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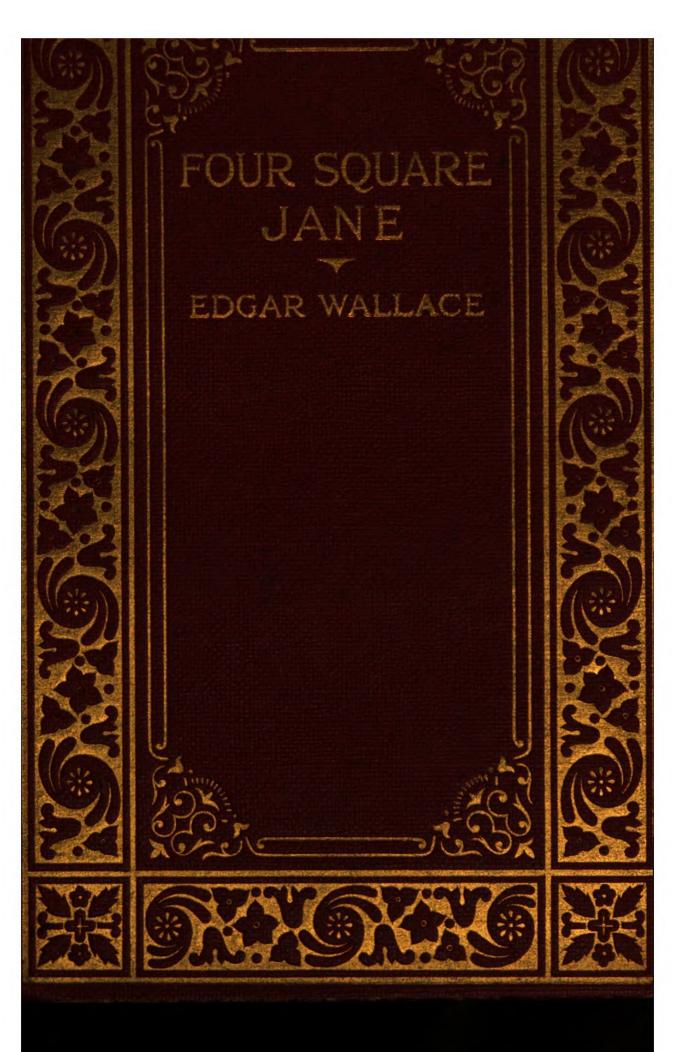
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FOREWORD

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FOUR SQUARE JANE

EDGAR WALLACE

Author of "Angel Esquire," "The Melody of Death," "The Thief in the Night," "Elegant Edward," etc.



CRIME SERIES

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HAVE YOU READ

The Thief in the Night

- AND -

Elegant Edward

— BY —

EDGAR WALLACE

Only Published in the READERS LIBRARY

:. EDITION :.

EDITOR'S NOTE

THE READERS LIBRARY has recently published a large number of the best "crook" stories of the day. Amongst famous mystery story writers whose books have been included in the LIBRARY are Edgar Wallace, Sydney Horler, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, Thea von Harbou, Earl Derr Biggers, and many others. Moreover, there is scarcely a first-class thriller produced on the films but an excellent novelised version of it appears in the READERS LIBRARY. Experience has shown that there are scores of thousands of readers who cannot be supplied with too much of this ingenious and absorbing type of fiction. READERS LIBRARY intends to go on selecting as many as possible of the best of these stories, and with the present volume starts a policy of producing them in a series of their own, with a specially designed paper wrapper by which they can be distinguished. "Crook" story devotees will thus be able to recognize good "crook" stories at sight. The Crime Series will contain nothing that is second-class. It makes an auspicious start with an entirely new book by Mr. Edgar Wallace—"Four Square Jane."

