

# *The Experience of John Spindler, the London Detective, with a Gang of Coiners*

The Detective on the Track of a Gang of Coiners

He Enters The House, Though The Landlady Protests A Heart-Thrilling Deathbed Scene—A Clever Physician—The Agent Of A Frenzied Woman At Hearing Of The Death Of Her Husband A Heart-Piercing Scream The Sad Duty Of A Detective—The Coiner Too Deep For Him—A Tragic Funeral Procession—The Detective Fairly Done!—Visiting The Humane Doctor—A Gentlemanly Swindler— Caught At Last

by George McWatters

A gang of counterfeiters of coin circulated for a long time a great quantity of spurious coin in London, and although the detective corps had for a long while tracked them in vain, I had vowed in my professional pride to capture them. More than once I pounced down upon them in their haunts, but all in vain; everything vanished like magic, no moulds or anything else to be found which might fairly convict them of guilt. Of course, I was not able to produce any proofs of their existence, or rather of their identity to my chief, and he fairly laughed at me and my efforts; this circumstance the more excited the desire within me, to show him that I had not been mistaken. I considered my failure in discovering them detrimental to my reputation, and was bound to leave nothing untried.

Jim Bradley was the chief of the gang I was looking for, and after several vain efforts I was one evening convinced that I should capture them this time, but all proved in vain. No sooner had I appeared, than every tool had vanished, and no trace of the crime could be found.

This naturally gave me considerable annoyance, and with some heat I ejaculated: "You have escaped me this time, Jim Bradley; but I'm not John Spindler if you do the next."

"When you catch me, hold me!" he grinned. "How dare you malign an innocent man?"

Well, it was nearly nine months before I again ran down Jim and his gang; then I detected them in a low, wretched street. The house they used was kept by an old Irish woman.

Having watched the house, till I was sure of my game, I went to Scotland Yard, saw the chief, reported my news, got some men, and on one dark, gusty winter's night made a swoop upon them.

Leaving the police I had brought, at a little distance, I knocked at the door. Getting no answer, I stepped back and looked up at the house.

It was dark as pitch, save a faint glimmer in the first floor windows. As I returned I felt certain I saw the blind of the lower room move. Trusting, if I was being inspected, that the darkness had concealed my identity, I repeated my summons, when, after a long delay, the door was opened by the old landlady, bearing a flaring tallow candle.

“Did ye knock afore?” she said, peering feebly at me. “Sure, I’m just as deaf as a post, yer honor, and I don’t hear a bit. Who do you want?”

“One of your respectable lodgers, Mrs. O’Brien,” I answered, entering the passage, and putting my foot so as to prevent the door closing. “Thanks, old lady; I won’t trouble you further.”

Giving a preconcerted whistle, my men came rapidly forward.

“Oh! the perleesc! Oh, holy St. Patrick! have mercy upon a lone widdier woman! Oh, good jintlemen, what’s the matter, sure!” shrieked the hag.

Paying no heed to these ejaculations, I placed one policeman on guard, and with the others sprung up stairs.

Reaching the landing, I found all dark, save a faint glimmer, which issued under the door in front of us. I tried the handle, it was locked.

“We have him this time!” I whispered, exultingly, for I had caught the sound of Jim Bradley’s voice. “I have examined the house well, and there is no means of egress, either by the roof, or by the windows. They are trapped. Open in the Queen’s name!” I exclaimed aloud.

“Hallo, is that you, my dear Spindler?” cried Jim from within. “Happy to see you, I’m sure. Remember what I said: ‘Hold me when you catch me, old boy!’ The thing is to trap your bird!”

“I will take care of that! Mr. Jim,” I rejoined. “Open, or we shall break in the door!”

“Oh, plaze, jintlemen—dear, good jintlemen, for the love of the saints, don’t make a noise. There’s a poor soul just partin’ this life up stairs, and his poor young widdy’s a’most distracted! Sorra a one of ye jintlemen hev any pity. Don’t terrify the colleen, nor the partin’ sowl, who sure has trouble enough.”

“Silence, you old crone!” I exclaimed, “and fetch a light, or I’ll have you arrested as an accomplice.”

With a regular howl of disappointment, she hobbled away, declaring she’d do anything for us, imploring pity for a poor lone woman, and compassion for the “partin’ sowl up stairs.”

We didn’t wait for her return. Aware no one could pass us on the stairs, and believing Jim might be trying to destroy the moulds, we put our shoulders against the door, and drove the lock from the box.

I had prepared for the light to be extinguished and a rush made.

I was disappointed. Jim sat composedly at the table with another man, playing cards.

