



For Afternoon Callers

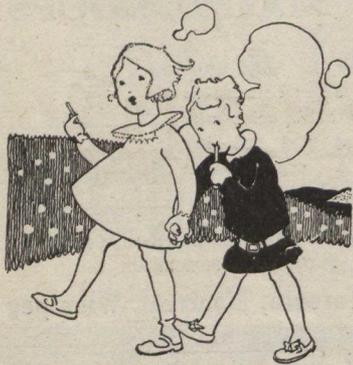
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had not moved the parcel in an absent-minded moment just before going out. He looked everywhere, under the bed, in the wardrobe, in his own suit-case, in the drawers, big and little. He drew blank every time. After that he put his hands in his pockets, whistled softly, and proceeded to think.

Most people, placed in this predicament, would have rushed to the bell, summoned the manager and initiated a movement of inquiry. But such a notion never entered Jimmie's mind. He knew things about this affair which he was not going to communicate to any hotel manager on earth. He wanted anything rather than inquiry, commotion, bother—the proper course was one of secrecy and quiet procedure. But, on what lines? It was very evident to him that Monsieur Charles was already at work. Jimmie's active brain had already conceived how the theft of the parcel had probably taken place. To begin with, Charles had most likely had him watched from the moment they parted at the Gare du Nord. There need have been no difficulty about that. Jimmie had noticed that at the cafe to which the Frenchman had taken him for dejeuner Charles was well known, and had exchanged greetings with several men. Secondly, it was evident that somebody who knew definitely what he wanted had entered Jimmie's room and purloined the parcel. That could have been done by either of two means—Charles might have some agent amongst the hotel servants to whom he had wired immediate instructions, or he might have commissioned some person in his employ to take a room at the hotel in close proximity to Jimmie's, to watch Jimmie out and to enter in his absence. All these things were within the bounds of reasonable probability—the sure and certain part was that the parcel was gone. By that time Monsieur Charles, agent and receiver of the thieves in London, would know that the booty sent over to him under cover of the innocent present had been intercepted and abstracted by him, Jimmie Trickett. And now, what would Monsieur Charles do?

It was characteristic of the Trickett temperament that Jimmie quickly made up his mind as to what he himself was going to do. He had already recognized that he was not dealing with any ordinary gang of thieves. In all probability there was over there in London a highly-equipped, clever, resourceful organization; it was only reasonable to suppose that there was just as highly organized a combination of ingenuity on this side of the water. That combination doubtless knew by this time that he, Jimmie, had foiled it in this particular case. Therefore, it would keep a sharp eye on him. And—there was Eva Walsden to consider.

JIMMIE quickly made himself ready for going out. Once more he locked his door; once more he walked away from the hotel. It was fortunate, he reflected as he did so, that he had comfortable knowledge of Paris. That knowledge enabled him to go straight to the headquarters of the police. Within a few minutes he was closeted with a high personage of the detective department. To him Jimmie, in his most business-like fashion, told the entire story, as he knew it, from the disappearance of the Tsar's Cross at Scraye to his discovery of it in the wickerwork hamper. The high personage, already sworn to secrecy, heard this marvelous narrative with a deep interest and enjoyment which he made no attempt to conceal. Indeed, he rubbed his hands over it, foreseeing many things. "And at present, monsieur?" he asked when Jimmie had made an end. "At present?"

"At present, monsieur, absolute secrecy on this side until you hear from me in London, where I return to-morrow morning," replied Jimmie. "But to-night—your assistance."

"Of what nature, then?" asked the official.

"This. I want one of your very best men—the best, the trustiest, the most resourceful man at your disposal, to keep in touch with me from this even-

ing and through the night until I leave the Gare du Nord to-morrow morning. I will pay handsomely for his services—now. There need be no trouble about expenses—I am a rich man. I may not need any special service—again, I may. But I want him to be at hand if I need him. You have such a man?"

The high personage smiled, and picking up a tube spoke a few words into its mouthpiece. Almost immediately the door opened and a well-dressed gentleman, spectacled and bearded, who might have passed for a highly respectable merchant or lawyer or doctor, entered the room.

"Monsieur Schmidt," murmured the high official with a glance at Jimmie. "At your immediate disposal, monsieur."

Jimmie saluted Monsieur Schmidt, and turned to the chief.

"You will perhaps explain briefly to Monsieur Schmidt how the matter lies when I am gone?" he said. "I am a little pressed for time. But I will explain now to Monsieur Schmidt exactly what I want to-night. It is this," he continued, turning to the detective. "This evening, Monsieur, at half-past six, I dine with a lady at the cafe at the bottom of the Rue Royale—you know it?—yes? I wish you to be there, to follow us in, or to be there when we arrive—that, perhaps, would be better—to dine there yourself, to follow me when we leave. We shall go to some theatre—you will follow us there. When we leave that I shall escort the lady to an address in the Rue de la Paix—the bonnet-shop of Valerie et Cie. You will see me leave her there. After that I wish you to spend the night at my hotel—the Grand. I am now going to telephone to the hotel to order a room for you—a friend of mine, you understand?—close to my own. We shall meet, then, at midnight, at your room there. All you have to do is to ask for the room ordered for you by Mr. Trickett. Is it all plain?"

