

Average Jones

by

Samuel Hopkins Adams

Web-Books.Com

Average Jones

I. The B-Flat Trombone	3
II. Red Dot	24
III. Open Trail	44
IV. The Mercy Sign-One	65
V. The Mercy Sign--Two	79
VI. Blue Fires	95
VII. Pin-Pricks	112
VIII. Big Print	129
IX. The Man Who Spoke Latin	147
X. The Million-Dollar Dog	180

I. The B-Flat Trombone

Three men sat in the Cosmic Club discussing the question: "What's the matter with Jones?" Waldemar, the oldest of the conferees, was the owner, and at times the operator, of an important and decent newspaper. His heavy face wore the expression of good-humored power, characteristic of the experienced and successful journalist. Beside him sat Robert Bertram, the club idler, slender and languidly elegant. The third member of the conference was Jones himself.

Average Jones had come by his nickname inevitably. His parents had foredoomed him to it when they furnished him with the initials A. V. R. E. as preface to his birthright of J for Jones. His character apparently justified the chance concomitance. He was, so to speak, a composite photograph of any thousand well-conditioned, clean-living Americans between the ages of twenty-five and thirty. Happily, his otherwise commonplace face was relieved by the one unfailing characteristic of composite photographs, large, deep-set and thoughtful eyes. Otherwise he would have passed in any crowd, and nobody would have noticed him pass. Now, at twenty-seven, he looked back over the five years since his graduation from college and wondered what he had done with them; and at the four previous years of undergraduate life and wondered how he had done so well with those and why he had not in some manner justified the parting words of his favorite professor.

"You have one rare faculty, Jones. You can, when you choose, sharpen the pencil of your mind to a very fine point. Specialize, my boy, specialize."

If the recipient of this admonition had specialized in anything, it was in life. Having twenty-five thousand a year of his own he might have continued in that path indefinitely, but for two influences. One was an irruptive craving within him to take some part in the dynamic activities of the surrounding world. The other was the "freak" will of his late and little-lamented uncle, from whom he had his present income, and his future expectations of some ten millions. Adrian Van Reypen Egerton had, as Waldemar once put it, "--one into the mayor's chair with a good name and come out with a block of ice stock." In a will whose cynical humor was the topic of its day, Mr. Egerton jeered posthumously at the public which he had despoiled, and promised restitution, of a sort, through his heir.

"Therefore," he had written, "I give and bequeath to the said Adrian Van Reypen Egerton Jones, the residue of my property, the principal to be taken over by him at such time as he shall have completed five years of continuous residence in New York City. After such time the virus of the metropolis will have worked through his entire being. He will squander his unearned and undeserved fortune, thus completing the vicious circle, and returning the millions acquired by my political activities, in a poisoned shower upon the city, for which, having bossed, bullied and looted it, I feel no sentiment other than contempt."

"And now," remarked Waldemar in his heavy, rumbling voice, "you aspire to disappoint that good old man."

"It's only human nature, you know," said Average Jones. "When a man puts a ten-million-dollar curse on you and suggests that you haven't the backbone of a shrimp, you--you--"

"--naturally yearn to prove him a liar," supplied Bertram.

"Exactly. Anyway, I've no taste for dissipation, either moral or financial. I want action; something to do. I'm bored in this infernal city."

"The wail of the unslaked romanticist," commented Bertram.

"Romanticist nothing!" protested the other. "My ambitions are practical enough if I could only get 'em stirred up."

"Exactly. Boredom is simply romanticism with a morning-after thirst. You're panting for romance, for something bizarre. Egypt and St. Petersburg and Buenos Ayres and Samoa have all become commonplace to you. You've overdone them. That's why you're back here in New York waiting with stretched nerves for the Adventure of Life to cat-creep up from behind and toss the lariat of rainbow dreams over your shoulders."

Waldemar laughed. "Not a bad diagnosis. Why don't you take up a hobby, Mr. Jones?"

"What kind of a hobby?"

"Any kind. The club is full of hobby-riders. Of all people that I know, they have the keenest appetite for life. Look at old Denechaud; he was a misanthrope until he took to gathering scarabs. Fenton, over there, has the finest collection of circus posters in the world. Bellerding's house is a museum of obsolete musical instruments. De Gay collects venomous insects from all over the world; no harmless ones need apply. Terriberry has a mania for old railroad tickets. Some are really very curious. I've often wished I had the time to be a crank. It's a happy life."

"What line would you choose?" asked Bertram languidly.

"Nobody has gone in for queer advertisements yet, I believe," replied the older man. "If one could take the time to follow them up---but it would mean all one's leisure."

"Would it be so demanding a career?" said Average Jones, smiling.

"Decidedly. I once knew a man who gave away twenty dollars daily on clues from the day's news. He wasn't bored for lack of occupation."

"But the ordinary run of advertising is nothing more than an effort to sell something by yelling in print," objected Average Jones.

"Is it? Well perhaps you don't look in the right place."

Waldemar reached for the morning's copy of the Universal and ran his eye down the columns of "classified" matter. "Hark to this," he said, and read:

"Is there any work on God's green
earth for a man who has just got
to have it?"

