

PROFESSIONAL BRETHREN

BY GEORGE E. WALSH

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(CONTINUED.)

Breakfast at this juncture interrupted John's talk, and we had no chance to renew it that morning. But about noon the subject was recalled to me rather forcibly by the appearance of Mr. Goddard. He looked troubled and dissatisfied. He came into the barn dressed in his ordinary morning smoking jacket.

"John, I've got to make some change here," he said. "My butler has become frightened over the recent robberies and won't stay, and the rest of the servants are up in arms too. They all talk of leaving. I must have some manservant in the house who isn't afraid of every little sound and ready to jump at his own shadow. Now the question is, Who shall I install there?" He looked significantly from John to me.

"I have a family to look after," John began to stammer, and as he spoke a look of annoyance swept across Mr. Goddard's face.

I did not let him finish, for I knew that he would only get himself into deeper water by displaying his cowardice. As a good, faithful coachman and kindly husband John was a success, but as a man of courage he was a total failure.

"If you have no objections, sir, I would like to offer myself as one willing to live in the house and look after things," I said modestly. "I don't think you will find me afraid of anything or anybody that may attempt to enter your house."

I could not help noticing a pleased expression on his face, although at first I expected he would resent my intrusion. I recalled the old, but sometimes erroneous, saying that "there's honor even among thieves," for in spite of what he knew about me he was willing to trust me. There was certainly a very peculiar relationship springing up between us.

"Thank you, William," he answered. "The change will be agreeable to me. You will have quite a responsible position, and I will have to trust much to your honesty and tact until this burglar scare passes away. It seems strange that the gang of thieves cannot be caught. I would give considerable myself as a reward just to break them up, for they are making the life of our neighbors miserable out here."

"Do you think that there is a gang of them?" I asked boldly.

"Certainly," he said, without hesitation. "How else could the robberies be committed with such success? Why, have you any reason to believe otherwise?"

He looked sharply at me, and my eyes wandered from his as I answered: "No, except that I believe a gang could not operate as successfully as one good skilled professional robber. Where there are too many one or more will get into trouble sooner or later, and they will squeal upon the others."

"That's very true, very true," he said reflectively. "I had never thought of that, and yet, yes, Jenkins, the detective, came to that conclusion some time ago, but I scouted the idea. Maybe there is more in the idea than I thought. I will think about it, and if such a man is really terrorizing the neighborhood I should like to see him captured. I believe I will offer a reward myself for his capture."

"It would be a good idea," I replied, "for you would probably never have to pay the reward."

"Why not?"

"Well, because a man sharp enough to evade detection all this time is not likely to be caught by somebody working to get a reward."

"That may be, but I shall offer the reward at once. I'll make it a thousand dollars for the man's capture and another thousand for his conviction."

"That ought to be sufficient to tempt any confederate to squeal and turn state's evidence."

"It might be, but I should hate to see the money go to a confederate, for it is my private opinion that a man who tells of his comrade in crime for a reward is worse than the man who is captured. He is not only a criminal himself, but a coward and traitor."

Mr. Goddard's eyes flashed sharply as he spoke, but I turned away without further remark. I knew for whose benefit the words were spoken. Did he think for an instant that I would turn traitor and claim the reward which he had offered for his own capture and conviction? And yet how easily I could do it? He had placed himself in my power, and now he seemed to challenge me upon my honor to betray him.

But, then, he had saved my life once, and he undoubtedly knew human nature well enough to satisfy himself that there was no danger of my betraying him. He had in reality made a coup d'état in rescuing me from the

rangs of the savage Dane the night before. He could easily have stood aside and let the hound finish me, placing me beyond all possibility of ever afterward annoying him, but his interference, coupled with my sudden change of position which brought me daily into closer contact with him, convinced me that he wanted to use me for some purpose. Either he had some object to attain through me or he wished to make me his confederate in order to dispose of the goods he must have collected, for I had no doubt that the series of robberies in the neighborhood had been committed by him.

What his purpose was I felt curious to know, and I looked forward to future developments with considerable interest.

CHAPTER VII.