No publisher who has recently had the fortune to produce an Edgar Wallace book can doubt that at the present time Mr. Wallace is easily the best seller in the world. The sales of the READERS LIBRARY volumes probably surpass those of any other books on earth. And amongst READERS LIBRARY books the four Edgar Wallace volumes which we have already published multiply their sales most phenomenally and quickly. It is a pleasure,

therefore, to follow them with yet another of the celebrated writer's stories, which has never appeared in volume form before, and which cannot be procured in any other edition. It can be said sincerely that "Four Square Jane" is amongst his best stories. It is concerned with a most ladylike crook. She is an uncannily clever criminal, all her female cunning being concentrated on her nefarious work. She makes the mere male detectives and policemen who endeavour to be on her tracks look foolish; and she and Mr. Edgar Wallace between them will successfully baffle readers of both sexes as to her identity. Mr. Wallace is most happy in his knack of getting his readers interested within the first two or three pages of a story in the particular character whom he does not intend to reveal to them until the close of the story. He is especially successful in this volume. Four Square Jane remains an enigmatic person until the end of the book, though in the meantime she is responsible for a series of risky crimes performed with a neatness and cleverness which cannot but evoke admiration. The expression with regard to Mr. Wallace may be becoming hackneyed, but it is undoubtedly true that he has written another masterly mystery story in this case.

Other volumes will follow quickly in The Crime Series, until it is a regular show gallery of clever criminals and clever detectives. Meanwhile, it is a pleasure to introduce (though the actual formal introduction is postponed until almost the last page of the book) the reader to Exhibit No. 1, than whom there will be none more interesting or charming—

Four Square Jane!

THE EDITOR.

III

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT DAWES, of Scotland Yard, was a comparatively young man, considering the important position he held. It was the boast of his department—Peter himself did very little talking about his achievements—that never once, after he had picked up a trail, was Peter ever baffled.

A clean-shaven, youngish looking man, with grey halfr at his temples, Peter took a philosophical view of crime and criminals, holding neither horror towards the former, nor malice towards the latter.

If he had a passion at all it was for the crime which contained within itself a problem. Anything out of the ordinary, or anything bizarre fascinated him, and it was one of the main regrets of his life that it had never once fallen to his lot to conduct an investigation into the many Four Square mysteries which came to the Metropolitan police.

It was after the affair at Lord Claythorpe's that Peter Dawes was turned loose to discover and apprehend this girl criminal, and he welcomed the opportunity to take charge of a case which had always interested him. To the almost hysterical telephone message Scotland Yard had received from Lord Claythorpe Peter did not pay too much attention. He realized that it was of the greatest importance that he should keep his mind unhampered and unprejudiced by the many and often contradictory "clues" which everyone who had been affected by Four Square Jane's robberies insisted on discussing with him.

He interviewed an agitated man at four o'clock in the morning, and Lord Claythorpe was frantic.

"It's terrible, terrible," he wailed, "what are you people at Scotland Yard doing that you allow these villainies to continue? It is monstrous!"

Peter Dawes, who was not unused to outbursts on the part of the victimized, listened to the squeal with equanimity.

"As I understand it, this woman came here with two men who pretended to have her in custody?"

"Two detectives!" moaned his lordship.

"If they called themselves detectives, then
you were deceived," said Peter with a smile.

"They persuaded you to allow the prisoner
and one of her captors to spend ten minutes

in the library where your jewels are kept. Now tell me, when the crime occurred had your guests left?"

Lord Claythorpe nodded wearily.

"They had all gone," he said, "except my friend Lewinstein."

Peter made an examination of the reom, and a gleam of interest came into his eyes when he saw the curious labels. He examined the floor and the window-bars, and made as careful a search of the floor as possible.

"I can't do much at this hour," he said.

"At daylight I will come back and have a good look through this room. Don't allow anybody in to dust or to sweep it."

He returned at nine o'clock, and to his surprise, Lord Claythorpe, whom he had expected would be in bed and asleep, was waiting for him in the library, and wearing a dressinggown over his pyjamas.

