

A Detective's Story

By Capt. Howard

During my twenty-five years of actual service as a detective, I have found many who have stolen the livery of heaven to serve the devil in.

One morning I stepped into Matsell's office, having just returned from the west, when I was accosted by the chief.

"Hullo, Harry; glad to see you; there is work ahead."

"What's up now? Another murder?" I exclaimed.

"No, it's robbery; or, as I should say, a series of robberies."

"Where away?"

"Bond Street."

"What, not on Bond Street!" I cried, astonished, for during my absence I had heard of frequent robberies being committed on that particular street.

"Yes, Harry, this is the tenth robbery there inside of two weeks," replied Matsell.

"Can it be fathomed?"

"I know not; in fact we had no one to work it up."

"Where's Bolt and Knight?"

"On that murder case in Newark."

"And Charley Ross?"

"He has just finished the Chatterton forgery case, and is expected here tomorrow. So, Howard, you will have to work up this one."

"I'll try it, but I cannot go to work till morning, for I must rest."

"All right!" returned the Chief, and I left the headquarters.

The many robberies which had taken place on Bond Street were very mysterious, and no trace could be had of the depredator, for they seemed to have been committed by one person.

Detectives from Philadelphia worked at the case a while, but went home no wiser than they came.

I had worked up many difficult cases, and was considered a first-rate detective, that is, by our Chief, and nearly all the mysterious and intricate work was placed in my hands.

As I entered headquarters the succeeding morning, I was halted by Matsell.

“Another robbery last night, Harry.”

“Not on Bond Street, I hope.”

“Yes, it is there again.”

“The devil!” I cried perfectly astonished.

“It is either his Satanic majesty or his imps,” said the Chief—a smile upon his face.

“Who was visited last night?”

“Mrs. Durant, the rich widow. She was here this morning, and said that she had been robbed of valuables amounting to over five thousand dollars.”

“Whew!” I exclaimed, “that was a big haul.”

“Now, Howard, you had better go and examine the scene of the robbery and do as you think best.”

I left the office and ere long stood on the marble steps of Mrs. Durant’s stone front. A servant bade me enter, and I was conducted to the parlor, where I found the widow bathed in tears. She quickly looked up and drew her hand across her eyes,

“I am Harry Howard,” I said, by way of introduction.

“Mr. Howard, the detective?”

“The same, madam.”

“You come to investigate the matter, do you not?”

“I do. I would like to see the room where you kept your valuables.”

“Follow me,” said the widow; and she led me up stairs to a small room where the jewels had been kept.

Things were in a topsy turvy condition. Drawers lay on the floor with their contents scattered about the room. The iron safe had been broken open and the money and jewels extracted. I noticed that there was a stain of blood upon one of the drawers, and concluded that the burglar had injured himself in some way, while committing his depredations.

The next moment I picked up a part of an envelope which was saturated with blood. I examined it closely, and found that it had been addressed to "Rev. Noah Newton, New York."

I hastily thrust it into my pocket, and turning to the widow, said:

"Mrs. Durant, do you know Rev. Noah Newton, of this city?"

"Oh, yes, he is our pastor; but you do not suspect him?"

"Oh, no. I was requested to inquire about him, by a friend," was my reply.

"Then you have no clue," said the widow, as I rose to go out.

"I have not, madam. This is the most complicated case I have engaged in. But I have one more question to ask."

"Proceed, sir."

"Can you describe any article that has been stolen?"

"Oh, yes, there was my betrothal ring. It was given to me by Mr. Durant many years ago; but he is dead now."

"Please describe it," I said impatiently.

"It is a heavy gold ring, the letters 'T.D.' are engraved on it."

"That will do," said I, and the next minute I was walking rapidly towards my lodgings. For a long time I thought of the case upon which I was engaged. I could not believe that Mr. Newton was the burglar, but then the question arose, how came the bloody envelope in the widow's room?

