

# BRITZ

OF HEADQUARTERS

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Elmor did not know how much she had been spared by the consideration of the warden in assigning her to a tier of cells in which the more brutal inmates of the Tombs never were confined. She had on a glance of the nether depths. Grave though the charge against her was, the good old man, whom an sceptic of politics had placed in control of the prison, had recognized from the first that she was of finer mould than anyone who had been entrusted to his custody in his whole term of office, and he had seen to it that her eyes and ears were not assailed by the dreary scenes of the blacker depths. As she passed, and Elmor was a woman of mature years, she could see how much misery she had escaped.

The visit of Mrs. Missioner and Sands to Elmor so much good that, when she went away, it was with a lighter heart she returned to her cell, with renewed courage she steadied herself to await the efforts of the god-friends and the devoted lover she knew were working to clear her name of the frightful charge Donnelly and Carson had lodged against her.

Her confidence in Dr. Fitch was not misplaced, for in the short time when Mrs. Missioner in her domestic was speaking back to her home in Mill on aires' Row, and Sands in a brougham was returning to his office in the Bowling Green building, Fitch and Britz were standing on a Fourth Avenue corner a short distance north of Twenty-third Street, gazing with diamy at a twenty-story skyscraper that stood on the site of the old curio shop to which duty had called the young ambulance surgeon years before.

"You are sure this is the place?" asked the detective.

"Absolutely," said the doctor. "I went over there to get some brandy for the old man, when I was working him out of his stupor. Fitch and Britz were standing on a Fourth Avenue corner a short distance north of Twenty-third Street, gazing with diamy at a twenty-story skyscraper that stood on the site of the old curio shop to which duty had called the young ambulance surgeon years before.

"Well," said the sleuth, "so far as that old curio shop is concerned, we're up against it, or what is worse, we're not up against it. We are confronted by this steel and stone monstrosity, and I guess there's no use wasting time making inquiries there; but there may be a few old timers with memories along this block, and we'll see what we can find out. You take that side of the street, and I'll take this."

Britz and Fitch went into one shop after another patiently repeating persistent inquiries as to what had become of the veteran curio dealer. Blank stares and equally blank answers were the result until Britz, in a tiny tobacco shop that was the center of all the old-time places huddled together for protection against the encroachment of progress, unearthed a memory incarnate in a man who, Fitch said, might have been the twin brother of the amateur alchemist.

"Yes," said the man, "I remember him, and it's a funny thing to me that anybody who ever saw him could ever forget him. He was the queerest little old duck I ever ran across."

Britz thought if anyone could be queerer than the ancient tobaccoist he would have to step out of a page of Dickens.

The incarnate memory recalled that the curio dealer had been taken away a week or two before his shop was torn down to clear the ground for the foundation work of the great brougham. No, he didn't go away. He was taken away.

"Anything wrong with him?" asked Britz.

"Well, not exactly what you might call wrong, so to speak," quavered the old tobacco merchant. "I wouldn't go so far as to say there was anything wrong with him, but neither would I undertake to tell you that he was altogether what you might call right, and he touched his forehead significantly.

"Oh," said Britz, "ward's or Randall's?"

"Huh," said the old tobaccoist, "I don't know what you mean."

"Why," said the detective, "what I mean is did they take him to the Asylum or to the Workhouse?"

"I can't take him to the Workhouse," said the tobacco dealer, "because, so far as I know, he never done no work in all his life, and he was too old a dog to learn the habit by that time. No, I guess they took him to the other place, but what do you want to know for? Are you missing heirs?"

Britz and Fitch laughed.

"No," he said, "my friend here just wants to brush up an old acquaintance." When the two had bought enough cigars to recall faintly the dreams of prosperity that had inspired the old man's youth, they strolled to the Twenty-third Street corner, where they jumped aboard a cross-town car that took them to the Island ferry.

### CHAPTER XV.

At Ward's Island.

