

A Clever Capture

“A letter, Sir Richard.”

“Any answer required?”

“I don’t know—the messenger is outside.”

“Wait!”

The speakers were Sir Richard Mayne, the chief of the London police, and a subordinate. With the last word of command, the commissioner, who was seated in his private office, in Whitehall, opened the envelope and read:

“The Duke of Skelty presents his compliments to Sir Richard Mayne and would be obliged for the attendance of a suitable detective at the ball and supper to be given by the duchess tomorrow evening.”

The chief smiled cynically as he perused the communication, for hitherto he had great difficulty in breaking down a prejudice amongst the titled classes and the work of his favorite department (the detective bureau) had been much impeded. Taking up his pen he wrote:

“I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your grace’s letter, and to inform you that an officer will be present at the time mentioned.

“Your obedient servant.
“RICHARD MAYNE”

Folding the letter, and inclosing it in an envelope with deliberation, the commissioner handed it to his subordinate, who immediately left the room. Sir Richard Mayne understood the duke’s motives in requesting the presence of a detective. He was aware that some of the most daring robberies in the metropolis had been perpetrated in those brilliant assemblages, but hitherto his hands had been tied by the conventional reluctance to even temporarily recognize a detective as an equal. The Duke of Skelty had made matters easy, and Sir Richard felt glad that the self introduction of members of the “swell” mob into reception and ball rooms had at last opened the way for police representation. On this occasion he was determined to send the best man available—one whose gentlemanly deportment and professional abilities would reflect credit on the department. He thought over the matter for a few moments, and then, touching a bell which was promptly answered, said briefly to the messenger: “Send for Inspector Carlton.” The inspector of detectives shortly after appeared, and, as he entered the commissioner’s office, that gentleman favored him with a smile, for he was a favorite with the chief. “Dick” Carlton was conceded to be “the handsomest man on the force.” He had been well brought up, and had received a good education. Though a blonde and rather effeminate in appearance, he had nerves of steel and a fine muscular development. He was always well dressed, imperturbably cool and self-possessed, spoke all the Continental languages with fluency and ease, was quick in his movements and prompt to take advantage of any circumstance that might further his professional ends. Most of the department, when they entered the office of the chief, waited in a respectful

attitude for the great man to bid them be seated, which he sometimes neglected to do. "Dick" Carlton, as stated before, was a favorite, and with a favorite's privilege he walked carelessly into the room, and gracefully posed himself in an easy chair.

"You sent for me, Sir Richard," said the inspector.

"Yes, Carlton, I have special work for you," was the answer; "several robberies have been committed in West End drawing rooms recently. Tomorrow there will be a ball at the Duke of Skelty's town residence in Belgravia. Although every invitation has been sent out by the duchess, it is possible that one or two objectionable persons will contrive to be present. You will attend in full evening dress, and the duke will, for the time, give you the welcome of a guest."

"That all, Sir Richard?"

"Yes, excepting that I desire you to report to me personally after the ball."

Inspector Carlton arose from his seat and leisurely withdrew. Those who knew the least of him dubbed him as lazy and not worth "his salt," but his intimates never made such a mistake. While his body was posed in a lazy attitude, his mind was active—teeming with life.

Questions which were asked in an idle, indifferent tone were pregnant with meaning to the questioner, if not to the person questioned. He seldom looked any one in the face when conversing, not because he was afraid to, but because his eyes were seeking information in one direction while his brain sought it in another. Far from looking lazy, he was, in reality, the most active man in the department. While others were fretting and fussing, hurrying hither and thither, with no very clear idea what to do, Carlton would arrange his programme while quietly smoking a cigar, then composedly hail a cab and go about his way in a methodical, cool, and clear-headed way. More than any other man in the force, he utilized the telegraph, cabs, railroads, etc., not because he was lazy, but because he estimated all these aids at their proper worth. Inspector Carlton had been engaged in some dangerous business since he adopted the vocation of a detective, and when he left his chief's office he congratulated himself that he had a pleasant task for once. Not one thought of danger entered his head, and yet, as a matter of fact, it was to be one of the most perilous adventures of his life. In pursuance with his instructions the detective made an elaborate toilet and presented himself at the residence of the Duke of Skelty. He went early because he desired to have an interview with the duke, and also to carefully note each arrival, while he, himself, was unobserved. His grace looked surprised when Carlton exhibited his inspector's card, countersigned by Sir Richard Mayne, by way of introduction. The Duke of Skelty was too well bred to make any comment, but he was astonished beyond measure. He had expected to see a respectable person, but not the polished man before him. He was considerably relieved, however, for he had dreaded that the detective's appearance would be noticed and commented on.

