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Multum in parvo library, vol. 1, no. 12, December, 1894, by Frank
Pemmon**

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DETECTIVE STORIES.

From the Diary of a New York Detective.

EDITED BY FRANK PEMMON.

A Chance Meeting.

Several years ago I was detailed to undertake the solution of a mystery surrounding a robbery which had baffled the police for a month or more. Then two detectives had been set at work upon it and had failed to locate the thief. I was given the case. I did not exactly succeed in finding the thief, but I brought him to justice, just the same. How, you shall see.

The house of Mr. Bond had been broken into and a large amount of jewelry stolen. Among the latter was a handsome gold watch belonging to the daughter of Mr. Bond. It had been a birthday present from her mother, and was highly prized by her. Her father offered a large reward for its recovery. I called at the home of Mr. Bond to get a description of the missing jewelry and whatever other information the family could give me. This was little enough. The jewelry had been stolen and no trace of the thief was to be found. That was all. I was expected, with no clue whatever to work upon, to ferret out and bring the thief to justice, and at the same time recover Miss Bond's watch. The only thing that the thief had left behind him was a piece of paper on which was written the words:

"Remember the poor." I did not regard this as being of any importance, and gave it little or no thought.

I was a young man at the time, unmarried, and, as it may be guessed, susceptible to the charms of pretty girls. Miss Bond—Clara—was a pretty girl, and I may as well confess, I fell in love with her at first sight. I also made an impression upon her. This caused me all the more eagerly to work up the case and try to bring it to a successful conclusion. Who knows, thought I, what may be at the end of it? I made a good many visits to the Bond house, nominally to seek information, in reality to gaze upon the face of the charming Miss Bond. My search for the thief did not progress very favorably. In fact, I had made no progress whatever. It promised to remain an unsolved mystery. I could not find the thief. Now comes the strange part of the story—how the thief found me. I had just boarded a railway train when a man followed me, and quietly slipped into the seat next to me. He carried a small bag which he hid under the seat. I also had a bag

somewhat similar to his own.

“Well, Jimmy,” he remarked, “how did you succeed?”

“First rate,” I returned, in a whisper, so as not to betray my identity by my voice. It was clear that I was in conversation with a thief—he did not look to my well-trained eyes like an honest man—and I must keep up the deception.

“Got the swag?” he asked.

I merely tapped my bag for reply. It was nearly dusk and the car lamps had not been lighted. My companion had not yet discovered his mistake. I didn’t feel exactly flattered at being mistaken, even in the half light, for a thief.

“How with you?” I asked.

“Aint done much since I tapped ‘Remember the poor.’”

“Remember the poor!” The words flashed across my mind. Was I on the track of the thief at last?

“Got the watch yet?” I asked.

“Yes, don’t dare to try to get rid of it. Where is Baggy John, now?”

What the deuce was I to say? Just then a man came down the car aisle. I saw at once it was the man whom my companion had really expected to meet. The resemblance between us was remarkable. My companion looked from one to the other and then tried to get away. Not before I had a pair of hand-cuffs encircling his wrists, however.

That is how I caught the thief, got my promotion, the reward, and last, but by no means least, my wife.

How Was She Killed?

“If I ever do it, I’ll do it in that way.”

These were the words I accidentally overheard one day, many years ago, as I was walking along the beach at one of our celebrated summer resorts. The person who uttered the above mentioned remark, a young man of about 28 or 30, spoke only half aloud and was evidently unaware that there was anyone within hearing distance. It was not my purpose to play eavesdropper. I was in a thoughtful mood myself, and with my head bowed almost upon my breast I had overtaken the young man and overheard his words. He had been reading a paper-covered novel of the sensational kind. As I passed him I glanced at the title. It was, “How was she killed?” I passed on my way as if I had not heard anything, and the young man turned to his book, in which he was evidently much interested. I had taken a sufficiently good look at the man to enable me to recognize him again. My memory for faces and forms is very good. On my return to the hotel I saw a number of copies of “How Was She Killed?” on sale. Partly out of curiosity I bought one and read it. I was afterward glad I did so.

Two years after the incident just narrated I was detailed to undertake the solution of a mystery surrounding the death of an unknown young lady. She had been found dead in the woods. It looked like a case of suicide by poison, as there were no marks of any kind upon the body to show that death had been the result of violence. An examination of the stomach was held, but there was no trace of poison in it. It was in a perfectly healthy condition. There was nothing to show that death had resulted from natural causes. If it was a case of suicide, how had the act been committed; if of murder, how had the murderer done his work? No one claimed the body and it lay for several days in the morgue.

