

Ottolengui Rodrigues

An Artist in Crime



Rodrigues Ottolengui

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CHAPTER I.

A GENTLEMAN THINKS HE CAN COMMIT A CRIME AND ESCAPE DETECTION

"Jack Barnes never gets left, you bet."

"That was a close call, though," replied the Pullman porter who had given Mr. Barnes a helping hand, in his desperate effort to board the midnight express as it rolled out of Boston. "I wouldn't advise you to jump on moving trains often."

"Thank you for your good advice, and for your assistance. Here's a quarter for you. Show me to my section, I am nearly dead, I am so tired."

"Upper ten, right this way, sir. It is all ready for you to turn in."

When Mr. Barnes entered the coach, no one was in sight. If there were other passengers, they were abed. A few minutes later, he himself was patting two little bags of feathers, and placing one atop of the other in a vain attempt to make them serve as one pillow. He had told the porter that he was tired, and this was so true that he should have fallen asleep quickly. Instead, his brain seemed specially active, and sleep impossible.

Mr. Barnes, Jack Barnes, as he called himself to the porter, was a detective, and counted one of the shrewdest in New York, where he controlled a private agency established by himself. He had just completed what he considered a most satisfactory piece of work. A large robbery had been committed in New York, and suspicion of the strongest nature had pointed in the direction of a young man who had immediately been arrested. For ten days the press of the country had been trying and convicting the suspect, during which time Mr. Barnes had quietly left the Metropolis. Twelve hours before we met him, those who read the papers over their toast had been amazed to learn that the suspect was innocent, and that the real criminal had been apprehended by the keen-witted Jack Barnes. What was better, he had recovered the lost funds, amounting to thirty thousand dollars.

He had had a long chase after his man, whom he had shadowed from city to city and watched day and night, actuated to this course by a slight clue in which he had placed his faith. Now, his man fast in a Boston prison, he was on his way to New York for requisition papers. As he had said, he was tired, yet despite his need of complete rest his thoughts persisted in rehearsing all the intricate details of the reasoning which had at last led him to the solution of the mystery. As he lay in his upper berth awake these words reached his ears:

"If I knew that man Barnes was after me, I should simply surrender."

This promised to be the beginning of an entertaining conversation, and as he could not sleep, Mr. Barnes prepared to listen. Extensive experience as a detective had made him long ago forget the philosophic arguments for and against eavesdropping. The voice which had attracted him was low, but his ears were keen. He located it as coming from the section next ahead of his, number eight. A second voice replied:

"I have no doubt that you would. But I wouldn't. You overestimate the ability of the modern detective. I should actually enjoy being hounded by one of them. It would be so much pleasure, and I think so easy, to elude him."

The last speaker possessed a voice which was musical, and he articulated distinctly, though he scarcely ventured above a loud whisper. Mr. Barnes cautiously raised his head, arranging his

pillows so that his ear would be near the partition. Fortunately, the two men next to him had taken the whole section, and the upper berth had been allowed to remain closed. Mr. Barnes now found that he could readily follow the conversation, which continued thus:

"But see how that Barnes tracked this Pettingill day and night until he had trapped him. Just as the fellow supposed himself safe, he was arrested. You must admit that was clever work."

"Oh, yes, clever enough in its way, but there was nothing specially artistic about it. Not that the detective was to blame; it was the fault of the criminal. There was no chance for the artistic." Yet Mr. Barnes had used that very adjective to himself in commenting upon his conduct of this case. The man continued: "The crime itself was inartistic. Pettingill bungled, Barnes was shrewd enough to detect the flaw, and with his experience and skill in such cases the end was inevitable."

"It seems to me either that you have not read the full account of the case, or else you do not appreciate the work of the detective. Why, all the clue he had was a button."

"Ah! Only a button – but such a button! That is where I say that the criminal was inartistic. He should not have lost that button."

"It was an accident I suppose, and one against which he could not have guarded. It was one of the exigencies of his crime."

"Exactly so; and it is these little accidents, always unforeseen, though always occurring, which hang so many, and jail so many, and give our detectives such an easy road to fame. That is the gist of the whole matter. It is an unequal game, this between the criminal and the detective."

"I don't catch what you are driving at?"

"I'll give you a dissertation on crime. Attend! In ordinary business it is brains *versus* brains. The professional man contends with his fellows, and if he would win the race towards fortune he must show more brains. The commercial man competes with other tradesmen all as clever as himself. So it goes from the lawyer to the locksmith, from the preacher to the sign painter. It is brains rubbing against brains, and we get the most polished thought as the result. Thus the science of honest living progresses."

"What has this to do with the criminal class?"

"One moment. Let the philosopher teach you in his own way. With the criminal it is different. He is matched against his superior. Those in his own class do not contend with him; they are rather his partners, his 'pals,' as they term it. His only contention therefore is with the detective who represents society and the law. No man, I suppose, is a criminal from choice, and it is the criminal's necessity which leads to his detection."

"Then all criminals should be caught."

"All criminals should be caught. That they are not is a strong argument against your detective; for every criminal, we may say is actuated by necessity, and therein lies the possibility of his defeat. For example: You may claim that the expert burglar lays his plans in advance, and that the crime being premeditated he should be able to make such careful pre-arrangements that he could avoid leaving tell-tale marks behind him. This, however, is rarely the case, for this reason: the unexpected often, if not always, happens, and for that he has not prepared. In a moment he sees prison ahead of him, and his fear steals away his caution, so that, as we have seen, he does leave a clue behind him."

"But when you say the unexpected happens, you admit the possibility for that to occur which could not have been premised, and therefore could not have been guarded against."

"That is true as the case stands. But remove the necessity which actuates our criminal, and make of him simply a scientific man pursuing crime as an art! In the first place, we get an individual who will prepare for more accidents, and secondly, would know how best to meet emergencies which occur during the commission of his crime. For example: if you will pardon the conceit, were I to attempt a crime I should be able to avoid detection."

"I should think that from your inexperience as a criminal you would be run to earth – well, about as quickly as this man Pettingill. This was his first crime you know."

"Would you be willing to make a wager to that effect?" This last remark fairly startled Mr. Barnes, who instantly understood the meaning, which, however, at first escaped the other listener. He waited eagerly for the reply.

"I don't grasp the idea. Make a wager about what?"

"You said that were I to commit a crime I should be captured about as quickly as Pettingill. If you wish, I will wager that I can commit a crime which will be as much talked of as his, and that I will not be captured, or rather I should say convicted. I would not bet against arrest; for, as we have seen in this very case, the innocent are sometimes incarcerated. Therefore I stipulate for conviction."

"Do I understand you to seriously offer to commit a crime merely to decide a wager? You astound me!"

"No more perhaps than Pettingill has surprised his friends. But don't be alarmed; I shall assume all responsibility. Besides, remember it is not crime that is scowled upon in this century, but detection. I wager with you against that. Come, what do you say; shall it be a thousand dollars? I want a little excitement!"

"Well, you shall have it. At least you shall have the excitement of paying the thousand dollars to me; for though I think you are not really intending to become a criminal, in either event I may as well profit by your offer."

"What do you mean by 'in either event'?"

"Why, if you do not commit a crime you pay; and if you do, I am sure that you would be caught. Then, however much I should regret your disgrace, I warn you that I should cut you dead, and take your money."

"Then you accept the wager?"

"I do!"

"Done. Now for the conditions. I am to have one month in which to plan and commit my crime, and one year for avoiding the detectives. That is, if I am free at the end of one year, and can prove to you that I committed a crime within the stipulated period, I win the wager. If I am in jail awaiting trial, the bet cannot be settled until the law has had its way, and I am either proven innocent or guilty. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly. But what class of crime will you commit?"

"My friend you are inquisitive. The wager is on, and my boasted caution must begin. Therefore, I must not tell you anything of the nature of my intended crime!"

"Why, do you suppose for an instant that I would betray you?"

"Well, yes, that idea does occur to me. Listen. As I said before, the necessities of the criminal prove his Nemesis. The necessities involve the object of the crime. That is always a good starting-point in following up a mysterious case. The more unusual the object the better, since it will fit fewer people. Plunder is the commonest and therefore the least promising to trace from. Revenge is common also, but better, because the special revenge connected with the deed must lead to the special individual most likely to execute such revenge. In this instance, I mean my own case, the object of the crime is so unique, that the detective who discovers it should be able to convict me. A crime committed to decide a wager is perhaps new."

"Its very novelty is your best safeguard."

"Yet there are two ways by which it may be discovered, and that is two too many. Had I undertaken this affair secretly there would really have been but a single way for one to learn my secret, – my own confession. As men have been weak enough to do this before now, I should even in that instance have taken precautions. But with my secret in the possession of a second party, the position is more complex."

"I assure you on my honor that I will not betray you. I will agree to forfeit five times the wager in such an event."

"I prefer that you should be perfectly at liberty in the matter. I expect it to be thus: in your own mind at present you do not think that I shall carry out my purpose. Therefore, your friendship for me is undisturbed. Then you count that, if I do commit a crime, it will be some trivial one that you may bring your conscience to excuse, under the circumstances. But let us suppose that a really great crime should be reported, and for some reason you should suspect me. You will hurry to my rooms before I get out of bed, and ask me flatly whether I am guilty. As flatly I should refuse to enlighten you. You would take this as a confession of guilt. You would perhaps argue that if your surmise were correct you would be an accessory before the fact, and to shield yourself and do your duty you would make a clean breast of it."

