

The Lottery Ticket

by A New York Detective

I was one day walking quietly down Broadway, thinking that I would buy a present for my wife, for the following day was her birthday, and she and I have always kept up the good old fashion of making each other presents on these occasions. I was debating whether it should be an article of jewelry, or a new dress, when I felt some one suddenly tap me on the shoulder. I turned quickly round, and found myself face to face with a gentleman of about sixty years of age. He was dressed in black, and wore a portly watch-chain, from which hung two or three seals, and was altogether a very respectable-looking individual.

“I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Brampton?” said he.

“That is my name,” I returned.

“You have been mentioned to me very favorably by Mr. M—. I wish to consult you in a very delicate matter. Can you accompany me to my house?”

I looked at my watch, and finding that I could spare a quarter of an hour, I agreed to accompany him. We jumped into an omnibus which was passing up town, and in a short time stood before his residence, which was situated in Bond Street. He took me into a small room which evidently served him for a study. A library table stood in the middle of the apartment, which was covered with magazines and papers. He invited me to be seated.

“My name is Morton,” said he; “I am engaged in no business, having sufficient to live upon comfortably. I possess considerable property in houses, and collect the rents myself. Yesterday was my collection day. Last night when I returned home I placed five thousand dollars in that safe which you see yonder, intending to take it to the bank this morning; but when I opened it for that purpose it was gone. Whoever took it must have had duplicate keys not only of the safe but of the house door.”

“Was the safe locked this morning?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Do you suspect anybody?”

“I am at a complete loss to know whom to suspect. Mr. M—, my lawyer, whom I consulted in the matter, mentioned your name to me as having extraordinary talent in ferreting out crime. I determined I would apply to you before taking any further steps in the matter.”

“Who are the inmates of your house?”

“There is no one but my wife and two servant girls.”

“You do not suspect the girls?”

“O, dear no, they have lived with us for many years. It must have been somebody from the outside that committed the robbery.”

“You say that the house had no appearance of having been broken into?”

“No; when the servants rose this morning all the doors were locked as usual.”

“It is rather a strange case,” I returned. “I must first of all make an examination of the premises.”

The old gentleman took me over the house, and I found after an attentive examination that there was only one means of entering the house from the outside – excepting, of course, the front entrance – and that by means of a garret window which opened on the roof, which communicated with several houses in the same block. I made a great many inquiries, making notes of everything I thought bore upon the case. I then left, promising to call the next morning.

When I got home, I what I call “studied out the case,” by which I mean I shut myself up, lighted my meerschaum, and perused the notes I had made. My mind was soon made up with respect to one point. I was certain that whoever had committed the robbery had entered by means of the attic window, that is, provided no one in the house was the guilty party. Early the next morning I made inquiries as to whom lived in the houses on the right and left of Mr. Morton’s residence. These inquiries resulted in the fact that the house on the left hand side was occupied by a family of the name of Carpenter, and that a nephew of Mr. Morton frequently visited there. In fact he had stayed there all night the very same night that Mr. Morton was robbed, and what is more, he occupied the attic room looking on the roof.

After I had made these investigations I again called on Mr. Morton for the purpose of making some inquiries respecting this nephew. I was at once shown into the old gentleman’s study, and who should be with him but the very young man in whom at that moment I was so much interested. He was a handsome young fellow of about twenty-one years of age. He had a fine open countenance, and there was nothing at all in his face which would lead me to suspect that he could be guilty of robbing his uncle. He was exceedingly well dressed, in fact I might say he was over-dressed, and I judged him to be a bit of a fop. They were conversing on the subject of the robbery when I entered, and the young man expressed himself exceedingly concerned at the loss his uncle had sustained.

After conversing a little time he took his leave, and I was left alone with Mr. Morton. He immediately asked me what conclusion I had come to with respect to the robbery.

“Before I answer your inquiry,” said I, “will you be good enough to answer me a few questions?”

“Certainly,” he returned.

“How many keys of the safe do you possess?”

“Only one.”

“Had you it in your possession on the night in question?”

“Certainly. I always put it into the drawer of the bureau in my room. I did so on that occasion, and found it there the next morning.”

