

## A PSYCHOLOGICAL MYSTERY.

"MR. GIERS, Feldon has gone and left things down there in confusion. I have just received a dispatch; he has taken along all the stock, securities and the private papers. You must go down at once and look the matter up. Get those papers at all hazards. As the scoundrel left but yesterday, he must be within reach. My private car will take you as far as the City of Mexico; there you take the Narrow Gauge to Orizaba. Your old friend, Jackson, will meet you at the station and assist you. Get ready. Steam is up; in five minutes you will have to start."

The morrow was to have been my wedding day. I was sorry to think of the annoyance which this sudden departure would cause my beautiful Beatrice and her family. I had long learned to make the interests of my chief my own; delay was impossible. I could not even bid them good-bye; duty before everything.

With feelings in which bitterness was curiously blended with satisfaction—satisfaction with the new evidence of confidence that I was giving—I said that I would be ready.

Returning to my office, I hastily wrote a note to Beatrice, took a box of cigars, and, in another two minutes, found myself in the chief's private car. He handed me written instructions and a cheque book, and, wishing me a safe journey, gave the signal to the engineer. A shrill whistle and away we sped at a tremendous rate.

I read the instructions carefully. Special stress was laid upon the recovery of those private papers which the chief had mentioned. Being acquainted with the country, I was sanguine of success, if I could but get hold of Feldon, although I did not know him personally.

We reached El Paso almost before I knew it. On we sped through Mexico until we reached Queretaro, where an accident happened to the car. Fortunately we were within twenty minutes of the night express from Aguas Calientes to the City of Mexico, which stops at Queretaro.

Having telegraphed to the chief regarding the accident, I ordered the car and the engine side-tracked until the next day and procured a ticket for a first-class compartment to the City of Mexico.

I say "a first-class compartment" because the ticket agent had informed me that the express was made up of English coaches, with doors on both sides. I don't feel myself called upon to discuss the difference between British coaches and American cars, but although there are some disadvantages in English coaches, owing to the fact that the passengers face each other, a first-class compartment when occupied by one or two passengers

is certainly far more convenient than the American car with its two-seat chairs. The seats, which run the whole width of the English compartment coaches, are comfortably upholstered, with soft arm-rests and head-cushions.

I was talking with the engineer, who swore at the Mexicans in choice machine-shop terms, when the express rushed into the station. I was ushered into a compartment by the conductor, the engine gave a shriek, and we sped to the City of Mexico.

The light in the compartment being rather dim, I did not, on entering, observe the presence of any other person. But I was made aware that I had a fellow traveller by something like a growl. My companion had evidently been disturbed in his slumber, and did not greatly relish it. As I looked more closely, I saw that he was well dressed, of gigantic size, and evidently an American. I apologized for the intrusion, but he made no answer. I had been travelling alone the whole day, and was inclined to talk to some one, so, nothing daunted, I stepped across to his corner and offered him a cigar; he refused and turned his head toward the window.

I said no more, and drawing my soft felt over my eyes, I tried to sleep. But—how shall I say it?—a mysterious power seemed to keep me awake. Opening my eyes, they met the steady gaze of the stranger. Again I closed them, and feigned sleep by a good imitation of a snore, while I looked at him through half-closed lids.

His gaze was still upon me; turn as I might, my eyes reverted to his, and the annoyance which I felt at first soon changed to horror, for suddenly his eyes took that strange brilliancy peculiar to savage beasts and the insane. The longer I looked at him, the firmer my conviction grew that I was a companion to a madman. It is literally true that this knowledge positively paralyzed me, for, as I thought of rising, I could not move. The horror grew so intense that I felt the perspiration oozing from every pore of my body.

My thoughts chased one another through my brain with the rapidity of lightning; my school days, my life as a newsboy, my meeting with the chief, my first step to an honored position, my lovely affianced, my rise to the highest position in the gift of the chief, my race after Feldon—all flashed before my mind, and there I was, my eyes spellbound by those of the madman.

I tried to recall my energy; I sought to coax my limbs into mobility. I reasoned with my fingers, asking them to move just a little; I knew that if they but moved one-hundredth of an inch I should be safe. I tried to persuade them to move in the direction of my overcoat pocket,

where I had my Smith & Wesson double action hammerless revolver.

The madman rose and slowly came toward me. What a tremendous fellow he was! His head touched the ceiling; his glance went right through me. He put his hand into my overcoat pocket, out of which he took my revolver and slipped it into his own pocket. As he did so he smiled a ghastly smile, more horrifying even than his gaze. Now he tapped me on the forehead, and at the same time saying: "Get up, mister!"

His touch acted on me like a powerful battery. I was up in an instant, strange to say, and as I stood on my feet my faculties returned, but with them the recognition that I was absolutely at the disposition of the merciless maniac.

For a moment I thought that he had hypnotized me and wanted some sport, but I soon found out my mistake. He was obviously insane.

I cried: "What do you want of me, sir?"

"I want you!" he replied ferociously.

"You want my money, I suppose. Here it is," and I handed him my pocketbook.

"Keep your money; I am not a robber. I am a philanthropist."

"And what do you want of me?"

"I want to show you an invention of my own; the automatic executioner."

"I shall be pleased to see it," said I.

"Shall you? I am glad of that."

With this he took from his pocket a curiously twisted cord and continued thus: "I have worked on this for years, and am at last ready to show the world what real genius is like. As sheriff of Montreal, I have executed many criminals in my time, but their last struggle was always a disgusting one. My invention does away with all this; one end of the electro-automatic-executioner is fastened to a hook, the noose is slipped over the criminal's head, and in a fraction of a second he is with the silent majority. Do you see the advantage of my invention?"

I thought it advisable to humor the trend of his mania, and said:

"This is truly a great invention. I should like to introduce this among the politicians of San Francisco."

"Introduce it, eh? Why, yes, certainly; it shall be introduced, but I will do that myself!"

"And what do you want me to do in the matter?" I asked, trembling at the thought dawned upon me that he possibly wanted to try his invention on me. His answer confirmed my fears. He said:

"You? Why, you shall be made glorious by verifying the utility of my invention. I have been hunting in every country in the world for the proper person, worthy enough for that grand