

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled Literary Club Papers 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

The Confessions of a Susceptible Solicitor

I was sitting alone in my office late one evening after the office boy had gone and the building was almost deserted when a light knock on the door aroused me, and pulling myself together, I called out "Come in." No lawyer ever expected any good business to follow a knock. Our profession's latch-string always hangs outside, so obtrusively, that we rarely have to give a more definite invitation to walk into our parlor. A knocking customer moreover, is always very likely to belong to that class of tangent clients, for whom the young lawyer generally looks in vain, to catch whom he hangs out an alluring sign in black and gold; and from whom he rarely gets any satisfaction. In response to my invitation the door slowly opened, and a woman came slowly in. She was rather young, though still not a girl. She was dressed, yes; I am sure she was dressed for I would have noticed it if she had not been dressed, and yet for the life of me that is all I can remember about her clothing. So I think she must have been well-dressed. But no man not even a man milliner would remember her gown, even if it had been the bright red of the present startling fashion, because her face was of that kind calculated to absorb the whole masculine attention. It was not a fresh, round pink and white face, nor were her other features blotted out by a pair of dazzling piercing eyes. It seemed at first not merely features, but all expression, and then when you looked again, you saw a low forehead from the center of which, the masses of rather coarse light brown hair were drawn loosely back from the tips of two very small virgin ears, in fact just as God had made them. Her eyes were of some color of course, but I never knew just what it was. On that first day they seemed a soft blue, and at other times they looked gray: but never mind their color, they were eyes that had an occasional yearning look in them: the sort of look that makes a man's extremities grow cold, and they were shaded by long, dark lashes that curled down almost to her cheek. Her nose was aquiline, and her skin colorless, her face rather thin, almost wan. Her lips as I think of them now, were a little too full and her mouth a trifle large, but they were used so prettily and the teeth were so white and the lips so red that what might have been a defect was a charm. As she came toward me, she asked, looking about, if there was a lawyer there. Answering her, I arose and pull up the chair for her. Hesitating a moment, and again looking nervously about, she took the seat, and giving me a searching glance, asked if I would attend to some business for her as she was in great trouble. Her story was soon told. Her husband to whom she had been married but two years, had brought her to the city from Canada, and they had lived happily, but recently, she had begun to notice unexplained abuses on his part and at last her suspicions being aroused, she had followed him, and from what she saw, and from a letter which had fallen into her hands, she had

learned enough to convince her of his faithlessness, and what was worse, that he intended shortly to desert her. They had recently mortgaged the house in which they lived, for almost all it was worth to enable him to establish himself in business on his own account, but she had learned that the five thousand dollars, they had thus raised, had been converted into U. S. bonds which her husband had left for safekeeping in the Safety Deposit Company. She had examined his pockets while he was asleep the night before, and had seen the receipt of that company for them. It was about those bonds she came to ask my advice and aid. The house was hers and she had mortgaged it to help him when she thought that what was his was hers. He had deceived her. He had never intended to go into business with the money, but was about to take the bonds and go off with the woman who had gained an influence over him. Her story was not an unusual one: the only unlikely part of it being that any man who had won the love of such a woman could be unfaithful to her, and also that such a strikingly attractive woman could have lived in the city two years without my seeing her on the street. For no one who had even seen her could forget her face. I told her that the bonds could be secured and should be recovered at once, but that it was too late to do anything before the next day. When she arose to go, she began to unbutton the front of her dress at the neck saying she had a picture of her husband which she wished to show me so that I would know him when I saw him. Not telling her that this was unnecessary, I waited while she drew from beneath her dress a tiny watch, upon the face of which was a miniature portrait. Wishing to hand me the watch so that I could examine it, she found her chain had caught in the lace at the back of her neck, and her efforts to loosen it being unsuccessful, after a moment I asked if I could help her. Thanking me she bent her head forward, and leaning over me, I fumbled with my trembling desecrating fingers among the sweet short curls at the nape of her lovely neck, catching an intoxicating breath of that heavenly aroma, of the sex, which escaped from beneath her high collar. In a second it was done in the chain came away and I tried to look at the picture, which seemed to be that of an ordinary middle-aged man, having nothing in his face to recommend him to such a charming woman.

I handed her back the trinket and as she was going she said she had been recommended to Mr. Buzzfuz whose office on the floor below mine was closed, and feeling that she must have advice at once, had come to the first office you could find open.

Inwardly thanking Heaven for its blessing, I bowed her out making an appointment for the verification of the petition in the morning.