"It's rather a remarkable coincidence, I'll admit," said Britz to Fitch, as they stood on the deck of the little ferry boat that bore them toward the island; "but it's possible your little old friend had something to do with the making of the imitation Maharane diamond. You realize thoroughly, I'm sure, the importance of that link in our chain of evidence. It may be difficult to fasten the responsibility for manufacturing all the other fraudulent diamonds of the necklace upon the guilty person, because diamonds of that size can be imitated in any

one of several large cities; but the man who made the fake Maharane is a great master of his craft, a man so skillful that even the most expert artificers of Europe and America do not pretend they can equal him."

"What makes you think the curio dealer had anything to do with it?" asked Fitch. "How could it be done? I thought the Maharane was made quite recently."

"I don't know how long it's been," the detective replied. "It may have been only a few months, and the diamond, if it is possible, may have been copied any time within the past year. That big office building has been less than a year in construction, and it's well within the bounds of fact that the curio dealer received the commission for the work twelve months ago, or possibly more."

"Oh," said the physician, "there is one flaw in your theory. He was a fakir. All the information I gleaned about him convinced me that he was not engaged in the manufacture of bogus jewels. His grand purpose in life was to make real diamonds."

"Fascinating," said Britz. "It is that fact, much more than anything else that leads me to think he may be in the employ of the persons we are trailing. Doesn't it occur to you that the false Maharane, in order to deceive Mrs. Missioner and all her friends, for a long time, must have been such a beautiful piece of work that it could not have been intended as an imitation? In other words, didn't the man who made the imitation Maharane believe he was manufacturing a genuine diamond?"

The physician was struck by the force of the detective's logic. He realized instantly the possibilities of this new clue. He glanced at the Headquarters man with unmistakable admiration for his cleverness, as he said: "Leutenant, give an apology to at least one member of the force—yourself. For many years I've had the idea that the last thing any policeman required to succeed in his work was real intelligence. I accepted the popular conception of the force, including the Detective Bureau, which is that 'the finest are men of brawn and little else. I now perceive that brain is an essential to a real detective, and I am free to admit that you display not only intelligence, but a high order of intellect."

Britz features relaxed into his inscrutable smile.

"It's well not to generalize doctor," he returned. "The Lexow investigations and other legislative probes, as the newspapers are so fond of calling them, have certainly put the force in a better light in many ways. Then, too, the performance of so many of my colleagues are not calculated to inspire the thinking portion of the public with any great confidence in our ability; but we are not all duds. I'm glad you recognize my endeavor to break out this case along logical lines. After all, successful detective work is only applied common sense."

The little boat started her nose against the island pier, and the two investigators sprang ashore. As soon as they entered the asylum grounds, their positions were reversed. Fitch became the pupil, for Britz the willing pupil, for in that abode of darkness reason were medical men whose hourly association with that phase of existence made them welcome gladly visitors from the outer world—especially members of their own profession. Fitch, as he ran up the steps of the visitors' entrance, was received royally, by three or four physicians and surgeons who had known him in his Bellevue days. There was no jealousy of his success among them. He had shot ahead of several of them, and it was pretty common knowledge among the island doctors that Lawrence Fitch was rapidly forging to the fore as a fashionable physician. What was more important in their eyes was the fact that he had gained real distinction in his profession. Several minor but helpful discoveries of his had been recorded in the "Lancet," and more than once his name had been mentioned with flattering recognition at meetings of the County Medical Society.

Fitch was now in his element. He grasped warmly the hands held out to him, clasped two or three of his closer cronies on the back, and presented Britz to the little group with a few words of introduction that won respect for the man from Mulberry Street.

"Got a patient here, Larry?" they asked him jokingly.

"No," said Fitch, "not exactly a patient; but it's possible you have a case here I'm a little bit interested in."

He recited the history of the curio dealer, with an urgent request that he be taken in connection with the old man be revealed to him. Britz, accustomed as he was to glean his facts tollsomenly, was unmistakably surprised by the readiness with which each of Fitch's friends promised aid, and hastened to put their promise into execution.

