

**JASON HILDRETH'S
IDENTITY,
PP. 579-646**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649350278

Jason Hildreth's Identity, pp. 579-646 by Virna Woods

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

VIRNA WOODS

**JASON HILDRETH'S
IDENTITY,
PP. 579-646**

*marked by
D. W. G. 187*

JASON HILDRETH'S IDENTITY.

BY

VIRNA WOODS,

AUTHOR OF "THE AMAZONS" AND "A MODERN MAGDALENE."

MERCANTILE LIBRARY,
NEW YORK.

MF 340597

PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.

W.

170

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
276657A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1926 L

Copyright, 1897, by J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY.

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA, U.S.A.

MERCANTILE LIBRARY.
NEW YORK.

LIPPINCOTT'S
MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

MAY, 1897.

JASON HILDRETH'S IDENTITY.

I.

HE awoke one morning and looked with vague interest about the unfamiliar room. A round marble-topped table, with several bottles of medicine on it, stood by his bed; a wash-stand was set against the opposite wall, and in one corner was a large wooden wardrobe. Two or three cane-seated chairs completed the furniture; the walls were unadorned, save with a half-length mirror that hung over the bare mantel. The blind was drawn down over the partly opened window, and he heard a faint rattle, as though from a city street, far below.

"I must be in a lodging-house," he thought; but farther than this his mind refused to go. "It may be Paris, or Melbourne, or New York," he reflected, with grim amusement.

The door opened, and a woman tiptoed into the room, carrying some towels over her arm. She was followed by a young man, who advanced to the bed and started back in surprise.

"The delirium is broken," he said.

He picked up one of the bottles on the table and poured out a spoonful of the medicine. The sick man opened his mouth and swallowed the dose obediently.

"Where am I?" he queried, looking up at the attendant, whom he judged to be a professional nurse.

"You are in San Francisco," was the reply; "but the doctor said I was not to allow you to talk."

The patient closed his eyes, and drifted from his dreamy thoughts so slowly that he did not know when they had merged into veritable dreams.

When he awoke again, it was early evening. The soft light of a shaded lamp burned on the table beside him. The nurse stood at the foot of the bed, and a man bent over him. It must be the doctor, for he had been feeling his pulse. The face was dimly familiar to him, as

though he had seen it in his dreams. It was a fair, bright, kindly face, still young; and the voice that belonged to it was cheery and pleasant.

"How do you feel?" it said, as the patient looked up with questioning eyes.

"I feel as though I had just been born," was the reply: he was very weak, and knew neither where nor who he was.

The doctor laughed and nodded his head.

"The fever has left you, and you have no strength," he said; "but you will soon be all right. And then," he added, with a chuckle, "you will have to give an account of yourself, for you seem to have dropped out of the clouds."

He gave some directions to the nurse and went away. The patient closed his eyes and pretended to sleep, that the attendant might not disturb him; for he wanted to think.

He remembered, after a little while, that the nurse had told him he was in San Francisco; but what the city looked like, or how he had come there, he could not tell. His idea of the place, he knew, must be the old idea he had when a boy at school, for it was a confused combination of sheep-men and sombreros and poker and pistols; but at the same time he heard the sound of car-bells and the noise of traffic on the street below.

"Who am I? who am I?" he repeated over and over to himself.

He half unclosed his eyes and looked at his wasted hand as it lay on the coverlet. It was long and slender, and evidently unused to manual labor.

"I cannot be a working-man," he thought. "I wonder if I am educated."

Then he tried to test himself; and, swiftly and inconsequently, isolated facts began to pass like a Mardi-Gras procession through his mind:

"Columbus discovered America in 1492; water is composed of two parts hydrogen to one part oxygen; the square of the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides."

Then he tried to repeat to himself the process of the circulation of the blood; and he remembered that the astronomers were theorizing about establishing communication with Mars. Next he found himself repeating automatically certain rules of Latin grammar that he must have learned when a boy; and immediately after he began to formulate his thoughts in the French language.

"Well," he thought, with inward satisfaction, "I seem to have been pretty well educated. I wonder if I am English, or American, or French."

Then a sense of utter isolation swept in upon him with intolerable pain. He was alone, cut off from his friends, who were perhaps waiting anxiously for tidings of him; unable to readjust himself to his position in the world. It was as though he were blind or dumb. The circuit was broken that connected him with the rest of mankind. He was terribly alone.

"In the centre of immensities, in the conflux of eternities," he murmured, involuntarily.

"Do you want anything?" asked the nurse, rising and going to him.

The sick man shook his head impatiently. He wanted to think undisturbed.

Again and again he tried to gain some clue to his identity, but in vain. He seemed to remember all the general truths that he had ever learned, to recollect books he had read, pictures he had seen, music to which he had listened; but all personal associations had been obliterated from his mind. Whether or not he had a family, he did not know; not a single face came to him from all the circle of friends and acquaintances he must once have possessed. He wondered how old he was. He thought, from his hands, and from his teeth, which seemed perfect, that he must yet be young.

A sudden fear broke into the current of his thought. The doctor had said that when he was stronger he must give an account of himself. He could not do so, and he was afraid he would be considered mad. That he was not mad, and that the memory of his life would some time return to him, he felt sure; but in the mean time he must face the danger of incarceration in an asylum. To prevent such a possibility, he must give himself a name and construct for himself a biography. He would defer the relation of the fiction as long as possible, in the hope that his true name and history would recur to him; but he would be prepared, if the doctor should seek to carry out his laughing threat. So he lay in the quiet of feigned slumber, and thought out the apocryphal narrative he was later to give to his new friends.

