

BRITZ

OF HEADQUARTERS

BY MARCIN BARBER

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"I hate to dry into any young lady's little keepsakes," he said in a patronizingly patronizing manner. "But, as Miss Holcomb hasn't been to Maiden Lane in such a long time, I know she won't object. Now, this little box, of course, contains nothing but trinkets or odds and ends—love-letters, mementoes, etc. It's not a very valuable thing, but it's a little souvenir—huh! of old romances, perhaps. Eh, it's great to be a summer girl, Miss Holcomb. If only you had jewels like Mrs. Missioner's, you'd shine with the best of them. Gee, but that must be a beauty, that necklace, if the imitation is so pretty."

He stirred the contents of the box. Nothing else remained to be searched. He had ransacked the intimate sanctity of the girl's room. He felt baffled and sorely irritated. A thought of failure he thrust his fingers into the box with such violence that everything it held fell to the floor. Carson stooped to pick up the scattered jewelry, placing it in Donnelly's hand to be returned to the box. After recovering several bits of jewelry, he laid in his big colleagues' greedy clutch a small, round object wrapped in silk tissue.

"Hello, what's this?" exclaimed Donnelly, rolling the fairy parcel in his finger and thumb. "You won't mind if I peep in the paper, young lady of course you won't. And this is only a—say, what the mischief is it? Oh, glory!"

Even Carson was startled into exclaiming "Oh!" and the three were almost screamed. For, nestled in the folds of the tissue, its facets twinkling in the persistent green glow of the vacuum lights, flashed a diamond, unmistakable and Dorothy and Elton recognized as one of the lesser gems from the Maharane necklace—much smaller than the Maharane diamond, but twice the size of an ordinary stone. And it was a diamond, even novice could tell was genuine!

All the blood left Elton's face. The muscles of her throat leaped and knotted as if she were strangling. She swayed for a moment, and then, with a long shudder, covering her face with quivering hands, Donnelly held the diamond to the light, was about to speak in what words, what manner, one can guess, when the mysterious in the girl's attitude struck the triumphant grin from his face, and there was momentary compassion in the tone in which he said:

"We'd better go back to the library, I guess. With me, go with my side partner, Miss Holcomb."

Carson's advance to the library was checked by the violence with which she whirled towards Mrs. Missioner, again with outstretched hands. This time the girl was in the meeting the appeal. She was stunned by the detective's discovery. All the finer sensibilities of her womanhood were benumbed. Astonishment large and compelling, was all she could feel for the moment. Still, the girl's imploring hands in hers and stood motionless, listening to the girl's passionate entreaty not to believe the evidence of her eyes, nor to believe her kindness could be outraged in such a way, not to believe that Elton for all the jewels in the mines of the world could be tempted from the high honor in which she had been reared. Clapping the younger woman's locked fingers in her own soft palm, she slipped her arm about Elton's waist, and walked with her to the lift. Dorothy, crying almost childishly, controlled her voice once or twice long enough to beg Elton not to give way to such torturing emotion.

But Elton Holcomb, shaking, sobbing, wildly bereaving, was oblivious to the silent watchfulness of the Central Office men, the covert glances from Blodgett's mask-like countenance, the amazed stare of the liveried youth in the elevator. All the way to the room in which Sands and Griswold and Ransome were waiting, Elton for all the jewels in the mines of the world could be tempted from the high honor in which she had been reared. Clapping the younger woman's locked fingers in her own soft palm, she slipped her arm about Elton's waist, and walked with her to the lift. Dorothy, crying almost childishly, controlled her voice once or twice long enough to beg Elton not to give way to such torturing emotion.

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"You won't have to telephone the Chief, Mr. Man," said Donnelly to Sands with as direct a sneer as he thought advisable. "This has been one of our cases, and you know it. His fat hand was extended toward the millionaire. In a crease of the palm the diamond blazed as if indignantly at such a setting. Sands glared at the stone, Griswold gazed at it as if spellbound. Ransome polished his glasses with much deliberation and, adjusting them with equal precision, looked at the gem.

"This one's the goods, eh?" the detective went on. Ransome, with marked fastidiousness, took the jewel from his hand and examined it as if his reputation as an expert depended on his test. Reluctantly, he returned the gem to Donnelly and said, gently, with a pitying glance at Elton:

"It is a diamond. A sweeping figure from Sands as he sprang to his feet fung the telephone from the desk. He reached Donnelly in two strides and appeared on the point of gripping him by the throat. But the big detective, for all his bulk and mental slowness, could be quick enough on his feet when he must, and he readily sacrificed dignity to safety. With a single backward spring, he clutched a light chair and, with a yell, he remembered 'I'm an officer!' he shouted. 'You ain't dealing with club stewards here, Mr. Sands. I know you and I know how much you think your money can do. But you can't put anything like that across with me.'"

