

Mr. Bluffer and the Monte-Men
by Allan Pinkerton

I HAVE at present in my employ, and have had for a great number of years, at the head of one of the departments of my business, a now elderly man, who is a genuine character. His fidelity and ability in my service have given him the right to my utmost confidence and respect; but he possesses traits of character that have created at different times, for myself, my officers, and large number of employees, almost infinite merriment.

He is known far and wide, as well as among my people, as Mr. Bluffer, which *sobriquet* was bestowed upon him some years since, by being deputized at Chicago to make the arrest of a notorious criminal who was at that time claiming a large share of public attention, and who had come under my surveillance for capturing.

Although then past the prime of life, and already gray and grizzled, he was determined in whatever he undertook; and though that kind of work was outside of his department, he accomplished his mission successfully, and with such vigor and spirit, that, when the prisoner was brought to my office, he laughingly remarked that his captor was a “cranky old bluffer, and no mistake!” and in honor of the exploit he came to be called “Mr. Bluffer.”

The most striking characteristics of Mr. Bluffer, which gave everything he said or did a marked individuality, were a disposition to speak out plainly about anything and everything that came under his attention—and but little escaped it—and then, if there was anything which he fancied wrong about the matter, he would set it right, if the very dead had to be raised in doing it. This, coupled with an abruptness and occasional ferocity which often provoked the most disastrous results to himself, caused him to be in hot water most of the time, always gave his tormentors the keenest enjoyment, and frequently resulted in his being handled without gloves.

Some time since I had occasion to send Mr. Bluffer from New York to Albany on a rather important mission, and on his return he met with an adventure in which he came out victorious but which, at the same time, nearly upset the old gentleman from the terrible “canary” which his indignation and rage threw him into.

The train left Albany at half-past eight in the morning, and, after an hour’s delightful companionship with an ancient and odorous pipe, which Bluffer keenly enjoys and which is his inseparable companion, he returned to the ladies’ from the smoking car, and with a copy of Mark Twain’s “Tom Sawyer” seated himself comfortably in a seat with a friend for the remainder of the trip.

He had not been long thus engaged when his attention was attracted from his book to an individual “made up” for a Texan homespun suit, sombrero hat, cowhide boots, etc.—who began a rambling conversation, in a high falsetto voice, with one or two of his neighbors.

The gist of his remarks was that in the North wonderful sights were to be seen by the unsophisticated Southerner, and lucky is the man who gets back to his country home without

being robbed and in a sober condition from the great metropolis of the West, Chicago, which great city he had just left.

The peculiar voice, the well-imitated Southern dialect, and his *tout ensemble*, had amused the passengers for some ten or fifteen minutes, when he suddenly bent forward and shouted in the ear of a gentleman who was quietly reading a paper in front of him:

“Say, stranger, that ar’ Chicago’s a buster anyhow, ain’t it?”

“Did you address your question to me, sir?” said the gentleman rather testily.

“Ya-as, ’n no bad meanin’ with it either. How do *you* like Chicago?”

“I’m a resident of Chicago and it’s good enough for *me*!” This with an expression of contempt for the questioner.

“Wall, all I’ve got ter say is just this,” resumed the Texan, not at all disconcerted, “Chicago is the gauldurndest town I ever struck. They tell me New Yoik is about half as big as Chicago, and I’m going to see the show thar too. These cities is big sights fur us cattle-raisers. Was you ever in Texas, stranger?”

“No, and have no desire to go there either.”

“Then you *do* live in Chicago, eh? Ar’ you travelin fur?”

“I am going to New York on business, simply,” answered the Chicago business man, evidently very much bored.

“Wall, now, you Chicago fellers are right smart. Some of the boys played it on me a couple of days ago; but I’m goin’ to get even on ‘em, gauldurned if I don’t. I’ll tell you how it was.”

At this point the passengers’ attention, ladies and all, had been attracted by the eccentric appearance and language of the “Texan,” and all were listening.

“You see,” continued the Texan, “I was walkin’ along the street, when a feller asked me if I wanted to buy a gold watch. ‘Wall, I reckon not,’ says I. ‘I can’t stand the press,’ ‘I know where you can get a good watch for a dollar,’ says he. ‘You *do*?’ says I.

‘I’m your man. ‘-Come along with me,’ says he. And stranger, we just measured mud right smart, you can bet. ‘Here you are,’ says he; and we walked into a nice looking doorway, and went upstairs into a room whar a gang of lads was chuckin’ dice. ‘Step right up and beat twenty-five, and you can git one of these elegant gold watches,’ a feller says to me as was standin’ behind a bar like; ‘it’s only a dollar a throw.’ I got up and I throwed, but I didn’t beat twenty-five. ‘You’re in bad luck not to beat twenty-five,’ says a young feller to me; ‘I jist won a watch, and I beat thirty-six!’ ‘Hold on thar,’ says I to the man behind the bar; ‘I’ll try that agin.’ But I slipped up on it, stranger, and I’ll be gauldurned if I didn’t try it twenty-five times. I couldn’t

fetch it once, and it cost me twenty-five dollars for my fun. But, by and by, I smelled a right smart-sized mice and I says: ‘Gentlemen, I’ve had enough!’ and gauldurn me if I didn’t get eout o’ that right quick—I reckon!”