"Look at this," exclaimed the old man, and waved a letter wildly.

Dawes took the document and read:

"You are very mean, old man! When you lost your Venetian armlet you offered a reward of ten thousand pounds. I sent that armlet to a hospital greatly in need of funds,

and the doctor who presented my gift to the hospital was entitled to the full reward. I have taken your pearls because you swindled the hospital out of six thousand pounds. This time you will not get your property back."

There was no signature, but the familiar mark, roughly drawn, the four squares and the centred "J."

"This was written on a Yost," said Peter Dawes, looking at the document critically. "The paper is the common stuff you buy in penny packages—so is the envelope. How did it come?"

"It came by district messenger," said Lord Claythorpe. "Now what do you think, officer? Is there any chance of my getting those pearls back?"

"There is a chance, but it is a pretty faint one," said Peter.

He went back to Scotland Yard, and reported to his chief.

"So far as I can understand, the operations of this woman began about twelve months ago. She has been constantly robbing, not the ordinary people who are subjected to this kind of victimization, but people with bloated bank

balances, and so far as my investigations go, bank balances accumulated as a direct consequence of shady exploitation companies."

"What does she do with the money?" asked the Commissioner curiously.

"That's the weird thing about it," replied Dawes. "I'm fairly certain that she donates very large sums to all kinds of charities. example, after the Lewinstein burglary a big crêche in the East End of London received from an anonymous donor the sum of four thousand pounds. Simultaneously, another sum of four thousand was given to one of the West End hospitals. After the Talbot burglary three thousand pounds, which represented nearly the whole of the amount stolen, was left by some unknown person to the West End Maternity Hospital. I have an idea that we shall discover she is somebody who is in close touch with hospital work, and that behind these crimes there is some quixotic notion of helping the poor at the expense of the grossly rich."

"Very beautiful," said the Chief drily, "but unfortunately her admirable intentions do not interest us. In our eyes she is a common thief."

"She is something more than that," said

Peter quietly; "she is the eleverest criminal that has come my way since I have been associated with Scotland Yard. This is the one thing one has dreaded, and yet one has hoped to meet—a criminal with a brain."

"Has anybody seen this woman?" said the Commissioner interested.

"They have, and they haven't," replied Peter Dawes. "That sounds cryptic, but it only means that she has been seen by people who could not recognize her again. Lewinstein saw her, Claythorpe saw her, but she was veiled and unrecognizable. My difficulty, of course, is to discover where she is going to strike next. Even if she is only hitting at the grossly rich she has forty thousand people to strike at. Obviously, it is impossible to protect them all. But somehow—" he hesitated.

"Yes?" said the Chief.

"Well, a careful study of her methods helps me a little," replied Dawes. "I have been looking round to discover who the next victim will be. He must be somebody very wealthy, and somebody who makes a parade of his wealth, and I have fined down the issue to about four men. Gregory Smith, Carl Sweiss, Mr. Thomas Scott, and John Tresser. I am inclined to believe it is Tresser she is after.

You see, Tresser has made a great fortune, not by the straightest means in the world, and he hasn't forgotten to advertise his riches. He is the fellow who bought the Duke of Haslemere's house, and his collection of pictures—you will remember the stuff that has been written about."

The Chief nodded.

"There is a wonderful Romney, isn't there?"

"That's the picture," replied Dawes. "Tresser, of course, doesn't know a picture from a gas-stove. He knows that the Romney is wonderful, but only because he has been told so. Moreover, he is the fellow who has been giving the newspapers his views on charity—told them that he never spent a penny on public institutions, and never gave away a cent that he didn't get a cent's worth of value for. A thing like that would excite Jane's mind; and then, in addition, the actual artistic and monetary value of the Romney is largely advertised—why, I should imagine that the attraction is almost irresistible!"