“Hello! you don’t stand on ceremony, John, my friend,” he remarked, laughing; “I thought every man’s house was his castle.”

“So it is, Jim, until he makes it a shield for law-breaking,” I answered.

“Prove your words, my man.”

“I intend to, I hope; so you will consider yourself my prisoner, while I search.”

“Please yourself and take the consequences,” he replied, and carelessly went on with the game.

Putting my men on guard, I began to examine the apartments.

I sounded the walls, groped up the chimneys, tried the flooring.

No, not a sign; while Jim Bradley’s utter indifference, I own, perplexed me.

“Done, again! “ I muttered, when I heard a heavy step in the room above.

“What’s that up stairs?” I asked.

“You should know by this time,” answered Jim. “I can only say, that confounded Irish hag is always screechin’ as a chap’s a-dying, which ain’t much concern of mine, as long as he keeps hisself to hisself, and don’t groan too loud. ‘Igh, low, game, without even the Jack, Phil,” he added, to his companion, putting down his cards.

The sick man’s a ruse perhaps, I thought.

“Come lads,” I said, aloud, “we’ll go up.”

Regardless of the old woman’s entreaties not to disturb “the poor dyin’ sowl,” we mounted.

The back attic was as bare as bare could be. When I was about to enter the other, the door opened, and a grave looking, respectably dressed man crossed the threshold.

“Hush! “ he said in a low tone. “May I ask the meaning of this disturbance? It is most unseemly and out of place! The poor fellow in here has but a few moments to live. His unfortunate young wife is distracted.”

I looked keenly at him.

“If it is not an impertinent question, sir,” I asked, “pray, who may you be?”

“Who am I?” he smiled, “I am Doctor Alexander of Jude street, close by. Now in my turn, who are you?”

I instantly acquainted him with my business. He looked serious and interested.

“Humph!” he said, drawing me a little aside; “I have only visited this place once or twice, but I own, I have had my doubts of its respectability. We medical men see strange scenes. Still, I don’t fancy the poor woman and her husband have had any connivance with the people below. He is a bricklayer. Though of course, in such matters, you are the best judge. Such persons are capable of all manners of tricks. It is, of course, your duty to make certain. Only in case you are wrong, be gentle with the wretched wife and mother. Come in.”

We entered. The room was almost devoid of furniture, and barely supplied with the commonest necessities of existence.

At one side was a miserable mattress, laid on the floor, and stretched on it was the dying man.

Kneeling by him, her head bowed down to his, her black hair streaming over the tattered patch-work covering, was the young wife, weeping bitterly, as she pressed her baby to her bosom.

I’m not hard-hearted, and the sight took me back, especially the countenance of the husband, upon which the hue of death had already settled.

I was following the doctor, when, abruptly, he leaned forward, then, drawing back, placed his hand on my arm.

“I thought as much,” he whispered; “all is over.”

The words were scarcely audible, yet they reached the wife’s ears.

I shall never forget the scream she gave. Starting up on her knees, she gazed wildly in the face of the dead, then, shrieked, turning appealingly to the doctor.

“Oh, no, no, not dead ! Don’t tell me that! Not dead! Oh, Tom, Tom—dear Tom, speak to me—speak to Lizzie!”

And casting herself on the body, she went off into violent hysterics.

“Poor thing,” said the doctor, raising her. “Pray, my good fellow, take her to a chair, while I close the poor man’s eyes.”

That done, he rejoined me.

“You want to search this room? I think it useless, but if you must, pray have pity on the poor woman, and do it before she recovers. Her trouble is enough without any addition.”

Duty was duty; yet I felt like a hard-hearted, mean-spirited cur as I performed mine, and confess to have lacked my usual acuteness, for more than once the disciple of Galen aided me in my suggestions.

Nothing however came of it. I could not find a trace.

“Yet,” I said, “I’d take my oath the dies are in this house, and it’s one hundred pounds in my pocket, if I find them.”

“Then I most decidedly should try,” said the doctor. “That sum is not to be got every day.”

“No; and I’ll keep a watch in this house till I’ve found them.”

“In the room?” he asked.

“No, I ain’t quite made of stone,” I rejoined, a bit hurt. “But I shall inspect all who go out or come in.”

“Quite right; and I wish you success, for there is no telling the suffering these coiners occasion.”

We then descended, and the doctor left, after telling the old Irish woman he would call, as he went home, on the parish undertaker, and give the necessary orders for the funeral.

Well, I needn’t lengthen out my story. I rented the parlor (by compulsion,) of the landlady, and established a watch night and day, upon who and what went out of, and entered the house.

Jim Bradley came and went, of course, unmolested, and chaffed me considerably when we met, while without the slightest [demur] he let me visit his room whenever I pleased.

