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**BRITZ**  
OF HEADQUARTERS

BY MARCIN BARBER

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Toronto.

"These investigators have all the  
information they require," said Sands  
to the widow. "I suppose they're an-  
xious to be off on the case." It was  
plain he half regretted having rung  
up 3100 Spring. Griswold glanced at  
him triumphantly.

"Well, ma'am—huh!—I guess we'll  
send the 'rooms' to Donnelly's  
next inquisitorial venture.

"Which rooms?" Mrs. Missioner was  
not at all pleased.

"The servants' of course. That's  
the next step." Donnelly was back  
in his routine now, and the catch left  
his voice again. He was effective, too.  
Mrs. Missioner really gasped.

"That is entirely unnecessary," she  
said icily. "I told you I could not sus-  
pect anybody."

"Never mind that, ma'am. We'll do  
all the suspecting that's necessary.  
Needn't disturb you, I suppose. This  
gentleman can show us the way?" and  
Donnelly turned inquiringly to the  
footman.

Blodgett's face always story, be-  
came adamant. But Mrs. Missioner  
made no sign of dissent, so he glided  
away with the Central Office men in  
his wake. Sands gazed after the de-  
tective ruefully. Griswold watching  
with unmistakable malice. Little Miss  
March began asking questions, but the  
widow stopped her with a playful  
cess.

"Let them look, dear," she said re-  
signedly. "They won't find anything,  
of course, but I suppose they would  
not be contented otherwise. Tell me,"  
she added to Griswold, "are there any  
really intelligent detectives?"

"Ask me something easy," he re-  
plied lapsing into the vernacular of  
the clubs. Mulberry Street has  
many minds. I suppose it must have  
some without any. Bruston is un-  
lucky, that's all."

There was a man in Mulberry Street  
Bruston was to find much more effi-  
cient than the present visitors from  
headquarters. As the widow did not  
know that, she was a good deal bored  
and some of her first distress at the  
loss of her jewels, particularly the  
Maharane diamond, returned. She  
was almost despondent when the de-  
tective, after an exhaustive search of  
the servants' quarters, returned. They  
had ransacked even the room of Mrs.  
Missioner's absent maid, but to no  
purpose. Blodgett, frozen in the door-  
way, gave no other sign than a malig-  
nant side glance without turning his  
head. It was apparent, however, Blod-  
gett didn't like Central Office men.  
Whatever his reasons, he didn't like  
them, and only the presence of Mrs.  
Missioner and her guests deterred him  
from manifesting his dislikes. Still,  
Blodgett was nobody's fool. He had  
submitted to a search of his room  
without protesting more you wish  
to know?" asked Mrs. Missioner, ris-  
ing. Donnelly was oblivious to the hint.

"Yes, ma'am, Mrs. Missioner," he  
answered. "I think we'll talk to your  
secretary now."

CHAPTER IV  
"The Chief Wants to See You"

Elinor Holcomb, tall, graceful, gray-  
eyed, stood framed between crimson  
portieres like a Velasquez portrait.  
Her refinement differed from Mrs.  
Missioner's climactically, but, de-  
spite the polar oppositeness of their  
coloring, there was a resemblance be-  
tween them. Mrs. Missioner's eyes  
turned to her apologetically.

"I regret to disturb you so late  
Elinor," he said, "but these gentle-  
men insist on seeing you. I suppose  
you were sleeping?"

"I was dozing, I fear," smiled the  
girl. "I had been reading." She held  
a book in her hand.

"The necklace with the Maharane  
diamond is gone," the widow explain-  
ed, "and paste jewels have been put  
in their place. This is Detective Don-  
nelly, of the Central Office, and this is  
Detective—ah—"

"Carson, ma'am," said Donnelly.  
Carson himself had been about to  
speak, but his big colleague, as usual,  
hastened to do the talking for him.

"I'm sure I'm very glad to see Mr.  
Donnelly and Mr. Carson, since there  
has been a robbery," said Elinor  
easily. She moved softly to the cen-  
ter of the room and stood looking at  
the Headquarters men. "Are you sure  
the real diamonds are gone?"

Mrs. Missioner made a gesture to-  
ward the safe and indicated the heap  
of false gems on the table.

"Is it likely," sneered Griswold,  
"that whoever put the paste stones  
there would neglect to take the real  
ones? I see you read De Maupassant's  
Miss Holcomb. Stories like 'The  
Necklace' don't happen."