One of the younger doctors showed himself familiar with the old diamond maker's case, and seemed thoroughly to understand his delusion.

"He is now in my ward," he said. "He has been there six months; rather unusual case; harmless; but hopeless. Can't rid himself of the idea that diamonds are banked up all around him, and that all he has to do is to make one with his own hands to possess the whole of that wealth in jewels. He does his best to make it, too. Unfortunately the ingredients he demands include several dangerous chemicals, and of course he cannot be trusted to go pounding away with a pestle and mortar when his brain is so far gone that he is likely to forget the combination."

The other medical men looked interested.

"What do you do with him, doctor?" asked Fitch.

"Oh, I substitute harmless things—a little blamuth and sodium phosphate, and a dash of French chalk, and he thinks he has everything he needs. All the stuff he wants that is not dangerous I let him have. He is happy

enough mixing and mashing the parts and hammering away all the time. He rolls the mess into dirty little grey balls, and thinks they are diamonds."

"Let us have a look at him," said Fitch.

"Sure thing. You won't mind if I don't go with you? I have an appointment on in about ten minutes, and as there is a green nurse helping me, I don't want to take any chances in letting her monkey with the other cone. So you won't mind, will you, if I ask you to run right along by yourself? Stay as long as you like."

Britz and Fitch were glad enough of an opportunity to question the old man without an auditor, and with a brief, "So long!" to his colleagues, the doctor piloted the detective through dreary stretches in that home of hopelessness to the ward where the curio dealer was found.

In a sunny corner of the long bleak room, the barrenness of which was relieved slightly by a few boxes and pots of geraniums and fuchsias on the window sill, seated at a bench covered by odd-looking leather, was a little old man the physician and the Headquarters sleuth sought.

In the patient's face was a rapt look that told them he was as far away from his present environment as if he had been in the little dingy curio shop where young Dr. Fitch first had seen him. His plant hands had been plunged many times into a dough-like lump plastic as a sculptor's clay at one end of the bench. A row of jars at the back of the bench was flanked by a phalanx of vials. An earthen bowl half full of water stood at his right hand. Directly in front of him, scattered in workmanlike confusion, were several palette knives and mixing brushes. Ceaselessly his fingers plucked tiny pellets from the plastic lump, rolled and patted them, dipped them in the bowl of water, coated them with the many-colored contents of the vials and jars, then trundled them upon the board with industry and purposeful performance, but purposeless of achievement.

At times a spectral smile seemed to glow upon his cadaverous features—a faint gleam like the spectre of a corpse-light. The sunlight, refracted from the rows of jars and bottles, played queerly on the net of wrinkles of his face and gave his tireless hands a ghostlike appearance. He was a poor little shrivelled remnant of a man, the dried core of what had been a dabbler in the occult, and which being a distinguished scientist, no one looking at him could ever have pictured him as possessed of the greed of gain. Britz, though he made no pretence of being a psychologist, comprehended at a glance the outer vision of the former curio shop proprietor conveyed little to his dis-trusted scientific mind. Beyond doubt, the old man, as Fitch had said, had run the shop merely as a means to an end. Fitch and Britz stood looking at him for a few moments before Fitch at last he glanced up, a shade of perplexity across his face, his fingers halted, and he stopped in their studious task, and he looked at them inquiringly. With a slight shake of his head he apparently gave up the attempt to puzzle out their identity, and once more bent his eyes on the bench he first had regarded as the threshold to Golconda.

"Guess you don't remember me, Mr. Martin," said the doctor. The old man appeared not to hear. Britz and Fitch exchanged glances, and the detective took up the attempt to awaken a response from the aged im-mortal's mental vacuum.

"Pretty good man, eh?" said Britz. He had touched the right chord. Any reference to the industry that absorbed his fading senses was sure to arouse the intelligence of the old curio dealer. He nodded briskly, and went on with his work more zealously than before.

"Got to finish a contract on time!" the Headquarters man pursued.

Another vigorous little nod, followed by a swift search of the detective's face on the part of the old man's sunken eyes.

