

# Justly Due

Jeffery Farnol

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By Jeffery Farnol

Fate, being not quite so blind as Justice, her sister goddess, sometimes borrows the sword and scales and, while patient Justice fumbles with facts and pores over proofs, metes out swift and sudden retribution with such extreme neatness and dispatch as may pass with the busy world as mere accident, fortuitous happening, or strange coincidence.

All of which may serve as introduction to Mr. Arthur Farrant, whose uncanny skill in the opening of burglar-proof safes and guaranteed thief-defying locks had won for him, in the higher walks of his one-time profession, such enviable titles as Slick Arthur the Yegg, Artful Art, and Gentleman Farrant.

It was, then, upon a certain balmy summer's eve that Mr. Farrant glanced up from the careful planting of an Emperor daffodil to see a man upon his newly-trimmed lawn, a thin,

narrow-shouldered, sharp-eyed man who nodded his sleek head and smiled, though his eyes seemed sharper than ever.

"Howdy, Slick!" he murmured. "Quite a little Eden you got here, eh? And some li'l Eve back in the house yonder—oh, boy!"

Mr. Farrant rose and turned upon his visitor with a certain lithe and cat-like celerity.

"Ah, Burrin," said he, softly, "get this right now—whatever you want there's nothing doing, and—good-by!" Mr. Burrin merely smiled.

"And such lov-ely roses too!" he sighed. "My, my! But, coming to cases, Art, old sport, all I want is them real magical hands o' yours ... tonight ... for half an hour ... say fifteen minutes ... and there's five thou for you, my lad, five thousand dollars for, say, ten minutes' work—"

"Now see here, Burrin," said Mr. Farrant, soft of voice but grim-lipped, "I'm through with you and all you mean, so get that right and hike!"

"Aw, say now, Slick—Art, old sport, we was friends once, real pals and—"

"No! We worked one or two jobs together, that's all. Now, do you go or must I—chuck you through the hedge?"

"Neither, Art—nix to both!" said Mr. Burrin, shaking his sleek, vulpine head. "No guy lays a hand on me, no, sir! And here's why—see?" Now, glancing down, Mr. Farrant saw

how the speaker's hidden left hand was swaying the skirt of his light overcoat gently to and fro.... "The old gat, Arty boy, me li'l old gun! I'm always heeled, you'll remember.... So, say now you're going to stand in with me tonight, eh, old-timer?"

"No!" answered Mr. Farrant, unflinching. "Shoot and be damned!" Mr. Burrin sighed wearily and jerked his head toward the distant, pretty house.

"Talking o' jobs, Slick," he murmured, "how if I step indoors and put your li'l Eve wise about some o' them jobs we pulled off in N'York ... or Paris ... or that dago that got bumped off at Monte Carlo?" Farrant turned slowly and stood gazing toward his home for some while and so still that he scarcely seemed to breathe; then, as slowly, he faced his visitor again, teeth bared and gnashing:

"Ah ... damn you!" he murmured in soft voice, dreadfully at odds with his distorted face. Mr. Burrin smiled and nodded brightly:

"Art, old sport," said he, "I knowed you would. I banked you'd trail along."

The mighty safe door, obedient to Slick Farrant's master touch, moved, swung slowly, smoothly open and Burrin, who crouched behind, holding the pocket torch, uttered a joyful gasp and leaned eagerly forward.... A sudden glare ... a

hoarse voice whose challenge was cut short by three rapid detonations; then they were afoot and, leaping the watchman's huddled body, ran for their lives....

"Hey—Sullivan—easy!" gasped Sergeant O'Brien, a few minutes later. "Easy wid that noight shtick, me bhoy ... don't kill 'em entoirely!"

Followed in due course the trial for murder but with only one prisoner at the bar, for Mr. Burrin had turned state's evidence and proved witness so damning that Arthur Farrant, alias this, that, and the other, known also as Gentleman Farrant, Artful Art, and Slick Arthur the Yegg was duly doomed to die. Now as they led him from the dock he turned for a last look:

"Your account will be paid!" said he, glaring malevolently; "you'll get your just dues," whereat Mr. Burrin cowered instinctively in his seat.

And now, though a free man with the whole earth before him, Mr. Burrin was possessed of a strange whim that lured and held him in the vicinity of this great, grim place wherein so many malefactors had been shocked from life by that dreadful engine—the electric chair.

So Mr. Burrin stayed in the neighborhood, waiting very patiently though troubled now and then, not by remorse, but by this new, sharp pain that stabbed him ever and anon. By good fortune he secured a room in a small hotel whence by merely sitting at the window he could glimpse the distant loom of that same grim building above swaying green of

trees. And he was sitting at his window this evening, for tonight Arthur Farrant was to die. But even now—oh, cursed fortune—his pain was back again, a pain so sharp that he writhed in his chair, an agony that grew with every dragging minute until at last he was forced to summon aid.

It was a breezy young medico who examined him with a jocosity that languished to somber gravity:

"Appendicitis—must operate at once."

"A ... hospital, Doctor?"

"Here! Now! At once! No time to lose!"

"Is it ... serious, Doctor?"

"Lord, no more than having a tooth out. But we must jump to it—right now! I'll ring up Dr. Pratt; he specializes in appendixes—loves 'em! Hello, ten o'clock—I'll just about catch him."

"Ten!" groaned the sufferer, "and in an hour ... only an hour ... they're going to electro— Oh, Doctor, d'ye think you'll be through with me in an hour?"

"Sure!" nodded young Æsculapius cheerily. "Don't you worry anyway!"

And so, after some while, in that small, very inadequate hotel room, the doctors got to their work, knives and sponges and forceps.

"Now!" said Dr. Pratt, bending close, "we must work fast. Be ready with— Ha, what the—" for in this most critical moment the lights had failed, dimmed to a glow—vanished. A tense moment and then all was confusion, blundering steps, crash of falling glass, uproar of urgent cries:

"Lights—lights for God's sake! Candles—a lamp ... anything...."

And then while feet ran stumbling to and fro the electrics glared again, a dazzling brilliance ... there was a gasp of horrified dismay:

"Good Lord—Pratt! ... Something's wrong. Look!..."

"God, man ... why ... he's gone ... he's dead! Ah, these damned electric lights! Landlord, what in hell's wrong with your service?"

"Why, nothing, Doctor," answered the peering landlord. "Ye see, they often dim on us so when they're on the job—up yonder ... ye see, they've just been busy up at the jail electrocuting that guy Farrant...."

"Well," answered Dr. Pratt, covering what lay on the bed, "I guess they've executed two men tonight."

For, as hath been said, Fate, not so blind as her sister Justice, works sometimes more speedily and as surely.

[The end of *Justly Due* by Jeffery Farnol]