

Some Vanished Diamonds.

A Detective's Story of the Value of Small Things.

"Your market seems to be pretty well glutted with leisure today, Colonel," said Abe Cronkite the former detective, as he seated himself near the imprisoned banker in the prison hospital; "so I'll do what I can to relieve the stagnation a bit; and having told a story against myself out of modesty, will now spin one with a successful ending out of self respect."

"It was in the heart of summer and business was slack at the private agency where I was employed some of the men being laid off while we who were lucky enough to be kept along on living wages used up our time just as you and me are doing now by swapping yarns. We sat around the big rear room, which had been given over to us in common, smoking and chinning, and when once in a while the manager's door would open and he would stick his head out and yell 'Shut up!' we didn't mind it a bit but went right on, being certain that it was the lack of any other orders to issue that made him so cranky. Our house was the oldest agency in this country, personally conducted by two partners until they became old and grey in the service, when they brought over this Mr. Redcliffe to take charge of their London correspondents having given him a big send off as a crack-a-jack and no mistake."

"So when the manager's door opened, one hot afternoon in mid-July, Colonel, just as I was in the midst of an adventure, I expected to hear nothing more or less than some intimation to stop my yawn. On the contrary, however, Mr. Redcliffe said, 'Cronkite [will you please step in here,] and slid back again into his box. It was easy to see from the way the boys winked and motioned with their thumbs to the stairs, that they thought I was in for an extended furlough without pay; and the least I myself expected as I obeyed his summons, was that he would light me up good."

"The manager's rooms were quite extensive, covering the front of the building; his private office at one end and then a succession of little hutches connected with the main entrance by a private hallway in which he could stow away clients while he was busy so that they could neither see nor be seen. Everything in this private office was characteristic of Mr. Redcliffe, as I now had the opportunity to observe since he waved me in a chair in a corner; businesslike, certainly, with rolling-top desks, double-locked files, pigeonholes full of papers, even a typewriter on which he rattled off his notes and correspondence, being too secretive to keep an amanuensis; but one and all having a bustling, slap dash air, as if only used and cared for to accomplish definite ends. I say I observed, Colonel, for that was my mental habit when waiting, which I could not shake off if I would; and so, without seeming to look, I noticed that Mr. Redcliffe was short and brusque with the young lady, to whom he was talking, and that she though naturally a sweet-faced, gentle girl, with big trusting eyes and a dependent way, looked not only terribly worried, but unalterably determined. I noticed something else, too, simply for want of anything to do, and with no idea that it might be important; and yet, as you will see, that same little thing led me out of the woods in which I was about to wander."

"Finally Mr. Redcliffe motioned to me, and I stepped over to his desk. 'Cronkite,' he began, in his quick, decided way. 'I want to introduce you to Miss Alice Leighton. I have been doing a little business for Miss Leighton, and I find her, if she will pardon me for saying so, a very obstinate young lady, one whom it is quite impossible to convince that the suspicions which brought her to me are groundless, absolutely groundless. Hence, as you seem to have a superabundance of time, which I haven't, and it was the wish of my superiors that you should be retained here, you might just as well follow out her wishes in this matter until she is satisfied. I can't stop to make any explanation; and it's better you should hear the story from her own lips, since I might prejudice your judgement, while her enthusiasm and energy may stimulate your own, if that were possible. So, do take her into room D. there, and after she has fully unburdened her soul, why, act as your discretion suggest. No one can suffer, at all events, from your working up the case, unless, perhaps, your friends in the other room may miss your genial

converse."

Now, miss, said I when we two were alone, 'you just start and tell me the situation as full as you can. Take plenty of time; Lord, I've got hours and hours to burn, I have. And lest you think because I don't interrupt you with questions that the manager quered my interest by his slurs, let me inform you first that I'll take my turn at talking when you get through, and secondly, that I'll be more worked up over your case, whatever it be, then ever I was when a new hand at the biz, with a reputation to make, and which I'm going to be guyed out of now, you may rest assured. Just try to believe that I look as fatherly as I feel, and do you feel as daughterly as you look, and we'll get along as chummy as birds in the spring."