What did it mean?

I also made a call, now and then, on the widow.

Poor thing! she was always crying, and so weak and full of grief as she moved about the room where her confined husband was—for she wouldn’t leave it—that the sight was pitiable.

The medical attendant dropped in once to inquire how I got on, and shook his head at hearing my want of success.

“I fear, if the dies are here, the fellow you call Bradley is too deep for you,” he said.

“Not if I know myself,” I said. “I have applied at head-quarters for permission to make a better search, and I’ll take up the flooring.”

“I fancy that’s the most likely place. What is that?” he asked.

“Only the undertaker’s men,” I said, putting the door open. “It’s the poor fellow’s funeral, to-day.”

“Indeed! Ah, they hasten these matters with the poor.”

Just at this moment the wretched coffin and its bearers passed along the passage, followed by the weeping widow, leaning on the old Irish woman. They were the sole mourners.

The doctor respectfully removed his hat, and we stood in silence, until it had gone by.

“Poor—poor thing!” my companion remarked, with a sigh; then giving me his card, and asking me to call, if I proved successful, he went away.

Well, the hours crept by, and the silence of the house began to surprise me. Bradley had gone out early, and hadn’t been home since. My assistant came in about eight o’clock; but neither the widow nor the landlady returned.

I waited and waited. Eleven o’clock struck.

I began to get suspicious.

Had I been done?

I turned hot, and then cold; then seizing the candle, darted up stairs. Bradley’s room was as usual, but the attic—the sight of it made me feel ready to drop.

“Done—cleverly done!” I cried, moving my candle around.

Yes; bitter the humiliation—I had been duped! I had been the victim of sensibility and a clever trick!

There was the mattress ripped up; and there, where the coffin had stood, was a hole in the floor, where the plank had been removed. That had been the place of concealment.

But where were the dies? Where? Why, in the *coffin*, of which, no doubt, the dead man had been one of the bearers.

“Nonsense!” I ejaculated. “The man must have been dead! It isn’t likely he could deceive the doctor—a kind-hearted fellow, but a keen one; I’ll go to him!”

Leaving my assistant in charge, I hastened to Jude street, with his card in my hand.

The red “danger signal” indicated the house, and knocking, I asked to see the doctor.

The servant, showing me into the surgery, went to summon him.

In a few minutes he appeared—that is, a gentleman appeared; a gentleman of about sixty, with silver gray hair.

“I beg your pardon,” I said; “it is Dr. Alexander I wish to see.”

“Alexander! My name, sir, is Lindsay, and I am the only professional man in the house—nay, in the street. There must be a mistake.”

“Impossible!” I cried. “See, sir, here is his card!”

“Humph! I have never heard the name in the neighborhood,” he remarked, perusing it. “Wait a moment,— if you will allow me, I will see.”

Taking down one of the two thick volumes from the book-shelves, he ran over lists under the initial A.

“No,” he said. “As I thought—his name is not here. I fear the title of ‘Doctor’ must be assumed, and he is not a certificated medical man.”

I then told my story.

“Sir,” remarked Dr. Lindsay, unable to suppress a smile, “I fancy you have not only been duped by a dying man, but also by his medical attendant.”

And so it proved.

The whole had been a very clever trick—from the widow to the doctor and “parish” funeral.

Nevertheless, I might have remained in doubt to the last, had not my “pride of place” been so wounded that I did not rest until I had tracked Jim Bradley again.

I had seen him pass in and out an old house on Hay-Market, and as I knew that he would deceive me again, if he knew with whom he had to deal, I so perfectly disguised myself as an old Jew, that I defied all recognition. I opened a little shop in Hay-Market, where I bought and sold old clothing, iron, copper, books, etc., and soon I was known among the boys, as buying all kinds of things. It wasn’t long, before Jim Bradley entered my shop, and wanted to purchase a coat; we soon agreed upon the price, and he paid me, but, judge how my heart bounded, he paid me partly in spurious coin. I knowingly winked at him, and asked whether he had no other money with him.

He looked piercingly in my face, and seemed to be satisfied.

“Why, is the money not good, old chap, or was it only your fancy to see some more of my money?”

“Why,” I replied, “to say the truth, a great deal of such money has passed through my fingers, but,” I added, whispering in his ear, and looking carefully around, as if I were afraid I should be overheard, “I never took it for the full value.”

“Ah, I understand, old chap!” replied Jim. “I will send my man around to deal with you. Good morning.”

“God bless you!” I ejaculated, and Jim left the shop.