"Has your grace any instructions?" asked Carlton.

"I simply desire that you will keep your eyes open in the interests of my family and my legitimate guests in case any person outside our circle should gain admittance."

“Very good.”

“Of course,” continued the duke, “if you see anything wrong you will be careful to avoid a scene—I do not desire that under any circumstances.”

“Your grace can rest easy, for there will be no scene.”

“May I ask if you anticipate any trouble, Mr. Carlton?”

“I do not, but it may occur,” was the detective’s answer.

“As you are quite a stranger, Mr. Carlton, I must see that you are treated courteously,” said the duke. “Come with me.”

Inspector Carlton followed to the drawing-room where he was introduced in due form to the duchess, who treated him with frigid courtesy. The guests soon after began to arrive, and from a retired corner of the room Carlton listened to the names and keenly scanned the features of the visitors as they arrived. Magnificent dowagers, queenly wives and pretty misses filed into the room attended by the officers of the army and navy, dignitaries of the church, officials high up in the civil service, M.P.’s and a few cabinet officers. Most of these personages Carlton knew by sight and others by name, and certainly none of them would answer to the description of a “suspicious character.”

“Lady Durbin and Colonel Hetherington!” shouted the lackey at the door. The detective looked at them critically. Lady Durbin was well known in the fashionable world, but who was her escort? Externally he looked like a gentleman, but there was not of the military bearing in his walk. There was an undefinable something about him which caused the eyes of the detective to turn to him again and again. He was dressed perhaps a little too “loud” for the company he was in. His jewelry was too loud to be in keeping with good taste. Detective Carlton continued his watch, and as he noticed the perpetual motion of the man’s body he unhesitatingly pronounced him a fraud. There was nothing of the grace and dignity of a well-trained soldier in his movements. They smacked more of the genuflections of a dancing master. In fact, Colonel Hetherington was acting a part, and like many another actor he overdid it. The lynx-eyed Scotland yardman did not know that Hetherington was a fraud, but he concluded that he was, and for that reason kept him under close surveillance. Moving across the room Carlton asked the duke in a low tone.

“Did her grace favor Colonel Hetherington with an invitation?”

“Hetherington?” said the duke, musingly. “Yes, he is a friend of young Gilman, Lord Gilman’s son, who is staying with his aunt, Lady Durbin.”

“Indeed!” Detective Carlton had not time to say more for the duchess approached and immediately after the duke hurried him away with the remark: “Let me introduce you to Mrs. Morton.”

“Mrs. Morton—permit me—Mr. Carlton.”

The lady smiled, and the inspector, as in duty bound, requested the honor of her hand for the opening dance. The lady monopolized Carlton’s attention so that, for a time, he could not follow the movements of Colonel Hetherington. He was not satisfied with the duke’s answer, for he knew that Gilman kept notoriously bad company. Later in the evening he noticed the colonel in an alcove quietly conversing with a lady magnificently attired and in whose coiffure glittered a cluster of beautiful diamonds. A few moments afterward they took their places for a quadrille, and inspector Carlton, being disengaged, moved to the alcove just vacated and watched the progress of the dance. He saw the gentleman slightly press the arm of the lady, who immediately gave a start and a little cry. Colonel Hetherington supported his fair partner to a lounge and seated himself by her side. The Duchess of Skelty soon after followed, supposing her guest was sick.

“I hope your ladyship is not indisposed,” said the duchess.

“Oh, no,” was the answer, “a slight pain in the arm, that is all. It was but momentary.”

The hostess expressed her sympathy, and retired, leaving the two alone on the lounge. Detective Carlton noticed that the brilliants in the lady’s coiffure were no longer there. What had become of them? Lord Varney, the husband of the lady, now approached, and Hetherington resigned his charge, and moved leisurely toward the ante-room. This was just what the inspector supposed he would do, and he no longer doubted that the bogus “colonel” had the diamonds in his pocket. The Duke of Skelty was standing near one of the doorways, and the detective whispered in a respectful tone: “Will your grace permit me a moment’s conversation outside?” The duke nodded, and followed Carlton out. “What is it?” he asked in an annoyed tone, as if anticipating some unpleasantness.

“I have no time to explain,” answered the detective, “but if your grace will kindly permit me to meet you in the library in a few minutes I have no doubt I shall be able to introduce an unworthy guest.”

The Duke of Skelty moved away without vouchsafing a verbal reply, his answer being a slight inclination of the head. He had scarcely gone when the colonel came jauntily down the hall with the evident intention of making a hasty exit.

