

An underwater photograph showing a swimmer's legs and arms. The swimmer is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt. The background is a deep teal color with some light particles visible.

***EDGAR
SALTUS***

***THE PACE
THAT KILLS:
A CHRONICLE***



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Edgar Saltus

The Pace That Kills: A Chronicle

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By the same Author.

Belford, Clarke & Co's New Books

PART I.

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I.

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"I wish you a happy New Year, sir."

It was the servant, green of livery, the yellow waistcoat slashed with black, bearing the coffee and fruit.

"Put it there, please," Roland answered. And then, in recognition of the salutation, he added, "Thanks: the same to you."

"H'm," he mused, as the man withdrew, "I ought to have tipped him, I suppose."

He leaned from the bed, poured some milk into a cup, and for a second nibbled at a slice of iced orange. Through the transom came a faint odor of home-made bread, and with it the rustle of a gown and a girl's clear laugh. The room itself was small. It was furnished in a fashion which was unsuggestive of an hotel, and yet did not resemble that of a private house. The curtain had been already drawn. Beyond was a lake, very blue in the sunlight, bulwarked by undulant hills. Below, on the road, a dogcart fronted by a groom was awaiting somebody's pleasure.

"It is late," he reflected, and raised a napkin to his lips. As he did so he noticed a package of letters which the napkin must have concealed. He took up the topmost and eyed it. It had been addressed to the Athenæum Club, Fifth Avenue; but the original direction was erased, and Tuxedo

Park inserted in its stead. On the upper left-hand corner the impress of a firm of tailors shone in blue. Opposite was the engraving of a young woman supported by 2-1/2*d*. He put it down again and glanced at the others. The superscriptions were characterless enough; each bore a foreign stamp, and to one as practised as was he, each bore the token of the dun.

"If they keep on bothering me like this," he muttered, "I shall certainly place the matter in the hands of my attorney." And thereat, with the air of a man who had said something insultingly original, he laughed aloud, swallowed some coffee, and dashed his head in the pillow. In and out of the corners of his mouth a smile still played; but presently his fancy must have veered, for the muscles of his lips compressed, and as he lay there, the arms clasped behind the head, the pink silk of his sleeves framing and tinting his face, and in the eyes the expression of one prepared to meet Fate and outwit it, a possible observer who could have chanced that way would have sat himself down to study and risen up perplexed.

Anyone who was at Columbia ten years ago will remember Roland Mistrial,—Roland Mistrial 3*d*, if you please,—and will recall the wave of bewilderment which swept the campus when that young gentleman, on the eve of graduation, popularity on one side and honors on the other, suddenly, without so much as a p. p. c., left everything where it was and betook himself to other shores. The flight was indeed erratic, and numerous were the rumors which it excited; but Commencement was at hand, other issues were to be considered, bewilderment subsided as bewilderment

ever does, the college dispersed, and when it assembled again the Mistril mystery, though unelucidated, was practically forgot.

In the neighborhood of Washington Square, however, on the northwest corner of Tenth Street and Fifth Avenue to be exact, there were others whose memories were more retentive. Among them was Roland's grandfather, himself a graduate, founder of the Mistril fellowship, and judge of the appellate court. And there was Roland's father, a graduate too, a gentleman widely respected, all the more so perhaps because he had run for the governorship and lost it. And again there was Roland's aunt, a maiden lady of whom it is recorded that each day of her life she got down on her knees and thanked God he had made her a Mistril. In addition to these, there were, scattered along the Hudson, certain maternal relatives—the Algaroths, the Baxters, and the Swifts; Bishop Algaroth in particular, who possessed such indomitable vigor that when at the good old age of threescore and ten he decided to depart this life, the impression prevailed that he had died very young for him. None of these people readily forgot. They were a proud family and an influential one—influential not merely in the social sense, but influential in political, legal, in church and university circles as well; a fact which may have had weight with the Faculty when it was called upon to deal with Roland Mistril 3d. But be that as it may, the cause of the young man's disappearance was never officially given. Among the rumors which it created was one to the effect that his health was affected; in another his mind was implicated; and in a third it was his heart. Yet as not one of these rumors had

enough evidential value behind it to concoct an anonymous letter on, they were suffered to go their way undetained, very much as Roland had already gone his own.

That way led him straight to the Golden Gate and out of it to Japan. Before he reached Yeddo his grandfather left the planet and a round sum of money behind. Of that round sum the grandson came in for a portion. It was not fabulous in dimensions, but in the East money goes far. In this case it might have gone on indefinitely had not the beneficiary seen fit to abandon the languors of the Orient for the breezier atmosphere of the west. The Riviera has charms of its own. So, too, have Paris and Vienna. Roland enjoyed them to the best of his ability. He even found London attractive, and became acclimated in Pall Mall. In the latter region he learned one day that his share of the round sum had departed and his father as well. The conjunction of these incidents was of such a character that he at once took ship for New York.

It was not that he was impatient to revisit the misgoverned city which he had deserted ten years before. He had left it willingly enough, and he had seldom regretted it since. The pins and needles on which he sat were those of another make. He was uninformed of the disposition of his father's property, and he felt that, were not every penny of it bequeathed to him, he would be in a tight box indeed.

