

THE CASE OF A PRIVATE DETECTIVE

BY DAVID CORNELL

Inside History of the Methous Employed in Criminal Investigation, Embracing True Narratives of Interesting Cases by a Former Operative of the William J. Burns Detective Agency.

3—The Hollister Jewel Robbery

THE STORY OF A MYSTERIOUS THEFT

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(Editor's Note.—In order that no advantage may accrue through the publication of these narratives to persons involved in the cases, names and places have in many instances been substituted for the real ones.)

One Monday morning in August, 1910, the Independent Burglary Insurance Company called up the office of the Burns Detective Agency and requested that an operative be sent to their offices at once.

"Cornell," said the manager to me, "you haven't had any experience in the burglary insurance line, but I guess you can handle the work. Go over and see what's up. And, say, Cornell, remember this, this agency is retained by the year by this insurance company. One of our big customers. Treat their work accordingly."

I found the offices of the Independent Company in a forty-second street building not far from Fifth avenue. On presenting my card I was ushered at once into the private office of the vice president, Mr. Blaney.

"Ah! The man from the Burns Agency," said Mr. Blaney. "Cornell is the name? Ah, yes; glad they sent you, Mr. Cornell. We've heard something of your work. You've never handled any of our cases, have you?"

"Not any," I said.

"Well, fortunately this isn't a complicated case, or at least we don't think it is. It's merely a matter of investigation to assure ourselves of the propriety of a policy holder's claim. A mere matter of form, almost. We always investigate all claims for payment, you know. Sometimes we are convinced that something is wrong; then we instruct your agency to find something for us to start a fight on. In this case, it isn't anything like that. In brief, Col. Malcolm P. Hollister, who lives on Long Island sound, was entered by burglars Saturday night and Mrs. Hollister's diamonds and pearls, valued at \$75,000, and insured for \$50,000, were stolen. There is scarcely the slightest possibility that there is anything wrong in the case. Col. Hollister is a fine, high-minded man, a gentleman of the old school. He has paid this company thousands of dollars in premiums for the last ten years and never presented a claim before this. We are all of the opinion that we will pay his claim in full, in due time. But—as a matter of fact, you understand—we're sending you down to look the thing over. Being new to the experience, and full of our interests as well as the feelings of Col. Hollister and his family. Assume yourself that the burglary was committed, that Mrs. Hollister's diamonds and pearls were stolen. That is the case."

That was enough, for before I had got through with it the Hollister case had developed into a case so sensational, so full of strange features that the Independent Burglary Insurance Company never dreamed of, that even today it is spoken of in the office of the agency as "the Hollister case."

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stairs, the window of the room had been opened, the jewel drawer had been forced and the jewels taken. "A plain case of robbery by someone who had studied the premises for a long time," said the colonel.

I asked a score of questions to throw them off the scent, and in the meantime I took a careful look at that window. It was 30 feet from the ground in a wall that looked as if it had been built by a giant, and the marks on the frame, and then I nearly whistled in surprise. The marks were made by some clumsy round instrument not at all resembling the efficient jimmy of the experienced burglar.

"An amateur's job," said I to myself. I looked more closely, and saw that the window never had been forced open at all. It had been left un-locked. The marks had been put in for a blind, or I was no judge. To force open such windows as were in the Hollister house required considerable leverage, and the marks of the tool used are sure to sink deep into the wood. In this case, the surface of the frame was only bruised, scarcely dented at all. The windows were not locked when the burglar came to do his work! Whoever had done the job had done it from the inside. The window had no part in it.

I thanked the Hollisters for their courtesy, excused myself because it was growing late, and said it would be necessary for me to pay another short visit to the house in the morning.

"I see that the man who did this job is an old experienced hand," I said, as I took my departure. "The signs of an old-time's work are all over the job. I'm afraid we'll have a hard time recovering your jewels, Mr. Hollister, if we ever do."

As I said this I watched her closely and I thought that a slight look of relief seemed to flicker in her eyes; but instantly she began to lament.