“I think I understood you to say that no one lives with you but your wife and two servants?”

“Yes. But my wife is absent-- she is visiting Baltimore,” he returned. “She has been there for the last three weeks.”

“Then on the night of the robbery there was no one in the house but yourself, and two servant girls?”

“Exactly.”

“Now I want you particularly to carry your mind back to that night. Did any sound disturb you?”

“Well, now you call my mind to the fact. I remember about three o’clock in the morning I fancied I heard a step in my room. I listened attentively, and not hearing it again I felt convinced I was mistaken, and fell asleep.”

“And in the morning you found the key in the same place that you had left it the night before?”

“I did.”

“I see your front door closes with a night latch, how many keys have you to that?”

“Two. I have one, my wife the other.”

“That is the only fastening you have to the door, I believe?”

“The only one. It is a patent night-latch, and perfectly secure.”

“Before I proceed any further I should like to see your two servants. Be good enough to call them in.”

The old gentleman did so, and in a minute or two they were in my presence. I addressed various questions to them, but all that I could gain was the fact that at about four o’clock in the morning the cook thought she heard a step on the stairs. I dismissed them.

“Mr. Morton,” said I, when we were again alone, “there was a young man here just now. May I ask his name?”

“His name is Edward Legrand; he is a nephew of mine.”

“What is his occupation?”

“He is clerk in a wholesale store down town.”

“What salary does he receive?”

“Eight hundred dollars a year. But I can’t see what all these questions have to do with the robbery.”

“You will see by-and-by; you must allow me to conduct this investigation in my own way.”

“Certainly. I did not mean to give any offence by the observation I made.”

“I understand that. Your nephew, I believe, is on terms of intimacy with your neighbors, the Carpenters, who live next door?”

“Yes, he is paying his addresses to the eldest Miss Carpenter.”

“On the night of the robbery he slept in their house.”

“Very likely; he frequently stays there all night.”

“I suppose you have implicit confidence in your nephew?”

“The most implicit in the world. I would trust him with untold gold. You surely do not suspect him?”

“The salary he receives, you say, is eight hundred dollars a year?”

“Yes, and on that he supports a widowed mother and sister.”

“Is it not strange that with such a moderate remuneration he should wear such an expensive diamond ring?”

“Diamond ring!” said Mr. Morton, in a tone of surprise; “he wears no diamond ring.”

“Excuse me, sir,” I returned. “I particularly noticed it when he was in the room just now. I am something of a judge of the value of precious stones. I assure you the brilliant he wears on the little finger of the left hand is of the first water, and could not have cost less than five hundred dollars.”

“What does it mean? It is very extraordinary! Perhaps he has not yet left the house,” said the old gentleman, making a step toward the door.

“Stop, my dear sir, stop!” I exclaimed, seizing him by the arm, “you would spoil everything. We must be very cautious in investigating this matter. There is enough evidence for us to suspect this young man, at the same time we must not be precipitate. If you see him again, act towards him just the same as usual, and above all do not let a hint escape you that he is suspected. I shall now go and make further inquiries. But first tell me if you can identify any of the bank notes that were stolen?”

“I cannot; there was a good deal of it southern money. I remember distinctly amongst it was a considerable quantity of Baltimore bank notes.”

“Where does this young man reside?”

“He lives with his mother and sister, No. 144 West Twenty-First Street.”

After having made a few more necessary inquiries I took my leave, promising to call the next day, or before, if I discovered anything conclusive. When I reached the street I turned the whole affair over in my mind, and was compelled to acknowledge the affair looked black against the young clerk. I felt sorry for him, for there was something very prepossessing in his appearance, and then I thought of his poor widowed mother and sister. A detective, however, must not indulge in the luxury of sympathy, or he would soon be rendered unfit for his duty. I therefore dismissed all these feelings, and at once decided as to the course for me to pursue.

I knew there were only two retail stores in New York likely to keep such expensive rings as the one worn by Mr. Legrand, namely, Ball, Black & Co., and Tiffany & Co. I determined I would call on the latter first. I soon reached their magnificent jewelry establishment. I entered the store and asked to be shown some diamond rings. An obliging clerk soon spread a variety before me. I remarked one which I thought resembled Mr. Legrand’s, and asked the price.