"I am beginning to be offended, Bob. I did not think you would trust me so little!"

"Don't get angry, old man. Remember that only a few minutes ago you warned me that you would cut me dead after the crime. We artistic criminals must be prepared against every contingency."

"I did not think when I spoke. I did not mean it."

"Yes, you did, and I am not at all angry. Let it be understood then that you will be at liberty to repeat the facts about this wager should your conscience prick you. It will be best for me to expect and be prepared for such action. But you have not asked what the second danger of discovery is. Can you guess?"

"Not unless you mean as you suggested, your own confession."

"No, though that really makes a third chance. Yet it is so simple. Have you noticed that we can hear a man snoring?"

"No!"

"Listen a moment! Do you not hear that? It is not exactly a snore, but rather a troubled breathing. Now that man is in the third section from us. Do you see the point?"

"I must confess that I would not make a detective."

"Why, my dear boy, if we can hear that fellow, why may not some one in the next compartment be listening to our *tête-à-tête*?" Mr. Barnes fairly glowed with admiration for the fellow's careful consideration of every point.

"Oh, I guess not. Everybody is asleep."

"The common criminal from necessity takes chances like that, without counting on them. I shall not. There is a possibility, however remote, that some one, in Number Ten say, has overheard us. Again he may even be a detective, and worse yet it might be your Mr. Barnes himself."

"Well, I must say if you prepare against such long odds as that you deserve to escape detection!"

"That is just what I will do. But the odds are not so great as you imagine. I read in an afternoon paper that Mr. Barnes had remained in Boston in connection with properly securing his prisoner during the day, but that he would leave for New York to-night. Of course the newspaper may have been wrong. Then in saying "to-night" it may have been inaccurate; but supposing that the statement were true, then there were three trains upon which he might have started, one at seven o'clock, one at eleven, and this one. One in three is not long odds."

"But even if he is on this train, there are ten coaches."

"Again you are wrong. After his hard work on this Pettingill case he would be sure to take a sleeper. Now if you recall the fact, I did not decide to go to New York to-night till the last minute. Then we found that we could not get a whole section, and were about to bunk together in a lower berth when, several more people applying, they determined to put on another coach. Therefore, unless Mr. Barnes secured his ticket during the day, he would inevitably have been assigned to this coach."

"Had you any special reason for suggesting Number Ten?"

"Yes. I know that Number Six is unoccupied. But just as we started some one came in, and I think took the upper berth of Number Ten."

"Mr. Barnes began to think that he would have exceedingly difficult work to detect this man in crime, were he really to commit one, in spite of the fact that he knew so much in advance. The conversation continued:

"Thus, you see, there are two ways by which my object may become known, a serious matter if unguarded against. As, however, I recognize the possibilities in advance, there will be no difficulty whatever, and the knowledge will be of no value to any detective, even though he be your Mr. Barnes."

"How will you avoid that danger?"

"My dear boy, do you suppose for an instant that I would reply to that, after pointing out that a detective may be listening? However, I will give you an idea. I will show you what I meant when I said that Pettingill had blundered. You said that he had lost only a button, and thought it clever in Barnes to trace him from the button. But a button may be a most important thing. If I should lose one of the buttons of my vest, whilst committing a crime, Mr. Barnes would trace me out in much less than ten days, and for this reason, they are the only ones of the kind in the world."

"How does that happen? I supposed that buttons were made by the thousand?"

"Not all buttons. For reasons which I need not tell the possibly listening detective, a friend travelling abroad had a set made especially, and brought them back to me as a present. They are six handsomely cut cameos, half the set having the profile head of Juliet, and the others a similar face of Romeo."

"A romance?"

"That is immaterial. Suppose that I should plan a robbery in order to decide this wager. As necessity would not urge me either as to time or place, I should choose my opportunity, let us say when but one person guarded the treasure. That one I should chloroform and also tie. Next, I should help myself to the designated plunder. Suppose that as I were about to depart a sleeping, uncalculated-for pet dog should jump out and bark furiously? I reach for it and it snaps at me, biting my hand. I grapple it by the throat and strangle it, but in its death throes it bites my vest, and a button falls to the ground and rolls away. The dog is at last silenced. Your ordinary burglar by this time would be so unnerved that he would hasten off, not even realizing that he had been bitten, that blood had flowed, or that the button was lost. Mr. Barnes is sent to the house the next day. The lady suspects her coachman, and Mr. Barnes consents to his arrest, not because he thinks him guilty, but because, as the mistress thinks so, he may be, and then more especially, his arrest will lull the fear of the real culprit. Mr. Barnes would observe blood on the ground, on the dog's mouth, and he would find the button. From the button he would find Mr. Thief, with his hand bitten, and there you are."

"But how should you avoid all that?"

"In the first place, were I really wise, I should not have tell-tale buttons about me at such a time. But let us suppose that the time had not been of my own choosing, then the buttons might have been with me. Assured as I should have been that the only person in the house lay chloroformed and tied, I should not have lost my nerve as did the other individual. Neither should I have allowed myself to be bitten, though if the accident had occurred I should have stopped to wash up the stain from the carpet while fresh, and also from the dog's mouth. I should have discovered the loss of the button, searched for and recovered it, untied the victim, and opened the windows, that the odor of chloroform could pass off during the night. In fact, in the morning the only evidence of crime would have been the strangled dog and the absence of the pelf."

"It is easy enough to explain your actions under supposititious circumstances. But I doubt if in Pettingill's shoes you would have been able to retain your presence of mind, and recover the lost button which led to his final arrest."

"It is possible that you are right, for had I been Pettingill I should have been coerced by necessities as he was. Yet I think I should not have planned such a robbery, choosing my own time as he did, and then have taken with me such a button. But from Mr. Barnes's standpoint, as I said before, very little of the artistic was needed. The button was constructed of a curious old coin. Mr. Barnes went the rounds of the dealers and found the very man who had sold Pettingill the coin. The rest was routine work."

"Well, you are conceited, but I don't mind making a thousand out of your egotism. Now I am sleepy, however, so good-night."

"Good-night, old man. Dream of a way to earn an extra thousand, for I shall win."

For Mr. Barnes himself sleep was now more impossible than ever. He was attracted to this new case, for so he counted it, and was determined to trap the individual who wagered against his acumen. It was a long step towards success to know as much as he had overheard. He would not lose sight of his man during the allotted month. He enjoyed the prospect of allowing him to commit his crime and then quietly taking him in the act. Carefully and noiselessly he dressed himself and slipped out of his berth. Then he crept into one opposite, so that he could have his eye on number eight, and settled down for an all-night vigil.

"It would not surprise me if that keen devil were to commit his crime this very night. I hope so, for otherwise I shall have no sleep till he does."

CHAPTER II.

A DARING AND SUCCESSFUL TRAIN ROBBERY

The train was just approaching Stamford, and from the window in the section which he occupied Mr. Barnes was watching the sun glowing red over the hilltops, when he heard approaching him the guard who had assisted him to jump aboard the night before. The man was making mysterious gestures, from which Mr. Barnes understood that he was wanted. He arose and followed the porter to the smoking-room.

"I think you called yourself Barnes," said the man, "as you jumped aboard last night."

"Yes, what of it?"

"Are you Mr. Barnes the detective?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because, if you are, the conductor wants to see you. There was a big robbery committed on the train during the night."

"The devil!"

"Exactly, but will you come into the next coach?"

"Wait a minute." Mr. Barnes went back into the main part of the coach and tip-toed towards number eight. Gently moving the curtains, he peeped in and looked long and earnestly. He saw two men undoubtedly sleeping soundly. Satisfied therefore that he could leave his watch for a brief period, he followed the porter into the next coach, where he found the conductor waiting for him in the smoking-room.

"You are Mr. Barnes the detective?" asked the conductor. Mr. Barnes assented.

"Then I wish to place in your hands officially a most mysterious case. We took on a lady last night at Boston, who had a ticket to South Norwalk. As we were approaching that point a short time ago she was notified by the porter. She arose and dressed preparatory to leaving the train. A few minutes later I was hurriedly summoned, when the woman, between hysterical sobs, informed me that she had been robbed."

"Of much?"

"She claims to miss a satchel containing a hundred thousand dollars, in jewelry."

"You have stated that adroitly. She claims to miss! What evidence have you that she has met with any loss at all?"

"Of course we cannot tell about the jewelry, but she did have a satchel, which is now missing. The porter remembers it, and we have searched thoroughly with no success."

"We have stopped at New Haven and at Bridgeport. How many persons have left the train?"

"No one has left the sleepers."

"When you say that no one has left the sleepers, I suppose you mean you saw no one leave?"

"No! I mean just what I said. I have sent the porters through the coaches and they report that all our passengers are in their berths. But here we come to a point. If no one has left the train, then the thief must be aboard?"

"Certainly!"

"The woman when she discovered her loss concluded to remain aboard and go on to New York. All the other passengers, save one, are booked for New York. That one is a man, and he is now dressing, as his destination is Stamford. If he leaves he may take the jewels with him, yet what am I to do?"

"State the facts of the case to him. If he is innocent he will willingly submit to being searched. If, however, he refuses, – well we can be guided by circumstances. Call him in here now."

A few minutes later a foreign and distinctly French-appearing man entered. In speech he disclosed his origin, but the accent was slight. He was of fine appearance, dignified and gentlemanly.