I am not a ladies' man, but on the contrary have always enjoyed the sex from afar, and this interview had a strange effect upon me. I found I was as much interested in my fair client as in her sad story. I could not get her face out of my mind. All night I dreamed of it and thought she smiled a sweet sad smile, though

I remembered that I had not seen her smile. The next morning she came at the appointed time, looking more careworn and troubled than before, but in greeting me, smiled as she had smiled in my dream. A smile that brought into her eyes for an instant a possibility of infinite tenderness. She told me in tears, that her husband had not gone yet, but that he evidently was preparing to go, she thought that very day, and that we had not a moment to lose. Not long after she had signed the petition, the writ of injunction was in the hands of the sheriff and soon after the service was made upon the Safety Deposit Company (the old dingy one on third Street not Harpers Gilded Palace with a prize in every package) I went down to see my friend Mr. Bishop who guardedly admitted to me that there was such a package as the writ described which had been left by a person of the same name as the defendant in our suit. Though Mr. Bishop said he did not know the man, and that he had never been in the Bank to his knowledge but once when he had brought the bonds and taken the receipt for them. I had not asked this question of Mr. Bishop because I had my doubts about the statement of my client but because I feared that the wretch of a husband might have been there before us, and it seemed that we were none too soon, for that afternoon my client came to the office much overcome. During her absence in the morning he had ransacked the house and had taken her silver and whatever was most valuable including what jewelry she was not wearing, and had left a note saying that she would never see him again, and that his creditors had driven him to flee; and she moaned that she was left without a cent in the world, and not a friend in the city, and then she leaned forward and burying her face in her hands on the edge of my desk, sobbed as if her heart would break. Every sob seemed to jerk at my heartstrings until I felt like taking her in my arms and sobbing with her. But I braced up and tried to make some common places to serve as consolation, telling her that she was well rid of such a wretch: that she had saved the bonds, and as for friends she would make them fast enough now she was rid of him, until gradually the force of her grief seemed to spend itself and she became quieter. During the paroxysm of sorrow I had tried not to notice that she had, in leaning forward unconsciously pressed her knee close against mine, and I had tried to get up moral strength enough to move gently away from her, for the warm impact of her limb grew so intense that it seemed as if all of my bodily sensibility was centered at that one spot; and I realized that my state of mind was almost sacrilegious, as it were. But as she became more calm, I felt less guilty. And gave myself up to the contemplation of the charming lines of her figure which her attitude brought out well. Running my eyes up the fine curve of her back they fell upon those lovely curls at the back of her neck which I had desecrated by my touch the night before, and diffident as I generally am the impulse to lean forward & kiss them was so strong that I was actually gripping the arms of my chair told myself down. When she started up and hastily brushing the tears from her eye's made a sweet apology for her loss of self-control, and rose from her chair making it seem as she moved away from me and brought me to my senses, as if miles had suddenly come between us. She appeared confused, and I know I am very

awkward. As she was going I asked if she did not need some money for her immediate wants and as she hesitated I pressed \$15.00, (all I had in my pocket,) into her hand. The next day she's sent me a well bred note telling that some parties who claim to have a mortgage on the furniture had possession of the house and that she had taken her clothing and gone to a boardinghouse of which she gave me the number, and closed by asking me if I would kindly lend her twenty five dollars more, which she would not ask of me if she had anyone else to turn to. Of course I sent her the money and a note which I meant to be cheering. The next day but one she came to the office and asked me to have the bonds sold as she needed money. Bills which her husband had left unpaid were being sent to her and many of them were for things for her own use and she could not see the poor people lose their money. I told her that the bonds could not be sold for some time. She would first have to prove that she was entitled to them, that we had not yet got service on her husband but were advertising for service. That the people at the Safety Deposit Company were very particular; that their legal advisor was a Methodist ex-judge of the Supreme Court whose declining years were made happy by rendering it more difficult to get any thing out of the Safety Deposit Company's clutches than for a smutty storyteller to get through the eye of a needle. I don't think I told her just this, but that was the idea. I also told her that she must put off the people with the bills, but this she flatly said she could not do: that they needed the money, & rejoicing to see a woman with this rare sense, I finally agreed to borrow some for her, though I confess I was surprised when she said she needed \$250.00. When she took her leave and thanked me for my kindness and the trouble I was taking for her, she looked into my eyes and let her warm soft hand (from which she had taken the glove to better use her handkerchief) linger trembling me and mine. I seemed to be lifted off my feet and felt as if I were going to float off into the upper air. But she withdrew her thigh and her hand, and herself, and I then came down to the floor and thence went down onto the street to see a friend who agreed to lend me the two hundred and fifty dollars which my client needed. I'm obliged to confess that after getting the money, but before sending it to her, I went again to see Mr. Bishop to ask him further details about those bonds. Mr. Bishop was out but in his place I saw his man, Friday the gentleman with the well bowed legs and gold bowed eyes, who looks like a cross between our old friends, Dr. Wendell and Prof. Fricke. After some formulas of delay had been gone through, the bonds were produced and I held them in my hand. They were tied up with red tape in a heavy brown envelope and sealed with blotches of red wax. The envelope was too full to close entirely, and at one corner of the contents were visible & a [] of the orange red of one of the bonds could be seen showing a figure five. I asked our Fricke-Wendell how much he thought the package was worth. He "hemmed" and turned the package over, and then "hawed", and turned it back again, and then said that in his judgment is dependent very much on the denomination of the bonds: that the bond which was visible showed a figure five, and was therefore a \$500 bond and if there were ten of them in the envelope and all fives that would