"Rather interesting work you're doing," pursued the detective.

Thereupon Mr. Martin rejoined: "It is the only work that can interest me. I have given my life to it, and I find it profitable!" inquired the sleuth.

For an instant those gray fingers paused in their manipulation of the clay pellets.

"Well, it depends on what you call profitable, young man," answered the ward of the State. "There are things more important than monetary gain."

"Oh, yes, I know, I know," said the detective hastily. "I suppose your work is purely scientific?"

"It is more than that," answered Martin. "It is art, philosophy, physics, thropy—everything. It is the crystallization of the beautiful. Love is beauty, and beauty is life. All mankind needs is beauty in greater measure and higher degree to attain perfection of happiness."

"And you are engaged in forwarding that theory?"

"Yes," said the old man simply. "I have taken upon myself the task of glorifying every home in the world with the prisoned sunlight of the sun-turries. Every abode of man, however humble, should be illuminated by the light of diamonds. The diamond is the most exquisite expression of creation. We love we have. The only trouble is that we have not enough of them. It has remained for me—it has remained for the poor old student of mysteries to find the key to the true jewel wealth of the universe. For thousands of years man has been seeking a way to the ground. I take them from the air."

In similar vein he ran on, his words betraying the strange groping of a clouded mind that in its time had been nearer the truth than most men's. There was something extraordinary about the little old fellow's brain. It had not cracked; rather, it had been attenuated by overstrain. It was after a process of patient questioning covering so long a time that it ended in twilight that Britz led the tireless

worker back to days before his arrival in the asylum. The protracted inquiry taxed all the detective's skill in word-handling, for each time he lifted the patient's prostrate intelligence above the horizon of sanity, it was only to see it slip back in a few seconds.

Fitch, scientist though he was, long conversant with the phenomena of the mind as he had been, marvelled at the Headquarters man's adroitness. Long before Britz had finished his task, the doctor, in a daze of bewilderment, dropped into a chair and stayed there in vacant attention. But the detective remained on his feet, immutable as the incarnation of will itself, and slowly, cautiously, persistently plotted that dazzling intelligence out of its depths through dreary stretches in that home of hopelessness to the ward where the curio dealer was found.

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trout or the detective's eyes. Britz resisted for a moment the impulse to snatch it from his grasp, but he gripped himself sharply. Awaiting the strong point of the detective's old alchemist was in a state of mind to share his knowledge with anybody. After a few more flourishes, Martin laid in Britz's hand a man's visiting card, face down.

Cautionally avoiding any appearance of haste, Britz turned it up and read the single line engraved upon it. Without the tremor of a muscle, and with only one swift significant look, he passed the card to Fitch.

The doctor, a little less self-reliantly a drawing on the back, gazed earnestly at the inscription on the face, then wonderingly, before the card fluttered from his fingers, he read the line aloud.

"Mr. Brunton Sands."

CHAPTER XVI.

The Assistant District Attorney.

While Britz was struggling with the tangled threads of contradictory circumstances that constituted the fabric of the diamond mystery, the District Attorney's office was not inactive. With the slow stealthiness of a cat approaching its prey it combined the disconnected fragments of evidence furnished by the police into the semblance of a perfect case, and prepared to present it to a jury. The Grand Jury had indicted Elmor Holcomb, and again she was dragged into the glare of a courtroom, this time to answer the verdict of a jury that maintained only the verdict of a jury to open the gates of State Prison for her. Her lawyer was served with the fateful notice of trial, and she was made to realize the great struggle was about to begin.