Elinor laughed as she turned the  
book in her hand so the others might  
see the name of the great Frenchman  
on the cover.

"Yet the way the young couple  
applied their lives to pay for the false  
necklace reads plausibly," she retort-  
ed. "You are growing more obser-  
vant, Mr. Griswold."

Sands was overcome by his grow-  
ing impatience.

"If the detectives have any ques-  
tions to put to Miss Holcomb, I sug-  
gest that they waste no time," he  
said. "There can't be much to ask."

"No, there isn't much, Mr. Sands,"  
retorted the large Central Office man.  
"I'd just like to ask the young lady  
who she thinks took the diamonds."

Elinor looked amused.

"How should I know?" she queried,  
a little irritated by the man's abrupt-  
ness. "This is the first time I heard of  
the robbery."

"The very first!" exclaimed Donnelly  
pointedly.

Miss Holcomb was standing close to  
Miss March. She only turned part of  
her face to the detective as she an-  
swered quietly:

"The very first?"

"Then maybe you'll explain, miss,  
why you didn't come in with the other  
huh?—that is, why you didn't ap-  
pear before?"

"I have told you I was reading in  
my room," she replied. "I know no-  
thing of the robbery, nor even of Mrs.  
Missioner's return from the opera, un-  
til the housekeeper knocked on my  
door with the information Mrs. Mis-  
sioner wished to see me in the li-  
brary."

"Housekeeper a friend of yours?"

Elinor regarded him frowningly.

"You evidently misunderstand," she  
said. "I am Mrs. Missioner's secre-  
tary." The widow looked at her pro-  
tectively.

"Well, you're one of her employes  
ain't you?" growled Donnelly. "I'm  
not here to split hairs, miss. A neck-  
lace worth a half-million dollars has  
been stolen, and I'm here to find out  
who stole it. Get me."

Miss Holcomb "got him" in the  
sense he meant, a deep flush started  
below her well-cheeked chin and  
mounted to the soft, dark waves of  
her hair. She turned an apprehensive  
glance upon the little circle of Mrs.  
Missioner's friends, ending with an  
appealing look at Mrs. Missioner her-  
self.

"I really regard this as wholly un-  
necessary," Mrs. Donnelly said to the  
widow, with slow insistence. "Miss  
Holcomb is not only my secretary, but  
my trusted friend. Her elder sister  
was in my class at Smith. I have  
known the Holcombs many years."

"You think you know them, ma'am,"  
Donnelly persisted, "but my experi-  
ence is you never can tell who you  
know in a case like this. Me and my  
side-partner have been sent here to  
recover your jewels and locate the  
thief, and if you don't let us do it on  
our own way, we can't be held res-  
ponsible."

"I'm afraid you'd better not inter-  
fere, Doris," said Sands.

It was difficult for him to hide his  
enjoyment of the turn the affair had  
taken. He watched Elinor as if he  
revealed in her distress.

"Besides, ma'am, if you'll pardon  
me," said Donnelly, "the case is one  
of your hands now; it's in the hand  
of the Detective Bureau."

"Very well," Mrs. Missioner sub-  
mitted. "But I know you're wasting  
your time, if Miss Holcomb could sit  
in any way, tell all she knows  
without being questioned."

"Perhaps she would," Donnelly re-  
joined, shooting a glance at Carson  
that seemed to say, "And perhaps she  
wouldn't. Again there came that  
squaring of himself, coupled with an  
occasional 'Huh!' of embarrassment,  
as he plunged into an examination of  
the widow's secretary. "Do you wear  
diamonds?" he asked mysteriously.

"What were you doing in Maiden  
Lane the other day?" asked Donnelly  
sharply.

"I was not down in Maiden Lane. I  
haven't been down in weeks. The last  
time I went south of the shop-  
ping district was more than a month  
ago."

"That is true," said Mrs. Missioner,  
hurriedly. "Miss Holcomb went to  
the Battery Trust Company for me."

"Much obliged, ma'am," Donnelly  
was anxious to show more deference  
to the widow. Carson, who whispered  
to him something of her social impor-  
tance. Yes, Carson, although he was  
only a neutral tint in the human color  
scheme, knew a few things.

"Was that the day you took the dia-  
monds to Tiffany's?" queried the big  
detective icily. "To have one of  
the small stones made tighter, you  
know?"

Miss Holcomb's disdain had given  
place to dull wonder. Where had the  
man got his misinformation? Could  
it be he really thought, but no. It  
was too strange. She was coming about  
her throat to force back the sob that  
would come.