“That is worth five hundred and twenty dollars,” was the reply.

“It is a beautiful stone,” I remarked. “I perceive it is the only one of the kind you have left.”

“Yes; we had two of them, but sold one of them yesterday.”

“Exactly,” I returned; “the young man who purchased it was rather tall, handsome and exceedingly well dressed?”

“That was the very person.”

“He paid you in southern money?”

“He did so,” returned the clerk, “chiefly Baltimore funds. The bills are in the cash-box now.”

“Thank you. Can I see the proprietor, if you, please?”

I was at once shown into his private office and explained my business to him. He promised to aid me all in his power, and to retain the bills until he heard from me again.

Proofs of young Legrand’s guilt were now accumulating thick and fast. My next duty was very clear, I must go and examine the house in which he lived. I jumped into an Eighth Avenue omnibus, and was soon set down at the foot of Twenty-First Street. I found the house to be about the middle of the block. It was a small, genteel-looking dwelling, and was scrupulously clean on the outside. I rung the bell, the door was answered by an elderly lady in a widow’s cap, whom I at once concluded was Legrand’s mother. I requested to speak with her privately. I was immediately conducted into a neatly-furnished parlor.

“Madam,” said I, “you are doubtless aware that your brother has been robbed of a large amount of money?”

“O, yes,” she replied, “Edward told us all about it. What a dreadful thing!”

“Your son is in possession of a very fine diamond ring, is he not?”

“Yes, his uncle gave it to him. But what can that have to do with the matter in question?”

“I am a detective officer,” I returned. “In a case like this it becomes absolutely necessary that wherever there is the slightest suspicion a search should be made. Will you be good enough to show me up to your son’s bedroom, that I may make an examination of his effects?”

“Surely, sir, you cannot suspect my son?” said the old lady, tears gushing into her eyes.

“My dear madam, restrain your feelings; an innocent party is never injured by a search.”

“Of course, sir, you are welcome to examine his room; but I must confess I feel grieved that my brother should allow the slightest suspicion to enter his mind. But come, sir, follow me.”

So saying, the old lady led the way into her son’s bedroom. It was a small apartment, comfortably furnished. A large trunk was placed on one side of the room. I commenced my search with this. I found it locked, but soon succeeded in opening it. It was filled full of books, papers and drawing utensils. I took each article out one by one, and laid it on the floor after I had examined it thoroughly. I proceeded in this manner until the trunk was completely empty. I had found nothing. I was about closing the lid when I fancied part of the lining of the bottom was slightly elevated. I ripped it up, and pulled out a large quantity of bank bills. They were most of them on the Merchant’s Bank, of Baltimore. The whole amount discovered was four thousand two hundred dollars. Mrs. Legrand stood aghast when she saw this money. She wrung her hands in consternation, and could only utter:

“He is not guilty! He is not guilty!”

To add to the painful character of this scene, Legrand's sister, a beautiful girl eighteen years of age, entered the room. When she learned what had occurred, she added her lamentations to those of her mother. She, however, soon recovered herself.

"Mr. Brampton," said she, for she had learned my name, "I acknowledge appearances are against my brother, but do not judge hastily. I am perfectly convinced that he is innocent of the crime imputed to him. I cannot account for this money in his trunk; but rest assured he will be able to give a satisfactory statement. He will be here in a quarter of an hour to dine. Wait until he comes, and then interrogate him."

I had already made up my mind to do so, and bowed acquiescence. Soon afterwards he entered the house. He certainly did not seem guilty from his bearing, for he was in the best possible spirits, and entered the parlor singing. When he saw me, he appeared somewhat surprised, but evinced no evidence of guilt.

"Mr. Legrand," said I, "a painful duty devolves upon me. I am compelled to arrest you on suspicion of robbing your uncle, Mr. Morton."

"Robbing my uncle!" exclaimed the young man, in a tone of surprise. "You are jesting."

"No, indeed," I returned, "and I must tell you the evidence is fearfully strong against you."

