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BRITZ OF HEADQUARTERS

BY MARCIN BARBER

Supplied Exclusively in Canada by the British & Colonial Press, Limited, Toronto.

Miss Holcomb knitted her brows. Her perplexity made her slow and hesitating of speech. "I cannot say that," she answered. "Sometimes I thought she cared more for Mr. Griswold, and then again I would feel certain she preferred Mr. Sands. In the main, however, I always believed that Mr. Sands held her affections; while Mr. Griswold simply pleased her with his attentions."

"Possibly Mrs. Missioner didn't know her own mind?" the detective asked. "Perhaps not," agreed Miss Holcomb. "Did she ever make any remarks to you that led you to believe she cared more for one than for the other?"

"None that I recall," Miss Holcomb, do you know the history of the Maharanee diamond?" he suddenly asked. "A quick spark of memory kindled her mind, and with the first flash she understood the import of his question."

"Mrs. Missioner told me the history of the stone," she said. "I believe there was some scandal connected with its purchase in India. She told me that when her husband obtained it, there was some talk of it having been stolen from a temple and that the provincial native government tried to regain possession of it. Mr. Missioner succeeded, however, in retaining it as part of his collection."

"What opportunity did the Indian servant have of obtaining the necklace?" "None at all," she answered hopefully, "unless he broke into the safe, and I believe that was not done."

"Mrs. Missioner informed me that on one occasion, when the necklace was lying on the table, the servant entered the room with a box. You were in the room at the time. Was he close enough to the table to touch the necklace?"

"I remember the incident very well," she replied. "I took the box from him at the door and he turned around and went downstairs. I do not believe he was within ten feet of the table at any time."

"I don't know what to think," Britz said, after some reflection. "Almost as soon as a new cleft bobs up, it falls down and I have to begin all over again. I have no more questions to ask to-day."

Fitch accompanied the detective out of the prison, begging vainly for some word of encouragement. Britz answered his questions with monosyllables, as if he feared to commit himself with regard to the outcome of his investigation. Just before parting, however, Britz said:

"Ever one that develops in this case, you can rest assured, will be followed to the end. So far, nothing has been discovered that changes the aspect of the case in the slightest degree."

The detective walked to Headquarters and entered the office of the Chief. "Has Donnelly or Carson reported anything new?" he inquired. "Nothing," answered the Chief. "And you?"

"Nothing that throws any light on the case," Britz, the Chief remarked, as though delivering some warning conclusion. "I think you're working on the wrong hypothesis. You seem to have decided that Miss Holcomb is innocent. If you will survey the case as it stands, you will have to acknowledge that absolutely everything in it points to her guilt. I do not understand why, what her motive was in stealing the jewels, unless it was simply the feminine lust for ornaments. I feel certain, also, that she was not alone in the crime. My belief is that she took the necklace out of the safe, turned it over to Dr. Fitch, or some one else, to have the duplicate made, and then returned the false jewels to the safe."

"But where were the paste gems made?" inquired Britz. "That's for you to find out," snapped the Chief. "I have personally visited every manufacturer of paste gems in this city and in Philadelphia, Boston, Buffalo and Washington. My men have been to all the places in the smaller cities. Manufacturers in all the other cities of the country have been visited by the local police, and I feel absolutely sure that the duplicates were not made in this country. Logan is on the way to Paris now, and until we hear from him I don't think we are safe in venturing any opinion as to the identity of the thief. I am receiving daily reports of the movements of Sands, Griswold, the butler, and the Indian servant, but they show nothing."

at a glance. I saw him yesterday and he informed me the stones he saw were genuine. "The following your line of reasoning, we must conclude that the original was out of the possession of Mrs. Missioner without her knowledge long enough to enable the thief to have the duplicate made? And if that is the case, then only one person could have succeeded in the crime. The secretary was the only one who had access to the safe, and she also would have known Mrs. Missioner's plans well enough to enable her to judge the length of time she could withhold the necklace without detection. Of course the theft would have been discovered at once by Mrs. Missioner if she were watching while it was gone."