Sands, breathing hard, took another step towards him. Donnelly gripped the chair for a defensive swing. "I don't care if you know a million Mannings," said the club steward. "If you can't behave like one gentleman to another, it'll be the worse for you. If you don't want to be run in, keep away."

Mrs. Missioner's annoyance and Dorothy's fright, no less than Elton's distress, recalled Sands again. "What does all this mean?" he said to Carson, ignoring the other. But Donnelly was not to be ignored. His successful defiance of a millionaire had heightened his desire for the center of the storm.

"It means," he rapped, "that we know who took Mrs. Missioner's diamonds, and all we've got to do now is to find the rest of 'em. And I guess that won't be a very long job. Come, Miss Holcomb, we and you'll be getting downtown. The Chief wants to see you."

CHAPTER V.

The Brownstone House.

While Elton, helpless in the reaction from her grief, was speeding to Mulberry Street in a taxicab with Donnelly and Carson, a swart, small, gliding out by the servant's door of the Missioner home. His modern garments, Oriental only by faint suggestion in the English looseness of their cut, caught the eye merely by contrast with the snowy turban that covered his head. He moved with the cat tread of one long accustomed to walking on his own soles. His shoes were conventional enough in appearance, but of softer leather than that of ordinary American make.

It was evident that he relied on the silence of his footgear and judging from the caution with which he kept himself out of the house and looked up and down the street without intruding his departure. Seeing no one in the block, he walked swiftly to the corner and turned the corner so sharply that he bolted over a district messenger. A few words in a foreign tongue were his response to the select vernacular of the youngster hurried at him. "Ah," said the messenger, "the gentleman is the utmost of which the astonished boy was capable by way of reply. To be flung to the sidewalk by a personage in a British uniform was a new experience for the tourists' suit with a side of rubber. The girl's attitude struck the triumphant grin from his face, and there was momentary compassion in the tone in which he said:

"We'd better go back to the library, I guess. With me, go with my side partner, Miss Holcomb."

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"Peace be to you, faithful one," answered the other. Not until then did all look his master in the face. The master, who did not wear the evening dress of the Occident in which he had appeared in the opera box adjoining Mrs. Missioner's. His slender, well-knit figure was swathed in the clinging garments of the East—garments of such stuff that the fustianer and rippled with every movement, that seemed to rustle in echo of his thoughts.

"What are your things, Ah?" asked the man on the divan. He gave it a thoughtful tug at a punkahstring and the resultant breeze stirred the smoke wreaths from his narghaleh. "The jewel, O Swami!"

"The other's eyes glinted. 'What of it?' he inquired. 'One's returned the humbler Hindu. 'Vanished!'

"And you did not get it?"

"Swami, I did not. Your servant is a dog and the son of a dog, but he has done his best."

The man on the divan watched his servant through slitted eyes.

"Where is the jewel?" he asked sternly.

"Who knows, holy man?" replied the visitor. "It has taken unto itself wings and in its place a false stone was left. The wit of your servant is completely at fault. I know not where the diamond is."

The Swami did not tell him he had seen the destruction of the false stone by Griswold's heel in the Metropolitan Opera House. He smoked thoughtfully, his fingers knocking and raveling the punkahstring in an absent way.

"And you have come straightway with the news?" he asked.

"As the hawk flies, master," said the servant. There was trepidation in his eyes, but he answered unhesitatingly.

"It is well," the Swami said, between rings of blue smoke. "Wait without. All, and I will have speech with you in a little while."

The visitor, with another low salaam, withdrew as he had entered, backing across the threshold. In the hall, his figure shot to its full height and he flashed a glance of uncertain meaning at the outer side of the portieres. He passed silently up the stairs and slipped into a room above that in which the Swami sat. His cat-like tread carried him to the closet, into which he crept, flattening himself on the floor, he applied his ear to a hole so small it scarcely widened the crack between two boards. He could not see, but he could hear the creak of the Punkah as, after a violent tug by the man on the divan, it continued to swing to and fro.

Hardly had the Hindu left the room when the Swami, like a mummer throwing off a mask, arose briskly from the divan and cast aside the silk robe that enveloped him. The alien turban remained on his head, but in all other respects he was dressed like a Wall Street man. His feet, drawn beneath his robe as he sat on the broad couch, had not shown the patent leather shoes in which they were encased. He slipped them off and, with a gasp and a gasp as if he enjoyed the change from the pungent Eastern to the chilly, he walked to the door and looked out. Up and down the room he walked, pausing from time to time with juddering forehead and hand resting on the edges of his coat pockets. Then he walked softly to a door at one side of the room, and opening it a little way, called softly:

"Kananda."