"Stuff!" he replied, "I can immediately prove my innocence. I should as soon think of committing murder as robbery. You have made some mistake. What are the grounds of your suspicions?"

"Well, young man," I replied, "I am not obliged to tell you; but I feel an interest in you, and I assure you no one will be more pleased to find you innocent than myself. The evidence against you up to the present time amounts to as follows. Two days ago Mr. Morton's safe was robbed of five thousand dollars, chiefly in Baltimore money. In the first instance no suspicion at all was entertained of you. It was supposed that some one had possessed himself of a key which would open the safe, and by some means he had obtained access to the premises. I was consulted in the matter. After examining the premises I came to the conclusion that the robber must have entered the house by the attic window. I also discovered that you slept at Mr. Carpenter's on the night the robbery was committed, and that you occupied the very room which opened out on the roof. This morning when I called on your uncle you were with him. I noticed something about you which immediately struck me. When you left the room I inquired what salary you received; I was told then that it was eight hundred dollars per annum."

"That is the truth," interrupted the young man; "but what was it you noticed curious about me?"

"Well, I thought it rather curious that a young man on so small a salary should possess such a magnificent diamond ring."

The young man turned deadly pale, and tottered into a chair.

“I have since learned that you told your mother that your uncle made you a present of it.”

“I did say so, fool that I was!” stammered the young man.

The faces of his mother and sister evinced the greatest surprise when they heard this. I continued:

“I this morning discovered that you yesterday purchased that ring at Tiffany’s for five hundred and twenty dollars, and that you paid for it in bills on a Baltimore bank. Suspicion was now fearfully strong against you. I next examined your bed-room, and concealed in the lining of your trunk, I discovered—”

“Money to the amount of four thousand two hundred dollars,” interrupted the young man, striking his forehead with his hand.

“Exactly; and more, this money is also in Baltimore bills.”

“Great God!” exclaimed the young man, starting from his seat, “what a fearful array of circumstantial evidence!”

“Edward, you are not, you cannot be guilty of this crime?” exclaimed his sister, clinging to him.

“No, Clara, I am not guilty; the only fault I have committed is in stating that my uncle gave me this diamond ring. I bought it at Tiffany’s as Mr. Brampton states.”

I could see a shadow of suspicion creep over the features of both his mother and sister. But their love would not allow it to rest there, for their countenances cleared, and his mother asked:

“But the money, Edward, explain how you came in possession of it.”

The young man paused a moment and then said:

“I am almost afraid to do so, for fear my statement should not obtain belief. The simple truth, however, is as follows. About two weeks since I accompanied a friend into the reading-room attached to the St. Nicholas Hotel. I mechanically took up a paper and found I was perusing the Sun, published in Baltimore, Maryland. Among other things the advertisement of a lottery on the Havana plan caught my eye. It was to be drawn in about a week, and the tickets were ten dollars each. I have not the slightest faith in lotteries, but it entered my head that I would purchase a ticket and try my luck. I then and there wrote to the party advertising, and enclosed ten dollars for a ticket. In two or three days I received it. What was my surprise to find, when the list of numbers which had drawn prizes was published, that my ticket had drawn a prize of five thousand dollars? I immediately wrote to the agent, of whom I had purchased the ticket, for the amount, requesting that he would send me Baltimore funds in preference to a draft on New York, for you must understand I was a little ashamed of the transaction, and determined to reveal it to no one. Yesterday I received the agent’s letter, containing the amount. I thought I would treat myself to a handsome diamond ring; I devoted a portion of the funds for that purpose, the rest I concealed under the lining of my trunk. This is the simple truth, so help me God!”

“It is true! It is true!” exclaimed both mother and sister, embracing him.

“Mr. Legrand,” I exclaimed, “your explanation will be perfectly satisfactory if it can be proved to be true. You have the agent’s letters of whom you purchased the ticket?”

“No, I have not; unfortunately I destroyed them. I have already told you I was ashamed of the transaction, and determined to destroy any proof of having been engaged in it.”

“You at least remember his name?” I asked.

“Indeed, I have forgotten it; it began with an M, I think.”

“Well, you remember the number of the ticket which drew this prize of five thousand dollars?”