Mr. Tresser was a difficult man to meet. His multitudinous interests in the City of London kept him busy from breakfast time until late at night. When at last Peter ran him down in a private dining-room at the

Ritz-Carlton, he found the multi-millionaire a stout, red-haired man with a long cleanshaven upper lip, and a cold blue eye.

The magic of Peter Dawes' card secured him an interview.

"Sit down-sit down," said Mr. Tresser hurriedly, "what's the trouble, hey?"

Peter explained his errand, and the other listened with interest, as to a business proposition.

"I've heard all about that Jane," said Mr. Tresser cheerfully, "but she's not going to get anything from me—you can take my word! As to the Rumney—is that how you pronounce it?—well, as to that picture, don't worry!"

"But I understand you are giving permission to the public to inspect your collection."

"That's right," said Mr. Tresser, "but everybody who sees them must sign a visitor's book, and the pictures are guarded."

"Where do you keep the Romney at night—still hanging?" asked Peter, and Mr. Tresser laughed.

"Do you think I'm a fool," he said, "no, it goes into my strong room. The Duke had a wonderful strong room which will take a bit of opening."

Peter Dawes did not share the other's confidence in the efficacy of bolts and bars. He knew that Four Square Jane was both an artist and a strategist. Of course, she might not be bothered with pictures, and, anyway, a painting would be a difficult thing to get away unless it was stolen by night, which would be hardly likely.

He went to Haslemere House, which was off Berkeley Square, a great rambling building, with a long, modern picture-gallery, and having secured admission, signed his name and showed his card to an obvious detective, he was admitted to the long gallery. There was the Romney—a beautiful example of the master's art.

Peter was the only sightseer, but it was not alone to the picture that he gave his attention. He made a brief survey of the room in case of accidents. It was long and narrow. There was only one door—that through which he had come—and the windows at both ends were not only barred, but a close wire-netting covered the bars, and made entrance and egress impossible by that way. The windows were likewise long and narrow, in keeping with the shape of the room, and there were no curtains behind which an intruder might hide.

Simple spring roller blinds were employed to exclude the sunlight by day.

Peter went out, passed the men, who scrutinized him closely, and was satisfied that if Four Square Jane made a raid on Mr. Tresser's pictures, she would have all her work cut out to get away with it. He went back to Scotland Yard, busied himself in his office, and afterwards went out for lunch. He came back to his office at three o'clock, and had dismissed the matter of Four Square Jane from his mind, when an urgent call came through. It was a message from the Assistant Chief Commissioner.

"Will you come down to my office at once, Dawes?" said the voice, and Peter sprinted down the long corridor to the bureau of the Chief Commissioner.

"Well, Dawes, you haven't had to wait long," he was greeted.

"What do you mean?" said Peter.

"I mean the precious Romney is stolen," said the Chief, and Peter could only stare at him.

"When did this happen?"

"Half an hour ago—you'd better get down to Berkeley Square, and make inquiries on the spot."

Two minutes later, Peter's little two-seater

was nosing its way through the traffic, and within ten minutes he was in the hall of the big house interrogating the agitated attendants. The facts, as he discovered them, were simple.

At a quarter-past two, an old man wearing a heavy overcoat, and muffled up to the chin, came to the house, and asked permission to see the portrait gallery. He gave his name as "Thomas Smith."

He was an authority on Romney, and was inclined to be garrulous. He talked to all the attendants, and seemed prepared to give a long-winded account of his experience, his artistic training, and the excellence of his quality as an art critic—which meant that he was the type of bore that most attendants have to deal with, and they very gladly cut short his monotonous conversation, and showed him the way to the picture gallery.

"Was he alone in the room?" asked Peter.

Peter nodded.

"Of course, the garrulity may have been intentional, and it may have been designed to scare away attendants, but go on."

"The man went into the room, and was seen

[&]quot;Yes, sir."

[&]quot;And nobody went in with him?"

[&]quot;No, sir."

standing before the Romney in rapt contemplation. The attendants who saw him swore that at that time the Romney was in its frame. It hung on the level with the eyes; that is to say the top of the frame was about seven feet from the floor.