I FOUND my new position much more to my taste than the one I had been serving in. I had complete command of all the silver and valuables of the house, and it was a satisfaction to look at all this wealth even though I had no right in any of it. The curious circumstance that I should ever be placed as a guard over so much treasure amused me and induced speculations in my mind about the uncertainties and inconsistencies of life. A man of my profession must of necessity be something of a philosopher. How else could he accept the continual risk of capture and conviction and silence all qualms of fear and conscience when engaged on delicate and dangerous jobs? There are ups and downs in every life, I suppose, but none more so than in that of the professional burglar.

The second day of my installation as butler in the house was marked by an interesting event. Dr. Squires and Miss Stetson both appeared at lunch.

This meeting was not premeditated by my master. It was apparently purely accidental.

About noon the two visitors appeared at the house on horseback. My master did not see them at first. He was smoking in his dressing room when the clatter of horses' hoofs on the hard, gravelly drive attracted his attention. I was passing through the room at the time, removing the remnants of a late breakfast.

"Who's that coming, William?" he asked.

I was near the window and, looking out, replied:

"Miss Stetson, sir, and I think the man they call Dr. Squires. I've never met him, but from what John said I judge it is."

A sudden exclamation from my master interrupted me, and I turned in time to see his face deathly pale. He recovered himself immediately, however.

"Dr. Squires and Miss Stetson, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

Then with admirable composure and with great tact he said:

"Oh, yes; I forgot to tell you, William, that they were coming here to lunch today. Have a good lunch for them at 2."

Then he hurriedly changed his coat and appeared in the courtyard in time to greet the guests. Through the open doors I could hear their voices.

"How do you do, Charles? Ready for early visitors? I didn't believe you were up yet?"

It was the loud, gruff voice of the doctor. Then a feminine voice said apologetically, I thought:

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STARTLED

By some sudden sound she drops the vase upon the floor. She is nervous and may be told that nervousness is a luxury which only a rich woman can afford to indulge in. Nervousness has cost many a woman her position. Sometimes when women run machinery the price of nervousness is mutilation,—a finger lost or perhaps the whole hand crushed.

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"Good morning, Charles! I was out riding this morning with my man, and we met Dr. Squires. He insisted that we should come around here. So I consented provided he would promise to make you go off for a ride with us."

"Yes, that was the agreement, and to make my word good you must get ready and go."

"Well, I hadn't thought of going out this morning, but I will accompany you if you will both agree to come back here and take lunch."

"That's the man of business," laughed the doctor. "He exacts a fee for everything he gives. He won't even ride with us, Miss Belle, unless we swear to return and lunch with him. Well, as for my part I agree to it, for Charles always tempts me with his good lunches."

I could not hear the replies as they moved into the parlor, but I knew enough to convince me that my master was very sensitive about his jealousy of the doctor, and that not even to me would he admit it.

A few minutes later I saw them going off together, Miss Stetson riding a fine roan, with the doctor mounted on a fiery, coal black steed on her right and my master on her left with his fine white Arabian mare. It was a spectacular sight to watch them, knowing as I did something of their lives. I wondered which she would select in the end—the black or the white?

Promptly at 2 they returned, a little fatigued by the ride, but jovial and in excellent spirits.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Not Through Yet.

"What kind of a Christmas did you pass?" asked the friend.

"The same as usual," answered Mr. Bliggins sourly. "Twenty minutes of turkey and mince pie, and six weeks of—Russia."—Washington Star.



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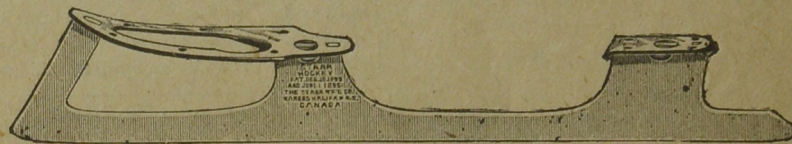
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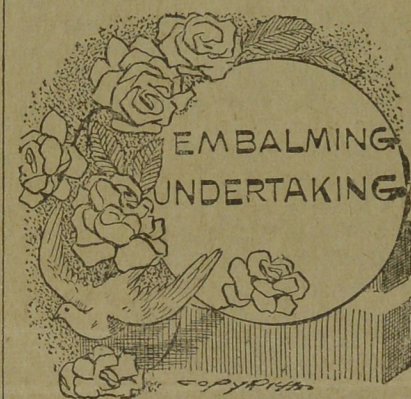
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