“Why didn’t you complain to the police?” kindly inquired a gentleman who was sitting behind him. This individual had been chatting with an elderly lady about the decadence of steamboat travel on the Hudson, and praising the good cheer of the olden times, when there were such life and gayety “on the river.” He was a pompous-looking person, and had let slip several remarks so worded that a stranger would easily understand that he was a member of some Legislature, and appeared to have plenty of money in his well-filled pocketbook, judging from its appearance when he displayed it as he gave his ticket to the conductor.

“Complain to the police? Why I didn’t want my friends to know I’d been such a gauldurned sucker. My friends read the papers—they do, stranger. And then I expected to get beat anyhow, somehow afore I got eout of Chicago, and so I jist said nothin’ to nobody.”

The roar of laughter had scarcely subsided, when Mr. Bluffer, whose ears had been pricked up for a time, and whose suspicious disposition had shown him that the car contained a first-class “monte” crowd, whispered to his companion: “I say, friend, that fellow ought to be an actor. He plays that very well.”

“What do you mean?” was the reply.

“Hold on—let’s wait; he’s got another yarn;” and just then the Texan, apparently flattered by the attention he was receiving, resumed his yarns about Chicago.

“But the worst beat I got was in losing five hundred dollars in the slickest way you ever seed.”

“How was that?” said the Chicago merchant, at length becoming interested, and unbending from his former dignity.

“Why, a feller come up to me and showed me three cards. He says: ‘I’ll bet you ten dollars you can’t tell me which one is the “old woman,”’ and he mixed ‘em all up an’ laid ‘em all down on a little board he had in front of him. ‘No, you don’t play that on me,’ I says; ‘I jist got bit on one game.’ ‘Here, I can tell you,’ says a young feller what was lookin’ on; and he did tell him.

‘Do you want to try it again?’ says he. ‘Well, I don’t mind,’ says the young feller. ‘I’ll bet you fifty dollars, all I’ve got with me,’ and I’ll be gauldurned if he didn’t win. ‘Here,’ I says, ‘I’ll go you on that thing.’ You see, I had been a watchin’, and I knew the card jist as well as the feller that won. ‘How much?’ says the feller with the cards. ‘Two hundred dollars,’ I says. ‘All right,’ says he, ‘I’ll bet you.’ I put my finger on the old woman, but he turned up the card, and it wasn’t her—not much: it was the Jack, and I got beat. Now you jist calkerlate my eyes stuck out. I couldn’t see how I made such a mistake, and I offered him to go just once more for three

hundred. He took it; but, stranger—well, don't you ever try that game—that's all. You'd get beat!"

And the Texan leaned back with a sigh.

"Then you lost?" asked the senator.

"Yes, you bet I lost. The feller offered to bet me just once more, to give me a chance to git even, but I told him I was tired and wanted to go home!"

Another roar of laughter followed this story and the Texan resumed:

"But I tell yer what I *did* do. I give that Chicager skunk ten dollars for them three keerds, and I'm goin' to take 'em down to Texas and clean all the cowboys out of their stamps. I kin do it, sure. Why, I've got 'em right here," said he; "I'll show 'em to you," and he went down into an inner vest-pocket, produced a red bandana handkerchief, which he carefully unfolded, and showed three playing-cards—the knave, queen, and king.

"There's the jokers," he said triumphantly, displaying them awkwardly to the Chicago merchant.

All this time Mr. Bluffer had been bristling up. Here were some villains aboard a coach full of respectable people—many of whom probably had large sums of money with them—who were now playing the prelude to the little drama of robbery. It was a shame, Mr. Bluffer thought; and, like a valiant knight, he determined to distinguish himself. He confided to his friend what was really going on under the appearance of rural simplicity, and expressed a purpose of denouncing the parties there and then; but he was finally persuaded to let the matter rest until there was really some danger of a swindle being perpetrated.

"Why," said the solid Chicago business man to the Texan, "that's the game they call 'three-card monte.' It's a shame," he continued, addressing a gentleman whose curiosity had drawn him near, "that such rascality cannot be prevented. The manner in which these poor, ignorant countrymen will allow themselves to be swindled is pitiable in the extreme. Something should be done to stop it. The penalties upon those convicted should be more severe than they are."

