

## *A Detective's Story*

"Hasheesh"

by James Mcmillen

In the fall of 1870 I was recalled from the southern part of the State, where I had been "working up" a horse case, and ordered to start immediately, upon the arrival of my relief, for Chicago, and report myself to our chief at headquarters. (I may here premise that I had been, for a number of years, a detective belonging to Pinkerton's force, and had always been considered an efficient officer by my superiors.)

My preparations were soon made, and after giving my relief, who had arrived the same evening, full instructions regarding the further "shadowing" of the horse thieves, I was soon bowling along by fast express for Chicago, which city I reached the next morning, and without going to my hotel, reported to the officer in charge at headquarters.

"Hello, Marker!" cried he. "Back so soon? We did not expect you much before evening."

"Well, I kind of thought by the way the dispatch was worded, that you had something important on hand that required haste, so here I am."

"Oh, it's important enough, but that won't prevent you from taking a little rest, and sprucing up a bit; so call around at eight this evening, and the old man will give you the points about the affair he wants you to try your hand upon."

Returning at the appointed time, I was put in possession of the following facts by the chief:

"During the past summer, a number of persons have made complaints at police headquarters, to the effect that they had been drugged and robbed, but that they have not the remotest idea how it was accomplished. The parties are, without exception, gentlemen, and are, or were, guests of one of our numerous hotels; and now what I want you to do," continued he, "is to visit some of the unfortunates yourself, and hear their story, and then see if you can't unravel the mystery. I could give you more information, and my own impressions, but I would rather you would work the case in your own way, unhampered by me, for I have great confidence in you. Here is a complete list, which embraces the names, address, etc., of the parties interested, and now pitch in Marker, and give a good account of yourself; by the way the reward is one third of all property recovered."

"That's fair. How often do you want me to report?"

"Whenever you have anything of importance to report, or stand in need of either money or assistance," replied he, waving his hand to me as a sign of dismissal.

The same evening I called upon one of the parties who had been robbed and received from him a statement of the affair, as follows:

“I had only been stopping at ‘S— House,’ two or three days when I became acquainted with a young, well-dressed fellow, who hailed from Cuba; he was a merry, jovial kind of chap; I don’t remember how we first came together, but anyhow we soon became firm friends; frequently strolling out, visiting the places of amusement, and sometimes taking a ride together; by the way, we always engaged the same hackman. One afternoon, ‘Velaz,’ that was the name he went by—came to me in the reading-room, and informed me that he had just received a letter from home which required his immediate presence there; that he had already made arrangements for leaving that same evening, but wouldn’t I like to take a farewell drive seeing it would be the last, and we might never meet again. Of course I assented; and after a parting drink or two, and a cigar with his numerous friends, we entered the cab and were driven away in the direction of Lincoln Park. We had not proceeded far when he exclaimed, ‘what a devilish poor cigar! Try one of these, Charlie! They’re genuine Havanas!’ at the same time offering me his cigar case. We each took one out, lit it, and lay back for a comfortable smoke; I had not smoked long ere I felt myself becoming unusually exhilarated and happy, and soon afterwards sleepy and—that was the last thing I remember until I woke in my own bed, at the hotel, with a terrible headache and my money, watch and other valuables gone.”

He here, at my request, gave me a full description of ‘Velaz’ and the hackman; and to my question, “how often, and where did you drink that day?” he answered:

“Not above three times, and then only at the hotel bar.”

I interviewed two or three more of the sufferers, but their statements were, in substance, the same as the above, except as regards dates, the name assumed by the Cuban, dress, and a few other minor points.

My next move was to interrogate the clerk of one of the hotels.

He said he remembered the young Cuban perfectly well, also the gentleman who was robbed, and, in addition to the statements of the latter, gave me some further particulars. ‘Velaz,’ after paying his bill, sent his baggage to the depot by the hackman whom he invariably engaged when he drove out; he then invited his friends to join him in a parting drink and cigar; after which he bade us all good-bye, and entering the hack, which had returned in the meantime, with Mr. C—drove off, and—that was the last seen of the Cuban.

Some time after dark the clerk’s attention was called to the curious antics of the gentleman who had gone out with Velaz; he was wandering around the house, singing, laughing and cheering in a most ridiculous and boisterous manner; his eyes rolling frightfully, hair and dress was disheveled, and altogether, he presented the appearance of a person very much intoxicated. The clerk, supposing such was the case, procured the assistance of one or two other gentlemen and conducted him to bed, where he presently fell asleep, and it was not until the following day that the clerk learned of his loss.