Assistant District Attorney Mott, taking a last survey of the deposition, the long file of papers, the curtain of guilt he would weave before the jury. To his mind the evidence was conclusive. It pointed irresistibly to Miss Holcomb as the thief. Experience had taught him that it was not an easy task to convict a woman on anything but the most direct evidence, yet he felt that the net of circumstances had drawn about her so tightly as to leave her helpless in its meshes. It was a compelling picture of sordidness that the assistant district attorney would draw in the courtroom. The central figure, a young woman, beautiful, accomplished, refined, impoverished in an environment of plenty. In her bosom angry passions of resentment and discontent seethed and bolt into fury against the conditions of her existence. She longed for the splendor and social position in which she was reared, and of which she feels she has been robbed. There is one way to break from the ruins of her early prospects. It is a dangerous way. The million dollars, valued at half the price, she would accept, and she would be free to go on with her life. She yielded to the temptation, but with the inexorable of the amateur, falls to cover her tracks. The evidence gathered by the detectives points in only one direction, and the prosecutor feels certain the twelve good men and true will not shirk the stern duty that justice calls on them to perform.

The evidence massed in Mott's mind seemed to bulge with the weight of Elmor's guilt. And yet, the prosecutor felt there was something strangely lacking in the structure; something that appeared hollow and unreal. No other reasonable explanation of the disappearance of Mrs. Missioner's necklace offered itself, and still it was hard to conceive Miss Holcomb as the thief. Mott knew the result of the same uncertainty in the minds of the jury would inevitably result in a verdict of acquittal. The benefit of any reasonable doubt as to her guilt must go to her, and he realized he had yet to eliminate that last slim possibility of a verdict favorable to the prisoner. Where it an ordinary larceny case he would be content to offer the testimony at hand and leave the verdict to the conscience of the jurors. But this trial would fill thousands of newspapers columns. The press of the entire country was on the alert for it. It means much to a struggling assistant to obtain a conviction in so famous a case. To lose, he feared, would reflect on his own competence.

The entrance of Britz brought the prosecutor out of his absorption.

"Just the man I wanted to see," he greeted.

"And I'm equally glad to find you in," the detective returned. His eyes lingered on the documents piled on the desk, and then sought the face of the prisoner. "Haven't got the case quite clear in your mind?" he questioned.

"I've got the evidence down pat," Mott responded. "It seems complete; and yet, somehow, I feel that it is not entirely convincing. I want to get something to clinch it. It's a pretty tough proposition, but to get a conviction on circumstantial evidence when the defendant is a woman of good appearance, and I don't want to slip up on this case. We haven't got much time left. The case is on the calendar for next Monday."

"That's what I came to see you about," informed Britz. "I want to get you to adjourn the trial a month."

"Another adjournment?" burst forth Mott in irritation. "We've put the case off twice without gaining anything. What do you expect to get in the next four weeks?"

"Conclusive evidence of Miss Holcomb's innocence," solemnly announced Britz. Mott eyed him incredulously.

"You really don't believe her innocent?" he asked.

"I do," came the swift retort.

"Is that just a guess, or is it based on evidence?"

"It is the inference I draw from facts that I have discovered," Britz pronounced.

"New facts?" anxiously inquired the prosecutor.

"Yes."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, tell me what they are," demanded Mott.

"I haven't got them in shape to offer yet," Britz returned. "But the case is shaping itself rapidly and with a mouth—perhaps in a week—I'll have the real thief under arrest."

"I think your judgment is astray in this matter," the prosecutor opined. "But, of course, I don't know what you've got up your sleeve. We've worked together on too many cases for me to treat flippantly anything you say. But we can't keep that girl in jail forever. If she's innocent she ought to be freed. If she's guilty she must be suffering now."

Britz squirmed uneasily in his seat.

"I hate to see her over there in the Tombs," he said, "but it is best to make the guilty man believe we are concentrating our efforts against the girl. There are still so many hurdles to jump before this case is over that I don't want to have him throw any more in our way. As long as he remains in fabled security he'll stay inactive. That's the way I want him to remain."

"Who do you think did the trick?" suddenly questioned Mott.

"Sands, Griswold, or the Indian servant," came from the detective's heated lips.

The prosecutor's hands went above his head in despairing gesture.

"Holy smoke!" he burst forth, vehemently. "Is that as far as you've arrived? Three suspects, and you've no idea which one you want! What sort of weak stuff is in your possession that you don't know whom you're after?"