Mr. Barnes sat at the window looking out. The conductor with considerable hesitancy explained the case concluding with:

"You see, my dear sir, this is an awkward business, but we are so sure that the thief is still aboard, that – "

"That you hesitate to allow me to leave the train, eh, Monsieur, is it not so? Yet why should there be any trouble? An honest man must never be hurt in his feelings when he is asked to assist the law, even though for the moment he is himself a – what you call it – suspect? In this case it is so simple, if only the honest men will make no trouble. They will say to you – 'Search me.' You do so, and at last one comes who says, 'You insult me.' That one is of course the thief, eh, Monsieur, do you not agree with me?" He turned towards Mr. Barnes, addressing this last remark to him. The detective looked at him a moment steadily, as was his wont when he meant to remember a face. The Frenchman returned the gaze undisturbed.

"I said almost the same thing to the conductor before you came in," said Mr. Barnes.

"Exactly so. Now then with your permission I will disrobe. Look, if you please, most carefully. My honor is at stake. The more carefully you examine, the less suspicion can attach to me hereafter."

The conductor made a thorough search, emptying every pocket and taking every precaution. He did not expect to find anything, but it was essential that extreme care should be observed. Nothing was found, and the man resumed his clothing.

"Now, if you please, I have with me but two small satchels. If the porter will bring them I will unlock them for you. I have no trunk, as I only went to Boston for a day's trip."

The satchels were brought, examined, and nothing found.

"Now, gentlemen, I suppose I am free, as we are at my station. I shall only remain here a few hours and will then go on to New York. If you should wish to see me again I shall stop at the Hoffman House. Here is my card. *Au revoir*."

Mr. Barnes took the card and scrutinized it.

"What do you think?" asked the conductor.

"Think? Oh, you mean of that fellow. You need not worry about him. There is not a shadow of suspicion against him – at present. Besides, should we ever want him, I could find him again. Here is his name – Alphonse Thaurer – card genuine too, of French make and style of type. We can dismiss him now and turn our attention to the other passengers. Do you suppose I could have an interview with the woman?"

"You shall have it if you wish. We will not consult her wishes in the matter. The affair is too serious."

"Very well then send her in here and let me have a few words with her alone. Don't tell her that I am a detective. Leave that to me."

A few minutes later a tall woman apparently about forty-five years of age entered. She was not handsome yet had a pleasing face. As she seated herself she looked keenly at Mr. Barnes in a stealthy manner which should have attracted that gentleman's earnest thought. Apparently he did not notice it. The woman spoke first.

"The conductor has sent me in here to see you. What have you to do with the case?"

"Nothing!"

"Nothing? Then why – "

"When I say I have nothing to do with the case, I mean simply that it rests with you whether I shall undertake to restore to you your diamonds or not. I look after such things for this road, but

if the loser does not wish any action taken by the road, why then we drop the matter. Do you wish me to make a search for the stolen property?"

"I certainly wish to recover the jewels, as they are very valuable; but I am not sure that I desire to place the case in the hands of a detective."

"Who said that I am a detective?"

"Are you not one?"

Mr. Barnes hesitated a moment, but quickly decided on his course.

"I am a detective, connected with a private agency. Therefore I can undertake to look up the thief without publicity. That is your main objection to placing the case in my hands is it not?"

"You are shrewd. There are reasons, family reasons, why I do not wish this loss published to the world. If you can undertake to recover the jewels and keep this robbery out of the newspapers I would pay you well."

"I will take the case. Now answer me a few questions. First, your name and address."

"My name is Rose Mitchel, and I am living temporarily in a furnished flat at – East Thirtieth Street. I have only recently come from New Orleans, my home, and am looking for suitable apartments."

Mr. Barnes took out his note-book and made a memorandum of the address.

"Married or single?"

"Married; but my husband has been dead for several years."

"Now about these jewels. How did it happen that you were travelling with so valuable a lot of jewelry?"

"I have not lost jewelry, but jewels. They are unset stones of rare beauty – diamonds, rubies, pearls, and other precious stones. When my husband died, he left a large fortune; but there were also large debts which swallowed up everything save what was due him from one creditor. This was an Italian nobleman – I need not mention his name – who died almost at the same time as my husband. The executors communicated with me, and our correspondence culminated in my accepting these jewels in payment of the debt. I received them in Boston yesterday, and already I have lost them. It is too cruel, too cruel." She gripped her hands together convulsively, and a few tears coursed down her face. Mr. Barnes mused a few moments and seemed not to be observing her.

"What was the value of these jewels?"

"A hundred thousand dollars."

"By what express company were they sent to you?" The question was a simple one, and Mr. Barnes asked it rather mechanically, though he was wondering if the thief had come across the ocean – from France perhaps. He was therefore astonished at the effect produced. The woman arose suddenly, her whole manner changed. She replied with her lips compressed tightly, as though laboring under some excitement.

"That is not essential. Perhaps I am telling too much to a stranger anyway. Come to my apartment this evening, and I will give you further particulars – if I decide to leave the case in your hands. If not I will pay you for whatever trouble you have in the interim. Good-morning."

Mr. Barnes watched her leave the room without offering to detain her or making any comment on her singular manner. Without rising from his seat he looked out of the window and strummed on the pane. What he thought it would be difficult to tell, but presently he said aloud, though there was no one to hear him:

"I think she is a liar."

Having relieved himself thus, he returned to his own coach. He found two gentlemen in the toilet room allowing themselves to be searched, laughing over the matter as a huge joke. He passed by and entered his own compartment, which the porter had put in order. One after another the few passengers arose, heard of the robbery, and cheerfully passed through the ordeal of being searched.

At last his patience was rewarded by seeing the curtains of number eight moving, and a moment later a fine-looking young man of six-and-twenty emerged, partly dressed, and went towards the toilet. Mr. Barnes sauntered after him, and entered the smoking-room. He had scarcely seated himself before a man entered, who was evidently the other occupant of section eight. Whilst this second man was washing, the conductor explained to the other about the robbery, and suggested that he allow himself to be searched. By this time the conductor was becoming excited. They were within a few minutes of New York, and all his passengers had been examined save these two. Yet these two looked more aristocratic than any of the others. He was astonished therefore to observe that the young man addressed seemed very much disturbed. He stammered and stuttered, seeking words, and finally in a hoarse voice addressed his companion:

"Bob, do you hear, there's been a robbery!"

His friend Bob was bending over the water basin, his head and face covered with a stiff soap lather and his hands rubbing his skin vigorously. Before replying he dipped his head completely under the water, held it so submerged a moment then stood erect with eyes shut and reached for a towel. In a moment he had wiped the suds from his eyes, and looking at his friend he answered most unconcernedly:

"What of it?"

"But – but – the conductor wants to search me."

"All right. What are you afraid of? You are not the thief, are you?"

"No – but –"

"There is no but in it. If you are innocent let them go through you." Then with a light laugh he turned to the glass and began arranging his cravat. His friend looked at him a moment with an expression which no one but Mr. Barnes understood. The detective had recognized by their voices that it was Bob who had made the wager to commit a crime, and it was plain that his friend already suspected him. His fright was occasioned by the thought that perhaps Bob had stolen the jewels during the night and then secreted them in *his* clothing, where if found the suspicion would not be on Bob. Mr. Barnes was amused as he saw the young man actually searching himself. In a few minutes, with a sigh of intense relief, having evidently discovered nothing foreign in his pockets, he turned to the conductor who stood waiting and expectant.

"Mr. Conductor," he began, "I fear that my conduct has seemed suspicious. I can't explain, but nevertheless I am perfectly willing to have you make a search. Indeed I am anxious that it should be a thorough one." The examination was made and, as with the others, nothing was found.

"Here is my card. I am Arthur Randolph, of the firm J. Q. Randolph & Son, Bankers." Mr. Randolph stood a trifle more erect as he said this, and the poor conductor felt that he had done him a grievous wrong. Mr. Randolph continued: "This is my friend, Robert Leroy Mitchel. I will vouch for him."

At the name Mitchel, Mr. Barnes was a trifle startled. It was the same as that which had been given by the woman who had been robbed. At this point, Mr. Mitchel, a man of forty-five, with a classic face, spoke:

"Thanks, Arthur, I can take care of myself."

The conductor hesitated a moment, and then addressed Mr. Mitchel:

"I regret very much the necessity which compels me to ask you to allow yourself to be searched, but it is my duty."

"My dear sir, I understand perfectly that it is your duty and have no personal feelings against you. Nevertheless, I distinctly refuse."

"You refuse?" The words came from the other three men together. It is difficult to tell which was the most surprised. Randolph turned pale and leaned against the partition for support. Mr. Barnes became slightly excited and said:

"That amounts to a tacit acknowledgment of guilt, since every other man has been searched."

Mr. Mitchel's reply to this was even more of a surprise than what he had said before.

"That alters the case. If every one else has submitted, so will I." Without more ado he divested himself of his clothing. Nothing was found. The satchels of both men were brought, but the search was fruitless. The conductor glanced at the detective helplessly, but that gentleman was looking out of the window. One who knew Mr. Barnes could have told that he was fearfully angry, for he was biting the end of his moustache.

"Here we are at the Grand Central," said Mr. Mitchel. "Are we at liberty to leave the train?" Receiving an acquiescent nod the two friends walked to the other end of the coach. Mr. Barnes abruptly started up and without a word jumped from the train as it slowly rolled into the great depot. He went up to a man quickly, said a few words in an undertone, and both went back towards the train. Presently the woman who had been robbed came along, and as she passed out of the building Mr. Barnes's companion followed her. He himself was about to depart, when, feeling a light tap upon his shoulder, he turned and faced Mr. Mitchel.