This account was also fully corroborated in the most essential parts by the other clerks upon whom I called.

I was satisfied now as to how the robberies had been committed, and who were the guilty parties, for I felt assured that the hackman was an accomplice and Velaz the principal; the next thing was to find them. I hovered around the hotels, depots, theatres and gambling dens, and interviewed everybody who I supposed could throw any light upon the subject. I racked and puzzled my brain most unmercifully, but I was no nearer a solution at the expiration of two months than I was at first; and as no more of the mysterious robberies had occurred since my arrival, I felt compelled to believe that Velaz and his companion in guilt had ‘jumped the town.’ I felt mortified, and told the chief so, but he only laughed, saying he felt sure I would come across a clue sometime.

One day in early winter, whilst glancing over a New Orleans paper, my eye was instantly arrested by an article that fairly made my blood tingle. It was nothing more or less than an account of a mysterious robbery that had occurred in that city and which had in it the identical points in the case which had, by this time, become an incubus to me.

The chief, after he had perused the article to which I had drawn his attention immediately started me for New Orleans, with enough money in my pocket to see me through, and a letter to the chief of the detective force in that city, requesting him to give me all the assistance that I required.

Two days afterwards I arrived in the Crescent City and put up at the St. C— Hotel, (where the party who had been robbed was stopping,) and the first thing I did was to make myself known to him.

He said he had lost over three thousand dollars, the proceeds of a sale of cotton which he had only consummated the last day he went out riding with ‘Obray,’ as he here called himself. The manner of performing in this case was almost precisely the same as at Chicago.

I was now upon the right scent, and I felt sure I would soon bag my game, for unlike Chicago, they had here only commenced operations.

The next morning I visited the chief, who after reading my credentials, promised me assistance whenever I called upon him for it. Being already dressed in a fastidious and stylish rig, I sauntered around some of the better class of hotels, but failed to spot my men that day, or the next. On the third day, however, I was amply repaid for my previous disappointments, for who should I see, as I was about to enter the D— House, but ‘Velaz,’ alias ‘Obray,’ coming out, and whilst I was taking a mental inventory of his person, I heard him hail a cab that was standing a short distance from the main entrance of the hotel, and when it drove up, enter and behold—there was my Jehu sitting on the box as large as life. I could not be mistaken; I had received their description too minutely and often for that. I saw that Velaz was alone, and so let him depart without following. I entered the hotel and asked the clerk who the gentleman was who had just left in the cab, saying at that same time that I thought I had seen him in Cuba, but I was not sure. He replied that it was altogether probable for he had registered from that island.

“He is stopping here, then?”

“Just arrived this morning; that’s his name.”

“Oh, I wasn’t personally acquainted with him there,” I remarked, at the same time, however, observing the name and penmanship. The writing was identical with the specimens I carried in my pocket, but the name was ‘D.Z. Novello, Matanzas, Cuba.’ “Another alias,” I muttered to myself, and then aloud, “I called to see what your rates are for permanent boarders, say by the month.”

The gentlemanly clerk rang a bell, and in a few minutes the proprietor made his appearance, and after being informed of my business, invited me into his private office, where over a bottle of wine, we soon agreed upon terms; after paying an installment in advance, and promising to send my baggage that evening, I was politely shown to the door by the obsequious proprietor.

The next day I took possession of my room at the ‘D— House;’ and now commenced the real business of hunting down my friend of many names.

The first thing to be done was to form his acquaintance, which was easily accomplished by asking him to join me in taking ‘something.’ After two or three ‘somethings,’ he commenced pumping me, as he supposed.

I told him I was just from Memphis, where I had carried on business as a cotton broker, but that I had sold out and was now looking around for an investment in cotton or sugar lands; and that I intended having a little fun before I settled down to the life of a planter.

He laughed, and told me he had only arrived in town himself two days previously—which I knew was untrue—he had been making the tour of the northern states, and as New Orleans was his last stopping place before reaching home, he, like myself, was bound to have a good time before the governor got hold of him and made a clerk of him in his banking business at Matanzas.

Of course I swallowed everything he told me. We were soon hail fellows, well met, and many a ride, game and drink we had together. One day I remarked to him:

“Novello, why do you always employ the same hackman when you drive out?”

