A Reputation

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Smoke and talk filled the dining-room of the Heterogeneous Club, one of those small, intimate clubs of reasonably liberal professional men and women one finds here and there in New York City. Alone, in his accustomed corner, Saunders Rook alternately sipped black coffee and fingered a wan mustache. He was on the fringe of an animated group, in it without being of it, and on this, as on other evenings, was taking an inconspicuous, nodding part in the conversation, sometimes going so far as to say "Not really?" to which the speaker would reply perfunctorily, "Yes, really," and go on as before.

Nobody knew much about Saunders Rook, and he aroused little, if any, curiosity. It was assumed by the other members, on what grounds no one could say, that he was an artist of some kind; perhaps he wrote music criticism for one of the more pallid of the weeklies; maybe he contributed notes on birds to an ornithological review; again, it might be that he was an architect, specializing in designing ornamental drinking-fountains; perhaps he gave lessons on the flute. His pepper-and-salt suits, his silent neckties, his manner gave no hint. Yet he was not an enigma; he'd gladly have told all about himself had anyone cared to ask him.

The members must have seen Saunders Rook scores of times before that fateful evening, but had you asked any of them to describe him, the reply doubtless would have been:

"Oh, yes, Saunders Rook. I believe there is such a fellow around the club. Let me see. No, I don't think he's very tall or very short or very dark or very light. In fact, I don't believe he's very anything."

How and when he had become a member of the club no one knew, and presumably no one had ever been concerned about knowing. Perhaps he was a friend of a friend of a member now deceased. He dined at the club four or five times a week and paid his bills. No one remembered having seen his face anywhere else. The Heterogeneous Club is proud of the range and brilliance of its talk but until this night it had never discussed Saunders Rook. After this night it could talk of little else.

Saunders Rook was not a glum, sullen, aloof soul; he was not unnoticed by choice; evening after evening he was on the edge of the circle of talk, listening, as politely attentive as a well-trained collie. He may even have ventured on one or two occasions to come out with something positive; but if he ever did so, it made no impression on the members of the club, and they were a not unimpressionable lot.

On this night, as he sat over his coffee, Saunders Rook from time to time moistened his lips with

his tongue and cleared his throat as if he were making ready to say something important, and then compressed his lips as if he had decided that it was not worth saying.

The truth was that Saunders Rook was afflicted with "cab-wit," that he was one of those unfortunates who think of the bright things they might have said only while on their way home in a taxicab. He was oppressed by the knowledge that if he did say anything, it would probably be as colorless and unoriginal as he suspected himself to be. He was oppressed mildly, for he was mild in all things, by the certainty that he could not compete with the witty Max Skye or the sparkling Lucile Davega, who could always quote something arresting from Krafft-Ebing. He did not enjoy being ignored any more than any other man does, and he had his full share of man's natural desire for a beam of the limelight. A craving for attention had of late been growing more insistent within him. His mind began to play with ideas, which, he reasoned, if uttered in a loud enough voice, might bring his hearers to their, and his, feet. He wanted just for once to cause a stir. Just once, he told himself, would appease him.

Then came the lull that always comes from time to time when groups are talking, and Saunders Rook found himself saying distinctly:

"On the Fourth of July I shall commit suicide."

Just why he said that he did not know. It must have been sheer inspiration. As a matter of fact, he had never contemplated doing anything of the kind. He had never demanded much of life; his existence was not rigorous, but placid. He was a sub-editor on a woman's magazine—he conducted the etiquette page—and this brought him twelve hundred dollars a year. He had inherited an income of twelve hundred more. He was able to live in modest comfort, for he was an orphan and a bachelor; he had a season ticket to the opera; his health was good. If he had a cross, it was a light one: minor editors of minor magazines usually rejected his minor essays, imitations of Charles Lamb, hymning the joys of pipe-smoking and pork-chops. So it startled him not a little to hear himself announcing his imminent self-destruction.