"The original stones were never stolen from the safe," Britz said in a positive tone. "Then how was the substitute made?" queried the other. "I don't know," replied the detective gloomily. "I have yet to discover the time of the substitution."

"It seems to me," said the Chief, "you have still to discover a good many things with regard to this case. As a matter of fact, you're as much at sea as on the day you took charge. I have only begun to throw you some lines." "I'll land fish before I'm through, and it won't be Miss Holcomb!"

As the detective left the office, he could not help a feeling of depression at the slow progress of events. As yet, the intricacies of the mystery were vaguely outlined in his mind. If he could not get a feeling of depression at the slow progress of events, as yet, the intricacies of the mystery were vaguely outlined in his mind. If he could not get a feeling of depression at the slow progress of events, as yet, the intricacies of the mystery were vaguely outlined in his mind.

CHAPTER I. Dorothy March Talks. Matinee girls in the Forest Theatre differ from their sisters of other New York theatres in that they are more serious than anybody in the evening audiences. Caramels, marshmallows, chocolate creams, are forbidden by the unwritten law of their cult. The utmost nourishment one of them can allow herself is a salted almond, and she surreptitiously betwixts a delectable little outburst of kid-gloved applause. It is not the sort of gathering in which one would expect to find the busiest sleuth of the headquarters staff, especially with a great diamond mystery on his hands.

On the surface, that is to say, in reality, he was not listening to a word of the Theopian culture that trickled over the footlights. But his ears were unoccupied, not so his eyes. His glance circled the auditorium like a ramrod swung on a swivel, resting on the stage at long intervals in a perfunctory way. Manning could have told in a moment that his own lieutenant was not at all interested in the unfolding of the attenuated plot on the boards; that Britz was looking for somebody.

Britz found the somebody he sought when his gaze fell on a slim girl-gowned, sitting in the fifth row of the centre aisle. Instantly his last pretense of attention to the play vanished. Keeping his eyes on the gray curves of the girl in the fifth row, he quitted his post at one side of the house and walked directly to the main exit, whence he watched her until the curtain fell on the first act. Meanwhile, he scribbled on a card, slipped a liberal tip into the receptive hand of an usher, and indicated the object of his interest. When the curtain fell down the aisle, and presented the card to the girl in gray.

"If Miss March," read the young woman, "will spare a few minutes to Britz, of Headquarters, she will confer a favor and serve her friend, Mrs. Missioner."

Dorothy gathered her wrap, glasses, and programme quickly, and followed the usher to the back of the theatre. The youth led her to the famous detective, whom, though she had heard of him through Doris Missioner, she beheld for the first time. She had expected to see a man whose cleverness was writ large on his exterior; she was disappointed by the almost commonplace appearance of the man who faced her. But she acknowledged his self-introduction with the sweetness inseparable from her mignon features, and, at his request, strolled with him to a corner of the lobby, where they seated themselves on softly tinted bent-wood chairs.

"You wished to see me?" inquired Dorothy. It was a banal question, and a flush tinged her cheeks as she realized its superfluity. She could not escape the greatest detective in New York. But Britz seemed not to notice it, and the simple directness of his manner put the girl at her ease. "I took the liberty, Miss March," he said pleasantly, "because I saw you across the orchestra, and I need a short course in social knowledge." His smile robbed the reply of flippancy.

"Fancy!" said Dorothy. She was so utterly at sea as to the detective's purpose she could think of nothing else to say save, "I fear you have sought a poor teacher."

"Well, I don't know, now," Britz returned, looking at her with respectful admiration. "You see, you're a society girl, and I know something of society, and therefore something worth knowing—something I ought to know."

"If there's anything I can tell you, Mr. Britz, I'll be glad to do so," Dorothy volunteered. "Especially if it will help you to find Mrs. Missioner's diamonds."

"I'm not sure it will," said Britz. "It may, however, save me from seeking them in the wrong place. You seemed to enjoy the play, Miss March."

