An O. Henry cocktail

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An O. Henry Cocktail

O HENRY'S 'Thimble, Thimble,' a story with an unsolved ending frankly imitated from Stockton's 'The-Lady or the Tiger;' was published in Hampton's Magazine, XXI (December, 1908), 698-704. An editorial note remarked: 'This story has caused so much commotion around the office that we are leaving it to our readers—with O. Henry himself as judge—to settle the perplexing question. As an inducement we will pay $50 for the best answer; $25 for the second; $15 for the third, and $10 for the fourth—a total of $100. And we do so with a genuine feeling of relief!' In the following February (XXII, 282-284) the editor wrote that 'every incoming mail is still bringing answers;' and that 'at this writing nearly three thousand of our readers have sent in guesses;' while O. Henry awarded the four prizes to contestants from St Paul, Minnesota, Augusta, Maine, Red Key, Indiana, and Richmond, Virginia. All four winners picked Black Tie as the Virginia Carteret to whom Uncle Jake delivered the heirloom watch.

As indicated by manuscripts now in the Harvard College Library, at least one reader, Miss Edith Morse, New Rochelle, New York, wrote directly to the author, using light blue stationery:

Dear O. Henry,

"Thimble, Thimble" is a mighty clever little story and had me guessing for almost a minute. —However, you
can't fool sister when it comes to spotting
the N.Y. guys.

"Blue Tie" is the Manhattan kid, & the
one who did the proposing to Miss De
Ormond, but it was "Black Tie" who
came to the rescue by handing out the
necessary coin & it was he who rec'd the
watch from Jake.

My reason for arriving at this conclu-
sion, is the clue given in "Black Tie's"
speech in which he says that "times have
changed;" and while the old Southern
idea of chivalry consisted in "maintaining
a moath eaten arrogance" his code was
"the prompt payment of debts"—Black
Tie, in his life North, has learned "some-
thing of business and a little of life." Also
in the same speech, Black Tie says
"Northerner's, Southerners," while if he
were a Northerner, he would in all prob-
ability he police & say Southerners first —
comprencz?

Good luck to you, O. Henry, you &
Bill Shakespeare can divvy up the laurel
wreath for giving us side lights on the
human nature problem, and your little
stories have cured me of the blues quicker
than a Dry Martini or a dose of quinine.

Hope you will solve the problem soon
& save us from brain fever.

Bag to remain,

Your sincere admirer,
Your sincere admirer,
(Miss), Edith Morse

P. S. Would much rather have your
autograph than the $25

One would suppose that O. Henry
was disconcerted by the ease and una-
animity with which his supposedly in-
soluble ending was solved. But in a
letter dated December 23, though post-
marked January 10, 1909, he wrote from
the Caledonia, 28 West 26th
Street, New York City, to his nearby
admirer, therein adding nothing to
literature but something guaranteed to
tickle the palate:

My Dear Miss Morse

Thanks for your letter. It was a pale
blue oasis in a desert of "communicati-
ons"

Joy compromm. I'm "awful" glad to
hear that my poor little stories rank with
a martini as a blues-dispeller.

Your answer was correct but escaped
me until too late—so here it gets this
"honorable mention."

Did you every [sic] try:

Gordon gin ½
Private Stock ½
Orange bitters big dash
Absinthe Moderate "
Mix

It is with genuine pleasure that I ap-
pend the autograph, and await confi-
dently your decision that the martini
substitute will win out against both lit-
terature and quinine.

Yours Very truly
O. Henry

I regret to say that I cannot endorse
O. Henry's opinion, but possibly the
fault is to be laid on the quality of
liquids obtainable in these days of Pri-
orities and Shortages.

Hyder E. Rollins
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