"I am completely confused by your  
questions," she stammered. "I do  
not know how to answer. What you  
say is so strange, I looked at the  
others with a world of apprehension  
in my eyes. Astonishment, sympathy,  
affection, cynicism, mutely replied.  
Stretching both hands towards Mrs.  
Missioner, advancing with faltering  
steps, the victim of the detective's  
persecution cried, "Mrs. Missioner,  
it is possible you can think—do you even  
imagine I—I—oh, with a swift  
to Miss March, "Dorothy, Dorothy!"

To the credit of little Miss March  
it is remembered she met Elinor's  
second appeal with undiminished ten-  
derness. Mrs. Missioner, too, was  
kind, but her gentle "No, Elinor," was  
not so reassuring as the loving pass  
Dorothy squandered on the bent shoul-  
ders of the distressed girl. Sands  
swore in his thoughts. His big fingers  
beat a gold pendulum into wavy lines.  
Ransome, with alternate finger-tips  
and lines in his palms. Griswold  
turned his cigarette round and round  
with agile fingers and thumb. Blod-  
gett's eyes seemed to lunge at the de-  
tective.

"I guess Miss Holcomb isn't ready  
to tell all she knows—yet," said Don-  
nelly meaningly. "While we're wait-  
ing for her, let's see how the other  
two hold up." He turned to Mrs. Mis-  
sioner and Carson, who were sitting  
just above a look in her room."

Mrs. Missioner was about to nega-  
tive the suggestion, but a glance at  
Elinor's shaming form stopped her.  
She did not reply, and the detectives  
walked out of the room in silence.

A look from the window sent Blod-  
gett stalking in their wake. The foot-  
man kept his eyes on Donnelly's  
turned back as if calculating how  
much strength was required to seize  
those thick ankles with a sudden  
heave. Not until the Central Office  
men were at the end of the passage  
did the sobbing secretary start in  
great agitation toward the door. On  
the threshold she paused and turned  
slowly to the face of the male group.  
"Since they are going to search my  
—the room," she said, in a choking  
voice. "I wish you would all come  
there with me. I—I feel that—won't  
you all come—please?"

The men hung back, but Doris and  
Dorothy joined her in the instant, and  
together the three women followed  
the detective into the lift. Blodgett  
backed from the car and stood staring  
at the detectives through the rose-  
tinted grill. A boy in quiet liver-  
y threw the lever and the steel cage  
shot upwards. The car stopped at the  
third floor and the little party pre-  
ceded to a room at the end of a  
softly lighted corridor.

It was a charming little boudoir into

which Donnelly's spreading feet and  
Carson's fat tread carried the de-  
tective. Mrs. Missioner, Elinor and  
Dorothy were only a little way in and  
looked on silently. The men made  
their search according to their na-  
tures. Carson with moderate indiffer-  
ence and despatch, Donnelly exhaus-  
tively, lingeringly, gleefully. When  
the large sleuth's thick fingers—  
and he was more than a little ordi-  
narily intrusive. Mrs. Missioner seem-  
ed about to protest, but each time she  
checked herself.

"It is better to let them search thor-  
oughly," said Elinor. "Since this is  
considered necessary, I wish it to be  
made complete. Please do not inter-  
fere with them." She handed to Car-  
son a small silver keyring. He passed  
it to his mate, and Donnelly's enjoy-  
ment of the situation increased by  
leaps and bounds. No single key on  
the tiny ring escaped use of his hands.  
He unlocked boxes, a dressing-cas-  
e and other places of possible conceal-  
ment. His method would have drawn  
a derisive smile from Chief of De-  
tective Manning. But Manning was far  
downtown in Mulberry Street, and  
could not know the course his subordi-  
nates were pursuing.

From a drawer in Elinor's chest-  
of-drawers, Donnelly took a box of  
rare lacquer and fitted a key to it. He  
stopped to gaze searchingly at Mrs.  
Holcomb for a few moments, then he  
unlocked the box.

"I hate to pry into any young lady's  
little keepsakes," he said in a per-  
fectedly patronizing manner, "but a  
Miss Holcomb hasn't been to Maiden  
Lane in such a long time, I know she  
won't object. Now, this little box, of  
course, contains nothing but trinkets  
or odds and ends—love-letters, may-  
be?" Elinor's heart sickened at the  
leer in his face. She turned her eyes  
to Dorothy's loving little face, and  
clung to the debutante's hand. Don-  
nelly, fumbling with the key for  
while, opened the lacquered box.

