

DOWNLOAD PDF JACQUES FUTRELLE THE TRAGEDY OF THE LIFE RAFT

Chapter 1 : The Tragedy of the Life Raft by Jacques Futrelle

Jacques Heath Futrelle () was an American journalist and mystery writer. He is best known for writing short detective stories featuring the "Thinking Machine", Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen.

Peter Ordway sat in a swivel chair in front of an ancient roll-top desk. He was the money lender of the Street, holding in cash millions which no one dared to estimate. In the last big panic the richest man in America, the great John Morton in person, had spent hours in the shabby office, begging for the loan of the few millions in currency necessary to check the market. Morton got the millions on collateral worth five times the sum borrowed, but Peter Ordway fixed the rate of interest, a staggering load. After glancing through two or three letters which lay open on his desk, he picked up at last a white card, across the face of which was scribbled in pencil three words only: Ordinarily it was a phrase to bring a smile to his withered lips, a morsel to roll under his wicked old tongue; but now he stared at it without comprehension. Finally he turned to his secretary, Walpole. On the following morning the card appeared again, with only three words, as before: Abruptly the aged millionaire wheeled around to face Walpole, who sat regarding him oddly. I saved the envelope, sir, if you would like to see it. Reduced to fragments, the envelope found its way into the wastebasket. For many minutes Peter Ordway sat with dull, lusterless eyes, gazing through the window into the void of a leaden sky. Slowly, as he looked, the sky became a lashing, mist-covered sea, a titanic chaos of water; and upon its troubled bosom rode a life raft to which three persons were clinging. Now the frail craft was lifted up, up to the dizzy height of a giant wave; now it shot down sickeningly into the hissing trough beyond; again, for minutes it seemed altogether lost in the far-plunging spume. Peter Ordway shuddered and closed his eyes. On the third morning the card, grown suddenly ominous, appeared again: Peter Ordway came to his feet with an exclamation that was almost a snarl, turning, twisting the white slip nervously in his talonlike fingers. Astonished, Walpole half arose, his yellow teeth bared defensively, and his eyes fixed upon the millionaire. Fragon picked them up and scrutinized them leisurely. Obviously the handwriting was that of a man, an uneducated man, he would have said. The postmark on the envelope was Back Bay; the time of mailing seven p. Both envelope and card were of a texture which might be purchased in a thousand shops. Walpole, who had been staring at the two men tensely, averted his shifty gaze, and busied himself at his desk. For an instant he was silent; then his avaricious eyes leaped into flame; his fingers closed convulsively on the arms of his chair. Find the person who sent them. You merely want to locate the man? But no fourth card had come! Walpole heard and understood the long breath of relief which followed upon realization of this fact. Peter Ordway opened it: Three hours later at his favorite table in the modest restaurant where he always went for luncheon, Peter Ordway picked up his napkin, and a white card fluttered to the floor: Instinctively he had known what was within. Again Fragon was summoned, and was ushered into the cheerless room where the old millionaire sat cringing with fear, his face reflecting some deadly terror which seemed to be consuming him. Incoherently he related the events of the day. Fragon listened without comment, and went out. On the following morning "Sunday" he returned to report. He found his client propped upon a sofa, haggard and worn, with eyes feverishly aglitter. It was telegraphed to you on Saturday morning. The card brought by the boy was handed in at a messenger agency by some street urchin, paid for, and delivered to you. The telephone call was from an automatic station in Brookline. A thousand persons use it every day. Instead he sent a note to his secretary: On your way uptown buy a good revolver with cartridges to fit. First there had been merely a fainting spell; later in the afternoon came complete collapse. Doctor Anderson diagnosed the case tersely. The thing you must have if you want to spend any of that money is an ocean trip "a good, long ocean trip" around the world, if you like. Robinson, answered the doorbell, admitting Mr. Franklin Pingree, a well-known financier. He had barely stepped into the hallway when there came a reverberating crash as of a revolver shot from the room where Peter Ordway and his secretary were. Robinson ran to the door. Still propped upon the couch, Peter Ordway sat "dead. A bullet had penetrated his heart. His head was thrown back, his mouth was open, and

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his right hand dangled at his side. Leaning over the body was his secretary, Walpole. In one hand he held a revolver, still smoking. Pingree disarmed him from behind. Hereto I append a partial transcript of a statement made by Frederick Walpole immediately following his arrest on the charge of murdering his millionaire employer. This statement he repeated in substance at the trial: I am forty-eight years old. I had been in Mr. My salary was eight dollars a week. I went to his apartments on the night of the murder in answer to a note. I bought the revolver and gave it to him. He loaded it and thrust it under the covering beside him on the sofa. He dictated four letters and was starting on another. I heard the door open behind me. I thought it was Mrs. Robinson, as I had not heard the front-door bell ring. Ordway stopped dictating, and I looked at him. He was staring toward the door. He seemed to be frightened. A man had come in. He seemed very old. He had a flowing white beard and long white hair. Nothing else was said. Ordway drew his revolver and fired. The other man must have fired at the same instant, for Mr. Ordway fell back dead. I ran to Mr. Ordway and picked up the revolver. He had dropped it. At the trial, the facts appeared as I have related them. The district attorney summed up briefly. Robinson, entering the room directly after the shot had been fired, had met no one coming out, as they would have had there been another man " there was no other egress. Also, the bullet which killed Peter Ordway had been positively identified by experts as of the same make and same caliber as those others in the revolver Walpole had bought. The jury was out twenty minutes. The verdict was guilty. Walpole was sentenced to death. Incongruously enough, they were old friends, these two " on one hand, the man of science, absorbed in that profession of which he was already the master, small, almost grotesque in appearance, and living the life of a recluse; on the other, a young man of the world, worldly, enthusiastic, capable, indefatigable. So it came about The Thinking Machine curled himself in a great chair, and sat for nearly two hours partially submerged in newspaper accounts of the murder and of the trial. The last paper finished, he dropped his enormous head back against his chair, turned his petulant, squinting eyes upward, and sat for minute after minute staring into nothingness. Here is a copy of it. You are about to allow the execution of an innocent man. I killed him for a good and sufficient reason. X" entered a private apartment without ringing. Either the door was unlocked, he entered by a window, or he had a false key. We must believe that two shots were fired simultaneously, sounding as one. We must believe that Mr. X was either wounded or the bullet mark has been overlooked; we must believe Mr. X went out by the one door at the same instant Mr.

Chapter 2 : Jacques Futrelle " Wikipedia

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