“Colonel Hetherington?” asked the detective.

“At your service, sir.”

“His grace desires to see you for a moment in the library, if you will be so kind.”

The colonel turned a shade paler, but with great presence of mind said, coolly: "I am much pressed for time if the matter is not important."

"He desired me to say that he particularly wished to see you," said the detective, looking keenly at the man before him.

"In that case," answered the colonel, "I am at his grace's service."

Detective Carlton walked by Colonel Hetherington's side chatting pleasantly until they came to the library, in which the duke was pacing up and down in a restless mood.

Carlton knocked, and then opening the door, followed his companion in. Giving the master of the mansion a quick look of intelligence the detective said: "I informed Colonel Hetherington that your grace desired to speak with him."

The duke, by way of answer, invited the colonel to take a seat, and Carlton turning to the fraud, said, quietly and firmly:

"Hetherington, or whatever name you choose to be known by, your game is up—please to lay on the table the diamonds you despoiled Lady Varney of."

The whole expression of the man's features changed in an instant, and there was a deadly gleam in his eyes, which the detective did not fail to notice.

"Who are you, sir, that dares to insinuate that Colonel Hetherington is a thief?" he asked, in a tone of suppressed anger.

"Inspector Carton, of Scotland Yard," was the prompt answer.

"Ah! I've heard of you," was Hetherington's only comment.

The duke rose from his seat and said, with grave dignity: "Is the inspector's charge true or not, sir?"

"The question itself is an insult, and I decline to answer," said the colonel, in the same cold and even tones.

"Will your grace kindly order a cab to be brought to the door?" asked the detective.

"For what purpose?" asked the duke, sharply.

"My duty is plain, your grace. This man is my prisoner, and must accompany me to Bow street."

"Never!" hissed Hetherington; and the next instant he drew a tiny but perfectly-finished revolver from his breast and sent a shot crashing into the detective's wrist. It had been aimed with lightning-like rapidity, at his body, but quick as the movement was, Carlton's arm moved

quicker, and so his life was probably saved. The duke sat for a moment stupefied, and in that moment Hetherington sprang to the door, but ere the handle had been turned the detective's fingers were on his throat.

Hetherington was a powerful man, but he could not shake off the inspector's grip. With his teeth hard set, Dick Carlton bore his opponent to the floor, although he could but use one arm. Hetherington still maintained his hold on the jeweled pistol and with the butt end struck the detective a cruel blow in the face, partly stunning him and causing the blood to flow freely. Inspector Carlton's fingers tightened on the man's throat until he was nearly black in the face, and then, while he was still gasping for breath, the detective loosened his hold, and with an adroit movement, drew a small pair of steel "cuffs" from his pocket and locked them on Hetherington's wrists. The duke had failed to render the slightest assistance. The whole affair had been so sudden that even now he scarcely realized what had happened. Seeing the blood still flowing from the detective's wounds, he said, hastily: "We must have assistance." Carlton answered, coolly: "Please not to call any one, I will sponge the blood from my face here, and if your grace will order a cab I will convey my prisoner to the station." With the same calmness of demeanor he locked the door and washed his face. Then a servant was summoned, a cab ordered, and the detective linked his arm in Hetherington's and escorted him to the door. Outside two officers in uniform were on duty. "Jones," said the inspector to one of them, "get on the box with the driver—Bow street!" "All right, sir," answered the officer and the cab rattled away.

At the station Hetherington was searched and his jewelry taken away from him. The diamonds were found on his person as the detective knew they would be. He had not, however, been able to satisfactorily account for the sudden start and cry of Lady Varney in the ballroom, but while handling Hetherington's signet ring the mystery was solved, for he accidentally touched a spring and a small needle projected, receding when the pressure was withdrawn. The police surgeon was sent for, and Carlton submitted patiently to the operation of extracting the ball, after which he was driven home.

Hetherington was retired from the public gaze for fifteen years, other and more serious crimes having been proved against him. Thus was the secret of his desperate resistance to arrest, for he knew if he once got in the power of the law his past record would be diligently hunted up and used against him. Lady Varney's \$25,000 jewel was restored to her, the loss of which greatly astonished her. Inspector Carlton was complimented by his chief on the ability he had displayed and, what was probably more acceptable, he received from the Duke of Skelty a check for £100 as a salve for his wounds, for alas! he was no longer "the handsomest man on the force."

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The Indiana [PA] Democrat, January 20, 1881

The Marion [OH] Daily Star, February 7, 1881