“I do not even remember that. I put it down on paper when I sent to claim the amount. But after I received the money I destroyed that paper also. I only remember it was seventeen thousand and something, but for the life of me I cannot recollect the exact number.”

“Mr. Legrand,” said I, in a grave tone, “you must accompany me to a magistrate. Your explanation may be true, but I am afraid, unless you can bring some corroborative evidence, it will not avail you in a court of justice. To tell you the truth, there is an air of improbability about your whole story.”

“Well, sir, time will prove. I am ready to accompany you. I feel conscious of my own innocence, and feel satisfied God will not allow me to be punished unjustly.”

He embraced his mother and sister, and we left the house together. We immediately proceeded to a magistrate’s, and Edward Legrand was that same night flully committed to the Tombs to await his trial.

When I returned home that night, I must confess I was not satisfied. Although suspicion was so strong against the prisoner, and his own explanation so lame, yet I thought it might be true. And then his handsome face haunted me. I asked myself the question over and over again, if it could be possible that he could be guilty? Wearied with conjecture I lighted a cigar, and was almost dozing to sleep when I was aroused by a ring at the bell. In a few moments afterwards my fellow-officer, Hardin, entered the room.

“How are you, Brampton?” said he, shaking me by the hand.

“How are you, Hardin? When did you get back?”

“I got back this morning. Not seeing you at the chief’s office all day, I thought you might be sick, and so I thought I would just drop in to see you.”

“I am quite well, I thank you. Take a cigar. What luck have you had?”

“O, I bagged my game. But I tell you I had a wily customer to deal with. I thought once he would escape me. The proofs I had against him were very meagre; but I stuck to him like a leech. Two nights ago he left Philadelphia for New York; but I was too deep for him, for I got in the same car with him. He returned to Philadelphia by the next train, and I went back too. At last I was convinced I had the right man, and he is now in the [gaol] at Philadelphia.”

This conversation had reference to a defaulter whom Hardin had been employed to arrest.

“He seems to have kept you running about; to take you from Philadelphia to New York and back again the same night was too bad.”

“Yea; but I met with an adventure in the cars which served to amuse me a good deal.”

“Indeed, what was it?”

“It did not amount to much; but anything, you know, serves to pass the time. The fact is, I met with an extraordinary *lusus naturae*, a silent woman.”

“A silent woman! What do you mean?”

“Well, you must know when I got into the cars in Philadelphia there were very few passengers. Among them, however, was a lady dressed in black, who wore a very thick veil. I wondered for a long time if she were handsome or not, and at last I determined to try and make her raise her veil. An opportunity presenting itself, I addressed some commonplace remark to her, but not a word could I get in reply. I made several fresh attempts, but met with no success. At last I gave it up in despair.”

“She doubtless thought you intrusive, and did not want to converse with you.”

“That was my opinion at the time; but I am now certain she had some special reason for remaining silent.”

“What makes you think so?”

“I told you the man I was watching stayed only two hours in New York, returning to Philadelphia by the next train. Well, would you believe it? the silent woman did the same thing, for there she was in the cars again. I again endeavored to commune with her, but with no better success than before. Now I think it very strange that a woman traveling alone should only visit New York for two hours in the middle of the night.”

“Did you catch a glimpse of her features?” I asked, eagerly.

“No, she kept her veil down all the time. I noticed, however, that she took the southern train.”

A light began slowly to enter my mind. I turned the conversation to some other topic, and in a few minutes Hardin took his leave. After he had gone I settled my course of action for the

following morning, and then retired to rest, and slept as only a detective can sleep, when he thinks he possesses the clue to a mystery which has bothered him for some time.

I was up very early the next morning, and having settled some business, found myself at eight o'clock at the Jersey City depot. I had determined to take a run down to Baltimore for the benefit of my health. At half-past four in the afternoon I reached the Monumental City, after a very pleasant trip. I installed myself in Barnum's Hotel, and having taken my tea, I determined I would go out and explore the city. I commenced with Baltimore Street, and walked slowly up this busy thoroughfare. When I reached the corner of St. Paul and Baltimore Streets, a large printed bill fastened to the front of a lottery office attracted my attention. It ran as follows:

"This is the lucky office. No. 17,512, sold here a few days ago drew a prize of five thousand dollars! Walk in and try your luck."