"Mr. Barnes," said the latter, "I want a few words with you. Will you breakfast with me in the restaurant?"

"How did you know that my name is Barnes?"

"I did not know it, though I do now"; and he laughed in a complacent manner which jarred on Mr. Barnes. The detective felt that this man was getting the best of him at every turn. But for all that he was only the more determined to trap him in the end. Accustomed to think quickly, he decided to accept the invitation, considering that he could lose nothing and might gain much by a further acquaintance. The two men therefore went below to the eating-room, and seated themselves at a small table. After giving the waiter a liberal order, Mr. Mitchel began:

"Won't it be best for us to understand one another from the outset, Mr. Barnes?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do. You asked me a moment ago how I knew your name. As I said, I did not know it, though I suspected it. Shall I tell you why?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"Perhaps I am a fool to show you your first blunder in this game, since you are evidently enlisted against me; but as I sent my friend off alone, purposely for the chance of doing so, I cannot resist the temptation."

"Stop a moment, Mr. Mitchel. I am not such a fool as you take me to be. I know what you are going to say."

"Ah, indeed! that is clever."

"You are about to tell me that I made an ass of myself when I spoke in the coach upon your refusing to be searched."

"Well, I should not have put it quite so harshly, but the fact is this: When you deliberately followed Randolph into the toilet-room, I became suspicious, being, as I was, at your heels. When the conductor spoke to me, I refused purposely, to watch the effect upon you, with the result, as you now see, that I had my suspicion confirmed. I knew that you were a detective, and, that point gained, there was no further reason for refusing the conductor."

"As I said, I acted like an ass. But I did not need this warning. It will not occur again, I assure you."

"Of course I see now that you overheard our conversation last night, and such being the case you naturally suspected me of this robbery. But I am wondering, if you did overhear our talk, why you did not watch me all night." To this Mr. Barnes made no reply. "I have one favor to ask."

"What is it?"

"That you reveal to no one the fact that I have undertaken to commit a crime. You of course are at liberty to play the ferret, and convict me – if you can."

"As surely as you commit a crime, so surely will I convict you of it," replied Mr. Barnes. "It will be perhaps to my interest to keep what I know to myself, but it will not do to make any promises to you. I must be free to act as circumstances direct."

"Very good. I will tell you where I am stopping, and I give you permission to call to see me whenever you please, day or night. I have a suite of rooms at the Fifth Avenue. Now let me ask you one question. Do you think that I committed this robbery?"

"I will answer you with a question. Did you commit this robbery?"

"Capital. I see I have a foeman worthy of my steel. Well – we will leave both questions unanswered, for the present."

CHAPTER III.

MR. BARNES DISCOVERS AN ARTISTIC MURDER

Whilst the meal was progressing, a man silently passed through the room. No one would have guessed that he had any special motive in doing so, for he noticed no one. Neither would one have supposed that Mr. Barnes observed him, for he had his back turned. Yet this was the same individual who upon his instruction had followed Rose Mitchel when she left the train.

Breakfast over, the two men started to leave the restaurant. Reaching the stairway which leads above to the main floor, Mr. Barnes courteously stood aside to allow his companion to ascend first. Mr. Mitchel, however, with a wave of the hand, declined, and followed Mr. Barnes. Whether either had any special design in this was a thought occupying the minds of both as they silently passed up-stairs. Mr. Mitchel had a slight advantage, in that being behind he could watch the detective. There seemed, however, to be little to see. To be sure the man who had passed through the restaurant was idly leaning against the doorway, but as soon as Mr. Barnes's head appeared, and certainly before he could have been noticed by Mr. Mitchel, he stepped out into the street, crossed over, and disappeared into the bank building opposite. Had any signal passed between these two detectives? Mr. Mitchel, despite his shrewdness in sending Mr. Barnes up-stairs ahead of him, saw none, yet this is what occurred: Mr. Barnes said adieu, and walked away. Mr. Mitchel stood in the doorway, gazing after him till he saw him enter the elevated railroad station; then, looking carefully about, he himself walked rapidly towards Sixth Avenue. He did not glance behind, or he might have seen the man in the bank step out and walk in the same direction. They had been gone about five minutes when Mr. Barnes once more appeared upon the scene. He stopped in the doorway, where the other detective had been leaning. Keenly scanning the panelling, his eye presently rested upon what he was seeking. Faintly written in pencil were the words "No. – East Thirtieth." That was all, but it told Mr. Barnes that Rose Mitchel had been followed to this address, and as it tallied with that which she herself had given to him, he knew now that she could be found when wanted. Wetting his finger against the tip of his tongue, he drew it across the words, leaving nothing but a dirty smudge.

"Wilson is a keen one," thought the detective. "He did this trick well. Saw my nod, wrote that address, and got out of sight in an instant. I wonder if he can keep an eye on that shrewd scoundrel? Pshaw! I am giving the fellow too much credit. I must leave it to Wilson for to-day anyway, as I must get through with this Pettingill matter." Half an hour later he was at head-quarters talking with his assistants.

Meanwhile Wilson followed Mr. Mitchel to Broadway then down to the Casino, where he stopped to buy tickets; then out again, and down Broadway to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, which he entered. He nodded to the clerk, took his key, and passed up-stairs. Evidently he lived there. Wilson of course had no further definite instructions. From Mr. Barnes's backward nod, he had understood that he was to shadow this man, and under the circumstances it was his simple duty to do this until relieved by further orders. In these days of telephones it is easy enough to make hurried reports to head-quarters and then continue the pursuit. The Fifth Avenue is not a promising place in which to watch a man, provided the man knows that he is being watched. It has three exits – one on Broadway, and one each on Twenty-third and on Twenty-fourth Streets. Wilson flattered himself that Mr. Mitchel was unsuspecting, and therefore whichever way he might leave the building, he would first return his key at the desk. He consequently kept that point in view. Not half an hour had elapsed when his man appeared, gave up his key, as expected, and passed out by the Broadway door. Crossing the Avenue, he walked down Twenty-third Street, eastward; Wilson followed cautiously, going through the Park. At Third Avenue Mr. Mitchel climbed the elevated stairway, and Wilson was compelled to do the same, though this brought him unpleasantly close. Both men took the

same train, Mr. Mitchel in the first coach, Wilson the last. At Forty-second Street Mr. Mitchel left the train, and crossed the bridge, but instead of taking the annex for the Grand Central Depot, as one is expected to do, he slipped through the crowd to the main platform and took a train going back down-town. Wilson managed to get the same train, but he realized at once that his man either knew that he was followed, or else was taking extraordinary precautions. At Thirty-fourth Street station the trick was repeated, Mr. Mitchel crossing over the bridge and then taking an up-town train. What puzzled Wilson was that he could not detect that his man had noticed him. It seemed barely possible, as they had encountered crowds at both places, that he had escaped unobserved. He was more satisfied of this when, at Forty-second Street again, Mr. Mitchel once more left the train, crossed the bridge, and this time went forward, taking the coach for the Grand Central. Evidently all the manœuvring had merely been prompted by caution, and not having observed his shadow, the man was about to continue to his true destination. Mr. Mitchel had entered the coach by the first gate, and was seated quietly in the corner as Wilson passed on, going in by the gate at the opposite end. A moment later the guard slammed the gate at Wilson's end, and pulled the bell-rope. As quick as a flash Mr. Mitchel jumped up, and before he could be prevented, had left the coach just as it started, carrying away Wilson, completely outwitted and dumbfounded. As soon as the train stopped he darted down-stairs, and ran back towards the Third Avenue station; but he knew it was useless, as it proved. He saw nothing of Mr. Mitchel.

Wilson was greatly disheartened, for he was most anxious to stand well with Mr. Barnes, his chief. Yet in revolving over the occurrences of the last half hour he could not see how he could have prevented the escape of his man, since it was evident that he had intentionally acted in a way to prevent pursuit. If one but knows or suspects that he is being shadowed, the Third Avenue elevated road, with its bridges at Thirty-fourth and Forty-second Streets, offers the most effectual means of eluding the most skilful detective. If Wilson had known anything whatever about the man who had escaped him, he might have been able to guess his destination, and so have caught up with him again by hurrying ahead and meeting him, as he had frequently done when following noted criminals with whose haunts he was acquainted. In this instance he was utterly in the dark, so could do nothing but swear.

If he could not report where Mr. Mitchel had gone, at least he might discover at what time he returned to his hotel, and possibly Mr. Barnes might receive some valuable hint by the lapse of time. With this idea, Wilson returned to the Fifth Avenue Hotel and waited patiently. He telephoned to head-quarters only to hear that Mr. Barnes had gone back to Boston to bring Pettingill to New York. Seven o'clock arrived, and yet his vigil was unrewarded. It suddenly occurred to him that as he had seen Mr. Mitchel purchase tickets for the Casino, that might be a good place to watch, though of course there was no certainty that they were for that night. Upon this meagre hope he hastened up-town and stationed himself where he could keep an eye on all who entered. At ten minutes past eight he was about concluding that his task was useless when a cab stopped, and to his intense satisfaction he saw Mr. Mitchel alight, and then hand out a handsomely-dressed woman. Wilson had prepared himself for this possibility, by purchasing a ticket of admission, so that he followed the couple into the theatre, determined not to lose sight of his man again. The opera over, he found it easy to shadow the two, as the woman declined the proffered cab, perchance because the exhilarating, though cold night air made a walk home inviting. He was, however, somewhat amazed at last to see them enter the very apartment-house on Thirtieth Street to which he had traced Rose Mitchel in the morning. His mind was at once set at ease, for since both of his birds had flown to the same dove-cot, it seemed plain that they were connected. Evidently it was to this house that Mr. Mitchel had gone after eluding him in the morning. At least so argued the astute detective.

