

**THE LUNATIC AT
LARGE: A NOVEL**

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The Lunatic at Large: A Novel by J. Storer Clouston

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J. STORER CLOUSTON

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A NOVEL

BY
J. STORER *C*LOUSTON

AUTHORIZED EDITION



BRENTANO'S

NEW YORK

1905

a. m.

THE LUNATIC AT LARGE.

INTRODUCTORY.



INTO the history of Mr Francis Beveridge, as supplied by the obliging candour of the Baron von Blitzenberg and the notes of Dr Escott, Dr Twid-
del and his friend Robert Welsh make a kind of explanatory entry. They most effectually set the ball a-rolling, and so the story starts in a small room looking out on a very uninteresting London street.

It was about three o'clock on a November afternoon, that season of fogs and rains and mud, when towns-people long for fresh air and hillsides, and country-folk think wistfully of the warmth and lights of a city, when nobody is satisfied, and everybody has a cold. Outside the window of the room there were a few feet of earth adorned with a low bush or two, a line of railings, a stone-paved street, and on the other side a long row of uniform yellow brick houses. The apartment itself was a modest chamber, containing a minimum of rented furniture and a flickering gas-stove. By a small caseful of medical treatises and a conspicuous stethoscope, the least experienced could see that it was labelled consulting-room.

Dr Twiddel was enjoying one of those moments of repose that occur even in the youngest practitioner's existence. For the purposes of this narrative he may briefly be described as an amiable-looking young man, with a little bit of fair moustache and still less chin, no practice to speak of, and a considerable quantity of unpaid bills. A man of such features and in such circumstances invites temptation. At the present moment, though his waistcoat was unbuttoned and his feet rested on the mantelpiece, his mind seemed not quite at ease. He looked back upon a number of fortunate events that had not occurred, and forward to various unpleasant things that might occur, and then he took a letter from his pocket and read it abstractedly.

"I can't afford to refuse," he reflected, lugubriously; "and yet, hang it! I must say I don't fancy the job."

When metal is molten it can be poured into any vessel; and at that moment a certain deep receptacle stood on the very doorstep.

The doctor heard the bell, sat up briskly, stuffed the letter back into his pocket, and buttoned his waistcoat.

"A patient at last!" and instantly there arose a vision of a simple operation, a fabulous fee, and twelve sickly millionaires an hour ever after. The door opened, and a loud voice hailed him familiarly.

"Only Welsh," he sighed, and the vision went the way of all the others.

The gentleman who swaggered in and clapped the doctor on the back, who next threw himself into the easiest chair and his hat and coat over the table, was in

fact Mr Robert Welsh. From the moment he entered he pervaded the room; the stethoscope seemed to grow less conspicuous, Dr Twiddel's chin more diminutive, the apartment itself a mere background to this guest. Why? It would be hard to say precisely. He was a black-moustached, full-faced man, with an air of the most consummate assurance, and a person by some deemed handsome. Yet somehow or other he inevitably recalled the uncles of history. Perhaps this assurance alone gave him his atmosphere. You could have felt his egotism in the dark.

He talked in a loud voice and with a great air of mastery over all the contingencies of a life about town. You felt that here sat one who had seen the world and gave things their proper proportions, who had learned how meretricious was orthodoxy, and which bars could really be recommended. He chaffed, patronised, and cheered the doctor. Patients had been scarce, had they? Well, after all, there were many consolations. Did Twiddle say he was hard up? Welsh himself in an even more evil case. He narrated various unfortunate transactions connected with the turf and other pursuits, with regret, no doubt, and yet with a fine rakish defiance of destiny. Twiddel's face cleared, and he began to show something of the same gallant spirit. He brought out a tall bottle with a Celtic superscription; Welsh half filled his glass, poured in some water from a dusty decanter, and proposed the toast of "Luck to the two most deserving sinners in London!"

The doctor was fired, he drew the same letter from his

pocket, and cried, "By Jove, Welsh, I'd almost forgotten to tell you of a lucky offer that came this morning."

This was not strictly true, for as a matter of fact the doctor had only hesitated to tell of this offer lest he should be shamed to a decision. But Welsh was infectious.

"Congratulations, old man!" said his friend. "What's it all about?"

"Here's a letter from an old friend of my people's—Dr Watson, by name. He has a very good country practice, and he offers me this job."

He handed the letter to Welsh, and then added, with a flutter of caution, "I haven't made up my mind yet. There are drawbacks, as you'll see."

Welsh opened the letter and read:—

"DEAR TWIDDEL,—I am happy to tell you that I am at last able to put something in your way. A gentleman in this neighbourhood, one of my most esteemed patients, has lately suffered from a severe mental and physical shock, followed by brain fever, and is still, I regret to say, in an extremely unstable mental condition. I have strongly recommended quiet and change of scene, and at my suggestion he is to be sent abroad under the care of a medical attendant. I have now much pleasure in offering you the post, if you would care to accept it. You will find your patient, Mr Mandell-Essington, an extremely agreeable young man when in possession of his proper faculties. He has large means and no near relatives; he comes of one of the best families in the county; and though he has, I surmise, sown his wild oats pretty freely, he was considered of unusual promise previous to this unfortunate illness. He is of an amiable and pleasant disposition, though at present, we fear, inclined to suicidal

tendencies. I have no particular reason to think he is at all homicidal; still, you will see that he naturally requires most careful watching. It is possible that you may hesitate to leave your practice (which I trust prospers); but as the responsibility is considerable, the fee will be proportionately generous—£500, and all expenses paid."

("Five hundred quid!" exclaimed Welsh.)

"I would suggest a trip on the Continent. The duration and the places to be visited will be entirely at your discretion. It is of course hardly necessary to say that you will seek quiet localities. Trusting to hear from you at your very earliest convenience, believe me, yours sincerely,
TIMOTHY WATSON."

Welsh looked at his friend with the respect that prosperity naturally excites. He smiled on him as an equal, and cried, heartily, "Congratulations again! When do you start?"

Twiddel fidgeted uncomfortably, "I—er—well, you see—ah—I haven't *quite* made up my mind yet."

"What's the matter?"

"Hang it, Welsh—er—the fact is I don't altogether like the job."

Scruples of any kind always surprised Welsh.

"Can't afford to leave the practice?" he asked with a laugh.

"That's—ah—partly the reason," replied Twiddel, uncomfortably.

"Rot, old man! There's a girl in the case. Out with it!"

"No, it isn't that. You see it's the very devil of a responsibility."