and you know I am about to commit suicide because she won't have me!

HENRY. (*Suddenly changes his belligerent manner, and a smile spreads over his face.*) I am not jealous, my dear fellow, not at all! I am simply amazed! (*laughs*) She thinks I am devoted to her? You see my devotion by the fact that I am about, or was about, to hang myself rather than live with her, and you, you cannot bear to live because you adore her! Give me another cigarette!

JIM. I haven't any! (*Some seconds pass while they smoke in silent meditation.*)

HENRY. (*Finishing his cigarette by taking the pin which holds his buttonhole flower, sticking it through the cigarette and smoking it.*) Listen! Now, in order to clear up this complication we must be perfectly frank with each other. Now, as to your views, you want to marry my wife. Now, of course, I don't want to appear mercenary, but, as her husband, you must realize that it is my duty to make the most favorable arrangements that I can for her. Now, speak frankly!

JIM. It is rather hard for me to talk with you without a certain restraint because I cannot help but regard you as a grievance, and to be perfectly frank with you, I will say that if I had cut you down half an hour later, life would have been just that much nicer for me!

HENRY. Good, good! We are progressing! Your income? Can you support her?

JIM. Yes.

HENRY. What do you do for a living?

JIM. I am in Miss Lee's own profession!

HENRY. So much more congenial! What's your line of business? Heavy leads, ventriloquism, performing rabbits, snakes?

JIM. My name is James Ferguson, that's all!

HENRY. James Ferguson, the great comedian? Now I know why your voice has been troubling me!

JIM. I have had a cold for the past week!

HENRY. Oh, I don't mean that! Familiar voice! (*Pulls his chair near JIM and sits quite close to him putting his hand on his knee.*) Up to this time, I really have had no choice of living with my wife and committing suicide, because things have not gone very well with me, and though I have a considerable amount of pride, yet her salary has helped me out of several pretty tight places, but now you appear, and it simply means that I shall go away abroad, and you can make me—er—er—an allowance! You see I am ready to do anything rather than live with my wife!

JIM. This is all very well, but Miss Lee may not agree to it. She may still harp upon her idea of duty. What then?

HENRY. But you have told me that her only objection is the fear that she would break my heart, but I am quite ready to tell her that for her happiness I am willing to sacrifice myself. (*Rises.*) I have a bottle of some very fine old Burgundy. How does a glass of it strike you?

JIM. Oh, if you insist!

HENRY. (*Goes to cupboard, produces bottle, opens same; fills two glasses.*) I am glad I have met you! Here's to your marriage! (*He drinks his wine in one swallow and fills it again. JIM sips his.*) You know I have quite an affection for you! In fact I don't know when, on such short acquaintance, I have felt so friendly towards any man. (*Empties his glass again in one swallow and fills it.*) Why to-night everything was black to me! My heart was as heavy as a cannonball, and now the world is bright again! Roses bloom before my feet, and the little larks are singing in the sky! Ah, how beautiful, how sublime is friendship! You know I once

did a turn! (*Drinks his glass; fills it again. He is beginning to show genial effects from the wine.*) Friendship better than riches, than youth, than the love of women! Riches melt, youth flies, women snore, but friendship is— A glass of wine with you! (*Finishes his glass, fills it again.*) It goes well, this wine! Oh, I feel twenty years younger! You wouldn't believe what I have suffered! My agonies would fill a book! By nature I am a domestic sort of fellow, but my home has always been impossible! I really hate to come in here! Why it is only in a restaurant that I ever see a clean tablecloth! All she thinks about is frivolity!

JIM. Oh, no, no; I cannot agree to that!

HENRY. You can't agree! You have seen her when she is laced in her stage costume, with the paint and the powder, and her best corset on! I see her in a wrapper and her hair in curl papers!

JIM. Curl papers?

HENRY. Certainly! I tell you I am naturally a man who takes life as it comes. I am very tolerant of the feelings of women, but it speaks volumes, and I would have hanged myself rather than remain with her! Then she has a pet snake!

JIM. Heavens! A pet snake?

HENRY. Yes, "everything in its place" is my motto, and the motto of my wife is "all over the place" for this snake has shortened my life! I never lay my head beside those curl papers that I am not afraid that snake is under the bolster, but you see I was not brought up in a zoölogical garden!

JIM. Oh, she'll get rid of that!

HENRY. Oh, I realize that when a man is in love with a woman, he always thinks the faults are with the husband! (*Finishes his glass.*) Of course I am not going to tell you that I am perfect; not at all; yet I wouldn't say that I treated my wife badly! I would simply say that I was nearly perfect!

JIM. (*Rising, and picking up the rope which is lying on the floor in front of him.*) After all, do you know, now that I come to think it over, I am not sure that we will be able to come to an understanding!

HENRY. What? I suppose because I have told you the truth, now you want to back out!

JIM. Well, she has spoken to me so many times of duty and all that, that I am beginning to believe that I should not rob you of her! I—— (*Going up towards the window*) have about made up my mind (*steps out of the window and speaks through the window*)—have about made up my mind that it would not be fair for me to take her away from you! I am going to be a man and live my love down! Good-night!

HENRY. Hey, stop! What is going to become of me? (*Picks up the strand of rope which was around his neck at the rise of the curtain, and which was cut by Jim, and holds it in his hand; mournfully.*) You have not even left me my rope.

JIM. (*throws HENRY his good rope*) Here is mine, old fellow. Better luck with it! Good night.

CURTAIN.



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