The examination of the doctors and others had evidently not been of a very thorough nature. I examined the body myself very carefully and found what they had apparently overlooked—a tiny mark near the heart, so small that at first sight it was not observable. At my request the heart was opened and examined. The result was as I had expected. The organ contained a fine steel needle, pointed at both ends. This was what had caused the unfortunate woman’s death. She had been murdered, and the murderer had done his work in such a manner as to allay all suspicion—almost. I immediately thought of the sensational novel, “How Was She Killed?” The victim in that story had met her death at the hands of her lover in exactly this way. Had this young lady a lover or any one who wished to

get her out of the way? It was a week before she was identified; and when she was, her lover—a scheming rascal—was found to be no other than the man I had encountered two years before and had overheard make the remark with which this story opens. It was an easy task to prove him guilty of the murder of his sweetheart, and he saved himself from the gallows only by committing suicide after his trial and conviction.

It Was Not Murder.

Old Farmer Bunker lived alone. His wife had died years ago and he had never [remarried](#). He had no children. People said he ought not to live alone, that something was certain to happen to him; robbers would break into his house and steal his valuables and perhaps kill him. For once the people happened, so it seemed, to be right. One morning Mr. Bunker was found dead in his bed, and an ugly knife wound over the heart seemed to tell only too plainly what had been the cause of his death. An autopsy was not considered necessary. The services of a detective rather than those of the medical examiner were called into requisition. I was the detective detailed to look into the case. The first thought was that robbery had been committed. An examination of the house failed to show any evidence that such had been the intention of the murderer. Apparently nothing had been disturbed. A bureau drawer containing a large sum of money had not even been opened. Then it was thought that the old man must have committed suicide. A search was made for the implement with which he had committed the deed, but it was nowhere to be found. It was certain that death had been almost instantaneous, and of course Mr. Bunker could not have had time to hide the instrument of self-destruction. It was, therefore, unmistakably a case of murder.

I began an immediate and most thorough and systematic search for the murderer. Although Mr. Bunker had lived alone he was neither a miser nor a crank, and did not appear to have had an enemy in the world. The crowds that flocked to the house came to view the body of their old friend, and to express a wish that his murderer be brought to speedy justice. Motives of mere curiosity did not actuate many of them. From several of them I gathered a number of clues, all of which pointed to one conclusion, namely, that a tramp had been seen coming from the direction of the Bunker farm early in the morning of the day on which the body of Mr. Bunker had been found. I now directed my efforts to trace and locate the tramp. On the next day I had him in custody. He had not gone far. He made some very extraordinary statements. He said that Mr. Bunker was his friend, and that he had not killed him. When searched he had in his possession over \$20 in bills. He was also known to have sent \$30 to somebody in Virginia. This money he claimed had been given to him by Mr. Bunker. He furthermore claimed that he was not a tramp but a machinist in search of work.

“Was an autopsy held upon the body of Mr. Bunker?” inquired the suspected

man.

“No; the cause of death was too plainly apparent.”

“I thought as much. If an autopsy had been held it would have shown that Mr. Bunker died a natural death.”

I was impressed with the man’s sincerity. He seemed to be no ordinary tramp, and I was convinced that he was telling the truth, as he believed it.

At my request an autopsy was held. The result of it went to prove that Mr. Bunker’s death occurred from apoplexy, and he was dead several hours before the knife wound in the heart had been inflicted.

“You evidently did not kill Mr. Bunker,” I said, “but do you know anything about the knife wound which we supposed caused the death?”

“Yes,” replied the tramp, “I inflicted it myself.”

“You! Why did you do it?”

“I’ll tell you.”

And he told the following story:

THE TRAMP’S STORY.

“Joseph Bunker and I have been friends from boyhood. We always lived near each other and grew up together. We never quarrelled as most boys will. The families of both of us were in well-to-do condition. The war came and reduced us to poverty. I forgot to tell you that we were natives of and then living in Virginia. After the war I learned the trade of a machinist, while Mr. Bunker wandered North to try his luck. He succeeded pretty well, I have reason to believe, far better than I have. The incident I have to relate occurred just before he left for the North. Joseph’s father died. There are a number of people in Virginia who, as perhaps you know, have a peculiar custom as regards the treatment of their dead. Before burial, in order to guard against the terrible possibility of burying their friends alive while seeming to be dead, they run a dagger through the heart. The Bunker family, as well as mine, had always adhered to this custom. Joseph Bunker, however, was an exception to the general rule. He believed the custom to be as unnecessary as it was revolting. He chose to accept the word of the doctors that his father was really dead, and did not believe there was any possibility or