But it produced the desired effect with an electrical suddenness. The lull became a hush; not only the group at his own long table, but other groups had heard, and the eyes of the entire room were directed to the man with the wan mustache.

"But, my dear fellow," cried Max Skye, "you don't really mean that."

Saunders Rook curbed an exigent impulse to recant on the spot, and replied firmly:

"But I do mean it."

A woman member in a far corner called:

“Would you mind repeating what you said? I’m not sure I heard you correctly.”

Saunders Rook cleared his throat and said again,

“On the Fourth of July I shall commit suicide.”

The members began to shift their chairs so that they could more plainly see and hear him.

“But why?” asked Lucile Davega.

“Yes, why?” came from other members. Some were a little excited.

Saunders Rook had not thought that far ahead, and the question confused him. He wanted very much to say, “Of course, I was only jesting.” No, he couldn’t do that. What a dolt they’d think him! Hastily, he ransacked his brain, cleared his throat to gain time, and declared:

“As a protest against the state of civilization in America.”

Again sheer inspiration. The state of civilization, up to that moment, had never worried him. He heard an interested ripple run round the room.

“But what do you consider the state of civilization to be?” asked Max Skye, bending toward him.

“Rotten,” said Saunders Rook, emphatically. Now that he was in for it, there was no sense in half-way expressions. “Rotten,” if not elegant, was strong, he decided.

He heard someone in a corner whisper:

“I say, who is that fellow?”

“Why, his name is Book or Cook or something,” was the whispered answer.

He smiled. He hoped they would think it the quiet, resolute smile of martyrdom.

“But Mr.—er—Rook,” said Lucile Davega, “have you made all your plans?”

Here was another contingency for which he had not prepared. He slowly cleared his throat.

“I have,” he said gravely. Then, with a touch of mystery, added, “And I haven’t.” He hoped they would probe no further. But the Heterogeneous Club is composed of inveterate probers.

“Oh, won’t you tell us all about them?” As Lucile Davega said this she clasped her hands. Mr. Rook frowned ever so slightly. They acted as if he were planning a trip to Bermuda. He’d have to show them how deadly in earnest he was.

“If you insist,” he said, his mind groping wildly for plans. Unanimously, they insisted.

“Mind you it must go no further than this room,” he said. They all said that of course it wouldn’t.

“Well,” said Saunders Rook, speaking very deliberately, “of course, you see, since it is to be a protest, it must have a certain amount of publicity.”

Everyone nodded approvingly.

“So I thought,” he felt his way along, “that I should do it in some rather public place.”

“Central Park?” suggested Max Skye.

“Exactly,” replied Saunders Rook, grasping at the idea. “The very place I had in mind.”

There were murmurs of “Splendid!” “A big thought!” “There’s a lot more to these quiet chaps than meets the eye.”

Saunders Rook, hearing, glowed.

Just then Oscar Findlater made one of his infrequent appearances at the club. The members were proud of belonging to the same club as Oscar Findlater, who was editor of “The Liberal Voice,” most advanced and oracular of weeklies. He was a vastly serious person of Jovian demeanor. Usually the members flocked about him to catch the pronouncements that dropped from his lips, but on this evening they only nodded toward him and continued to gaze expectantly at Saunders Rook. To Saunders Rook, Oscar Findlater had always seemed a god, despite the fact that “The Liberal Voice” had rejected numerous choice essays on pipe-smoking by the fireplace and kindred topics over which Saunders Rook had toiled. He had mildly envied the attention paid to the editorial Olympian. Now he, Saunders Rook, was actually stealing the spotlight from the great man. It was most pleasant.

“Good evening, Findlater,” said Max Skye. “You know Saunders Rook, don’t you?”

The editor murmured something about never having had that pleasure.

“Rook,” announced Max Skye, impressively, “is going to commit suicide.”

“On the Fourth of July,” added Judy Atwater.

“As a protest,” contributed Rogers Joyce.