"Almost immediately after the attendants had looked in the old man came out talking to himself about the beauty of the execution. As he left the room, and came into the outer lobby, a little girl entered and also asked permission to go into the gallery. She signed her name 'Ellen Cole' in the visitors' book."

"What was she like?" said Peter.

"Oh, just a child," said the attendant vaguely, "a little girl."

Apparently the little girl walked into the saloon as the old man came out—he turned and looked at her, and then went on through the lobby, and out through the door. But before he got to the door, he pulled a hand-kerchief out of his pocket, and with it came about half a dozen silver coins, which were scattered on the marble floor of the vestibule. The attendants helped him to collect the money—he thanked them, his mind still with the picture apparently, for he was talking to himself all the time, and finally disappeared.

He had hardly left the house when the little girl came out and asked: "Which is the Romney picture?"

"In the centre of the room," they told her, immediately facing the door."

"But there's not a picture there," she said, "there's only an empty frame, and a funny kind of little black label with four squares."

The attendants dashed into the room, and sure enough the picture had disappeared!

In the space where it had been, or rather on the wall behind the place, was the sign of Four Square Jane.

The attendants apparently did not lose their heads. One went straight to the telephone, and called up the nearest police station—thesecond went on in search of the old man. But all attempts to discover him proved futile. The constable on point duty at the corner of Berkeley Square had seen him get into a taxicab and drive away, but had not troubled to notice the number of the taxi-cab.

"And what happened to the little girl?" asked Peter.

"Oh, she just went away," said the attendant; "she was here for some time, and then she went off. Her address was in the visitor's book. There was no chance of her carrying

the picture away—none whatever," said the attendant emphatically. "She was wearing a short little skirt, and light summery things, and it was impossible to have concealed a big canvas like that."

Peter went in to inspect the frame. The picture had been cut flush with the borders. He looked around, making a careful examination of the apartment, but discovered nothing, except, immediately in front of the picture, a long, white pin. It was the sort of pin that bankers use to fasten notes together. And there was no other clue.

Mr. Tressler took his loss very calmly until the newspapers came out with details of the theft. It was only then that he seemed impressed by its value, and offered a reward for its recovery.

The stolen Romney became the principal topic of conversation in clubs and in society circles. It filled columns of the newspapers, and exercised the imagination of some of the brightest young men in the amateur criminal investigation business. All the crime experts were gathered together at the scene of the happening and their theories, elaborate and ingenious, provided interesting subject matter for the speculative reader.

Peter Dawes, armed with the two addresses he had taken from the visitors' book, the address of the old man and of the girl, went round that afternoon to make a personal investigation, only to discover that neither the learned Mr. Smith nor the innocent child were known at the addresses they had given.

Peter reported to headquarters with a very definite view as to how the crime was committed.

"The old man was a blind," he said, "he was sent in to create suspicion and keep the eyes of the attendants upon himself. He purposely bored everybody with his long-winded discourse on art in order to be left alone. He went into the saloon knowing that his bulky appearance would induce the attendants to keep their eyes on him. Then he came out—the thing was timed beautifully—just as the child came in. That was the lovely plan.

"The money was dropped to direct all attention on the old man, and at that moment, probably, the picture was cut from its frame, and it was hidden. Where it was hidden, or how the girl got it out is a mystery. The attendants are most certain that she could not have had it concealed about her, and I have made experiments with a thick canvas cut to the

size of the picture, and it certainly does seem that the picture would have so bulged that they could not have failed to have noticed it."

"But who was the girl?"

"Four Square Jane!" said Peter promptly,

"Impossible!"

Peter smiled.

"It is the easiest thing in the world for a young girl to make herself look younger. Short frocks, and hair in plaits—and there you are! Four Square Jane is something more than clever."

"One moment," said the Chief, "could she have handed it through the window to some-body else?"