"Or this:

"WANTED--A venerable looking man with
white beard and medical degree. Good
pay to right applicant."

"What's that?" asked Average Jones with awakened interest.

"Only a quack medical concern looking for a stall to impress their come-ons," explained Waldemar.

Average Jones leaned over to scan the paper in his turn.

"Here's one," said he, and read:

WANTED--Performer on B-flat trombone.
Can use at once. Apply with instrument,
after 1 p. m. 300 East 100th Street.

"That seems ordinary enough," said Waldemar.

"What's it doing in a daily paper? There must be--er--technical publications--er--journals, you know, for this sort of demand."

"When Average's words come slow, you've got him interested," commented Bertram.
"Sure sign."

"Nevertheless, he's right," said Waldemar. "It is rather misplaced."

"How is this for one that says what it means?" said Bertram.

WANTED--At once, a brass howitzer and
a man who isn't afraid to handle it.
Mrs. Anne Cullen, Pier 49 1/2 East River.

"The woman who is fighting the barge combine," explained Waldemar. "Not so good as it looks. She's bluffing."

"Anyway, I'd like a shy at this business," declared Average Jones with sudden conviction. "It looks to me like something to do."

"Make it a business, then," advised Waldemar. "If you care really to go in for it, my newspaper would be glad to pay for information such as you might collect. We haven't time, for example, to trace down fraudulent advertisers. If you could start an enterprise of that sort, you'd certainly find it amusing, and, at times, perhaps, even adventurous."

"I wouldn't know how to establish it," objected Average Jones.

The newspaper owner drew a rough diagram on a sheet of paper and filled it in with writing, crossing out and revising liberally. Divided, upon his pattern, into lines, the final draft read:

HAVE YOU BEEN STUNG?

Thousands have.

Thousands will be.

They're Laying for You.

WHO?

The Advertising Crooks.

A. JONES

Ad-Visor

Can Protect You

Against Them.

Before Spending Your

Money Call on Him.

Advice on all Subjects

Connected with Newspaper,

Magazine or Display Advertising.

Free Consultation to

Persons Unable to Pay.

Call or Write, Enclosing

Postage. This Is On The Level.

"Ad-Visor! Do you expect me to blight my budding career by a poisonous pun like that?" demanded Average Jones with a wry face.

"It may be a poisonous pun, but it's an arresting catch-word," said Waldemar, unmoved. "Single column, about fifty lines will do it in nice, open style. Caps and lower case, and black-faced type for the name and title. Insert twice a week in every New York and Brooklyn paper."

"Isn't it--er--a little blatant?" suggested Bertram, with lifted eyebrows.

"Blatant?" repeated its inventor. "It's more than that. It's howlingly vulgar. It's a riot of glaring yellow. How else would you expect to catch the public?"

"Suppose, then, I do burst into flame to this effect?" queried the prospective "Ad-Visor." "Et apres? as we proudly say after spending a week in Paris."

"Apres? Oh, plenty of things. You hire an office, a clerk, two stenographers and a clipping export, and prepare to take care of the work that comes in. You'll be flooded," promised Waldemar.

"And between times I'm to go skipping about, chasing long white whiskers and brass howitzers and B-flat trombones, I suppose."

"Until you get your work systematized you'll have no time for skipping. Within six months, if you're not sandbagged or jailed on fake libel suits, you'll have a unique bibliography of swindles. Then I'll begin to come and buy your knowledge to keep my own columns clean."

The speaker looked up to meet the gaze of an iron-gray man with a harsh, sallow face.

"Excuse my interrupting," said the new-comer.

"Just one question, Waldemar. Who's going to be the nominee?"

"Linder."

"Linder? Surely not! Why, his name hasn't been heard."

"It will be."

"His Federal job?"

"He resigns in two weeks."

"His record will kill him."

"What record? You and I know he's a grafter. But can we prove anything? His clerk has always handled all the money."

"Wasn't there an old scandal--a woman case?" asked the questioner vaguely.

"That Washington man's wife? Too old. Linder would deny it flatly, and there would be no witnesses. The woman is dead--killed by his brutal treatment of her, they say. But the whole thing was hushed up at the time by Linder's pull, and when the husband threatened to kill him Linder quietly set a commissioner of insanity on the case and had the man put away. He's never appeared since. No, that wouldn't be politically effective."

The gray man nodded, and walked away, musing.

"Egbert, the traction boss," explained Waldemar. "We're generally on opposite sides, but this time we're both against Linder. Egbert wants a cheaper man for mayor. I want a straighter one. And I could get him this year if Linder wasn't so well fortified. However, to get back to our project, Mr. Jones--"

Get back to it they did with such absorption that when the group broke up, several hours later, Average Jones was committed, by plan and rote, to the new and hopeful adventure of Life.