“Against the rotten condition of civilization in America,” finished Lucile Davega.

Oscar Findlater gazed at the wan mustache with sharpened interest.

“Not really?” he exclaimed.

“Yes,” said Saunders Rook, in the voice of a man whose mind is irrevocably made up, “really.”

“By Jove!” cried Oscar Findlater, and sat down. He was plainly stirred. “Do you mind talking to me about it?”

“Not at all,” said Saunders Rook, trying to inject casualness into his tone, “if you think it at all interesting.”

“Interesting?” Oscar Findlater excitedly stroked the black ribbon that streamed from his nose-glasses. “Why, man alive, it’s overpowering. Biggest idea I’ve struck this year.”

He studied Saunders Rook.

“Your mind is made up?” the great man asked.

“Absolutely.”

“Nothing can change it?”

“Nothing.”

“Well,” said Findlater, with a sigh, “then I suppose we must make the best of it.”

He sank his head on his bosom, the usual attitude by which his disciples knew he was submerged in thought. Then he said:

“Rook, would you consider doing a series of essays for ‘The Liberal Voice’?”

Would he? What a question! Saunders Rook could only nod.

“Let’s say six essays tracing the genesis of the idea, you know, and arraigning civilization.”

But Saunders Rook merely nodded.

“Of course,” went on Oscar Findlater, “there are only three weeks between now—” he paused embarrassed—“and then.”

Saunders Rook murmured:

“Of course.”

“Still,” exclaimed Oscar Findlater, struck by a happy thought, “we could bring out the last three posthumously.”

“Posthumously,” echoed Saunders Rook, sepulchrally. At that second came again the impulse to say, “But, of course, this is all in fun.” He stifled it. After all, it was something to have essays in “The Liberal Voice,” even posthumously. “How long should they be?” Saunders Rook found himself asking carelessly.

“Oh, about three thousand words; more if necessary. Not too heavy in tone, of course, or morbid. Readable, you know, almost chatty; but with an underlying strain of philosophy.”

“Precisely,” said Saunders Rook.

“We’ll want the first one immediately,” said the editor.

“You shall have it,” promised Saunders Rook.

He could not but note the admiration, almost awe, in the circle of eyes. He was wise enough to depart before the spell was broken.

“Well,” he said, rising, “I think I’ll run along to bed now. Can’t be too careful of my health, you know.” He tossed this last sentence off with a grim smile. He was full of inspiration tonight.

The members crowded around him.

“Will you come to my studio for tea tomorrow?” asked Lucile Davega.

“And dine with me afterward at the Authors’ Club,” insisted Max Skye. “Some fellows I want you to meet.”

“We’d love to have you come up to Croton for a week-end,” said Rogers Joyce. “The crowd up there would like to know you. Jolly lot. Keen on new ideas like yours.”

For the first time in his thirty-three years Saunders Rook had the gratifying sensation of being inundated with invitations, of being sought after. He consulted a date-book, appeared surprised to find that it so happened that he was not booked up to any extent in the near future, and accepted sundry invitations.

As he strolled to his snug two rooms and bath in Grove Street, Saunders Rook could not but congratulate himself on being a singularly fortunate fellow.

At the tea given by Lucile Davega Saunders Rook experienced a new and not unwelcome sensation: he was lionized. He found it extremely pleasant to play the lion to a studio of pretty women. He noted how the tea went cold and the toast untasted as they flocked around him. Also, each one found an opportunity to take him aside and say:

“Of course you don’t really mean it.”

“But I do,” he would reply almost severely.

“But what have you against civilization?”

“It’s rotten,” he would growl. He was getting better and better in the rôle.

“O Mr. Rook!”

He enjoyed the sensation he was creating.

One girl, Margery Storey, who was young and had red hair, a combination that sometimes appeared in Saunders Rook’s dreams and private yearnings, whispered to him that she was sure he was disappointed in love; but, she added archly, there were plenty of uncaught fish in the sea.