He was at that time just entering his thirtieth year—that age in which a man who has led a certain life begins to be particular about the quality of his red pepper, and anxious too that the supply of it shall not tarry. Though meagre of late, the supply had been sufficient. But at present the

palate was a trifle impaired. Where a ten-pound note had sufficed for its excitement, a hundred now were none too strong. Roland Mistical—3d no longer—wanted money, and he wanted plenty of it. He had exact ideas as to its usefulness, and none at all regarding its manufacture. He held, as many have done and will continue to do, that the royal road to it leads through a testament; and it was in view of the opening vistas which that road displayed that he set sail for New York.

And now, six weeks later, on this fair noonday of a newer year, as he lay outstretched in bed, you would have likened him to one well qualified to keep a mother awake and bring her daughter dreams. Our canons of beauty may be relative, but, such as they are, his features accorded with them—disquietingly even; for they conveyed the irritating charm of things we have hoped for, striven for, failed to get, and then renounced with thanksgiving. They made you anxious about their possessor, and fearful too lest the one dearly-beloved might chance to see them, and so be subjugated by their spell. They were features that represented good stock, good breeding, good taste, good looks—every form of goodness, in fact, save, it may be, the proper one. But the possible lack of that particular characteristic was a matter over which hesitation well might be. We have all of us a trick of flattering ourselves with the fancy that, however obtuse our neighbor is, we at least are gifted with the insight of a detective—a faculty so rare and enviable that the blunders we make must be committed with a view to its concealment; yet, despite presumable shrewdness, now and

then a face will appear that eludes cataloguing, and leaves the observer perplexed. Roland Mistrial's was one of these.

And now, as the pink silk of his shirt-sleeves tinted it, the expression altered, and behind his contracted brows hurried processions of shifting scenes. There was that initial catastrophe which awaited him almost on the wharf—the discovery that his father had left him nothing, and that for no other reason in the world than because he had nothing whatever to leave—nothing, in fact, save the hereditary decoration of and right of enrolment in the Society of the Cincinnati, the which, handed down since Washingtonian days from one Mistrial to another, he held, as his forefathers had before him, in trust for the Mistrials to be.

No, he could not have disposed of that, even had he so desired; but everything else, the house on Tenth Street,—built originally for a country-seat, in times when the Astor House was considered rather far uptown,—bonds, scrip, and stocks, disappeared as utterly as had they never been; for Roland's father, stricken with that form of dementia which, to the complete discouragement of virtue, batters on men that have led the chastest lives, had, at that age in which the typical rake is forced to haul his standard down, surrendered himself to senile debauchery, and in the lap of a female of uncertain attractions—of whose mere existence no one had been previously aware—placed title-deeds and certificates of stock. In a case such as this the appeal of the rightful heir is listened to with such patience that judge and jury too have been known to pass away and leave the tale unended. And Roland, when the earliest dismay had in a measure subsided, saw himself closeted with lawyers who

offered modicums of hope in return for proportionate fees. Then came a run up the Hudson, the welcomeless greeting which waited him there, and the enervating imbecility of his great aunt, whose fingers, mummified by gout, were tenacious enough on the strings of her purse. That episode flitted by, leaving on memory's camera only the degrading tableau of coin burrowed for and unobtained. And through it all filtered torturesome uncertainties, the knowledge of his entire inability to make money, the sense of strength misspent, the perplexities that declined to take themselves away, forebodings of the morrow, nay of the day even as well, the unbanishable dread of want.

But that for the moment had gone. He turned on his elbow and glanced over at a card-case which lay among the silver-backed brushes beyond, and at once the shock he had resummoned fled. Ah, yes! it had gone indeed, but at the moment it had been appalling enough. The morrow at least was secure; and as he pondered over its possibilities they faded before certain episodes of the previous day—that chance encounter with Alphabet Jones, who had insisted he should pack a valise and go down with Tremont Yarde and himself to Tuxedo; and at once the incidents succeeding the arrival paraded through his thoughts. There had been the late dinner to begin with; then the dance; the girl to whom some one had presented him, and with whom he had sat it out; the escape of the year, the health that was drunk to the new one, and afterwards the green baize in the card-room; the bank which Tremont Yarde had held, and finally the successful operation that followed, and which consisted in cutting that cherub's throat to the tune of three thousand

dollars. It was all there now in the card-case; and though, as sums of money go, it was hardly quotable, yet in the abstract, forethought and economy aiding, it represented several months of horizons solid and real. The day was secure; as for the future, who knew what it might contain? A grave perhaps, and in it his aunt.

II.

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"If I had been killed in a duel I couldn't be better." It was Jones the novelist describing the state of his health. "But how is my friend and brother in virtue?"

"Utterly ramollescent," Roland answered, confidently. "What the French call *gaga*."

The mid-day meal was in progress, and the two men, seated opposite each other, were dividing a Demidorf salad. They had been schoolmates at Concord, and despite the fact that until the day before they had not met for a decennium, the happy-go-lucky intimacy of earlier days had eluded Time and still survived. Throughout the glass-enclosed piazza other people were lunching, and every now and then Jones, catching a wandering eye, would bend forward a little and smile. Though it was but the first of the year, the weather resembled that of May. One huge casement was wide open. There was sunlight everywhere, flowers too, and beyond you could see the sky, a dome of opal and sapphire blent.

"Well," Jones replied, "I can't say you have altered much. But then who does? You remember, don't you"—and Jones