Wilson had waited opposite the building perhaps an hour, lulled into abstraction of thought by the silence of the neighborhood, when he was startled by hearing a piercing shriek, loud and long continued, which then died away, and all was still again. Whether it came from the apartment-

house or one of the private dwellings next to it, he was in doubt. That it was a woman's cry he felt sure. Was it a cry of pain, or the shriek of nightmare? He could not tell. That solitary, awful cry, disturbing the death-like stillness, seemed uncanny. It made him shiver and draw his cloak closer about him. If it had only been repeated, after he was on the alert, he would have felt better satisfied; but though he listened intently he heard nothing. Ten minutes later, another thing occurred, which attracted his attention. A light in a window on the fifth floor was extinguished. There was certainly nothing suspicious about this, for lights are usually put out when one retires. He noticed it because it was the only light which showed from any of the windows during his vigil. Whilst he was thinking of this, the door opposite opened and a man emerged. Judging it to be Mr. Mitchel, he hastily followed. That there might certainly be no mistake, Wilson walked rapidly enough to reach the Avenue corner ahead of the man, when he crossed, so timing himself that he passed in front of the other just as they both reached the street lamp. Taking a quick, but thorough look, Wilson saw that it was not Mr. Mitchel, so abandoned the pursuit, going back quickly towards the apartment-house. He had proceeded but a few paces, when he met Mr. Mitchel coming rapidly towards him. Breathing a sigh of relief, he passed, then crossed the street, and with his usual skill readily kept Mr. Mitchel in sight till he entered the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Wilson saw him take his key and go upstairs, so that he felt that his vigil was over for that night. Looking at his watch he noted that it was just one o'clock. Going into the reading-room he wrote a report of the day's occurrences and then calling a messenger, sent it to head-quarters addressed to Mr. Barnes. This done he felt entitled to hurry home for a short sleep – short, because he knew it would be his duty to be on the watch again the next day, and until he received further instructions from Mr. Barnes.

Mr. Barnes had immediately after his arrival obtained the requisition papers for which he had telegraphed, and which he found awaiting him. With these he had returned to Boston the same day, and obtaining his prisoner succeeded in catching the midnight train once more, arriving in New York with the loss of but a single day from the new case which so absorbed all his interest.

Thus the morning after that on which the jewel robbery had been discovered he entered his offices quite early, having delivered his prisoner at police head-quarters.

When he read Wilson's letter, the only sign which he gave of dissatisfaction was a nervous pull at one corner of his moustache. He read the paper through three times, then tore it carefully into tiny pieces, doing it so accurately that they were all nearly of the same size and shape. Any one who should attempt to piece together a note which Mr. Barnes had thus destroyed, would have a task. Standing by the window he tossed them high in the air and saw them scattered by the wind.

At half past eight o'clock he stood before the apartment-house in East Thirtieth Street. The janitor was sweeping from the pavement a light snow which had fallen in the early hours of the morning.

Mr. Barnes without speaking to the man walked into the vestibule and scanned the names over the letter-boxes. None of them contained the one which he sought, but there was no card in No. 5. Recalling that in Wilson's report a light had disappeared from a window on the fifth floor, he knew that it could not be unoccupied. To get in, he resorted to a trick often practised by sneak thieves. He rang the bell of No. 1, and when the door silently swung open he walked in, apologizing to the servant on the first landing for having "rung the wrong bell," and proceeded up to the fifth floor. Here he rang the bell of the private hall belonging to that special apartment. He could have rung the lower bell of this apartment at the outset, but he wished to make it impossible for anyone to leave after his signal announced visitors. He stood several minutes and heard no sound from within. A second pull at the bell produced no better results. Taking a firm hold of the door-knob, he slowly turned it, making not the slightest noise. To his surprise the door yielded when he pressed, and in a moment he had passed in and closed it behind him. His first idea was, that after all he had entered an empty apartment, but a glance into the room at the farther end of the hall, showed him that it was a furnished parlor. He hesitated a moment, then walked stealthily towards that room and looking

in saw no one. He tip-toed back to the hall-door, turned the key, took it from the lock and dropped it into his pocket. Again he passed forward to the parlor, this time entering it. It was elegantly and tastily furnished. The windows opened on the street. Between them stood a cabinet writing-desk, open, as though recently used. Beside it was an enamel piano-lamp, possibly the same which had furnished the light which Wilson had suddenly missed several hours before. Opposite the windows a pair of folding glass doors communicated with an apartment beyond. These were closed. Peeping through a part of the pattern cut in the glass, Mr. Barnes could just distinguish the form of a woman in bed, her long hair hanging down from the pillow. This sight made him uncertain as to the next move. This was possibly Mrs. Rose Mitchel, as she had announced herself. She was asleep, and he had entered her apartment without any warrant for doing so. True he looked upon her with some suspicion, but the most innocent frequently suffer in this way, and without better reason than he had, he knew that he could not account legally for what he was doing. As he stood by the glass doors cogitating, he chanced to look down. Instantly his eye was attracted by that which made him shiver, as accustomed as he was to strange sights. It was a tiny red stream, which had managed to pass under the door and had then run along the edge of the carpet for the space of a few inches. Instantly he stooped, dipped his finger into it, and then ejaculated under his breath:

"Blood, and clotted."

Standing upright, he once more peered into the room. The figure in bed had not moved. Without further hesitation he slowly slid the doors apart. One glance within, and murmuring the single word "Murder," Mr. Barnes was no longer slow in his actions. Stepping across a big pool of blood which stained the carpet, he stood at the side of the bed. He recognized the features of the woman who had claimed that she had been robbed of her diamonds. She seemed sleeping, save that there was an expression of pain on the features, a contraction of the skin between the eyebrows, and one corner of the mouth drawn aside, the whole kept in this position by the rigidity of death. The manner of her death was as simple as it was cruel. Her throat had been cut as she slept. This seemed indicated by the fact that she was clad in her night-dress. One thing that puzzled Mr. Barnes at once, was the pool of blood near the door. It was fully six feet from the head of the bed, and whilst there was another just by the bedstead, formed by blood which had trickled from the wound, running down the sheets and so dropping to the floor, the two pools did not communicate.

"Well," thought Mr. Barnes, "I am first on the scene this time, and no busybodies shall tumble things about till I have studied their significance."

This room had not been designed for a sleeping apartment but rather as a dining-room, which, upon occasion, could be opened into the parlor, converting the two into one. There was one window upon an air-shaft, and in an angle was a handsome carved oak mantel with fireplace below. Mr. Barnes raised the curtain over the window, letting in more light. Looking around he noticed almost immediately two things: first, that a basin stood on a washstand half filled with water, the color of which plainly indicated that the murderer had washed off tell-tale marks before taking his departure. Second, that in the fireplace was a pile of ashes.

"The scoundrel has burned evidence against him, and deliberately washed the blood from his person before going away. Let me see, what was it that Mitchel said: 'I should have stopped to wash the stain from the carpet whilst fresh, and also from the dog's mouth.' That is what he told his friend he would do if bitten whilst committing a crime. In this instance the 'stain on the carpet' was too much for him, but he washed it from himself. Can it be that a man lives who, contemplating a deed of this character, would make a wager that he would not be detected. Bah. It is impossible." Thus thought Mr. Barnes as he studied the evidence before him. He next turned to the woman's clothing which lay on a chair. He rummaged through the pocket, but found nothing. In handling the petticoat he noticed that a piece had been cut from the band. Examining the other garments he soon saw that the same had been done to them all. Like a flash an idea struck him. Going over to the bed

he searched for some mark on the garments which were on the corpse. He could find none until he lifted the body up and turned it over, when he found that a piece had been cut from the night-dress.

"That accounts for the blood by the door," thought Mr. Barnes. "He took her out of the bed to get her nearer to the light, so that he could find the initials marked on the clothing. Whilst she lay by the door the blood flowed and accumulated. Then he put her back in bed so that he would not need to step over her in walking about the room. What a calculating villain. There is one significant fact here. Her name cannot have been Rose Mitchel, or there would have been no reason for destroying these marks, since she had given that name to several."

Mr. Barnes next brushed the charred ashes from the grate upon a newspaper, and carried them to the window in the front room. His examination satisfied him of two things; the murderer had burned the bits of cloth cut from the various garments, and also a number of letters. That the fellow was studiously careful was plain from the fact that the burning had been thoroughly done; nothing had escaped the flame save two buttons with a bit of cloth attached, and various corners of envelopes. With disgust Mr. Barnes threw the ashes back where he had found them.

Next he paid his attention to the cabinet desk which stood open. He pulled out all the drawers, and peered into every nook and cranny, but his search was fruitless. He found nothing but blank paper and envelopes, and these of common kind.