He said sternly that love or lack of it did not enter into his plan at all. The act he was to perform was to be a perfectly calm, philosophic protest against the state of civilization in America.

“You will remember,” he told her, “how the early Christians walked naked into the arenas as a protest against the brutality of the gladiatorial combats. My motive, I hope, is equally

untinged by any selfish emotion."

His heart was accelerated by her glance, so full of compassion. She said a little diffidently that she was a painter, and would he sit for his portrait? She'd love to do it; her studio was Number 148——

No, he interrupted, he could not. Actually he wanted to very much. He was busy, he explained, on a series of essays for "The Liberal Voice."

"After that, then?" she suggested.

"For me," said Saunders Rook, "there will be no 'after that.'□ "

Her blue eyes were full of sympathy.

"It seems too bad," she said. "You are still so young."

He smiled a smile of practised cynicism.

"In years, perhaps," he said.

He saw that he had moved her.

Decidedly, this new rôle of his was worth playing, said Saunders Rook to himself as he donned his dinner-jacket that night in preparation for his dinner with Max Skye at the Authors' Club. He was pleased with himself. In retrospect were the sympathetic blue eyes of Margery Storey; in prospect, a dinner among the celebrities of the Authors' Club, into which sacred premises he had never gone physically, but solely in his most roseate imaginings.

Max Skye, who was a poet of no mean repute, introduced Saunders Rook to a group of notable men.

"This," said Max Skye, with the air of a showman, "is Mr. Saunders Rook, who is going to commit suicide on the Fourth of July."

Saunders Rook bowed to them; gravely they bowed back and stared at him, fascinated.

"In Central Park," continued Max Skye.

Saunders Rook bowed deeply.

"As a protest against the rotten state of our civilization," added Max Skye.

Saunders Rook again bowed.

They returned his bows with marked deference, he noted delightedly. He managed, however, to maintain an air of great world-weariness as he said:

“When one feels as I do about it, what else can one do?”

He had rehearsed this coming up in the taxicab.

“Mr. Rook is writing a series of six essays for ‘The Liberal Voice,’□ ” announced Max Skye, plainly proud to be the discoverer and friend of so remarkable a man.

“But,” objected Deline, the novelist, a man Saunders Rook had long admired from afar, “how can you publish six essays? It’s June now. When could the last three be published?”

“Posthumously,” said Saunders Rook, with a touch of pride.

“Posthumously?”

They all repeated the word as if there was magic in it.

“But why do you feel that the state of civilization requires so drastic a protest?”

Deline asked this question as Saunders Rook was enjoying the third course, tender roast young guinea-fowl with mushrooms; Rook loved good food.

“Because,” said Saunders Rook, with fork poised, “it’s rotten.”

Around the table went murmurs of approbation and interest.

“But, my dear fellow,” exclaimed Deline, warmly laying his hand on Saunders Rook’s arm, “we need men like you.”

“Yes, yes,” cried others about the table. “America needs men with the courage of their convictions.”

“You see,” said Deline, with a wave of his hand. “You’re needed.”

No one had ever before intimated to Saunders Rook that he was in the least needed. The happy thought occurred to him to rise and say, “In that case, gentlemen, I shall stay with you.” But he didn’t say that. Going home in the taxicab, he wished that he had. What he

actually did was to sit with folded arms, a picture of determination, and say:

“When one feels as I do about it, what else can one do?”

Perhaps, after all, he mused, it was just as well that he had not recanted. It was something to be told by a great novelist that you are needed. Perhaps, if he recanted, they might discover that they did not need him so very much, after all.