"I won't attempt to repeat her language, Colonel; like the tone of her voice, it was her own private property. But this is the substance of what it were. She was an orphan, a clergyman's daughter, highly educated and as poor as a church mouse filling the place as governess in the family of a millionaire by the name of Marchmont, at which I pricked up my ears, for, of course, we kept tabs on all criminal matters of any importance. Old Marchmont, it seemed, had had a private secretary, a young fellow named Proctor, who also lived in the house, and as was natural, these two, being thrown much together during their leisure, and pride working both ways to shut them off from the others, above and below, fell in love and became engaged. Then came the trouble. The millionaire, like all old men twice married, was silly fond of his young wife: and on her last birthday, about three months before, to show his burning affection, presented her with a zone of diamonds, easily worth, when broken up and shipped over to Amsterdam, \$50,000, and the Lord, He alone only knows what the uxorious old cuss gave up for it at retail. Quite an amount of available stuff, you'll be thinking, to have lying around the house, but neither Marchmont nor his wife thought it necessary to keep the diamonds in a safety deposit: for at the same time, he bought and set up in his library a chilled-steel safe, a new idea that the newspapers had recently been cracking up as a regular burglar-teaser; and nobody besides them two knew the combination except Proctor, the private secretary."

"Now, about a week after the birthday Mrs. Marchmont went to the safe to get the zone to sport at some social function, when lo and behold you, on opening the compartment which had been specially prepared for it, there was nothing inside but emptiness. The diamonds were gone. What followed? you ask. Why, the wife wouldn't accuse her husband, and the husband wouldn't accuse his wife, so naturally they agreed in accusing the young secretary with the result that he was tried and convicted and railroaded into prison at special limited speed. Of course there were suspicious circumstances; the lad had been extravagant and was hard pressed and all that; but it isn't necessary for me to go into them. There always are suspicious circumstances, Colonel; why, if an angel came down, and was pinched as a fugitive from justice, there'd be enough suspicious circumstances, springing up on all sides and breeding into a tangle, to warrant any committing magistrate in holding him."

"Such then was the case that poor Miss Leighton, distracted by the fate of her lover and confident in his innocence, had brought to our office. Such was the case that our manager himself had investigated and found nothing in that could cause him to think that justice had gone astray. It certainly seemed to be a reasonable an inevitable conclusion for all she had to tell; her suspicions were directed against no one in particular, she had no newly discovered evidence, she had nothing at all but faith; and if faith without works is dead, Colonel, as the Good Book says, faith without evidence is deader."

"I'll warrant you can call the turn. Colonel, on the first questions I asked Miss Leighton. You think they were about her mistress? Yes, that's right; of course I went into whether the lady had any feelings tender or otherwise for this young fellow in her household, as there have been instances since Mrs. Potiphar set up the fashion in old Egypt. There was nothing in it. Mrs. Marchmont had always been civil to the young man, but indifferent; and indiffer-

ence, Colonel, knocks out any idea of either love or hate. Then, of course, I went into the other branch of that same theory which the generosity of men naturally supposes about a young and handsome woman with an old husband. 'Seek the woman,' the French say, the eternal woman, who generally turns out to be the infernal woman, in their romances. Again it was euche! She had no followers. While she made no great pretences to loving her husband, she was faithful to him, being grateful for the luxuries he gave her, which, nowadays, are often dearer to a woman's heart than the pangs and dangers of an intrigue. I not only exhausted this entire field with my questions, but also subsequently with my outside investigations, until I was satisfied that the lady was wholly unknowing of the fate of her diamonds and sincere in her belief in the secretary's guilt; and in these conclusions I was right."