Once more returning to the room where the corpse lay, he noticed a trunk from which protruded a part of a garment. Raising the lid he found everything within in a promiscuous pile. Evidently it had been hastily searched and carelessly repacked. Mr. Barnes took each article out and examined it closely. Everything upon which a name might have been written showed a place where a piece had been cut out. "There must be some good reason for hiding this woman's identity, or the scoundrel would not have been so thorough in his work," thought Mr. Barnes. Just then in replacing the clothing he heard a crinkling sound which indicated that a bit of paper was in the pocket of the garment. Hastily he withdrew it, and was delighted to observe writing. "A clue at last," he murmured, hurrying to the front-room window to read it. For what he found see p. 44.

This was all, no name being signed. Mr. Barnes regretted this last fact, but felt that he held a most important paper in his hand, since it seemed to be corroborative of the woman's statement that she had lost a lot of unset jewels. It was of great value to have so minute a description of the stolen gems. Folding the paper carefully, he placed it in his wallet, and then returned to the vicinity of the corpse. Looking closely at the cut in the neck, the detective determined that the assassin had used an ordinary pocket-knife, for the wound was neither deep nor long. It severed the jugular vein, which seemed to have been the aim of the murderer. It was from this circumstance that the detective decided that the woman had been attacked as she slept. This aroused the question "Did the murderer have the means of entering the house without attracting attention? Either he must have had a night-key, or else some one must have admitted him." Mr. Barnes started as the thought recurred to him that Wilson had seen Mr. Mitchel enter the house some time before the scream was heard, and depart some time after. Was this the woman who had accompanied him to the theatre? If so, how could she have retired and fallen to sleep so quickly? Evidently further light must be thrown upon this aspect of the case.

Whilst meditating, the detective's eye roamed about the room, and finally rested upon a shining object which lay on the floor near the trunk. A ray of light from the front window just reached it and made it glitter. Mr. Barnes looked at it for some moments mechanically, stooping presently to pick it up, with little thought of what he did. He had scarcely examined it, however, before a gleam of triumph glistened in his eye. He held in his hand a button, which was a cut cameo upon which was carved the profile head of a woman, beneath which appeared the name "Juliet."

CHAPTER IV. DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

Mr. Barnes, after discovering the cameo button, immediately left the apartment. With little loss of time he reached the Fifth Avenue Hotel. He found Wilson sitting in the lobby, and learned from him that Mr. Mitchel had not yet come down-stairs. He made his subordinate happy, by complimenting him upon his work, and exonerating him from blame because of his having lost his man for a few hours the day before. With the button in his pocket, Mr. Barnes found it easy to be good-natured. If the truth were known, he was chuckling to himself. The thought which proved such a fund of merriment was the idea that his man up-stairs had proven himself just as human as ordinary criminals, since he had left behind him the very tell-tale mark which he had boasted would not be found after he had committed his crime. Externally, however, there was no sign to show that Mr. Barnes was in any way excited. He calmly asked at the desk for Mr. Mitchel, and sent up his card just as any ordinary visitor might have done. In a few moments the hall-boy returned with the curt message, "Come up."

Mr. Barnes was shown up one flight of stairs into a suite of two rooms and a bath, overlooking Twenty-third Street. The room which he passed into from the hall was fitted up like a bachelor's parlor. Comfortable stuffed chairs and two sofas, a folding reading-chair, an upright piano in mahogany case with handsome piano-lamp beside it, a carved centre-table on which stood a reading-lamp, cigar case in bronze, photo-albums, handsome pictures on the walls in gold frames, elegant vases on the mantel, an onyx clock, a full-sized figure of a Moor carved in wood serving as a card-receiver, – in fact everything about the place was significant of wealth, luxury, and refinement. Could this be the den of a murderer? It seemed not, unless there might be some powerful hidden motive, which would make a man who was evidently a gentleman, stoop to such a crime. According to Mr. Barnes's experience such a motive must involve a woman. As yet there was no woman in this case, save the corpse which he had just left. All this flashed through the detective's mind as he noted his surroundings in a few swift glances. Then he heard a voice from the next room say:

"Come in, Mr. Barnes: we must not stand upon ceremony with one another."

Mr. Barnes in answer to the invitation crossed into the adjoining room and noticed at once that the sleeping apartment was as luxurious as the parlor. Mr. Mitchel was standing in front of a mirror shaving himself, being robed in a silk morning wrapper.

"Pardon this intrusion," began Mr. Barnes. "But you told me I might call at any time, and –"

"No excuses necessary, except from me. But I must finish shaving, you know. A man can't talk with lather on one side of his face."

"Certainly not. Don't hurry, I can wait."

"Thank you. Take a seat. You will find that armchair by the bed comfortable. This is an odd hour to be making one's toilet but the fact is I was out late last night."

"At the club, I suppose," said Mr. Barnes, wishing to see if Mr. Mitchel would lie to him. In this he was disappointed, for the reply was:

"No, I went to the Casino. Lillian Russell you know has returned. I had promised a friend to go, so we went."

"A gentleman?"

"Are you not getting inquisitive? No, not a gentleman, but a lady. In fact, that is her picture on that easel."

Mr. Barnes looked, and saw an oil painting representing a marvellously beautiful female head. A brunette of strong emotions and great will power if her portrait were truthful. Here was a significant fact. Mr. Mitchel said that he had been to the Casino with this woman. Wilson claimed

that they had gone to the house where the murdered woman lay. It would seem that Mr. Mitchel's friend must live there, and thus he had gained access the night before. Did he know that the other also lived there, and did he go into her apartment after leaving his companion? As this passed through Mr. Barnes's mind his eyes wandered across the bed. He saw a waistcoat upon which he observed two buttons similar to the one which he had secreted in his pocket. Stealthily he reached his hand towards the bed, but his fingers had scarcely touched the waistcoat, when Mr. Mitchel said, without turning from his shaving:

"There is no money in that waistcoat, Mr. Barnes."

"What do you mean to insinuate," said Mr. Barnes angrily, withdrawing his hand quickly. Mr. Mitchel paused a moment before replying, deliberately made one or two more sweeps with his razor, then turned and faced the detective.

"I mean, Mr. Barnes, that you forgot that I was looking into a mirror."

"Your remark indicated that I meant to steal."

"Did it? I am sorry. But really you should not adopt a thief's stealthy methods if you are so sensitive. When I invite a gentleman into my private room, I do not expect to have him fingering my clothing whilst my back is turned."

"Take care, Mr. Mitchel, you are speaking to a detective. If I did stretch my hand towards your clothing it was with no wrong intent and you know it."

"Certainly I do, and what is more I know just what you were wishing to do. You must not get angered so easily. I should not have used the words which I did, but to tell you the truth I was piqued."

"I don't understand."

"It hurt my feelings to have you treat me just like an ordinary criminal. That you should think I would let you come in here and make whatever examinations you have in your mind, right before my very eyes, wounded my pride. I never should have turned my back upon you except that I faced a mirror. I told you I know what you wished to do. It was to examine the buttons on my vest, was it not?"

Mr. Barnes was staggered but did not show it. Calmly he said:

"As you know, I overheard your conversation on the train. You spoke of having a set of five curious buttons and –"

"Pardon me, I said six, not five." Once more Mr. Barnes had failed to trap the man. He suggested five, hoping that Mr. Mitchel might claim that to have been the original number, thus eliminating the lost one.

"Of course, you did say six, now I remember," he continued, "and I think you will admit it was not unnatural curiosity which led me to wish to see them, that – that – well that I might recognize them again."

"A very laudable intent. But my dear Mr. Barnes, I have told you that you may call upon me at any time, and ask me any questions you please. Why did you not frankly ask me to show you the buttons?"

"I should have done so. I do so now."

"They are in the vest. You may examine them if you desire it."

Mr. Barnes took up the vest, and was puzzled to find six buttons, three of Juliet and three of Romeo. Still he was satisfied, for they were identical with the one in his pocket. It occurred to him that this man who was so careful in his precautions, might have lied as to the number in the set, and have said six when in reality there were seven. A few questions about the buttons seemed opportune.

"These are very beautiful, Mr. Mitchel, and unique too. I have never heard of cameo buttons before. I think you said they were made expressly for you."

Mr. Mitchel dropped into a cushioned rocker before he replied:

"These buttons were made for me, and they are exquisite specimens of the graver's art. Cameo buttons, however, are not so uncommon as you suppose, though they are more usually worn by women, and, in fact, it was a woman's idea to have these cut. I should not have – "

"By Jove!" said Mr. Barnes, "the Romeo buttons are copies from your likeness, and good portraits too."

"Ah! You have noticed that, have you?"

"Yes, and the Juliets are copies of that picture." Mr. Barnes was getting excited, for if these buttons were portraits, and the one in his pocket was that of the woman whose likeness stood on the easel, it was very evident that they were connected. Mr. Mitchel eyed him keenly.

"Mr. Barnes, you are disturbed. What is it?"

"I am not disturbed."

"You are, and it is the sight of those buttons which has caused it. Now tell me your reason for coming here this morning."

Mr. Barnes thought the time had come to strike a deciding blow.

"Mr. Mitchel, first answer one question, and think well before you reply. How many buttons were made for this set?"

"Seven," answered Mr. Mitchel, so promptly that Mr. Barnes could only repeat, amazed:

"Seven? But you said six only a moment ago!"

"I know what I said. I never forget any statement that I make, and all my statements are accurate. I said that six is the entire set. Now you ask me what was the original number, and I reply seven. Is that clear?"

"Then the other button has been lost?"

"Not at all. I know where it is."