A few days later as he sat at his desk among the other sub-editors—beauty editors, household editors, baby-care and feeding editors, kiddie page editors, cooking editors—he was summoned, just as he’d finished writing a letter to a lady in Waterloo, Iowa, to tell her that engraved invitations are not required for a straw-ride, into the sanctum and presence of the publisher and owner of the magazine, Keable Gowler, a man of terrifying importance in Saunders Rook’s eyes. Until that moment it had not occurred to Saunders Rook that he was anything more to Mr. Gowler than a name on the pay-roll, and rather far down on the pay-roll at that. Yet Mr. Gowler greeted him with a fatherly affability, and offered him a chair.

“Well, Rook, tell me all about it,” said Mr. Gowler, with heavy geniality.

“About what, Mr. Gowler?”

“This story I’ve been hearing about you and the Fourth of July.”

“Really now——” began Saunders Rook.

“Is it true, or is it not true that you are going to commit suicide in Madison Square?” demanded Mr. Gowler.

“Central Park,” corrected Saunders Rook, mildly.

“It is true, then?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Gowler made tutting noises with his lips.

“Oh, come now, Rook,” he said, “you’re not serious.”

“I am,” said Saunders Rook. He was pleased to know that he was more than a mere name to his employer, and he wished to remain a personage.

“But, my dear young man,” cried Mr. Gowler, distressed, “I ask you, would that be fair to the magazine? People might hold us responsible, you know.”

“No, they won’t.”

“How can we be sure?”

“I have made it plain,” said Saunders Rook, “that no petty, personal motives are behind my act. It is to be purely a protest against the state of civilization in America.”

“America seems pretty civilized to me,” observed Mr. Gowler. “What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s rotten,” said Saunders Rook.

Mr. Gowler looked horrified, but he surveyed Mr. Rook with a strong, new interest.

“Come, now,” said Mr. Gowler, soothingly. “Let’s see if we can’t settle this thing. We’d miss you, Rook. The interior decoration page would miss you.”

“I do the etiquette page, Mr. Gowler,” said Saunders Rook, gently.

“Yes, yes. I meant that; why, of course,” said Mr. Gowler, hastily. He decapitated a cigar and faced Saunders Rook. “Look here, Rook,” he said, “I’m afraid we’ve been hiding your light under a bushel around here. To be frank with you, I didn’t realize the stuff you were made of —until a few days ago.” Mr. Gowler paused significantly.

“Now, what this magazine needs,” he went on, “is a live young man of forceful character, who has modern ideas and isn’t afraid to back them up. Roscoe Quimper is getting old; been an editor too long; we need a man with spirit for his position. Will you take it?”

Saunders Rook moistened dry lips; speech failed him; it was a post he had long coveted. He affected to consider.

“It pays fifteen thousand,” said Mr. Gowler. His tone was actually persuasive.

Saunders Rook thought swiftly.

“I’ll take charge, Mr. Gowler.”

“Good!” cried Mr. Gowler. “Good!”

“Until the Fourth of July,” added Saunders Rook.

Mr. Gowler evinced his concern by a sharp elevation of his shrubbery of eyebrows.

“Then you are in earnest?”

“Absolutely.”

“Of course”—this was said almost cajolingly—“if fifteen thousand seems too little, I might be willing to——”

Saunders Rook held up his hand.

“Thanks,” he said; “but it’s not a question of money.”

Mr. Gowler shook his head dejectedly.

“Then I guess there’s nothing I can say. Still”—he brightened—“even if your mind is made up, you could take charge until the Fourth of July and outline a policy and get things started, couldn’t you?”

“If you wish,” said Saunders Rook, handsomely.

“Good!” ejaculated Mr. Gowler. “Good!”

Saunders Rook, somewhat in a daze, started for the door.

“Oh, by the way, Rook,” said Mr. Gowler, “couldn’t you take dinner with us next Thursday? The governor of the State, two United States senators, a few congressmen, and a professor will be there. They’d like to know you.”

Saunders Rook riffled through his date-book and said he might be late, as he had two teas and a talk before a Brooklyn club scheduled for that day, but that he would try to get to the dinner in time for the dessert. Mr. Gowler was greatly obliged to him.