"That's true," remarked the senator warmly. "We are thinking of introducing a bill at the coming session of the legislature at Albany making it an offence punishable with imprisonment ten years in the penitentiary. Gambling must be stopped!"

By this time Mr. Bluffer was in a very fever of virtuous indignation, and low mutterings from time to time escaped him, and were given in very strong language. He'd be dashed if *he'd* see such goings on. Very decided adjectives affirmed that *others* might permit such damnable work, but old Bluffer, true to his pugnacious disposition, would be blanked if he would allow it. In fact, he began to attract considerable attention in his part of the car; but his friend, who had some curiosity to see how the matter would end, coupled with some apprehensions that the deputy's violent temper might precipitate trouble should he interfere in his brusque manner, quieted him down somewhat for the time being.

The Chicago business man had noticed this; and after [eyeing] Mr. Bluffer for a moment, he beckoned him to follow him to the extreme end of the car, where, although the former evidently endeavored with a most winning argument to calm my old employee down, from the indignant snortings, the savage shaking of his head, and the demonstrative manner of his entire person, it could be seen that it was an entirely one-sided argument.

While this by-play was going on, the Texan and his confederate, the senator, were losing no time. The former proceeded to show his amused and interested listeners just how he had been beaten. He shuffled the cards in a bungling manner, eliciting a remark from the senator to the effect that he must do better than that or he would never get even on the Chicago sharks by beating his friends in Texas on that game, because any man could tell which card was the “old woman.”

“Wall, now, stranger, I doubt it. I kinder think *you* can’t turn her over!”

“Oh, yes; anyone can tell,” responded the senator airily.

“Look a-here: I’ll just bet yer a ten-dollar note yer can’t, stranger!”

“Done! Here it is!” And the senator picked up the right card, which was apparent to every bystander, from the clumsy manner in which the cards had been shuffled.

“Wall, you *did* beat me, didn’t you?” ejaculated the Texan, with a look of stupid simplicity and unaccountable astonishment. I reckon I’ll have to practice this thing a little afore I can hide it; but I’ll be gauldanged ef I don’t git even!”

Down at the end of the car, where the virtuously indignant Mr. Bluffer and the Chicago business man were having their one-sided argument, the former was shaking his head furiously, and exclaiming:

“No, sir—never! That’s all very fine; but I can’t see it! I wouldn’t be found dead with any of your money on me! If I was to carry it about me in Chicago, I’d be arrested for handling counterfeit money. You’ve got hold of the wrong man for a bribery!” and the like; and then Mr. Bluffer, snorting and puffing, returned to his friend, muttering and fussing, and showing many symptoms of a near explosion.

In the meantime the senator had been solicited to bet once more, and had done so to oblige the Texan; and again won—this time fifty dollars.

Among the spectators stood a young man, with a Jewish cast of countenance, whose hand had been going in and out of his pocket for some time, as though he were anxious to try his luck. The fire of excitement was in his eyes, and his cheeks were flushed—a gambler in inclination, young as he was, and evidently unsophisticated.

“I’ll bet you ten dollars I can show you that card,” said he; and he was laying down a ten-dollar bill on the improvised table, consisting of an overcoat upon the Texan’s knee, on which he was showing how the “little game” was played, when suddenly Mr. Bluffer, in a burst of indignation, seized the young man’s arm.

“No, you don’t!” he exclaimed, pushing him away; “no, you don’t! Don’t be a fool, young man!” he continued, while the bystanders looked surprised, and an ugly light scintillated from the Texan’s eyes as he looked up at the intruder.

“Let him bet. I’ll take my chances. Let him bet,” said the Texan.

“You’ll take your chances, will you?” burst forth old Bluffer ferociously. “A nice chance that would be for *him*, wouldn’t it?”

The young man paused for a moment bewildered, while the Chicago business man, smiling pleasantly and reassuringly, beckoned him to bet; and the senator urged him to try his luck: why, he could beat him certainly, just as easy as *he* had done. The young Hebrew was reaching his hand down, when a sign from Bluffer and his friend restrained him again.

“You’re a nice gang, ain’t you?” blurted out Bluffer hotly, [eyeing] the Chicago merchant with a look of contempt as his fists began to double up. “I want you to get out of this car as quick as ever you can go!” and he made a step in the direction of the latter, while that sleek individual assumed an indignant attitude and turned very red in the face.

“What do you mean, sir?” he exclaimed, bridling up. “Do you know to whom you are speaking? I demand to know what you mean by insulting me in this manner.”

The passengers stared from one to another in astonishment, and the ladies began to look frightened.

“I am a respectable merchant from Chicago, sir, and I demand an apology instantly, sir, or you must answer for this insult!”