It was later in the evening that he heard the murmur of voices in the hall just outside his room. The attendant had gone out for a few moments, and two women, probably maids in the establishment, were standing just outside his door, which was slightly ajar.

"He hasn't said a word about his friends or asked them to send word to any one," one of the voices murmured.

"No," said the other, in the same cautious undertone; "but, whether he has friends or not, he has money. Mrs. McFall says there was eight hundred dollars in his valise. And lucky for him, or he'd been taken to the county hospital."

"A good-looking young man he is, too," continued the first voice, "for all he's that poor you can a'most see through him. It's queer, now, isn't it, that there was never a letter nor a card on him at all. But we'll know all about it when Dr. Richmond comes. Trust me to get it out of Peter, for all he's a professional nurse."

The girls passed down the hallway, and the voices became inaudible.

The patient lay back and closed his eyes wearily. The test was coming sooner than he expected; and already his strange reticence had been noticed. Had he a mother, or a sweetheart, or a wife? His heart thrilled at the thought, but no answering chord of memory stirred in his brain.

The nurse came back and resumed his patient watch by the window : the monotony of an hour was measured by the ticking of the clock.

The feigned sleep of the patient was disturbed at last by the entrance of the doctor.

"You're better to-night," he said, as he bent a moment over the bed. But before he could make any further remark he was interrupted by the patient himself, who had decided to take the initiative in the conversation and use the cue the housemaids had unconsciously given him.

"I have been worrying about a little matter, doctor," he said, "since I have regained consciousness ; and I wish to relieve my mind about it. I had about eight hundred dollars in my valise——"

"It is all right," said the doctor, smiling : "it is locked up in the safe down-stairs ; that is, the most of it. What we have had to use has been kept account of, and you shall see that it is all right."

"Then I should like to know how I came here ; for I cannot remember anything about it."

"No wonder you can't remember," said the doctor, delighted that his mysterious patient was beginning to talk at last. "You were found lying half clothed on the pier at the Pacific Mail wharf, sand-bagged and robbed. The fiends must have been frightened away, or they would probably have pitched you into the bay. You would have been taken to the Receiving Hospital, had you not been recognized by the bell-boy here as a lodger of Mrs. McFall's. But no one knew who you were, as you had just come the day before, and had given no name : so it was impossible to send word to your friends."

"Didn't I talk in my delirium?" the sick man asked.

"Yes, you talked a great deal," the doctor replied, "but nothing sensible that we could understand. Half the time you spoke in French. You said a great deal about *ma petite chérie*, but you mentioned no names."

"I wonder if I am French," the patient thought ; and he hastily interpolated in the narrative he had prepared an explanation of his use of that language.

"But my letters," he ventured to suggest, feeling out in a new direction ; "surely you must have found my name somewhere."

"No," the doctor replied ; "whatever letters and papers you had must have been on your person when you were robbed, and were taken with your other valuables. There was nothing whatever by which we could identify you. The only writing we could find among your possessions was a verse written on a slip of paper in a book of German poetry. A stanza was written in German in a masculine hand, and the translation of the stanza was written below in a woman's writing."

"Evidently I read German," said the sick man to himself. "What next ? I am afraid to go on with this investigation, lest I find myself to be an Arab or a Chinaman." But aloud he asked to see the paper.

When it was handed to him, he read, in clear, large German script, the words,—

Seele des Menschen,
Wie gleichst du dem Wasser;
Schicksal des Menschen,
Wie gleichst du dem Wind.

And below it was written, in a clear, flowing English hand, the translation :

Soul of man,
How like the water !
Fate of man,
How like the wind !

He stared at the paper, struggling to connect the familiar writing with some associated ideas, until he saw that his silence was observed. Then he spoke abruptly.

"The German," he said, "is my own writing; the translation is that of a friend."

He spoke carelessly, but his thoughts were perturbed.

"Truly, indeed," he reflected, "my soul is like the water and my fate like the wind; for I know not whence I come nor whither I go."

"Do you not wish," said the doctor, as the patient volunteered no further remark, "to have word sent to some of your friends?"

"It is not worth while to do so until I can write myself," the sick man replied. "My friends are all in the East,—in New York," he added, as the doctor looked at him inquiringly. "I have no family. My nearest relative is a cousin on my father's side. I came out for a pleasure-trip, with the idea that if I liked the place I would remain. You see, I am perfectly free, and can follow my whims."

"Excuse me," said the doctor, with much interest, "but are you French?"

"My mother was French," was the reply, "and I have spoken the language from my infancy."

While they were talking, the door had been cautiously opened, and Mrs. McFall's ample figure had slipped silently into the room. A few moments later, the two maids whose voices the sick man had heard in the hall had returned and stopped again at the partially opened door. He became aware of the presence of his silent auditors, and his nervousness and fear of discovery increased.

"I could not be more anxious to deceive them if I had committed a crime," he thought.

He lay silent, still hoping that they would not ask his name; and yet he was uneasily aware that his reticence seemed strange to them. A dozen names he had thought over and rejected: some seemed so common as to excite suspicion of an alias; others were foreign, or in some way startlingly strange. At last he had settled, almost at random, upon one that seemed to possess individuality without being sufficiently peculiar to provoke comment. He had felt, somehow, that a great deal depended upon this selection of a name; and now that it was trembling on his lips, he felt a strange distrust of it. But he had no time to reconsider it or cast it aside; for the doctor leaned over him and asked his name. He saw Mrs. McFall bend forward