In the great human hunt which ever has been and ever shall be till "the last bird flies into the last light"--some call it business, some call it art, some call it love, and a very few know it for what it is, the very mainspring of existence--the path of the pursuer and the prey often run obscurely parallel. What time the Honorable William Linder matured his designs on the mayoralty, Average Jones sat in a suite of offices in Astor Court, a location which Waldemar had advised as being central, expensive, and inspirational of confidence, and considered, with a whirling brain, the minor woes of humanity. Other people's troubles had swarmed down upon him in answer to his advertised offer of help,

as sparrows flock to scattered bread crumbs. Mostly these were of the lesser order of difficulties; but for what he gave in advice and help the Ad-Visor took payment in experience and knowledge of human nature. Still it was the hard, honest study, and the helpful toil which held him to his task, rather than the romance and adventure which he had hoped for and Waldemar had foretold--until, in a quiet, street in Brooklyn, of which he had never so much as heard, there befell that which, first of many events, justified the prophetic Waldemar and gave Average Jones a part in the greater drama of the metropolis. The party of the second part was the Honorable William Linder.

Mr., Linder sat at five P. m., of an early summer day, behind lock and bolt. The third floor front room of his ornate mansion on Brooklyn's Park Slope was dedicated to peaceful thought. Sprawled in a huge and softly upholstered chair at the window, he took his ease in his house. The chair had been a recent gift from an anonymous admirer whose political necessities, the Honorable Mr. Linder idly surmised, had not yet driven him to reveal his identity. Its occupant stretched his shoeless feet, as was his custom, upon the broad window-sill, flooded by the seasonable warmth of sunshine, the while he considered the ripening mayoralty situation. He found it highly satisfactory. In the language of his inner man, it was a cinch.

Below, in Kennard Street, a solitary musician plodded. His pretzel-shaped brass rested against his shoulder. He appeared to be the "scout" of one of those prevalent and melancholious German bands, which, under Brooklyn's easy ordinances, are privileged to draw echoes of the past writhing from their forgotten recesses. The man looked slowly about him as if apprising potential returns. His gravid glance encountered the prominent feet in the third story window of the Linder mansion, and rested. He moved forward. Opposite the window he paused. He raised the mouthpiece to his lips and embarked on a perilous sea of notes from which the tutored ear might have inferred that once popular ditty, Egypt.

Love of music was not one of the Honorable William Linder's attributes. An irascible temper was. Of all instruments the B-flat trombone possesses the most nerve-jarring tone. The master of the mansion leaped from his restful chair. Where his feet had ornamented the coping his face now appeared. Far out he leaned, and roared at the musician below. The brass throat blared back at him, while the soloist, his eyes closed in the ecstasy of art, brought the "verse" part of his selection to an excruciating conclusion, half a tone below pitch. Before the chorus there was a brief pause for effect. In this pause, from Mr. Linder's open face a voice fell like a falling star. Although it did not cry "Excelsior," its output of vocables might have been mistaken, by a casual ear, for that clarion call. What the Honorable Mr. Linder actually shouted was:

"Getthelloutofhere!"

The performer upturned a mild and vacant face. "What you say?" he inquired in a softly Teutonic accent.

The Honorable William Linder made urgent gestures, like a brakeman.

"Go away! Move on!"

The musician smiled reassuringly.

"I got already paid for this," he explained.

Up went the brass to his lips again. The tonal stairway which leads up to the chorus of Egypt rose in rasping wailfulness. It culminated in an excessive, unendurable, brazen shriek--and the Honorable William Linder experienced upon the undefended rear of his person the most violent kick of a lifetime not always devoted to the arts of peace. It projected him clear of the window-sill. His last sensible vision was the face of the musician, the mouth absurdly hollow and pursed above the suddenly removed mouthpiece. Then an awning intercepted the politician's flight. He passed through this, penetrated a second and similar stretch of canvas shading the next window below, and lay placid on his own front steps with three ribs caved in and a variegated fracture of the collar-bone. By the time the descent was ended the German musician had tucked his brass under his arm and was hurrying, in panic, down the street, his ears still ringing with the concussion which had blown the angry householder from his own front window. He was intercepted by a running policeman.

"Where was the explosion?" demanded the officer.

"Explosion? I hear a noise in the larch house on the corner," replied the musician dully.

The policeman grabbed his arm. "Come along back. You fer a witness! Come on; you an' yer horn."

"It iss not a horn," explained the German patiently, "'it iss a B-flat trombone."

Along with several million other readers, Average Jones followed the Linder "bomb outrage" through the scandalized head-lines of the local press. The perpetrator, declared the excited journals, had been skilful. No clue was left. The explosion had taken care of that. The police (with the characteristic stupidity of a corps of former truck-drivers and bartenders, decorated with brass buttons and shields and without further qualification dubbed "detectives") vacillated from theory to theory. Their putty-and-pasteboard fantasies did not long survive the Honorable William Linder's return to consciousness and coherence. An "inside job," they had said. The door was locked and bolted, Mr. Linder declared, and there was no possible place for an intruder to conceal himself. Clock-work, then.

"How would any human being guess what time to set it for," demanded the politician in disgust, "when I never know, myself, where I'm going to be at any given hour of any given day?"

"Then that Dutch horn-player threw the bomb," propounded the head of the "Detective Bureau" ponderously.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