"Then what do you mean by saying that the set now is only six?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Barnes, if I decline to answer that question. I have replied now to several since I asked you why you came here this morning."

"I will tell you," said the detective, playing his trump card, as he thought. "I have been examining the place where your crime was committed, and I have found that seventh button!" If Mr. Barnes expected Mr. Mitchel to recoil with fear, or tremble, or do anything that an ordinary criminal does when brought face to face with evidence of his guilt, he must have been disappointed. But it is safe to assume that by this time so skillful a man as Mr. Barnes did not expect so consummate an actor as Mr. Mitchel to betray feeling. He did show some interest, however, for he arose from his chair and, walking up to Mr. Barnes, he asked simply:

"Have you it with you? May I see it?"

Mr. Barnes hesitated a moment, wondering if he risked losing the button by handing it to him. He decided to give it to him, and did so.

Mr. Mitchel looked at it closely, as though an expert, and after several moments of silence, he tossed it carelessly into the air, catching it as it came down, and then said:

"This would make a pretty situation in a play, Mr. Barnes. Follow me. Detective discovers crime, and finds curious button. Goes straight to criminal, and boldly tells him of the fact. Criminal admits that he has but six buttons out of seven, and asks to see the button found. Detective foolishly hands it to him. Then criminal smiles blandly, and says: 'Mr. Detective, now I have seven buttons, and my set is complete again. What are you going to do about it?'"

"And the detective would reply," said Mr. Barnes, falling into the humor of the situation: "'Mr. Criminal, I will just take that back by force.'"

"Exactly. You catch the spirit of the stage picture. Then, fight between two men, applause from the gallery, and victory for either party, as the author has decided. That is the way it would be done in a play. But in real life it is different. I simply hand you back your button, thus," handing

button to Mr. Barnes, and bowing politely, and then remarked: "Mr. Barnes, you are welcome to that. It is not a part of my set!"

"Not a part of your set?" echoed the detective, dumbfounded.

"Not a part of my set. I am sorry to disappoint you, but so it is. I will even explain, for I sympathize with you. I told you the set was originally seven. So it was, but the seventh button has the head of Shakespeare on it. All seven were given to me by my friend, but as I could wear but six, I returned to her this odd Shakespeare button, which I had made into a breast-pin, and kept the others, thus reducing the set of buttons to six. The seventh is no longer a button, you see."

"But how do you account for the fact that this button which I have is plainly a portrait of your friend, and a counterpart to those on your vest?"

"My dear Mr. Barnes, I don't account for it. I don't have to, you know. That sort of thing is your business."

"What if I should decide to arrest you at once, and ask a jury to determine whether your original set included this button or not?"

"That would be inconvenient to me, of course. But it is one of those things that we risk every day. I mean arrest by some blundering detective. Pardon me, do not get angry again; I do not allude to yourself. I am quite sure that you are too shrewd to arrest me."

"And why so pray?"

"Because I am surely not going to run away in the first place, and secondly you would gain nothing, since it would be so easy for me to prove all that I have told you, and in your mind you are saying to yourself that I have not lied to you. Really I have not."

"I have only one thing more to say to you, Mr. Mitchel," said Mr. Barnes, rising. "Will you show me that seventh button, or breast-pin?"

"That is asking a great deal, but I will grant your request upon one condition. Think well before you make the bargain. When I made that wager I did not calculate the possibility of entangling in my scandal the name of the woman whom I love dearest on earth. That is the portrait of the woman who will soon become my wife. As I have said, she has the other button and wears it constantly. You will gain nothing by seeing it, for it will simply corroborate my word, which I think you believe now. I will take you to her and she will tell you of these buttons, if you promise me never to annoy her in any way in connection with this affair."

"I will give you that promise cheerfully. I have no wish to annoy a lady."

"That is for you to decide. Meet me in the lobby at noon precisely, and I will take you to her house. And now will you excuse me whilst I complete my toilet?"

CHAPTER V. THE SEVENTH BUTTON

On the second floor of the apartment-house in East Thirtieth Street lived Mrs. Mortimer Remsen, and her two daughters, Emily and Dora.

Mrs. Remsen's husband had been dead more than ten years, but he had amassed a handsome fortune, which left his family able to maintain the position in New York society to which they were heirs by birth and breeding. They lived in the most commodious apartment in the magnificent building in Thirtieth Street, and were surrounded by an elegant luxury which results from a combination of wealth and refined taste. They entertained frequently, and Mrs. Remsen, still a handsome woman, was always a conspicuous figure at the most notable social and charitable events of the season.

Emily, the eldest daughter, was a woman of twenty-six, who commanded, rather than attracted, admiration. She was of admirable proportions, easy and regal carriage, with a fine head well poised on magnificent shoulders. As to her face – well, I cannot describe it better than did the eminent artist Gaston de Castilla, who was requested to paint her portrait. "Madam," said he, to her mother, "I do not like to undertake your commission. Your daughter has one of those marvellous faces which defies art. Every feature is a departure from recognized standards, and yet the result is nobility and beauty of the highest type. Only Nature herself can produce such effects. Through an imperfect countenance she sheds the rays of an illumined soul, till all faults are obliterated, forgotten. We poor artists cannot hope to supply on our cold canvas what so singular a face must have, to make it beautiful." Nevertheless, he did paint the portrait, the one which the detective had seen in Mr. Mitchel's room, and he had succeeded at least in suggesting the marvellous effects of character, revealing itself through the features. Other painters had failed, perhaps because they appreciated less than he what they attempted.

This description also gives a hint of the woman herself. A combination of all the softer emotional elements, she dominated self and others by a supreme will. She was rarely disobeyed by suitor or by servant. That she had engaged herself to marry Mr. Mitchel had surprised the entire circle within which she moved, and yet perhaps the secret of his success lay in the simple fact that he had had the courage to ask for her, and to do so in a loving but masterful way which plainly showed that he anticipated no refusal or coy hesitancy. His wooing had been of an impetuous whirlwind kind, and he was affianced to her within a month of their acquaintance.

It was this fact which had caused the most comment. Mr. Mitchel moved in good society, but he was a newcomer, and now that he had captured the prize of the matrimonial market, all were asking "Who is he?" a question which none seemed able to answer. He was a Southerner and that single fact had shed about him a halo of attractive light which had blinded the eyes of those who feebly attempted to look deeper.

Mrs. Remsen had protested when Emily announced her engagement, but Emily had replied, "Mother, I have given my word," and the discussion was ended. A few moments later she had affectionately seated herself at her mother's feet, and after tenderly kissing her, whispered "I love him. He is my king," and then buried her head in her parent's lap. Few women argue against an appeal of that nature. Thus Emily and Mr. Mitchel became engaged, after which he came and went much as though he were the master of the house. Why not, since he had become the master of its mistress?

Dora was her sister's antithesis, save that both were brunettes. She was simply a lovable, docile, impressionable, pretty girl. She adored her mother, and worshipped her sister whom she

called "The Queen." Dora was only seventeen. There had been three boys born between the sisters, but they had died in infancy.

The two girls were in the sumptuous parlor of their apartment, Emily lying on the soft lounge, whilst Dora sat near her in a cosy armchair which made her look almost a little girl.

"Queen, did you enjoy the opera last night?" asked Dora.

"Oh! yes," replied Emily, "But you know, my dear, comic opera – is comic opera, and all is said."

"It's all very fine for you to talk in that patronizing way, Queen, about amusement, but it is different with me. I have not outgrown the theatre yet. I'll tell you what I have been thinking of seriously – "

"Seriously," laughed Emily, pinching her pretty sister's cheek. "Why you sly little rogue, you couldn't be serious if you tried."

"Oh! couldn't I! But listen. I am going to ask Bob – "

"Bob?"

"Mr. Mitchel, you know. I told him last night that I mean to call him Bob after this, and he kissed me and said it was a bargain."

"Kissed you, did he? Well Miss Impudence, I like that."

"So did I. But you need not scold, because you know what Bob says is law. You are as much afraid of him as – well as all the rest of the men are of you. But I haven't told you what I am going to do. I want Bob to take me with you both, whenever you go to the theatre."

"Oho! So that is your little plot, is it?"

"Yes! What do you think of it?"

"What do I think of it? Now I shall surprise you. I think it is an excellent idea. I love you very much, my little sweetheart sister, and shall be only too glad to see you have as much pleasure as your heart longs for."

"You darling Queen!" and with an impetuous bound the younger girl was on her knees with her arms around Emily, raining kisses upon her lips. This effusive show of affection, Emily received with evident pleasure, for, however dignified she could be in her bearing, leaving the impression that she was cold, in reality she was warm-hearted to a degree which would have surprised the gossips.

Nestling her head in the folds of her sister's soft silk gown, thus hiding her face, Dora said timidly:

"May I tell you something Queen?"

"Ha! You mischief, what have you to confess now?"

"I have invited a man to call here," replied Dora suddenly raising her head, and speaking with a different touch in her tones.

"Is that all?" laughed Emily, "Who is the monster? Where did you meet him?"

"I have met him several times, at afternoon teas. The last time he asked me if he might call – and I told him he could do so this afternoon, when I thought you would be at home. Was it very wrong?"

"Well, Dora, I don't think it was exactly proper, but perhaps it may be all right, since you have met him at several of our friends' houses. But what is his name?"

"Alphonse Thaurer."

"A Frenchman?"

"Yes, though he speaks English with only a very slight accent."