"What, then, remained? Why, the old man next. Colonel, you must have known him, at least by hearsay, Marchmont, the multimillionaire, to whom the loss of fifty thousand ought to be a mere flea bite, but who would feel worse about it than if he was stuck fast to a bee hive; old Marchmont, the meanest but the squarest man on the Street, whose word is as good as his bond and much better, for that matter, because he never went on one in his life; old Marchmont, the shrewdest, cunningest file, in the bull hardware shop, who never speculates, but who, having made his pile, knows how to keep it, and let money breed more money like rabbits breeding more rabbits! Why, the idea that he had worked any hypotheating game with them diamonds was ridiculous! Again, I landed plumb against a stun-wall and again I was right in getting there."


"What else was there? Why, finally, the servants, lord, Colonel, there wasn't too much Miss Leighton could say good of them. A lot of old trustees, that you read about and seldom see, devoted to their masters' interests, and each one with a savings-bank account! When I found this out I didn't go any further, for the crooked Colonel, don't cotton to a savings bank for a cent. They're looking for large profits in order to make quick returns of what they took; leastwise that's what they always say, though in my experience restitution is generally put off till the last moment."

"Detecting, Colonel, is often like a sum in subtraction. You lump together all the possibilities, and then, one by one, you deduct those that investigation shows to be groundless, and when you've done this just as far as you can, then the truth ought to be somewhere in the remainder. But, in this case there seemed to be no remainder, unless the conviction of the court had been right, and young Proctor was the thief of the missing diamonds. It was with a heavy heart that I bid Miss Leighton good bye for a day or two, though I put on a brass front; for I liked her style and her pluck, and most of all I liked her loyalty as men like things they may have dreamed about when they were boys, but have never seen before."

"As I passed through the corridor, the manager called me into his office. 'Well, what did you make out of it?' said he. 'Nothing,' said I. 'Of course not,' said he; 'I looked into it myself, out of pity, you know, and then I called you in, because she was so damned obstinate that she said she would go with it to so and so—naming rivals of ours—which I don't want. Just sleep over it for a while. Cronkite, you're good at that; and before you know it she'll meet someone else she likes, and then good-bye to Proctor and his case. Let me see, how long is it you men say a woman sticks to a man in the pig; six months is the limit, isn't it?'"

"I didn't answer, Colonel, being hotter than before under the collar, but slouched away in a manner which no doubt strengthened Mr. Redcliffe's contempt for me. Perhaps there is where he made a mistake, too; for when a man's pride is hurt and his better feelings aroused, then's when his thinking machine is going to do double-quick work. The more I considered such treatment of a client, an old employee, and a house that had been an honorable exception in a profesh with a full supply of crookedness, the hotter I got; and it was my mad, Colonel, not my deliberate judgement, that turned my thoughts in a new direction, a direction that led to the truth."


"The next evening, Colonel, I spent going over the record with young Proctor's lawyer. There wasn't much to it; the prosecution had made out a prima facie case, by virtue of the suspicious circumstances I mentioned and all there was to offset it was the bare denial, bold and candid, but not worth much before city jurymen, with their leaning toward law and order and high respectability. The trouble was, the defense had been all at sea with nothing to do but to fish. Thus the cross-examination wan-



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dered, taking up one subject only to drop it for another; and the only facts it brought out, which didn't seem utterly worthless to me, had been side explanations attracting no attention. Old Marchmont volunteered the statement that the safe was a peculiar English invention, designed exclusively for the protection of valuables within a small space. Then, later on, when asked by the defendant's attorney, more to use up time than for any other purpose, whether the lock ever got out of order, he answered that it had worked all right before the burglary, but that the very next day after, he had to send for a man to come to repair it, the tumblers being displaced by the violence with which he had slammed the door, in his rage over the discovery of his loss."

"All night long, Colonel, my mind was filled with wild ideas about that safe, and the next morning the first thing I did was to walk by the showy offices that the English inventor had taken in a fashionable part of the town. They were closed and inquiry at the agents' showed that the man had departed hurriedly and for parts unknown. I didn't hesitate a moment, but went right up to old Marchmont's house, and was lucky enough to find him at home. At first, he stormed, but on my appealing to his might and the weakness of my client, he consented to let me see the famous safe. I swear, Colonel, if I had gone into the library alone, I shouldn't have been able to find the darn thing. In appearance it wasn't a safe at all, but merely a handsome cabinet. The little door to the compartments seemed but a part of the woodwork, and the combination knob but a carved boss. Nothing, of course, was within the tiny space but its proper share of emptiness. I rapped along the sides, the top, the bottom; and there I rapped and rapped again."