In the afternoon, the “doctor” came in. There he was. My identical, gentlemanly-looking, good-hearted, obliging doctor, who was so very much afraid that these false coiners would corrupt society. There he stood before me, all flesh and blood. I could hardly restrain myself from embracing him.

“Good day, old man,” said the doctor; “one of my men bought a coat of you this morning?”

“Yes, sir,” I said, lifting respectfully my cap.

“Has he paid you? “

“Yes, at least the gentleman intended to.”

“What do you mean, was the money not good?”

“Well,” I replied, “good enough for such as know how to bring it in the market, and who desire to make a little something on it.”

“Can we speak privately together?”

“Well, no!” I said, scrutinizing. “I think it would be better to come in the evening, when my shop is closed; I have a private, cozy room behind the store, and some good old Malaga. You might knock at eight o’clock, at the back-door.”

“All right, I will be there this evening.”

The “doctor” went away. I sent, at once, a note to the chief, requesting him to send assistance, but to have the men disguised, as I was afraid the shop would be carefully watched.

About an hour afterwards, a Jewish woman entered the shop, and after I had talked with her a little while, I had the satisfaction to make the discovery that I was speaking to a brother of the profession.

From time to time other disguised people entered, and at about seven o’clock in the evening, I had a neat little guard of six policemen in my store.

At eight o’clock sharp, a soft knock was heard at my back-door. I carefully opened, and there I saw the doctor and Jim Bradley enter; never in my life were guests more heartily welcome.

I opened one bottle of Malaga after the other, and soon we began to talk business; they wanted to know what my facilities for circulating were, and as I told them, they seemed to be well pleased; but I, at the same time, discovered what sharp rascals they were.



The doctor said that it would not do for them to be seen too often visiting my shop, and soon we agreed that I should call once a week at their head-quarters, at nine o'clock in the evening, and should be allowed to enter by giving the watchword "Alexander," (the name of my "doctor.")

At last, they handed me fifty pounds of spurious coin, for which I paid them twenty-five pounds, and it was agreed between us, that after this we would trade on that standard.

I forgot to mention that, after Jim and the doctor had entered, I had carefully locked the door, and put the key in my pocket. Two of the policemen had been concealed, before that, behind a curtain, which I had hung over my bedstead.

At once, I stood up, and laying my hand on the shoulder of Jim, I said: "Jim Bradley, this time, I think, I have trapped the bird." At once, Jim and the doctor drew pistols; but the policemen were already upon them, and had soon hand-cuffed them in such a way that resistance was impossible.

Now, I threw off my mask and clothing, stretched myself out, and Jim looked in the face of John Spindler.

"Why, old boy," said Jim, in the coolest possible manner, "happy to see you, I'm sure. I had the best of you the last time, it is but fair that you should have your turn."

"And I am going to have it," I replied.

Well, Jim and the doctor were marched off to the station, and I, with two policemen, marched off to the house indicated by Jim. I had put on my mask again.

I had the pleasure of seeing, once more, the old Irish lady, before me; I gave the watchword

"Alexander," and the door was readily opened.

"One flight of stairs, good jintleman, to the left, if you please," shrieked the old crone.

I asked her to get a light, as I did not know the way in the house, and it was dark as pitch, and added that I had no desire to break my neck.

She grumbled, and went up stairs. Quick as lightning, I opened the door, the policemen softly entered and concealed themselves in a dark corner of the hall. No sooner had the old woman appeared, with the light in her hand, at the top of the stairs, when I exclaimed:

"All right, I can see now," and up I went.

Opening the door, I saw only one man sitting before a table, and the young widow, whose heart was so fearfully broken by the death of her husband.

I thought that further disguise was superfluous, threw off my mask, whistled, and the policemen flew up stairs, and at once seized the man, while I, grasping the young woman by the shoulder, inquired whether she had often visited the grave of her husband.

She now looked sharply in my face, and soon she recognized me, and exclaimed:

“This time we’re done!”

And done they were. The woman and the man soon joined Jim and the doctor, and after a thorough search, the tools were found hidden in a hole in the wall, and so artfully covered up, that only a minute examination and sounding of the wall would betray the hiding-place.

Already in the following week, Jim Bradley and his accomplices were brought before court; the court-room was crowded with spectators, Jim Bradley and the widow, the old woman and two accomplices, were sitting in the bench of the accused, and when I entered the hall, the pseudo-doctor told his story, raising his hand in a solemn manner; he, in his gentlemanly appearance, proved to be the greatest rogue of the lot, as his pleasant manners and aristocratic face defied all suspicion, and under such circumstances, the circulating of the spurious coin was a comparatively easy task for him.

To my great satisfaction, I saw them all sent off, for a considerable time, to Portland, with small chance of a ticket of leave.

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