Peter shook his head.

"I have thought of that," he said, "but the windows were closed and there was a wire-netting which made that method of disposal impossible. No, by some means or other she got the picture out under the noses of the attendants. Then she came out and announced innocently that she could not find the Romney picture—naturally there was a wild rush to the saloon. For three minutes no notice was being taken of the 'child'."

"De you think one of the attendants was in collusion?"

"That is also possible," said Peter, "but every man has a record of good, steady service. They're all married men and none of them has the slightest thing against him."

"And what will she do with the picture? She can't dispose of it," protested the Chief.

"She's after the reward," said Peter with a smile. "I tell you, Chief, this thing has put me on my mettle. Somehow, I don't think I've got my hand on Jane yet, but I'm living on hopes."

"After the reward," repeated the Chief; "that's pretty substantial. But surely you are going to fix her when she hands the picture over?"

"Not on your life," replied Peter, and took out of his pocket a telegram and laid it on the table before the other. It read:

"The Romney will be returned on condition that Mr. Tresser undertakes to pay the sum of five thousand pounds to the Great Panton Street Hospital for Children. On his signing an agreement to pay this sum, the picture will be restored.

"JANE."

[&]quot;What did Tresser say about that?"

[&]quot;Tresser agrees," answered Peter, and has

sent a note to the secretary of the Great Panton Street Hospital to that effect. We are advertising the fact of his agreement very widely in the newspapers."

At three o'clock that afternoon came another telegram, addressed this time to Peter Dawes—it annoyed him to know that the girl was so well informed that she was aware of the fact that he was in charge of the case.

"I will restore the picture at eight o'clock to-night. Be in the picture gallery, and please take all precautions. Don't let me escape this time—The Four Square Jane."

The telegram was handed in at the General Post Office.

Peter Dawes neglected no precaution. He had really not the faintest hope that he would make the capture, but it would not be his fault if Four Square Jane were not put under lock and key.

A small party assembled in the gloomy hall of Mr. Tresser's own house.

Dawes and two detective officers, Mr. Tresser himself—he sucked at a big cigar and seemed the least concerned of those present—the three attendants, and a representative of the Great Panton Street Hospital were there.

"De you think she'll come in person?" asked Tresser. "I would rather like to see that Jane. She certainly put one over on me, but I bear her no ill-will."

"I have a special force of police within eall," said Peter, "and the roads are watched by detectives, but I'm afraid I can't promise you anything exciting. She's too slippery for us."

"Anyway, the messenger—" began Tresser Peter shock his head.

"The messenger may be a district messenger, though here again I have taken precautions—all the district messenger offices have been warned to notify Scotland Yard in the event of somebody coming with a parcel addressed here."

Eight o'clock boomed out from the neighbouring church, but Four Square Jane had not put in an appearance. Five minutes later there came a ring at the bell, and Peter Dawes opened the door.

It was a telegraph boy.

Peter took the buff envelope and tore it open, read the message through carefully, and laughed—a hopeless, admiring laugh.

"She's done it," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Tresser.

"Come in here," said Peter.

He led the way into the picture gallery. There was the empty frame on the wall, and behind it the half-obliterated label which Four Square Jane had stuck.

He walked straight to the end of the room to one of the windows.

"The picture is here," he said, "it has never left the room."

He lifted his hand, and pulled at the blind cord, and the blind slowly revolved.

There was a gasp of astonishment from the gathering. For, pinned to the blind, and rolled up with it, was the missing Romney.

"I ought to have guessed when I saw the pin," said Peter to his chief. It was quick work, but it was possible to do it.

"She cut out the picture, brought it to the end of the room, and pulled down the blind; pinned the top corners of the picture to the blind, and let it roll up again. Nobody thought of pulling that infernal thing down!"

"The question that worries me," said the Chief, "is this—Who is Four Square Jane?"

"That," replied Peter, "is just what I am going to discover."

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