

# *Ingenious Bank Robberies*

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## A Detective's Story

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by C. V. Walls.

I had been one of Pinkerton's detectives two years when I first met Kate Putnam, the prettiest and sweetest girl—to me—that I had ever seen. She was fair as a lily, with eyes of impenetrable blue, cheeks and lips like roses, and a wealth of golden ringlets that captivated me completely. She possessed a well-rounded and rather plump form, and was below the medium height, but as I was rather tall and slender I naturally admired the plumpness that I lacked in my own person; so true it is that we poor mortals desire most that which nature has failed to provide us with.

Kate had been a resident of Blakesburg but a few weeks when I was sent by my chief to perform a little job of detective work in that village, and I first met her at a church fair. I was thrown into her society by purchasing a supper, which was sold by numbers and served in baskets, and, as fate would have it, I luckily drew the number of her basket. As is usual on such occasions, I shared the lunch with her. This was the beginning of an acquaintance that soon ripened into mutual respect and admiration, and later, into love.

I succeeded in securing the evidence in the case I was working up—that of arson—but I was loth to leave Kate. It was so much pleasanter to bask in her smiles than to associate with criminals, and hence I remained in the town two weeks when I should have finished my work and returned to Chicago in one-fourth of that time. It is probable, however, that I would not have returned to the city for two months, but for a telegram from my chief, informing me that two or three daring bank robberies had been perpetrated, and commanding me to report at headquarters immediately.

When I informed Kate of the character of the telegram, she seemed greatly agitated, but, as I had no time for explanations, I tore myself away from her and was soon hurried to Chicago. She exacted a promise that I should write frequently, which was entirely unnecessary, for I would have attended to that at the risk of neglecting my business.

Arrived at Chicago, my chief informed me of the details of three burglaries, so far as he could learn the details, but the information was very meager, and the clues to the identity of the burglars were unsatisfactory.

The bank in the village of Redwing had been robbed of \$22,000, and the directors of the bank suspected the cashier; for the burglary was committed about 11:30 o'clock on a Monday morning, or at least the money was missing.

One week later a bank at Laughing Water was also robbed, \$17,000 being gone. The circumstances of the burglary were in every respect similar to those at Redwing.

Two days later the bank at Elm Grove lost \$11,000 in precisely the same way that the other two banks were robbed.

As soon as my chief gave me all the information he had on the subject, he asked me for my theory of the case, as it was evident that the robberies had been committed by the same person or persons, although at widely separated points.

I told him that I had no theory, having no data sufficient to construct a theory upon, but I gave it as my opinion that the last bank robbed should receive the first attention, as it was more likely to furnish clues.

The chief coincided with me, and I departed immediately to the scene of the latest bank robbery, after notifying Kate as to my whereabouts. I knew it would require some time to unravel the mystery connected with the crime, and, eagerly as I set to work, I felt a deeper interest in Kate than solving the difficult problem of the robbery.

Arriving at Elm Grove, I sent a message to the President of the bank, asking him to meet me at my room in the principal hotel in the village. He complied, but could give me very little information other than I already possessed. He had a theory, and, like many other persons, endeavored to bend the facts to make them fit his theory. There are few persons who do not do this, and, therefore, there are few really good detectives.

The President believed that the cashier, whom he had always regarded as the soul of honor, was either the guilty party or in collusion with the party who robbed the bank.

“What is your reason for believing this?” I asked.

“Because of the silly and unsatisfactory explanation of the cashier,” replied the President.

“How does he explain it?”

“He says he can’t explain it. An old stranger applied to have a draft for a small amount cashed, and while they were talking he suddenly lost consciousness.”

“Well?”

“That’s all, except that when I came down to the bank the door was locked and the money gone.”

“Where was the cashier?”

“Locked up in the bank and looking like a fool.”

“Maybe he was drugged,” I suggested.

“No,” replied the President, “I think not, for the cashier never drinks, and, besides, he is not such a simpleton as to drink with a stranger while on duty.”

“Possibly he may have been chloroformed.”

“He says he thinks not. He was a prescription clerk in a drug store for several years, and would have noticed the smell of chloroform long before it could have taken effect.”

“Maybe he is an opium eater and took an overdose and went to sleep.”

“Great heavens!” ejaculated the President. “I never thought of that. It may be as you suggest.”

“You discharged the cashier?”

“No, he is still at the bank. The fact is that he owns nearly as much stock in the enterprise as I do.”

“When can I see him?”

“At any time you choose. I think it would be well to watch and ascertain whether he uses opium or not.”

As I had been a drug clerk for a few months I soon ingratiated myself into the good will of the proprietors and the clerks of the three drug-stores which the village contained, and was not long in discovering that Mr. Watkins, the cashier, had never purchased a particle of opium in any of its forms. An inquiry among the physicians confirmed the statements of the druggists. Still it was possible that he purchased opiates in a distant city.

After conversing with Mr. Watkins a few minutes I was satisfied that he had nothing to do with the robbery. He had an intelligent and honest look, and was a gentleman in every sense of the word. He told me without hesitation all that he knew of the circumstance, which was little more than I had heard before.

“What kind of a man was the gentleman who presented the draft on the day of the robbery?”