probability of his being in a trance. He refused to allow his father's remains to be mutilated, as he called it. It was winter time when his father died. It was an unusually severe winter, and to dig a grave was out of the question. So the body was deposited in the receiving vault to wait for spring. In the spring a grave was dug and everything made ready for the burial. Just previous to the interment, Joseph expressed a desire to look once more upon the face of his dead parent. The casket was opened, and a most horrifying sight met the gaze of those who stood around. The corpse, as it was believed to be, had evidently come to life, and in the struggle to get out of the casket, the lid of which had been only too securely fastened down, Mr. Bunker had torn his hair out by the handfuls, and had torn to shreds the interior furnishings of his narrow prison. Strong man though he was, Joseph Bunker fainted away and did not recover consciousness until the body of his father had been buried. He and I alone remained by the grave side when the others had gone. We then and there made a solemn vow that the survivor should perform for the dead man—what the doctor should call the dead man—the office which my companion had neglected to perform in the case of his father. Shortly afterwards, as I have said, Joseph Bunker went North. A week ago I wandered into this neighborhood, partly in search of work and partly to pay a visit to my old friend. I had his address, for we had always been in communication with each other. In nearly all of his letters of late, he referred to the fact that his health was failing and that he wished I could make it convenient to be present at his death. My visit to his house found him suffering from the effects of a recent shock of apoplexy. He told me he didn't think he had long to live. He spoke in truth. He died that very night, a few minutes after midnight. His last words were: 'Don't forget our vow, old friend.' I hadn't forgotten, but I put off doing the unwelcome work until I was certain my old friend was dead. I waited five hours, then I fulfilled my vow. I was afraid to be found with the dead body. People would not believe my story, I feared. So I struck off and got away as far from the place as possible; guilty of no crime, yet fearing punishment at the hands of those who would perhaps not believe my story."

A Freight Car Adventure.

The freight cars of the B. & R. Railroad were being systematically robbed. During one month in 1891, the railroad company lost over \$5,000 in this way. It was impossible to catch the thieves. On several occasions the conductor, engineer and brakeman had been shot at, and narrowly escaped death. The thieves used to board the train either before it left the freight yard, or during one of its numerous stops along the road, and hold the train until they had secured what they wanted, thrown it off, usually in a lonely spot far from dwellings, and made their escape. On numerous occasions a posse of police were secreted on the trains, but these nights (the robberies occurred always at night) the thieves failed to put in an appearance, evidently having learned that pains had been taken to give them a warm reception. I suspected something more than the railroad officials seemed to suspect, and when I was told to do my best to bring the thieves to justice, I laid my plans accordingly. I sought leave from the conductor to ride on his train in disguise.

“I can’t allow you to do so without permission from headquarters,” declared the conductor.

“But I want to try to capture the thieves who have been robbing this company’s trains and shooting at you, and I haven’t time to get the necessary permission,” I protested.

The conductor still refused to let me ride.

“I must and shall ride on your train to-night,” I said. “To-morrow night I shall be a good many miles away and I must carry out my orders to-night.”

“I have my orders, too, to carry out,” declared the conductor.

“I shall ride, nevertheless,” was my parting shot.

I did not ride. I had no intention of doing so. There was nothing taken from that train that night.

On the following night I secreted myself in the train, disguised as a tramp. I lay in hiding in an empty hay car. At the various stopping places, I took careful note of what occurred. Nothing suspicious happened until we got about two miles beyond C——. Here the train slowed up, although there was no station anywhere in sight. From my post of observation I saw everything that occurred. The conductor and some of the brakemen broke open the door of a car in which,

as I afterward learned, there was a big consignment of tobacco and cigars. A large quantity of this was thrown out. Pretty soon one of the brakemen left his fellows and started rapidly away from the train. Hastily slipping from my place of concealment, I hurried after him. I had not taken half a dozen steps when a pistol shot whistled past my head. I stopped short, drew my revolver and prepared to open fire upon those in my rear. Just as I turned I saw the conductor take off his hat, and, holding it in his hand, deliberately fire his revolver at it. On the morrow, he would doubtless tell a harrowing tale of adventure with train robbers, and show visible proof of his own narrow escape from death. I was immediately taken in charge by the train crew, and, it being part of my plan, I made no resistance. We had not gone many miles when the conductor came to me and magnanimously offered me my freedom and promised not to turn me over to the authorities, if I would go quietly about my business.