This shift of subjects was so abrupt that if Dorothy's breath had not hurriedly been coming in catches, she might have been laughing. There were two actresses who were more original than society men. She wondered absently if the type was worth studying.

manufacturer by young woman. Gave name of Elinor Holcomb. Britz dismissed the visitor, left the house, and hastened to the office of Dr. Fitch. Taking the important cablegram from his pocket, he handed it to the physician. The doctor's eyes lingered on each word. He palely, his eyes looked forward, a violent tremor ran up and down his frame.

"This is awful!" he groaned. "It's great news for you and Miss Holcomb," the detective smiled. Fitch eyed him in perplexity. To detect a man who had been steadily, and slowly folding the cablegram, he said:

"It proves beyond question she had no part in the crime." "How?" Fitch demanded eagerly. "If Miss Holcomb had been enough to pass the theft, she'd have known better than to about Paris ordering the duplicates. Also, if she had taken the diamonds, she'd never have permitted one of them to remain in her room in Mrs. Missioner's house. No, whoever stole those gems deliberately tried to throw suspicion on her."

"But who could have conceived such a dastardly crime?" Fitch burst, a wave of anger sweeping his frame. "Whoever it was," Britz returned, "either was actuated by enmity toward the young woman, or knew enough about the diamonds to realize the suspicion would naturally fall on her, and therefore he decided to use her as a cloak to hide his own identity. However, I now have something to work on, something that will produce quick results. Dr. Fitch, you may tell Miss Holcomb that in my calculation she is entirely absolved from participation in the crime. You may inform her also that the hunt for the thief has begun."

Before the physician recovered from the pleasant shock of the detective's words, Britz was hurrying down the steps.

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case. "I believe it's considered one of the best hits of the season. Very elevating, you know, and—well, different." "Modern, Miss March?" "It has two periods. The first deals with the life of to-day, the second harks back to the early-Victorian period, with, I understand, an abrupt return to the present."

"She was chatting quite easily with the detective now. Had she been reared in Mulberry Street instead of on Murray Hill, she could not have felt more natural. "Now, this society subject—by the way, Miss March," Britz switched again. "Is there as much difference between social life then and now?"

"Oh, a great deal, I should say. Her eyes twinkled. "Of course I cannot speak with authority—from personal observation." "I wouldn't ask you to tell me anything about Ward McAllister from personal observation, Miss March," said the sleuth. His gallantry on occasion was the wonder of the Central Office.

Dorothy looked alarmed. Could it be great detectives wasted time on compliments, too? But a side glance at the detective's serious expression reassured her. It was manifestly a debate he had no idea of making an impromptu speech along that line. She laughed frankly and looked at him again in the friendliest way. "I know you don't want to ask me anything so recent as the Spanish War," she said, "now, do you?"

"Candidly, I don't," he rejoined. "To tell you the plain truth, I don't know exactly what I wish to ask nor how to ask it, but I have an idea you can help me, and I'm sure you will for Mrs. Missioner's sake."

"And Miss Holcomb's?" asked the girl eagerly. "She, too, you know, is a dear friend of mine." "And Miss Holcomb's," answered the Headquarters man warmly. "Let me say, too, my dear young lady, as one old enough to be your—your—"

"Don't say my brother, Mr. Britz," interposed Dorothy mischievously. "I—I—well, I don't really see how I can be a sister to anybody else. She felt impelled to treat this strangerly natural man naturally—she, who despite her inexperience, could freeze presumption with a glance, felt that way. It was a tribute to his adaptability."

"Miss March," he said with more heartiness in his tone than had colored it in many a day. "If I were not so busy, it would be a delight to be an elder brother to you. But I guess you're not interested in my impulses, and we were talking of the play."

"Oh, yes, the play's the thing," Dorothy countered with keen relish of the situation. If subtly was his intention, she would show him what a woman—Dorothy was all of nineteen—a woman could do. "I never would have supposed," she added, allowing herself full measure of mischief, "that a famous detective could be a matinee man."

Britz winced. His ready good nature parried her shafts, however, and it was with the same slow smile that he replied: "Does the author reconcile the manners of the two periods, or is the piece one of those plays that colored it in many a day. If I were not so busy, it would be a delight to be an elder brother to you. But I guess you're not interested in my impulses, and we were talking of the play."

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