“Oh,” he laughed, “It’s only a whim of mine. He was the first one to speak to me when I arrived in town, and as his stand is so near the hotel, and the poor fellow don’t appear to get many fares, why of course I try to help him along.”

I know this was all bosh, for I had known him to refuse fares, saying he was engaged to wait for a gentleman in the hotel; so he didn’t make his living out of the hack, that was sure.

But why follow the scamps from day to day. Suffice it to say the day at last arrived when he was to bid me good-bye. He had just received a letter recalling him home, and would I like a drive with him for the last time, etc., etc.

I could hardly conceal my gratification at the approaching finale of my labors—certainly I would ride out, seeing it was for the last time, laying a slight stress upon the latter words.

The usual drinking, hand-shaking and adieus had been exchanged, and we were about to jump into the cab when I—pretending to have forgotten something—requested him to wait a moment while I ran up to my room.

“All right!” exclaimed he, “Don’t be gone long.”

Now my idea, in making this excuse, was to speak to an assistant, whom I had had on duty all the time I was at the D— House. I gave this man a sign and he followed me to my room, where I informed him, speaking hurriedly, how things stood; and for him to immediately engage a cab and keep ours in sight; but under no circumstances to attempt the arrest of either of the scamps without the signal from me; and if they parted, he must ‘shadow’ the one who went alone, for I should be sure to keep one of them company.

He understood me, and when a few minutes afterward, I looked back from the cab window, I saw, by a well known signal, that he was following.

We had been driving probably ten minutes, when my companion suddenly exclaimed, at the same time throwing his half-consumed cigar out the window:

“What detestable cigars these hotel people do keep! Let’s stop somewhere and see if we can’t get a couple of better ones—Oh, I forgot! I do believe I have some left in my case. So I have!” continued he. Drawing a cigar case from his pocket, opening it, and taking one himself. “Try one of these, Marker, they are some the governor sent me and you can depend upon their being good.”

Now this was just what I had been expecting and was prepared for, I knew that some of the cigars contained a drug or narcotic, and I noticed that when he reached the case, which was a double one, to me, that the side from which he had extracted his contained but one cigar, and the other side three, so I said in a joking manner—suiting the action to the words,—

“If they are as good as you say, “I’ll take two and then we will be even.”

“All right. I have no objections,” said he smiling.

While he was lighting a match, I put the two cigars in my vest pocket, at the same time taking one of my own out and lighting it.

We now lay back puffing and conversing; but I saw that he kept his eye on me in an anxious manner, and knowing I had a part to play, I commenced, after a time, singing and talking nonsense, interspersing my apparent joyfulness with an occasional war whoop.

When I thought I had carried this on about long enough, I began to grow sleepy, and before many minutes I was sound asleep—with one eye open—in a corner of the cab.

I shortly felt, rather than saw, my companion lean over me and examine my countenance, at the same time listening intently to my snoring; at last becoming satisfied, he rapped upon the little window in the front of the cab to attract the attention of the driver, who pulled up, and I then heard the following conversation:

“He’s all right Bill; sound as a dollar.”

“Bully for him! How’s he heeled?” anxiously inquired Bill.

“Got a stunning watch and chain, and he always carried a fat leather. Now you just drive around lively while I go through him; by that time he will be as crazy as a loon, and then you can leave him at the hotel while I strike out for our quarters with the swag.”

“All serene, my handsome,” muttered Bill, as he whipped up his horses, while the other scoundrel went through me.

I had received a hint, from the villains, as to how the drug was expected to affect me; and as I hoped to secure both of them as well as a large amount of plunder, I let ‘Velaz’ manipulate me until he had satisfied himself that I had no more valuables. He then rapped upon the window and jumped out, leaving me to the tender mercies of Bill.

‘Velaz’ had no sooner left than I commenced playing crazy again, which I did with such vehemence that I heard Bill growl—“The infernal fool must have got an extra dose.”

Shortly after the cab was stopped and the door opened by Bill, who unceremoniously jerked me out, ruffling me not a little. I then perceived that we were near the hotel, to which he was conducting me. After taking me to the main entrance he left me suddenly, returned to his cab, and, mounting the box, drove off rapidly, with me in another cab in close pursuit.

I tracked him to a livery stable, where he put up his team. He then walked hurriedly away in the direction of the river, and in five minutes I had him safely housed in a small cottage on the levee.