make \$5000: and that was as near as he could tell. I thanked him very much and went off feeling a little ashamed of my want of faith. I had promised myself the pleasure of taking the money to her in person, as this seemed to furnish reasonably valid excuse for a call at her boarding house. But after yielding to that unworthy impulse to investigate the bonds further before taking her the money, I felt that I could not look into her eyes again at once, and so I punished myself for my doubts of her, by staying away and sending the money to her by messenger. Of course I got a sweet note in acknowledgment but I did not see her again for some time. So as the days went by and I had no news of her, cruel doubts came over me. What if she had gone and left me without any means of proving her case and of getting the bonds of which I now was, as it were part owner: but no, she could not do that. Her own interests would keep her for the trial. About that time I was suddenly called out of town and was gone several days: thinking of her often and always trying to smother any thought of her that was doubtful-in any sense. On my return I found a note from her on my desk. It was two days old. In it she told me bad news from her only brother in Canada and begged me to come to her for she was ill and unable to come out. I got away from the office as soon as I could and hastened to her boarding house. After waiting for what seemed to me, and no doubt was, a very long time in the parlor, I was asked if I would please go up to her room. To be sure I would and so I did. She lay on a lounge wrapped in a light colored fluffy gown. To my surprise she looked better, and stronger, and lovelier than ever before, and so soon as I came into her presence I began to feel that delightful intoxicating influence which she always had over me. She smiled that same tender yearning smile of my first dream of her and held out her hand, thanking me for coming, even before I could explain the cause of my apparent neglect. Then she put her handkerchief to her eyes and begged me to excuse her, but in a moment she recovered herself & told me briefly the story of her new sorrows. Her brother, her only brother, just a year younger than herself, the play fellow of her happiest days, had become the trusted servant of a large business house in their native town; he had speculated; had lost, had tried to repair his losses, and had used his employer's money; had been arrested and was then in jail. The amount he owed was only two thousand dollars & she must help him. She had the bonds and she would give all to him if necessary. Couldn't the money be raised on the bonds? Couldn't the court be told about her brother and her sad distress? Oh; it was too cruel that she should have the means with which to save him and yet not be able to use them. Would I not help her: I had been so kind, more than kind. She had no one else to look to but me – couldn't I do something for her? All this time I sat by her side, and I believe I held one of her hands from nearly the first, and then after a while I think I softly smoothed the hair on her forehead. I was not [] you know but what was a man to do? Finally I said to myself, "Young man get out of this room at once or you will make a fool of yourself." Jumping up I gave her hand a last squeeze and seizing my hat said, "Of course I can help you: we must raise that money on your bonds right away. Give me your brother's

address and I'll telegraph him to cheer up." "No," said she, "let me send a telegram, you only get the money for me as quick as you can." Going to the table I wrote a transfer to myself of all her right and interest in the bonds, which she signed, while I unsteadily held a book for her to write upon, and watched the motion of the lace at her bosom. I did not know how I was to get the money. Nobody would lend money on the bonds before the question of their ownership was decided, and as I walked along, I began to fear that I had been hasty in my promises. At all events I would have the bonds examined, and after I had found the value of them I would see what I could do. I went first to the courthouse & got an order appointing a friend of mine Receiver to examine the bonds & report to the court of their value; while the entry was being made I had telephoned for my friend who came & qualified at once. Leaving him to get a certified copy of the order for old Bishop, and then go to the bank and make the examination, I hurried off into the far West End to find a friend who I thought might be willing to advance me the needed money, on my putting the case before him and endorsing to him, my client's transfer of the securities. To my disappointment after an hour's ride, I found my friend was out of town; but thinking of another monied friend, I got into another car & started for his home at Clifton. Again I was disappointed. He too was away and three hours had been wasted. Heavy at heart but still not discouraged I hurried back to the city with still another friend in view. When I reached the corner of 4th & Walnut a small boy thrust an evening paper in my face shouting "All about the bond fraud at the Safety Deposit Company." Filled with fears of I knew not exactly what, I rushed down to 3rd street. but the bank was closed. In a few moments more I reached the office of my friend whom I found lying on his back on his lounge calmly smoking a cigarette. As I came in I saw a twinkle in his eye. Controlling myself as best I could, I said, "What did you find?" "There is my report", said he pointing to the table without getting up. I picked up the freshly written sheet and read: "According to the order of the Court in this cause the undersigned has examined the package, said to contain United States Bonds which is involved in this case, and is deposited at the Safety Deposit Company, and report to the court, that said package contains one \$50 US coupon bond with all coupons off, the same being carefully wrapped about ten copies of the Cincinnati evening Post of sundry dates. I only heard a laugh as I went downstairs. When I turned the corner toward my client's boarding house a carriage coming rapidly up the street almost ran me down. As I drew back to let it pass, a pair of well-known eyes looked out of it at me, and this time I think those Dear Eyes looked green. When I saw the trunk on the carriage, I realized that my client had read the evening papers and had a sudden call out of town. My first impulse was to follow her and catch her at the station, but what good would come of it? I gave it up, and I am now waiting patiently for the maturity of my \$50. bond.

C. B. Wilby

Budget
Wald Editor
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