"Just what I said, you see," he ex-  
claimed. "Nothing but trinkets and  
other little souvenirs—huh! of old  
souvenirs, perhaps. Eh, it's great to  
be a summer girl, Miss Holcomb. If  
only you had jewels like Mrs. Mis-  
sioner's, you'd shine with the best of  
them. Gee, but that must be a beauty,  
that necklace. If the imitation is so  
pretty."

He stirred the contents of the box  
idly. Nothing else remained to be  
searched. He glanced at the little  
maid sanctity of the girl's room. He  
felt baffled and sorely irritated. At  
the thought of failure he thrust his  
fingers into the box with such vio-  
lence that everything it held fell to  
the floor. Carson stooped to pick up  
the scattered jewelry, placing it in  
Elinor's hand. "You won't mind  
the box. After recovering several bits  
of jewelry, he laid in his big colleague's  
greedy clutch a small, round object  
wrapped in silk tissue.

"Hello, what's this!" exclaimed Don-  
nelly, rolling the fairly parcel between  
finger and thumb. "You won't mind  
if I peep in the paper, young lady?  
Of course you won't. And this is only  
—a—say, what the mischief is it? Oh,  
glory!"

Even Carson was startled into an  
echoing "Oh!" and the three women  
almost screamed. For, wrapped in the  
olds of the tissue, its facets twinkling  
in the insistent green glow of the  
vacuum lights, flashed a diamond—an  
unmistakable diamond— which Mrs.  
Missioner and Dorothy and Elinor re-  
cognized as one of the lesser gems  
from the Maharane necklace—much  
smaller than the Maharane diamond,  
but twice the size of an ordinary  
stone. And it was a diamond, even a  
novice could tell was genuine!

All the blood left Elinor's face. The  
muscles of her throat leaped and  
knotted as if she were strangling.  
She swayed for a moment, then took  
a long step toward the detective and  
stood trembling, covering her face  
with quivering hands. Donnelly, hold-  
ing the diamond to the light, was  
about to speak—in what words, what  
manner, one can guess. But the mys-  
tery in the girl's attitude struck the  
triumphant grin from his face, and  
there was momentary compassion in  
the tone in which he said:

"We'd better go back to the library,  
I guess. Will you go with my side-  
partner, Miss Holcomb?"

Carson's advance to the secretary's  
side was checked by the violence with  
which she whirled towards Mrs. Mis-  
sioner, again with outstretched hands.  
This time the widow was slower in  
meeting the appeal. She was stunned  
by the detective's discovery. All the  
finer sensibilities of her womanhood  
were aroused. Astonishment, large  
and compelling, was all she could feel  
for the moment. Still, as she took  
Elinor's imploring hands in hers and  
stood motionless, listening to the  
girl's passionate entreaty not to be-  
lieve the evidence of her eyes, nor to  
believe her kindness could be out-  
raged in such a way, not to believe  
that Elinor for all the jewels in the  
mines of the world could be tempted  
from the high honor in which she had  
been reared. Claspings the younger  
woman's locked fingers in her own  
soft palm, she slipped her arm about  
Elinor's waist and walked with her  
to the lift. Dorothy, opening almost  
childishly, controlled her voice once  
or twice long enough to beg Elinor not  
to give way to such torturing emotion.

But Elinor Holcomb, shaking, sob-  
bing, wildly beseeching, was oblivious  
to the silent watchfulness of the Cen-  
tral Office men, the covert glances  
from Blodgett's mask-like counte-  
nance, the amazed stare of the liveried  
youth in the elevator. All the way to  
the room in which Sands and Gris-  
wold and Ransome waited, all the  
way across the old English library, to  
the ruddy zone before the fireplace,  
she continued her prayers to Mrs. Mis-  
sioner to hold her privates. That was  
the one thought that shaped her  
thoughts: that the woman to whom  
she owed the shelter of her life, to whom  
she should not think her capable of such  
ignominious ingratitude. There was no  
slightest shade of appeal to the de-  
tective, no regard for the conclusions  
others in the room might draw. But  
that Mrs. Missioner should give cred-  
it to the cold accusation that had  
entered in the diamond Donnelly had  
found—that plainly was the unbar-  
able thing in the wretched young woman's  
present position.

"You won't have to telephone the  
Chief, Mr. Man," said Donnelly to  
Sands with a direct sneer as he  
thought advisable. "This has been  
one of our easiest cases."

(To be continued)



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