At the dinner at Keable Gowler’s Fifth Avenue house the attention paid to Saunders Rook by the governor, the senators, the assorted congressmen, the professor, and their wives would have flattered a person even less susceptible than he. In trumpet tones Mr. Gowler announced him:

“This is Mr. Saunders Rook, one of my most valued associates. On the Fourth of July, as a protest against our civilization, he will commit suicide in Washington Square.”

“Central Park,” said Saunders Rook, bowing modestly.

“Not really?” they all said in breathless chorus.

“Yes, really,” said Saunders Rook.

He talked, and they listened. He had been expanding the idea, and had worked up an indictment or two against civilization.

Over his after-dinner liqueur the governor declared that, if necessary, he would do the only thing he could think of to prevent Saunders Rook from robbing the State of so valued a citizen, and that was call out the militia. He was not prepared to say, he remarked darkly, how he should employ it, for he was fresh in the gubernatorial chair. However, he knew that a governor has the power to call out the militia, and he was interested to learn what would happen if he did call it out. Surely the case of Saunders Rook, he maintained, warranted the step.

The senator from Alabama promised that he would see the President at once, and volunteered to get the cooperation of Federal troops to help the governor’s militia. Saunders Rook listened, sphinx-like, outwardly impassive, inwardly agog. The senator from North Dakota said that it had not before been called to his attention that the state of civilization in these United States was sufficiently rotten to cause a man of his good friend Rook’s high type to plan so violent a protest, but now that it had been called to his attention, something should be done about it by the Senate. Political considerations, he said, prevented him from committing himself to any definite program, but this he would do: he would rush back to Washington on the morrow and start a senatorial investigation into civilization at which Saunders Rook would be the chief witness.

One of the congressmen present said that for his part he was prepared to introduce a resolution in the House of Representatives calling for the immediate appropriation of three hundred thousand dollars for the establishing of a congressional commission of seven on civilization, and that, obviously, the only person for the chairmanship was Mr. Rook. Another congressman said he was in hearty agreement with his honorable colleague in principle, but would like to amend the bill, so that it would call for eight hundred thousand dollars and a commission of twenty-one. While they were debating this point, Saunders Rook forced himself to depart. He had to look over the proofs of his article in “The Liberal Voice,” he said. Keable Gowler himself helped Saunders Rook on with his coat and urged him to come again.

The appearance of the first Rook article brought him a tidal wave of letters. Scores of persons in all parts of the globe begged him for various reasons not to do it; two elderly ladies offered to adopt him and leave him their not inconsiderable estates; a group of young

Russian radicals by cable offered to jump into the Volga on the Fourth of July to show they were in sympathy with him; eleven clergymen asked permission to call; a publishing house offered him a handsome figure for his diary, novel, or what had he? Fourteen ladies of different ages offered to marry him, and of these seven sent photographs, of which two were quite personable; three motion-picture companies asked him to name his own price for the exclusive rights; a vaudeville syndicate offered him two thousand a week for a ten-minute monolog twice daily until the Fourth of July; the police commissioner wrote to warn him that suicide is an offense amounting to disorderly conduct, and is punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both. A procession of reporters, photographers, feature-story writers, and interviewers invaded his apartment. In newspapers and magazines his wan features began to appear, accompanied by stories of varying degrees of accuracy. He began to be pointed out on the street; ribs were nudged as he passed. He loved it.

Crowded days passed, days full of pleasurable excitement and intense living for Saunders Rook. So swiftly did they speed by that it was a distinct shock for him, one morning, to be awakened by a boy with a tall stack of telegrams. The messages were from many people and many places; some urged, begged, and a few even conjured him not to do it today; many said simply, “Farewell.” Today? Saunders Rook glanced at the date on the telegrams—“July Fourth.”