“That’s all very fine! that’s all very fine!” snorted Mr. Bluffer, weaving back and forth from a very excess of contempt and rage. “Oh, you do it very well—very well. You ought to be an actor! A respectable merchant from Chicago, eh? Why, ladies and gentlemen, these scamps are an organized gang of three-card-monte gamblers, who have come here to rob: yes, rob—and be damned to you!” he added savagely, as “Texas” jumped up, muttering threats and curses, and placing the cards in his pocket “And what are you going to do about it? Yes, ladies and gentleman,” said old Bluffer, in a high tragedy voice, “and this fellow here” (pointing to the “business man”) “does the genteel business. That one over there” (referring to the senator) “is pal No. 2, and always wins to encourage the victims, in order that that scoundrel” (pointing to the Texan) “may fleece them. Why, that Chicago business man!”—and here the brave old Bluffer shook his trembling finger very close to the nose of that individual—“not five minutes ago offered me twenty-five dollars to keep my mouth shut and say nothing. It’s all pretty well played, but I object to their presence here, and, damn me, but they’ll go out of the car, or I will!”

At this the “business man,” boiling with rage, suddenly put his hand into a convenient valise, drew forth a revolver, which he cocked. This was followed by shrieks from the ladies, while an ominous and painful silence ensued among the bystanders, who shrank out of the way. The ugly eyes of the baffled Texan gleamed, the “senator,” in a ridiculous attempt at dignity, and with wholly the look of a sneak, appeared not to know just how to act, while the hand of the “business man” trembled and his face paled, as he said hoarsely: “Take back what you said, or I’ll blow daylight through you!”

“Come away, or you’ll be hurt!” whispered Mr. Bluffer’s friend.

“Not much!” blurted out the old fellow defiantly, “He daren’t shoot! He’s too big a coward!” and he looked the gambler in the face, while he bantered him to shoot.

“Give it to him—shoot!” yelled the Texan. “Why *don’t* you shoot?” he howled wildly. “Give the ‘pop’ to me; I’ll bore him!”

“Oh, yes! that’s all very fine! why *don’t* you give it to him? He’ll shoot—oh, yes! shoot nothing!” snarled old Bluffer defiantly, while the taunted party looked nervously around.

“Stop the train and call the conductor!” shouted one frightened individual; while Mr. Bluffer’s friend stole around behind the “Chicago business man,” ready to snatch the revolver on the first sign of genuine danger.

Mr. Bluffer seemed to get braver and braver. His blood was up! He was ready for battle. His pugnacious spirit, coupled with a knowledge that the scoundrelly gang were weakening, made him bolder than a lion, and he fairly danced up and down in front of the gamblers.

“Look at the trunk of the gentleman from Chicago!” giving the satchel a nimble kick, which sent it spinning, and disclosing an empty interior; “nothing in it but a pack of cards! Don’t you acknowledge?” yelled Bluffer, advancing, “or shall we call in all the passengers?”

“Yes, the game is up. I own up,” replied the Chicago business man in a low voice of baffled rage, at the same time putting his revolver in his pocket and picking up the empty valise to follow the “senator,” who still attempted to appear dignified, to the door; while the Texan, concluding things were beginning to look warm, as he observed the now determined faces of nearly all the passengers, followed after.

“All right, my fine old snooker! We’ll fix you!” shouted the Texan to Mr. Bluffer, as the former retreated.

The train was now nearing the suburbs, and it had got bruited about that the demonstrative old fellow was one of my men—“one of Pinkerton’s superintendents,” had, in fact, reached the ears of the retreating gamblers; and they stopped at the door to give their persistent enemy a parting shot.

Of all the vile language ever used, the Texan, the “business man” and the “senator” now indulged in. They raked the sturdy old Bluffer fore and aft. Outside of all the fine names their tongues could fling forth, they sneered at him, jibed him, bullied him, called him a janitor, hurled at him taunts of being Pinkerton’s coal-heaver, Pinkerton’s floor scrubber, Pinkerton’s hostler, and altogether so hurt the old fellow’s pride in his position and badgered him on his personal appearance and infirmities, that, had not the ancient Bluffer been restrained, he would have thrown himself upon the three, in all the might and power of his boundless indignation and rage, and probably got a good, sound drubbing, if not worse.

As it was, he followed them, with trembling form, shrieking tones, and shaking fists, to the last that he was able, and earned another great victory, in his own estimation, in behalf of decency and justice.

The gamblers were hustled off the train at the first stop made, breathing dire threats of revenge; while my triumphant and faithful employee, amid the hearty congratulations of the passengers, solaced himself, until the

Union depot was reached, by mighty and vigorous puffings at his ancient and odorous pipe; and when the passengers disembarked for their various destinations might still have been seen puffing and muttering away but wearing the dignity of a conquering hero.

Allan Pinkerton, *Criminal Reminiscences and Detective Sketches*. New York: G.W. Dillingham, 1878.

This story was included in the illustrated anthology *Criminal Reminiscences and Detective Sketches*.