"The circle is narrowing very quickly," Britz observed. "In the next few days I'll know who committed the robbery, how it was committed, and where the jewels were taken. But I have got to have the necessary time."

"All right," agreed the prosecutor. He called a clerk and directed him to inform Miss Holcomb's lawyer that the case had been withdrawn from the calendar for a month.

"Thank you," murmured the detective. "You'll see the wisdom of the move pretty soon."

"I don't want to send an innocent woman to jail," drawled Mott, "but I'll be hanged if I see how you're going to convince anyone that she didn't take those jewels. That little diamond in her room is more eloquent than all the theories you can propound. However, Britz, go ahead and do your worst," he laughed.

The detective was reaching for his hat when Donnelly and Carson burst into the room. Donnelly's face was flushed with the news of great discovery. Carson was smiling approvingly on his partner.

"We've got the motive for the crime," the two men shouted in one breath.

Britz assumed an attitude of eager interest. The prosecutor looked significantly at him.

"What have you discovered?" he asked.

"That man Fitch is mixed up in the case just as I always thought," Donnelly informed him. "She stole those diamonds for his sake. It's another case of the girl turning thief to help her lover."

Meaning glances darted between Britz and the assistant district attorney.

"Well," drawled Donnelly, as if to prolong the suspense, "we've run the whole thing down and we have it here in black and white." His fingers clasped three or four letters which he flaunted tamperingly before the eyes of the prosecutor. "They confirm our suspicion that Fitch is at the bottom of the whole case. Rather, that he's the man 'higher up.'"

Mott gathered the contents of the missive in three or four sweeping glances. An exultant smile lit his face as he handed them to Britz. He perused them closely, as if weighing their import while noting their contents. His impassive face masked the emotions they aroused in him, and he returned them to the assistant district attorney with an air of indifference.

"These letters are conclusive," Mott pronounced.

"Conclusive of what?" demanded Britz.

"That Miss Holcomb was the tool of her fiance and that the two have conspired to defraud me."

"I guess it's all your sympathy," Britz remarked.

"I guess it would be a big help to detective work to get those letters," Donnelly smiled.

"I guess not," agreed Carson, anxious to justify his partner's little outburst of self-satisfaction.

Britz turned to them abruptly. Their flippant tones irritated him. His nature revolted at the ill-bred rejoicing over the prospective degradation of a woman.

"How did you get the letters?" he asked the assistant.

"Donnelly's ready to burst with the important evidence he had gathered, he needed no urging to impart the desired information."

"I had Dr. Fitch shadowed from the day he appeared at Headquarters to inquire about Miss Holcomb," he said. "That's how I got on that he was negotiating with a real estate agent. Luckily, the agent was a friend of mine, and he informed me that Fitch had purchased and paid for a site on which to build a modern sanatorium. Yes, sir, he put up \$30,000 for the ground; and the buildings and furnishings, I learned, are to cost nearly a quarter of a million. It wasn't easy to get the agent to turn over Fitch's name, but I told him he'd have to produce them before the grand jury under a subpoena, so he handed them over."

"Have you tried to learn where he got the money?" Britz demanded.

"Donnelly smiled a blighting smile. "It's plain enough where he got the money," he replied. "The individual stones of the necklace would bring all the money he needed for the deal."

"But have you tried to make sure that he sold the diamonds?" Britz persisted.

"I'll get all that without much trouble," he said with confident reply.

"Well, go ahead and get it," Britz ordered.

When the two detectives left the room Mott found it impossible to restrain his gratification.

"I guess you'll admit you're on the wrong side," he jeered. "You've bewildered yourself with your own zeal. This is the sort of stuff I want," he declared, fingering the letters. "You've been led astray. Now get on the right trail and accomplish something."

An attendant completed with a card. The prosecutor glanced at it and passed it over to the detective.

"He's an old friend," Mott remarked. "A dark flush suffused Britz's countenance and deepened his yellow ivory complexion to a dull grey. He fixed a look of anxious interrogation on Mott, as if doubtful of the wisdom of admitting the visitor into this back room of the temple of justice.