“Why do you hold me prisoner?” I demanded.

“For complicity in robbing this train,” replied the conductor, coolly. “Your accomplice got away.”

“Yours, you mean,” I remarked.

“Who’ll believe that story?”

The conductor did not suspect my identity. He put me off the train. If he had known whom I was, my life would probably not have been worth ten cents.

I hurried to the nearest station, hunted up the telegraph operator, and when the robbed train reached the end of its run, there were several policemen on hand to put the conductor and his accomplices under arrest.

For another lot of choice detective stories see No. 11 of Multum in Parvo Library.

Two Ghosts.

The following extraordinary story came under my observation some years ago:

Tom Johnson and Jack Spencer were close friends. One evening in Johnson's room they played cards and Spencer won every cent Johnson had. Spencer was visiting his friend at the time, and retired to sleep with him. Sometime after midnight Spencer awoke feeling very uncomfortable. There was a strange silence in the room. Johnson, usually a loud snorer, was sleeping as quietly and peacefully as a baby. Was he really sleeping or was he dead? This question flashed across Spencer's mind. He leaned toward his friend to ascertain whether he was breathing. He was not. He felt for his heart. It was not beating. He raised his friend's head from the pillow. It dropped back, heavy as lead. The limbs were stiff. The *rigor mortis* had already come upon the body.

"Johnson must have committed suicide," thought Spencer aghast. "It's all on account of his losing so much money at cards. Now that it has been impressed upon me, I recall his strange remark on saying good-night. It was, 'Well, if I should die to-night, good-bye, old fellow.' And he seemed quite despondent. I also saw him drink something out of a small phial, poison, no doubt. What shall I do? I have been indirectly the cause of his committing suicide. I won all his money at cards—money which he no doubt had intended to devote to some special purpose. How can I face his mother under such circumstances? I can not and shall not. I'll get out of the way for a few days, until I recover from the shock of this terrible affair."

Another impulse came to him and he proceeded to set upon it. He took nearly all the money from his pocket and put it on the table, where the friends of the dead man would be sure to find it. He also placed near it a note, inscribed as follows: "Please use this money to defray the funeral expenses. Spencer."

Then he quietly left the house, and he took the first train from the city. He eagerly scanned the evening papers next day, for news of the finding of the dead body of Johnson. There was nothing to that effect, but instead he read the following item concerning himself:

IS IT SUICIDE?

John Spencer has mysteriously disappeared and is supposed to have committed suicide. Before committing the rash act, he left a sum of

money which he directed to be used for defraying the burial expenses. The ponds in the neighborhood are being dragged in the hope of finding the body.

His surprise on reading the above can readily be imagined. He returned home immediately. Almost the first person he met was his friend, Johnson.

Spencer staggered and put his hand to his head. Was he awake? Johnson showed similar signs of surprise.

“Then you didn’t commit suicide,” said Johnson.

“And you are not dead?” returned Spencer.

“Dead? Certainly not.”

“But I left you for dead in bed last night.”

“Dead! You must have been dreaming.”

“No; you were pulseless and cold and stiff.”

“Ah,” said Johnson, “that is easily explained. I was simply in one of my cataleptic fits. No wonder you thought I was dead.”

“Yes, I thought you had committed suicide.”

“That’s what we all thought about you. What did you leave the money for?”

“Why, to pay your funeral expenses.”

“Well, since I don’t need it, I shall return it,” said Johnson. “I was afraid I’d have to use it to pay yours.”

“I am glad it has all turned out so happily, old fellow,” said Spencer, and the two ghosts shook hands.

He Addressed the Jury.

A man who had never seen the inside of a courtroom until he was introduced as a witness in a case pending in one of the Scottish courts, on being sworn, took a position with his back to the jury, and began telling his story to the judge.

The judge, in a bland and courteous manner, said,—

“Address yourself to the jury, sir.”

The man made a short pause, but, notwithstanding what had been said to him, continued his narrative.

The judge was then more explicit, and said to him, “Speak to the jury, sir; the men sitting behind you on the benches.”

The witness at once turned around, and, making an awkward bow, said, with perfect gravity,—

“Good morning, gentlemen.”

Transcriber's Note:

Punctuation has been made consistent.

The following change was made:

[p. 7](#): married changed to remarried (never remarried. He)

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