Here I found, as I expected, my assistant, who had shadowed ‘Velaz,’ keeping a close watch upon the house; and leaving him to keep an eye upon it, I started for headquarters, where a squad of police was put under my charge.

Upon arrival, we surrounded the house, which stood in an enclosed lot of about half an acre in extent, and advancing to the door with my assistant, I rapped loudly and peremptorily.

Presently, a window in the front of the house was cautiously opened, and through the slats of the shutter which were closed I saw ‘Velaz’ peering out at us. His eyes no sooner fell upon me than, hastily withdrawing his head, I heard him exclaim: “Great God! Bill, we are caught; it’s that infernal Marker who we have just plucked! Quick! To the back windows!”

“It’s no use! The house is surrounded!” I cried, as, exerting all my strength, I burst in the door, and rushed into the house, closely followed by my men. We were just in time to see them leap out of the back windows, plump into the arms of the officers.

I never saw a more crestfallen brace of rogues in my life than were they when confronted by me, and learning what I was; they hadn’t a word to say—they saw it all, and if looks could kill, I wouldn’t be alive now to tell this story.

We reached the house, which contained only a bed, a table and a few chairs, but nothing of value except three trunks (two of which I recognized,) and what was on the table, which stood in the center of the back room; this table was covered with greenbacks, watches and jewelry, and it was evident that they were about making a division, when we so unceremoniously pounced upon them; this proved to be the case, as we afterwards discovered.

Taking the three trunks with us, we soon had the prisoners safely locked up, and in a few days thereafter, brought to trial. They were charged with highway robbery on two indictments, and were easily found guilty upon both. They were sentenced to the full extent of the law upon each indictment; and as they would be pretty old men if they lived to leave the penitentiary, I thought I would not press the Chicago cases.

Shortly after they were sentenced, ‘Velaz’, (he wouldn’t tell his right name,) sent for me, and upon my promising to tell him how I had ‘worked him up,’ he told me the following story:—

“I was born in Cuba—I won’t say in what part. My father was wealthy, and gave me a good education, but being naturally of a vicious disposition, he could make nothing of me, and falling into the hands of some sharpers about this time, I soon became an expert in all kinds of roguery and wickedness.

“My father had repeatedly told me that he would drive me from the house if I didn’t reform, but I paid no heed to him.

“One night, assisted by Bill, I robbed the old man, and escaped to the United States, where we lived high as long as the money lasted, but that soon came to an end, and something had to be done soon. It was Bill who originated and proposed the plan we afterwards pursued, for fleecing the unwary.

“I will not tell you where we first tried our little game; at any rate, we were successful, consequently highly elated, for we saw a ‘big bonanza’ looming up in the future.

“Our programme was to work all the large cities from New York to New Orleans, keeping all the plunder, except what was required for current expenses, making a ‘divvy’ here, and separate; but you spoiled that scheme, curse you!

“The first thing we did when we reached a city we intended working, was to engage an empty house as far away from the centre of the city as possible. In this house we concealed ourselves

and baggage after each haul, until the excitement had somewhat died out. Next, we would engage a team for every day, leaving its value a security; and then Bill would drive me to the best hotel in town, and leaving me there, take up his stand near the hotel. My reason for driving out so often, was to get familiar with the city, as well as to keep Bill informed of my progress.

“You know the rest, up to my giving you the cigar. Now that cigar contained ‘*Cannabus Indica*,’ better known as ‘Hasheesh,’ or ‘Indian Hemp,’ one of the most powerful narcotic and intoxicating drugs known to medical science.

“Bill always took the victims back to the hotel, or near it, so as to allay suspicion, and prevent them from falling into the hands of the police, which they would be sure to do if we left them to take care of themselves, whilst under the influence of ‘Hasheesh.’

“Now let’s hear how you tumbled to the trick.”

I gave him my version, and left him cursing me, his luck, and everything around him.

We recovered over twelve thousand dollars, fourteen watches, and an unlimited quantity of jewelry, such as pins, rings, studs, sleeve buttons, charms, etc., etc.

All the watches and jewelry, which we could find owners for, we returned; and a pro rata division of the money was made among the losers; for of course we didn’t recover all of that. I was amply rewarded, and thus ended one of the most curious cases with which I ever came in contact.—*Our Fireside Friend*.

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