"I know he's one of your suspects," the prosecutor laughed, at the same time pressing a button which sounded a buzzer in the reception room. "Yes, he's one of the figures in this case of errors you're playing, but I'll not inform him that, in your eyes, he's one of the possible thieves. You may go ahead suspecting whom you will without interfering on my part."

The swinging door opened, and Griswold sauntered into the room. The cordial smile he bestowed on Mott faded to superciliousness when he beheld Britz. He glanced at the detective as if resentful of his presence.

"I presume you can guess why I called," he said familiarly to the prosecutor.

"It requires no mind-reader to fathom the object of your visit," Mott laughed.

"Mrs. Missioner is on the verge of nervous prostration," Griswold informed. "She asked me to inquire about the progress of the case. Do you know, she can't get herself to believe Elmor guilty. Sands is inclined to agree with her to the extent of offering to go on Miss Holcomb's bond."

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"Why are you in a hurry to bring the case to trial?" suddenly flashed Britz. The blunt query arrested Griswold to a recognition of the peculiar position into which he had thrust himself.

"Of course, I have no right to interfere with your criminal prosecution," he hastened to explain. "But I am deeply concerned for Mrs. Missioner, and I only echo her expressed desire when I request a speedy termination of the intolerable situation in which she finds herself."

"The intricacies of the case necessitate further investigation," repeated Griswold.

"Why, the case is simplicity itself. All the circumstances point in one direction, and circumstances never lie."

"No, but the inferences drawn from them are frequently incorrect," Britz amended.

"You don't mean to hint that you believe Miss Holcomb innocent?" flashed Griswold.

"I'm not hinting at anything," the detective flared back. "I only mean that if she's guilty we want more time to fasten the guilt on her."

The detective's tone carried a message that Griswold understood. He urged haste in bringing Elmor to trial, the society man realized, would result in an unpleasant verbal encounter with Britz. And, above all other things, Griswold detested unpleasant outbursts of temper.

"By the way, have you discovered any new evidence?" he asked in a tone of unconcern.

Mott's hand went unconsciously to the letters. One by one he handed them to Griswold, perusal.

"I haven't got them in shape to offer yet," Britz returned. "But the case is shaping itself rapidly and with a mouth—perhaps in a week—I'll have the real thief under arrest."

"I think your judgment is astray in this matter," the prosecutor opined. "But, of course, I don't know what you've got up your sleeve. We've worked together on too many cases for me to treat flippantly anything you say. But we can't keep that girl in jail forever. If she's innocent she ought to be freed. If she's guilty she must be suffering now."

Britz squirmed uneasily in his seat.

"I hate to see her over there in the Tombs," he said, "but it is best to make the guilty man believe we are concentrating our efforts against the girl. There are still so many hurdles to jump before this case is over that I don't want to have him throw any more in our way. As long as he remains in fabled security he'll stay inactive. That's the way I want him to remain."

"Who do you think did the trick?" suddenly questioned Mott.

"Sands, Griswold, or the Indian servant," came from the detective's heated lips.

The prosecutor's hands went above his head in despairing gesture.

"Holy smoke!" he burst forth, vehemently. "Is that as far as you've arrived? Three suspects, and you've no idea which one you want! What sort of weak stuff is in your possession that you don't know whom you're after?"

"The circle is narrowing very quickly," Britz observed. "In the next few days I'll know who committed the robbery, how it was committed, and where the jewels were taken. But I have got to have the necessary time."

"All right," agreed the prosecutor. He called a clerk and directed him to inform Miss Holcomb's lawyer that the case had been withdrawn from the calendar for a month.

"Thank you," murmured the detective. "You'll see the wisdom of the move pretty soon."

"I don't want to send an innocent woman to jail," drawled Mott, "but I'll be hanged if I see how you're going to convince anyone that she didn't take those jewels. That little diamond in her room is more eloquent than all the theories you can propound. However, Britz, go ahead and do your worst," he laughed.