"Perfectly, monsieur," murmured the detective. "I comprehend matters precisely. I shall have my suit-case forwarded to the hotel during the evening to be in readiness on my arrival."

"That's all right," said Jimmie. He drew out his pocket-book, handed certain banknotes to the high personage, exchanged a few words with him as to secrecy and future developments, and went away. At the next telephone call-box he rang up the hotel, and secured a room for his friend—the next room to his own. And that done, he strolled off to the Rue Royale to await the appearance of Eva Walsden.

"Lay fifty pounds to fifty farthings that I'm being followed," mused Jimmie as he lounged carelessly beneath the lamps. "I only hope that the chief there was right when he said that Schmidt was absolutely unknown to the criminal aristocracy of Paris. If he is so, it helps matters."

AS Jimmie waited for his lady guest at the door of the restaurant, Schmidt, still the highly-respectable, top-hatted, gloved and umbrella'd citizen, intent on nothing but dinner and the relaxation of the evening, came along the street. He glanced at Jimmie, showed no more recognition of him than of the nearest lamp-post, and walked ahead into the brilliantly-lighted interior. Five minutes, later, Jimmie, entering with Eva, caught sight of him leisurely sipping an aperitif. And for some reason for which he could not account, he felt relieved to know that he and his companion were under expert surveillance.

Jimmie, as he came to keep his appointment, had debated the question of telling Eva Walsden of the events of the day. He had an uneasy feeling that she might be in some danger, the exact nature of which he could not prophecy. And yet, if he told her everything, she might form an entirely wrong impression of himself. She might, for instance, knowing as little of him as she did, get the idea that he had been exploiting her for his own interest in tracking down Charles and the gang behind him. In any case, she would be seriously alarmed. He decided that the best thing to do was to follow his usual policy of letting matters take their course; he, at any

rate, would take care that she returned to London in safety. After that—

"You have seen no more of Monsieur Charles?" he asked as they settled down to dinner. "He hasn't been in again?"

"I have seen no more of Monsieur Charles," she answered. "But—I have heard from Madame in London."

She made a little grimace of amused annoyance as Jimmie turned and stared at her.

"From Madame Charles!" he exclaimed. "What—since I saw you? How?"

"By telephone—this afternoon. I suppose Monsieur Charles has been telephoning to her. She is—furious."

"Furious? What—about the hamper?"

"About the hamper. She—abused me—frantically. She blamed me entirely. And she said I must at once do all I could to find the hamper—leave all business and set to work at once."

"What time was this?" asked Jimmie, after a moment's silent consideration.

"Time? Oh, about half-past one. Of course, I could do nothing. I don't understand why there is so much fuss about that ridiculous goose. Still—I shall have a very unpleasant quarter of an hour with Madame when I return."

"You had better allow me to see her," remarked Jimmie. "I'll take all the blame. And perhaps I can bring her to see reason."

He felt as he spoke that it was all very well saying this; but, after all, it was mere talk. He knew now that Monsieur Charles must have telephoned to London as soon as he, Jimmie, had left him; that showed the anxiety he felt about the missing valuables. Well, Jimmie knew of later things than this. Unconsciously, he glanced across at Monsieur Schmidt. That gentleman, apparently very much at his ease, was eating his dinner with all the enjoyment of your true Parisian—for all the sign that he showed of it there might have been no crime in the world. His calm face gave Jimmie courage.

"Eh bien!" he said suddenly. "Hang Madame and Monsieur and their old goose. Let's enjoy ourselves."

He gave himself up to entertaining his companion, pressed all the dainties of the season upon her, showed her every attention, finally drove her off to a theatre and did all in his power to give her a pleasant evening. And always he was conscious of the presence of Monsieur Schmidt. He was on evidence at the theatre; Jimmie felt that he was at hand when he left Eva at the house in the Rue de la Paix. And, when, half an hour later, Jimmie knocked at the door of the bedroom next to his own, the detective opened it with a smile and a bow.

"There you are!" said Jimmie, cordially. "Come into my room and have a drink—I've got the materials there. I—hullo!"

Inside Jimmie's room, the door of which he had left open, the telephone bell began ringing. Jimmie turned and ran back to seize the receiver.

"Hullo—hullo!" he exclaimed.

"Who's that?"

The next instant he turned a frightened face to the detective.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "This is Miss Walsden calling me!"

(To be continued.)

ANOTHER OPTIMIST.

AMONG the passengers on a train on a one-track road in the Middle West was a talkative jewelry drummer. Presently the train stopped to take on water, and the conductor neglected to send back a flagman. An express came along and, before it could be stopped, bumped the rear end of the first train. The drummer was lifted from his seat and pitched head first into the seat ahead. His silk hat was jammed clear down over his ears. He picked himself up and settled back in his seat. No bones had been broken. He drew a long breath, straightened up, and said: "Well, they didn't get by us, anyway."