A man of mature years came in quietly and looked inquiringly at the Swami. He was of portly build, but his vigor still showed traces of the athletic training he had followed in English schools and colleges. His western manner and excellent English were not in surprising contrast to his Indian avowedness among the educated of the period had sprung from the day when he remarked it was not his fault his father was a Maharajah, and that it shouldn't be treasured against him, even though he couldn't live it down. Nandy, as they called him on the banks of the Ganges, had stuck to him wherever men foregathered, from the Strangers' Club of the Straits Settlement to White's and the Union League.

"What's the row, your reverence?" asked the Chief. He had entered a hall lighted only by a glimmer that slipped through the glass from a gas lamp in the street. A voice in the dark asked a question in a language somewhat like that the Hindu took to the North, the Casino, the East Drive of the Central Park, the Hindu pulled the check strap and gave new directions to the cabman. The bandstand turned out of the park at Seventy-second Street and rubbed its nose at the North, the Casino, the East Drive of the Central Park, the Hindu pulled the check strap and gave new directions to the cabman. The bandstand turned out of the park at Seventy-second Street and rubbed its nose at the North, the Casino, the East Drive of the Central Park, the Hindu pulled the check strap and gave new directions to the cabman.

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CHAPTER VI.

The Third Degree.

Police Headquarters—the old headquarters of Mulberry Street—was one of the architectural monstrosities of New York. Fronting Mulberry Street, it added brick walls presented a forbidding aspect to the ancient, tumble-down rookeries across the way. Its rear walls faced Mott Street, harmonizing with the squalid tenements of that narrow, ill-smelling thoroughfare. It was a type of public building now happily obsolete, which an awakened artistic sense is rapidly relegating to the scrap heap. Its rigid lines were set in concrete, as if it were another type of public building now happily obsolete, which an awakened artistic sense is rapidly relegating to the scrap heap.

Visitors to the Detective Bureau entered a dingy room, approached by a narrow hall, on the Mott Street side of the building. Its most conspicuous furnishings were several brass rails which crossed one another in bewildering fashion. Half-open doors led boldly into other offices, as if it were the atmosphere of secrecy that hovered perpetually over the place. Two uniformed lieutenants of police were constantly on guard at open desks backed against opposite walls. On the narrow following the Missioner diamond robbery, the two guards were busy sorting piles of documents scattered over their desks.

"Guess it's time for the line-up," remarked one of the lieutenants.

He entered the adjoining room, a large square chamber, in which the rays from clusters of electric bulbs mingled with the pale, shivery light of the sun.

"Here's the list," he called to the desk lieutenant, at the same time handing a bundle of documents to him.

Massed against the opposite wall in listless attitudes were fifty or sixty detectives, their faces covered by white masks. They waited for the prisoners to be brought before them for inspection. This daily spectacle, terrifying to the innocent suspects, amusing to the old-time law-breakers, marks the beginning of the morning's routine of the man detailed to prevent crime and hunt down criminals. Not a pleasing exhibition, but a necessary one. For the opportunity must be provided for the detectives to become familiar with the countenances of the lawbreakers. And by the simple device of the masks, the hunters are shielded from becoming equally familiar to the hunted.

The opening of the door at the rear of the room brought the waiting detectives to attention. Their former manner became watchfully alert.

"Good-morning," greeted Chief of Detectives Manning. The men saluted in return.

With quick, nervous strides the Chief made his way behind the long desk, took up half the length of the room, and took up a position of survey. His eyes, of hawklike penetration, swept the room while the desk lieutenant called the roll. The absentees having been called on the blot, the process of lining up the prisoners began without further ceremony.

A line of bedraggled, disheveled men and women, their eyes bleary from a night of wakefulness, in narrow, unventilated cells, shuffled into the room.

"Michael Noonan," droned the lieutenant.

An emaciated, weak-faced man, the wretchedness of his lot emphasized by the frayed clothing that hung in loose, broken lines from his form, stepped forward. A look of dull misery was stamped on his countenance, a hopeless disregard of the fate in store for him showed in his manner.

"Take a good look at this crook," commanded the Chief. "Never was pinched before. Caught with the Wolf. Swipin' lead pipe from a half-finished house."

The eyes of the detectives bent on the human wreck as he shrank back into line.

"Philip Pratt," called the lieutenant. A young man, not more than thirty, whose sullen mien and restless eyes betrayed his occupation even before the Chief announced it, faced the masked battery of eyes. His thin lips curled into a distasteful smile as the Chief read his record from a slip of paper.

