

The Wicked Gambler and His Walking Cane



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The Wicked Gambler—a man of humble beginnings but possessed by an attraction to the cards and an avarice for success—began his journey by becoming an accomplished cheat at whatever game he intended to master.

Unfortunately his mastery of cheating was not complete, for his effort in this underhanded endeavor was discovered in a grand gambling hall of Salisbury and he was immediately challenged to a duel.

As dueling was not to his liking and certainly not to his ability to remain among the living, he fled that very night to London where he took lodgings and determined to continue his wicked ways.

In time, while making the rounds of the various gambling establishments in London, he was approached by an angular gentleman who wore an expensive dark suit with a red waistcoat and red cravat. If winning was his life's aim, the angular gentleman explained, then perhaps a gift might aid that ambition? This walking cane being offered had an extraordinary power that would soon bring to the Wicked Gambler success and riches beyond measure...yet there must be a price affixed to the giving...you see?

The price...a pittance...only your soul when it is called for...and you may be assured that would be many, many years in a most agreeable future.

Did the Wicked Gambler think this gentleman to be mad? Did he take into consideration that this was a serious bargain?

One might say he gambled on the consequences.

In possession of the walking cane, the Wicked Gambler discovered to his amazement and financial delight that the cane had the power to not only read the cards in the hands of his opponents, but to whisper the revelation to him in its secret voice.

Zounds, what a time was ahead for the Wicked Gambler! The riches poured into his pockets, and soon among the circle of London's gamblers he became as well-known and much-feared as

the most respected and feared duelist of the time, though the cards might be his weapon of attack.

The future arrived, as futures must.

Here was the angular gentleman in his expensive dark suit, red waistcoat and red cravat, calling at a midnight hour. He requested from the Wicked Gambler a stroll to the nearest bridge over the Thames, so that their bargain might be resolved.

But did the Wicked Gambler go? Of course this midnight visitor was a madman! What nonsense was the moon-gazer talking? Out and away with you, and if you darken my door again a troop of constables shall have a wagon to cart you to a well-justified dungeon!

As you please, said the angular gentleman. As you please.

Soon...very soon...the Wicked Gambler found himself losing money at the tables with every turn of the cards. The walking cane was silent...but how were the opponents at the tables—whom he had bested again and again—able to beat him so soundly night after night?

And then he realized with horror: the walking cane was no longer speaking to him, but to his opponents...revealing his cards, in its secret voice whispered to their ears.

Enough of this! He did go to the nearest bridge over the Thames to toss the cane to the depths...until he realized it had melded itself into his hand and could not be pried loose like the vicious parasite it had become.

No blade could saw through it. No amount of strength could remove the cane from his hand. His desperation inflamed him into nearly using a blade to remove his own flesh...and then came again the angular gentleman...who reminded him once more that the future had overstayed its welcome, and all dues must be paid in full.

It is said that someone at a midnight hour did see the Wicked Gambler walking across a nearby bridge in company with another, his shoulders slumped and his halting gait that of a gent on his path to the gallows...and then the roiling yellow fog took both gamesmen, and they were gone. It is said also that many years later an angular gentleman in an expensive dark suit, red waistcoat and red cravat

offered an interesting walking cane to a dealer of antiques on Flat Iron Square. His hope—said the gentleman who was obviously a well-bred aficionado of the finer things in life—was that this object should find itself in the possession of a worthy soul. One, he said, who had the sense and sophistication to appreciate the time-honored art of the deal.