He dressed himself with care in his new gray suit and lavender tie, took his bamboo stick, and sauntered up Fifth Avenue. It was a delicious, sun-lit day; the avenue was bright with flags; somewhere a parade was forming, and he heard the gay sounds of distant bands. Life had never seemed quite so fair to Saunders Rook, but, and he stopped abruptly, what of tomorrow?

Today, the Fourth of July, the eyes of the nation were on him. He bought a morning paper. Yes, there he was on the front page, a picture, smudged, but resolute-looking, and a two-column headline, “Saunders, Self-Slain Today for Civilization’s Sake.”

He wiped his brow with his silk handkerchief. It was impossible for him not to think of himself on July fifth; also July sixth, seventh, eighth.

“What a lot of dynamite there is in one little word!” he muttered to himself. “What a difference there is between, ‘Saunders Rook, the man who is going to commit suicide on the Fourth of July,’ and ‘Saunders Rook, the man who was going to commit suicide on the Fourth of July!’ One is romantic, promising, glorious; the other,—ugh!—the other is the epitaph of a weakling, a turncoat, a failure.”

He stopped before a picture-store and moodily gazed at a seascape in the window. He recalled that some sage has said, “Any man can make a reputation; it takes a real man to keep one.” He had a reputation, he reflected. He derived pleasure from that fact even now.

It was more than he had dared hope for. Three weeks before it had seemed that he had been cast for a minor rôle in life, the voice of the mob offstage; almost overnight he had attained stardom. He, who had never expected to have a line to speak, had strutted and postured and declaimed in the center of the stage and heard the sweet music of applause. Today he was a hero; tomorrow he would be a joke. The day was warm, but he shuddered.

A holiday crowd in summer colors was passing. There was laughter in the air. How intelligent the people looked, he mused, and how civilized! A graceful, powerful motor car purred by.

He paused before a window full of books, and saw many that interested him. He glanced up at the spired heights of a church, and his gaze traveled onward to a new building, towering, shapely, beautiful; men, he reflected, had made it, had shaped the steel and stone to their will. The paper dropped from his fingers, and a passing stranger courteously picked it up, and handed it to Saunders Rook with a friendly smile. Saunders Rook felt an impulse to cry aloud, “This land, these times aren’t so rotten, after all.” The words died still-born. Down Fifty-second Street he heard the shrill cry of a newsboy, “All about Saunders Rook, the martyr.”

He hurried on toward Central Park. The governor had kept his word; he had called out the militia; alert soldiers with fixed bayonets patrolled the paths and scrutinized the picnickers from under their hat-brims. The green lawns were dotted with blue policemen. They, too, were watchful. Indeed, as Saunders Rook slipped into the park, unrecognized, he saw a burly officer collar a mild, blond little man, and heard the man protesting loudly that he was not Saunders Rook, but only Ole Svenson, a pastry-cook, and that the thing he had just eaten was not poison, but a banana. As he left the man struggling in the hands of the law, Saunders Rook shrugged his shoulders, smiled a pale smile, and penetrated deeper into the park.

“They’ve gone to a lot of trouble on my account,” he said to himself, almost proudly. “It wasn’t always like that. Funny how little interest people took in me when I only wanted to live.”

He picked a flower and stuck it in his buttonhole.

“It’s great to have a reputation,” he remarked. Then, as he paced along, added, “But it’s tough to have to live up to it.”

He had reached the sequestered end of the reservoir, and, glancing about, saw neither soldier nor policeman in sight.

“Stupid, incompetent fools!” he muttered.

He stood looking down into the cool, clear water. Then he raised his head and drew the fresh air into his lungs, and expelled it with a sigh. How well he felt! Slowly from an inside pocket he took his little red date-book, and with his fountain-pen wrote in his round, precise hand:

“I do this as a protest against the rotten state of civilization. Saunders Rook.” He blotted it neatly with a pocket blotter. He looked up at the smiling sky and sighed deeply.

“Still, after all, a reputation is a reputation,” he said.

Then he jumped.