“Do you mean for me to describe his appearance?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, he is hard to describe. I think he must have been 60 years of age, and was dressed in a dark suit. He was rather small, and I don’t think he is as old as he looks. He had blue eyes that looked much younger than he did, and his face appeared as though it might be painted. I am convinced that he wore a wig. While we were talking about the draft which I refused to cash, he glared at me fiercely and gesticulated wildly, and that is the last I remember.”

“What was the first thing you did when you became conscious?”

“I found myself standing with my face to the wall with my finger on the head of a tack.”

“Where is the tack?”

“Sticking in the wall there, with a blue circle around it.”

I examined the circle, and concluded that it had been made with a blue pencil. A close scrutiny of the tack, which was an ordinary large-headed carpet-tack, showed that it was branded “B. & Co.,” which were doubtless the initials of the names of the manufacturers. A new theory sprang into my mind, as I asked:

“Mr. Watkins, were you ever mesmerized?”

“Not that I am aware of,” was the reply. Then, slapping me on the shoulder, he almost shouted: “By Jove! I believe you are on the right track now.”

After a few more interrogatories I began to conclude that Watkins had been the victim of a professional mesmerist, and the more I studied the matter the more certain I was that I had found the key to the mystery. But after all what would this fact avail unless I could discover the mesmerist himself?

At length I decided to visit the other banks that had been robbed, and, if possible ascertain whether the same tactics had been employed in relieving them of their cash. I went to Redwing first, as it was the nearer, and was overjoyed to discover that the cashier had been mesmerized and robbed in precisely the same way, even to the tack and blue circle, as had been the bank at Elm Grove. I wrote my discovery to my chief, and received his compliments, and I determined to visit the bank at Laughing Water.

It was only a few miles out of the way from Laughing Water to Blakesburg, so I concluded to visit Kate Putnam, my charmer, for a few hours. She gave me a royal welcome, and I proposed and was accepted, and it is needless to say that I was supremely happy. I detailed to Kate a part of what I had discovered, and she listened with evident interest. In the midst of our *tete-a-tete* a lady friend called, and Kate excused herself for a moment and left me alone in the parlor. To while away the time I began to study the fine paintings with which the parlor was decorated.

In attempting to gain a better view of a new picture that I had not observed before, I knocked down a pretty bracket and broke it. I was attempting to repair it when Kate entered the room. I told her in some confusion what I had done, and offered to repair it if she would furnish me a hammer and some small nails to fasten it together. She was gone a few moments and returned with the implements, and I proceeded to repair the damage, remarking that I feared if she undertook to drive a nail she would cripple her lovely fingers.

I adjusted the two pieces of the bracket, picked up the hammer and started to drive a tack.

Great heavens! What a coincidence: Dropping the hammer and bracket, I nearly swooned. There, standing out in bold relief before me, was the brand “B. & Co.” on the head of the tack!

“Goodness!” Kate exclaimed. “What’s the matter with you?”

“Only a slight attack of vertigo from stooping,” I explained, recovering my composure.

After finishing the job I proposed to Kate that we take a walk down the lane, as it would doubtless revive me.

Taking out my memorandum to record an incident or two that I had omitted, I discovered that I had lost my pencil.

“How provoking!” I exclaimed. “I want to make a little memorandum, but have lost my pencil. Will you please lend me yours, my dear?” I had got to using sweet titles when speaking to Kate in private.

Giving me a tiny gold pencil, she said: “I don’t know whether this will answer your purpose or not; *it is blue!*”

I fairly reeled with astonishment. Here was another coincidence. To conceal my agitation I proposed that we rest by seating ourselves on a log. Then after toying with her gold bracelets a few minutes I said:

“Kate, I have a pair of bracelets in my pocket for you, and I guess you had better try them on.” So saying, I had handcuffs on her pretty wrists in a twinkling.

Instantly her pretty features took on one of the most diabolical expressions that ever I saw on the face of a woman. She raved and swore like a drunken sailor. And I? What did I think? My angel had become a devil. She tried to shoot me, but I was too quick for her. Finally she calmed down, admitted the whole affair, and said she had the entire \$50,000 concealed, and that if I would marry her as I had promised, we would live happily on the proceeds of her crimes.

But I was inexorable, and into prison she went. She told me that she had studied mesmerism in France, and was one of the best operators in the country. She had traveled and lectured, and, although she could not mesmerize more than one man in ten, she could tell at a glance who were and who were not susceptible to hypnotism or mesmerism. She found three bank cashiers in six weeks’ travel whom she could control. She was a brazen adventuress, and was sent to the penitentiary for twenty years, but succeeded in mesmerizing some of her keepers, and by that means effected her escape. She is still in France, and has fallen very low.

Well, the shock didn’t kill me, but I am a bachelor yet. I made \$10,000 out of the job, and am at work on other cases that will doubtless pay me \$10,000.

*The Daily* [Huntington, IN] *Democrat*, July 13, 1886  
*Sterling* [IL] *Standard*, July 29, 1886  
*Eldora* [IA] *Herald*, August 11, 1886  
*Anita* [IA] *Tribune*, August 12, 1886  
*Malvern* [IA] *Leader*, August 12, 1886