The detective was reaching for his hat when Donnelly and Carson burst into the room. Donnelly's face was flushed with the news of great discovery. Carson was smiling approvingly on his partner.

"We've got the motive for the crime," the two men shouted in one breath.

Britz assumed an attitude of eager interest. The prosecutor looked significantly at him.

"What have you discovered?" he asked.

"That man Fitch is mixed up in the case just as I always thought," Donnelly informed him. "She stole those diamonds for his sake. It's another case of the girl turning thief to help her lover."

Meaning glances darted between Britz and the assistant district attorney.

"Well," drawled Donnelly, as if to prolong the suspense, "we've run the whole thing down and we have it here in black and white." His fingers clasped three or four letters which he flaunted tamperingly before the eyes of the prosecutor. "They confirm our suspicion that Fitch is at the bottom of the whole case. Rather, that he's the man 'higher up.'"

Mott gathered the contents of the missive in three or four sweeping glances. An exultant smile lit his face as he handed them to Britz. He perused them closely, as if weighing their import while noting their contents. His impassive face masked the emotions they aroused in him, and he returned them to the assistant district attorney with an air of indifference.

"These letters are conclusive," Mott pronounced.

"Conclusive of what?" demanded Britz.

"That Miss Holcomb was the tool of her fiance and that the two have conspired to defraud me."

"I guess it's all your sympathy," Britz remarked.

"I guess it would be a big help to detective work to get those letters," Donnelly smiled.

"I guess not," agreed Carson, anxious to justify his partner's little outburst of self-satisfaction.

Britz turned to them abruptly. Their flippant tones irritated him. His nature revolted at the ill-bred rejoicing over the prospective degradation of a woman.

"How did you get the letters?" he asked the assistant.

"Donnelly's ready to burst with the important evidence he had gathered, he needed no urging to impart the desired information."

"I had Dr. Fitch shadowed from the day he appeared at Headquarters to inquire about Miss Holcomb," he said. "That's how I got on that he was negotiating with a real estate agent. Luckily, the agent was a friend of mine, and he informed me that Fitch had purchased and paid for a site on which to build a modern sanatorium. Yes, sir, he put up \$30,000 for the ground; and the buildings and furnishings, I learned, are to cost nearly a quarter of a million. It wasn't easy to get the agent to turn over Fitch's name, but I told him he'd have to produce them before the grand jury under a subpoena, so he handed them over."

"Have you tried to learn where he got the money?" Britz demanded.

"Donnelly smiled a blighting smile. "It's plain enough where he got the money," he replied. "The individual stones of the necklace would bring all the money he needed for the deal."

"But have you tried to make sure that he sold the diamonds?" Britz persisted.

"I'll get all that without much trouble," he said with confident reply.

"Well, go ahead and get it," Britz ordered.

When the two detectives left the room Mott found it impossible to restrain his gratification.

"I guess you'll admit you're on the wrong side," he jeered. "You've bewildered yourself with your own zeal. This is the sort of stuff I want," he declared, fingering the letters. "You've been led astray. Now get on the right trail and accomplish something."

An attendant completed with a card. The prosecutor glanced at it and passed it over to the detective.

"He's an old friend," Mott remarked. "A dark flush suffused Britz's countenance and deepened his yellow ivory complexion to a dull grey. He fixed a look of anxious interrogation on Mott, as if doubtful of the wisdom of admitting the visitor into this back room of the temple of justice.

"I know he's one of your suspects," the prosecutor laughed, at the same time pressing a button which sounded a buzzer in the reception room. "Yes, he's one of the figures in this case of errors you're playing, but I'll not inform him that, in your eyes, he's one of the possible thieves. You may go ahead suspecting whom you will without interfering on my part."

The swinging door opened, and Griswold sauntered into the room. The cordial smile he bestowed on Mott faded to superciliousness when he beheld Britz. He glanced at the detective as if resentful of his presence.

"I presume you can guess why I called," he said familiarly to the prosecutor.

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