"Was the workman alone when he repaired the lock the next day?" I asked.

"I suppose so," snapped out Marchmont; "why should any one have watched him? We've got something else to do besides barring the door after the horse has been stolen."

"Get me a stout hammer and I'll show you, said I."

"Well, he cursed a little, but finally he rang the bell, and one of the old trustees brought a miniature sledge to me. And then, Colonel, I took a chance, for, without another word, I drew back and hit the bottom of the compartment a whack at my full strength. The plate—it was nothing but a thin steel plate—shivering like glass, and in another moment we were examining as pretty a piece of trick work as I ever saw in the hull course of my professional career."

"It was hollow underneath, Colonel, instead of being the solidest and chilliest of steel, hollow where it wasn't chock full of all sorts of clock work. There was contrivance to cause the bottom of the compartment to slide back at a certain time and dump whatever might be in it into a little space below. There was a contrivance to cause the lock to get out of order at a certain time after this had happened. Blame me, if I don't think there were contrivances enough to cause the cabinet to drop itself out of the window, if it had been thought wise for it to do so. The proof was too plain for any argument; old Marchmont had been hounded by as slick a gang of English swindlers as ever struck this country for their own good."

"I must say that the old man came up to the scratch without wincing. Young Proctor, he swore, should be got out of quod without delay and have his girl. He would marry them off instant and set them up for life. As for the scoundrels who had fooled him, he would follow them to hell and back at the cost of half his fortune. 'To think of the credentials they showed, he raved, 'from the highest police authorities in England!' At that, Colonel which was to the suspicious which my mad had aroused like fire to tow. I got in my fine work, and by entreating and promising, I finally persuaded the old fellow to agree to keep quiet and do nothing for a few days."

"Do you remember, Colonel, when I was telling you about my wait in the manager's office, I said that I noticed something, simply for want of anything else to do and with no idea that it might be im-

portant? Yes? Well, that something I noticed was that the platen of his typewriting machine was covered with words and letters, caused by his writing in such slap-dash style that now and again his paper would run out before he knew it, and part of what he was writing would remain on the platen. I hadn't thought anything of it, then, except that it was another of the many instances I had known where a man through very cautiousness laid himself open to betrayal by not also taking into account and guarding against his own little, insignificant personal habits. Redcliffe was too cautious to keep an amanuensis; and yet, by not guarding against his hasty, slap-dash way of typewriting, it might well be that he had left imprinted on the platen some word or part of a sentence which would give a clue to what he would most wish to hide. At all events, Colonel, I was determined to have that platen, and see what it might have to reveal."

Colonel, it told the truth, and nothing but it, so help me! That night I had the platen out of Redcliffe's machine and was studying it under a microscope. At 11 o'clock I had made out an address. 'Moritz et Cie., Amsterdam;' might not the diamonds have been shipped to them? At 12 o'clock I was closeted with our old firm the good, square partners, who had never thought me stupid because I liked to chat and smoke with the boys. At 1 o'clock the cables were humming to our agents in Europe. Oh, it was rapid work, I tell you! Moritz & Co. squealed of course; our men on the Continent take bigger chances with the third degree than we dare to do here, and they coughed up some of the stuns. Redcliffe was pinched and exposed, and got a ten-specker for his pains. And old Marchmont kept his word, getting young Proctor pardoned out, and married off to Miss Leighton and set up 'solid in a jiffy. And do you know, Colonel, when I went to call on the happy pair, in their bang-up flat, blow me, if they didn't have my picture on the pianer with a big bow of lace above it! Oh Lord, I wonder if they would like one now?"

And Abe Cronkite, the former detective convicted of complicity with opium smugglers, jumped from his seat and stood looking out of the barred window of the prison hospital."

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