I walked in as requested, and found a middle-aged man behind the counter.

"Good evening," said I, as I entered.

"Good evening," returned the lottery-office keeper. "What can I do for you? Two little beauties to be drawn tomorrow – the lucky little 'Patapsco,' and the 'Maryland Consolidated' — tickets only one dollar. Let me sell you some; choose your own numbers if you like."

"Well, I don't know," I replied, putting on as country a looking air as I could. "I don't believe much in lotteries. Why, there's Jem Randall, of our town, has tried his luck ever so many times, and he never got a prize. And, by golly, I never heard of anybody winning anything."

"My rustic friend, you are mistaken," returned the lottery-office keeper. "I very frequently sell large prizes. Why, only last week I sold a prize for five thousand dollars on a venture of ten."

"Oh, yes, it's very easy to say that. I don't say you don't tell the truth; but—"

"Here is the ticket that drew the prize," replied the man. "And here are the letters of the young man who purchased the ticket. He lives in New York and his name is Edward Legrand."

So saying, he handed me the letters in question. One glance at them was sufficient to prove that young Legrand's statement to me was true in every particular, and it followed as a matter of course that he was innocent of the robbery. I had just finished reading the letter when a lady dressed in black entered the office. She handed the man a large bundle of tickets. He looked them all over very carefully.

"I am sorry to inform you, madam," said he, "that you have been unlucky again— you have drawn no prize."

She wore a thick veil which concealed her face; but I could see her tremble.

“I have almost determined I will not try again,” said she. “I have already lost nearly five thousand dollars. However, here are two hundred more, this may be my last venture.”

“You will very likely draw a big prize this time, which will make up all your losses,” replied the office keeper, handing her a quantity of tickets for the money she had given him.

The lady left the store. I followed her, and saw her enter a house in Courtland Street. When she had been in ten minutes, I went to the door and rang the bell.

“I wish to speak with Mrs. Morton,” said I to the servant who answered my summons.

I was shown into a parlor, and found the lady in black there alone.

“Madam,” said I, “I have come to inform you that your nephew, Mr. Edward Legrand, is in prison, charged with the robbery of five thousand dollars from your husband’s safe.”

She turned as pale as death, and trembled so violently that she could scarcely support herself.

“He is innocent!” she murmured at last.

“I am aware of it, madam, and I come to you to do justice to him. It was you that took the money from your husband’s safe. On the night of the robbery you left Baltimore, and surreptitiously entering your husband’s house, you went to his bedroom, took the key of the safe from the bureau drawer, and appropriating the contents, you replaced the key, and returned to Baltimore by the next train. You have spent the whole of this money in the purchase of lottery tickets.”

“I acknowledge I am guilty,” returned the woman, covering her face with her hands. “I have been mad-crazy; but I had hopes of getting back what I had lost, and then I intended to confess everything to my husband.”

“You must make that confession in writing now, madam. I need scarcely tell you that your husband cannot proceed against you, and that in the eyes of the law you are guilty of no crime; but it is necessary that Edward Legrand should be immediately exculpated.”

“I will do anything you wish.”

At my dictation she wrote out a full confession. It appeared that when she first came down to Baltimore, out of curiosity she bought a lottery ticket. With this she won a small prize. The passion for gaming was developed in her mind, and she risked all the money she had in her possession. Maddened at her loss, she determined to return to New York and procure more. She knew where to find the key of her husband’s safe. She abstracted the money, and then returned to Baltimore, and lost all the money she had taken in the purchase of lottery tickets.

Edward Legrand was of course immediately liberated, and a few weeks afterwards. I had the satisfaction of learning that he had been admitted an equal partner in the house in which he had served as clerk.

Mrs. Morton's husband forgave her for what she had done, and the last I heard of them was that they were living happily together.

Published in

Ballou's Dollar Magazine, October 1862

Leaves from the Note-Book of a New York Detective: The Private Record of J. B. Ed. John B. Williams, M.D. New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1865