"Another old friend back," the head of the detective force commented. "Philip Pratt, alias Morse, alias Charlie Dodge, alias Toledo Phil. Confidence game. Did a turn in the pen for a short stretch up the river, and a leg in Joliet."

The particular offense for which the prisoner was in the toils again was described, and he, too, retired to temporary obscurity in the lines of the unfortunate.

"Carrie Chase," came from the lieutenant. Member of that frail sisterhood whose shame is no deeper than that of the civilization from which it is born, she carried herself with an easy dignity born of familiarity with her surroundings. The heavy lines of her face were drawn into an expression of grim defiance, but her eyes, dulled by long desecration, could not hide the dumb fear that lurked in her soul.

"Got away with a gent's super," the Chief drawled. He displayed a gold watch as if it held all the triumph of his years of pursuit in the underworld. "But we found the goods on her," he added smugly.

Her career was part of the elemental knowledge of the assembled detectives and the Chief dismissed her quickly.

"The chances are she'll do a long stretch this trip," he commented. "Every condition of moral obliquity was represented in that shifting line of prisoners. There were youths, still in the formative period of their criminal careers, trying with the old-timers in the forced bravado of their demagogues. Others there were, shamefaced and sad, overcome with remorse, and praying silently for the

termination of the painful spectacle. Still others, old men and young men, regarding the proceedings with the indifference of disinterested spectators. And there were women, too, from the bedridden "badger queen," her hair and complexion as false as the jewels shimmering from her fingers, an throat, to the tremulous, weeping restaurant cashier, accused of going petty defalcation. They represented types as varied as the emotions struggling within them, but as they stood side by side facing the expressionless masks, they seemed headed toward the same ultimate destiny. One by one, another they stepped forward for inspection until the line was exhausted. When the last of them had filed out of the room, the detectives did not move their masks, as was the custom. Instead, they stood about in a high fever of expectancy. Quizzical glances were cast in the direction of the door leading to the cells. Suddenly the men bulked forward, as if inspired by a common impulse of curiosity. The vision of a woman, accompanied by the tread of masculine feet, sounded in the doorway. A woman's form, her head bent to her breast, her limbs unable to bear the weight of her frail body, was being half dragged, half carried into the room. All the line seemed to have drained out of her. Her hair hung disordered over her shoulders, her hands swung limp, like loose pendulums.

"Elton Holcomb!" cried the lieutenant.

Donnelly and Carson, each with an arm under her shoulder, propped her shuffling form.

"Lift your head," commanded the Chief.

The order fell on deaf ears. She seemed as one in the last agony of a mortal illness.

"Lift it for her," came in a voice of mingled sternness and compassion. Donnelly's hand flew to her shoulder, lifting her face upward. For an instant she raised her heavy eyelids, then recoiled as from a blow. The crowd of masked spectators floated before her eyes like hideous spectres of a horrid dream. A low groan, like the last lament of a tormented soul, came from her lips. She seemed turned into a mass of jelly.

"Take her away," commanded the Chief, and the two detectives carried her out of the room.

"Accused of stealing the Missioner diamonds," was the curt explanation of her presence. In a harsh monotone, the Chief read the various quarters orders to the force, and then the men not engaged on old work received their assignments of new cases. As abruptly as he had entered, the head of the Bureau left the room and retired to his private office. Then he summoned Donnelly and Carson.

"Takes it pretty bad, eh?" he asked.

"Like all the swell ones when they're nabbed the first time," answered Carson.

"Had to call the doctor twice during the night, the matron tells me," informed Donnelly.

"Did she make any statement on the way to Headquarters?" inquired the Chief.

"Nothing but hysterics," Carson answered.

"And she's in no condition to be questioned now," added Donnelly.

"Anyone been inquiring for her?" the Chief suddenly snapped.

"Yes," flashed back Donnelly. "A guy who says he's a doctor and is supposed to marry her. He's been hanging around here all morning. Wants to know how he can get her out. Look as if he might be mixed up in it, as I'm having him shadowed."

"Good," commented the Chief. "If a lawyer calls, tell him she's in no condition to be seen. We don't want anyone to see her until we've questioned her."

It was late in the afternoon before Miss Holcomb was escorted into the hospital chamber. She had fallen into a fitful slumber on the rude iron bed that projected from the wall of her cell, when Donnelly and Carson opened the grated door and called her out of her sleep. She gave a start and gasped when she saw them, a convulsive shudder racked her frame. A sudden influx of painful memories overwhelmed her with a pitiful sense of helplessness as she dragged herself to the office of the Chief.

With a show of courage, she eyed Manning resolutely, and then sank into a soft leather chair close to his desk. Donnelly and Carson occupied seats at her elbow.

"What did you do with those stones?" the Chief asked, with those without utterance.

"Come, come!" he cried impatiently.