"I don't like Frenchmen. I know it is preposterous prejudice but I never meet one without thinking him a possible adventurer. With their soft sycophantic ways, they remind me of cats, and I expect them to show their claws at any moment. However, pet, perhaps your Frenchman will not call, and then – "

"Oh! but he will. He said he would come this afternoon. That is why I have been so nervous. I was afraid you might be going out, and – "

"No, I will be here to protect you. Besides I expect Bob at any moment. He said he would come about noon, and it is after that already. Perhaps that is he now; yes, three rings.

"Oh, so Romeo and Juliet have signals! But jump up, Queen, he must not catch us lying down, and 'spooning.'"

A moment later Mr. Mitchel entered to find both girls seated in the most dignified manner, reading novels. Walking over to Emily he stooped, and kissed her lightly on the forehead, whispering "My Queen." Next he patted Dora on the head, as one would pat a child.

"Emily I have taken the liberty of telling a friend of mine that he might call here. You do not mind?"

"Why, of course not, Roy." She had made this name for him by eliminating the first syllable of his second name, Leroy. She told him, that thus she could call him King, without heralding it to the world. Almost immediately the bell sounded again, and Mr. Barnes was introduced. Mr. Mitchel presented him to the two ladies, and then devoted himself to Dora, thus leaving the detective perfectly free to converse with Emily. Being well educated, and having travelled through England early in life, Mr. Barnes soon made himself at ease, and talked like any society man. Presently Mr. Mitchel took Dora to the window and stood there looking out and chatting, apparently absorbed and unobservant of the others. Mr. Barnes decided that this was his opportunity.

"Pardon me, Miss Remsen, and let the interest of a collector excuse the impertinence of my noticing that beautiful pin which you wear. Cameos I think are too little appreciated nowadays. They are passed by, whilst statuettes bring fancy prices. Yet does it not require exquisite skill to carve so small an object?"

"I agree with you, Mr. Barnes, and am not at all angry with you for admiring my pin. You may look at it if you wish." Saying which she took it off and handed it to him. It was the facsimile of those which Mr. Mitchel wore as buttons, save that it bore the image of Shakespeare. The cameo was mounted in a gold frame, and, surrounded by diamonds, made a beautiful ornament. "You would never guess, Mr. Barnes that that was once an ordinary button?"

Mr. Barnes assumed an expression of surprise as though the idea was entirely new to him. All he said was:

"It may have been a button, but surely never an ordinary one."

"Well no, not an ordinary one of course. I suppose you know that I am engaged to your friend?"

Mr. Barnes assented with a bow, and Emily continued:

"Shortly after we became engaged, I went to Europe, and whilst there I came across a jeweller who produced the most beautiful carvings in cameo and intaglio. I ordered a set made to be used for buttons."

"All similar to this?"

"Similar but not identical. This one has Shakespeare's head. The others represent Romeo and Juliet."

Mr. Barnes determined upon a bold stroke. Taking the button from his pocket, and handing it to Emily, he said quietly:

"Here is a cameo of Juliet. Perhaps it may interest you?"

"Why this is extraordinary! It is one of my set!"

"One of yours, why have you lost one? How many did you have?"

"There were seven including this one of Shakespeare. The other six – " Here she stopped and colored deeply.

"Miss Remsen, you think that is one of the original set. If so of course it is yours, and I should be too glad to restore it to you. But have you lost one?"

"Lost one? No – that is, I don't know." She seemed much confused, and looked intently at the button. Suddenly her whole expression changed, and with her self possession fully restored she startled Mr. Barnes by saying, "I am mistaken. This is not one of the original set. Yet it is very similar."

Mr. Barnes did not know what to think. Did she divine that there might be some danger in admitting that there was a seventh button still? Had that matchless schemer Mitchel sent her a note warning her to say that there were but seven in the original set? He could not decide at once, but hazarded one more stroke.

"Miss Remsen, I have seen your portrait, and it struck me that that button is a copy of it. What do you think?"

The girl once more became confused and stammered.

"I don't know," then suddenly, and with complete composure again, "Yes, I think you are right. This is a copy from my picture. The portrait was made last summer, and afterwards I allowed the artist to exhibit it. I think photographs were made from it, and possibly some cameo cutter has used it for his work."

This was ingenious, but not satisfactory to Mr. Barnes, for he knew that it was far from probable that another gem-cutter should have used the picture, and then have called it Juliet. Beside it would have been too great a coincidence to make a button of it. He decided therefore that the girl was doing the best she could to invent a plausible explanation to a question, which Mr. Mitchel himself had simply refused to answer. Not wishing to arouse any suspicion in her mind that he doubted her word, he replied quickly:

"That is very likely, and surely he could not have chosen a better face for his subject."

"Mr. Barnes," said Emily, "you offered just now to give me this, thinking that I had lost it. Of course I should not accept a present from one whom I have had the pleasure of knowing for so short a time, but you are Mr. Mitchel's friend, and as I would really prefer not to have my portrait in the hands of strangers, I accept your gift with thanks."

This was entirely unexpected. When Mr. Barnes had made the remark that he would be glad to restore her her own, he had done so feeling safe, because to obtain it she would need to admit that she had lost it. Now it seemed that she had deprived him of his piece of evidence. He did not know what to say, when Mr. Mitchel walked across to them and remarked pleasantly:

"Well, Emily, do you find my friend Mr. Barnes entertaining?"

"Mr. Barnes has been most agreeable, Roy, and see, he has actually given me a present," saying which she handed the button to Mr. Mitchel across whose countenance Mr. Barnes thought he saw a fleeting smile of triumph pass.

"I am proud of you, Emily. You command homage wherever you extend your influence. Do you know, Mr. Barnes refused to give this cameo to me, only this morning. You can guess why I wanted it."

"Because it has my picture copied on it?"

"Exactly. Mr. Barnes, allow me to add my thanks to those of Miss Remsen. You can readily appreciate why we prefer to have this bauble in our own possession?"

Mr. Barnes thought that he could. He saw that he was fairly caught and that he could do nothing without making a scene. He met a glance from Mr. Mitchel which he knew was meant to remind him of his promise not to annoy Miss Remsen. He had about decided that he had been a fool to make such a promise and to have visited the place at all, when he suddenly changed his mind, as a servant announced:

"Mr. Alphonse Thaurer."

Immediately the detective remembered the name. It was upon the card given to him by the Frenchman who had left the train at Stamford. He was watching Mr. Mitchel when the newcomer

was thus unexpectedly announced, and he thought he detected a glance of displeasure. Were these two men acquainted, accomplices perhaps?

"Mr. Mitchel, let me present Mr. Thauret," said Dora.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman before," replied Mr. Mitchel, and with a stiff bow he crossed to the side of Emily as though to prevent an introduction to her. This, of course, was impossible, and Mr. Mitchel was plainly annoyed. Emily stepped forward, extended her hand to Mr. Thauret, and then turning, presented him to Mr. Barnes, who had arisen, and who simply bowed.

"Ah! Mr. Barnes," said the Frenchman, "I am delighted to meet you again."

"Why, do you know Mr. Barnes also?" cried Dora greatly surprised.

"Who does not know Mr. Barnes, the celebrated detective." He said this in that extremely polite tone so much assumed by his race, when inclined to be most complimentary. Yet Mr. Barnes thought that he had some sinister motive in thus proclaiming his connection with the police. Was it to prevent him from calling upon these women again? If so he failed to make the desired impression upon Dora, for that young woman seemed fairly enraptured.

"A detective?" said she. "Are you really the great Mr. Barnes?"

"I am a detective, but scarcely a great one."

"Oh! but you are, you are! I read all about the wonderful way in which you caught that man Pettingill. And now tell me, are you going to catch the man who robbed the woman on the Boston train yesterday?"

"How do you know that it is a man?" asked Mr. Barnes amused at her impetuosity, and pleased at the turn taken by the conversation.

"Oh! it is not a woman. I am sure of that. I read about it in the papers this morning. I bought three so as not to miss anything. No woman would have been clever enough to plan it all, and then carry it out so thoroughly."

"This is very interesting," said Mr. Thauret. "Of course I too have read the papers, but besides that, as you know, Mr. Barnes, I was on the train myself, and the first to be searched. I have thought of the case ever since. In my own country we claim that our detectives can unravel any mystery, and I am curious to know how you will manage in an affair of this kind. The thief evidently is clever, do you not think so?"

Mr. Mitchel had drawn apart and apparently was absorbed in a conversation with Emily; nevertheless Mr. Barnes was confident that he missed little of what was being said by the group of which he himself was one. Under ordinary circumstances he would not for a moment have thought of speaking of so important a case before one who at least might be suspected of complicity. But these were not ordinary circumstances. Here were two men, about both of whom there was a mysterious connection with the crime, or crimes, which he was investigating. If either, or both, were guilty, it was evident from their courage in visiting unconcernedly at the very building in which the murder had been committed, that extreme skill would be required to obtain a conviction. The detective therefore considered that these men must be met with methods as bold as their own. Speaking in a tone loud enough to reach Mr. Mitchel's ears he said:

"I think that the thief is clever, but that he is not so clever as he considers himself."

"How is that?"

"He believed – I say he, because like Miss Remsen, I think it is a man –"

"How delightful of you to agree with me," said Dora.

"This man then," continued Mr. Barnes, "considers that he has misled me. He thinks that when I directed that all the passengers should be searched, I did so hoping to find the lost jewels, whereas I was not looking for the jewels, but for the thief."

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