But I must see the minister and know more about him. I sauntered down Broadway and stepped into a store to purchase some articles which I stood in need of. While making the purchase, a man stepped in and asked for some things which had been left there for Noah Newton.

"Are you Mr. Newton?" asked the clerk.

"I am, sir."

"Bob, run up stairs and get Mr. Newton's things," cried the clerk to the errand boy.

Bob hurried off, and I improved the time in studying Newton's face. I had expected to see a person of sinister countenance, but was woefully mistaken.

He was a man of about twenty-eight years of age, with a cleanly shaven face, and was neatly dressed. His eyes were large and expressive, and the noble looking forehead told me he was intelligent. Though his looks spoke well of him, I thought he needed watching, and determined to do it. When he left the store I followed him, but he went directly to his boarding house.

The next night I watched Newton's house and saw him come forth and walk away. I fell behind, and he led me through street after street, until we entered R— street. Was he going to a gambling hell?

Yes, it was true. I saw him entering a fashionable gambling resort. I followed suit, and saw my man seat himself at a faro table. He bet heavily, but lost, and at last he laid his last dollar upon the table. This time he won, and continued to do so until he was a thousand dollars ahead. He then left the room and went to his boarding house.

Night after night I followed him to and from the gambling house, but learned nothing more.

But success was to come. One night I was looking at some gold pens in a jewelry shop, when a woman entered and stood near me. Her person glittered with diamonds. As she turned her face toward me I saw Anna Rodman, one of the many women of New York who

“Barter their soul for the means of a living.”

As she laid her left hand upon the counter, I saw a plain gold ring glistening on one of her fingers. I leaned forward, looked at the ring, and saw the letters ‘T.D.’ engraved upon it. I knew it instantly. It was the betrothal ring of which Mrs. Durant had been robbed.

How came Anna in possession of that ring? I must ascertain; so I hastily purchased a pen, and took my station outside of the store to await her exit. She came out at last and walked rapidly away. I followed her through several streets, until, when in the vicinity of the battery, she was joined by a man who, as the light of the lamp fell on his face, I recognized as Noah Newton, the minister. The two entered a house near by. Presently Newton came out and walked away without being followed.

After waiting an hour longer I saw Anna emerge from the building. I stepped forward and laid my hand upon her shoulder.

“Who are you?”

“Harry Howard.”

“A detective? Yes, I've heard of you.”

“Anna, I am engaged in my legitimate business, and I want you to assist me in catching a villain.”

“I will do so if I can, sir.”

“Then please inform me who gave you that ring,” I said, pointing to the stolen ring which was still upon her finger.

“Noah Newton, a young man who lives on S— street.”

“Was it the person whom you met a while ago?”

“It was, sir.”

“Then, Anna, that ring belongs to Mrs. Durant, and that man whom you met to-night is a preacher, and the celebrated Bond street robber.”

“Why, you don’t say so! He said he was a jeweler, and gave me many pretty things!” she exclaimed.

“Will you keep this conversation as you would a secret, Anna?”

“Yes, sir; and I hope you will catch him,” she answered and walked away.

It was ten o’clock now, but I determined to visit the widow. She received me kindly, but her face wore a look of disappointment when I told her I had no clue to the robber. After we talked awhile, she said:

“Our pastor preaches his farewell sermon tomorrow.”

“His farewell sermon!” I cried, utterly astonished.

“Yes, he leaves for California immediately after the services are concluded. His brother has written for him to come. His congregation will be sorry to part with him, and I especially, for he comforted me when I was in sorrow and pointed me to the lamb of God!”

“The hypocrite!” I mentally exclaimed.

I left the widow’s in a hurry and went to headquarters, got Charley Ross and proceeded to Newton’s house to arrest him. But the bird had flown. He had gone, his housekeeper said, to spend the night with a friend in the lower part of the city.

We were chagrined at our defeat and resolved to arrest him before he reached the church. We went to the church at an early hour, but our game was already there and the choir was singing. We entered and occupied a back seat; we were compelled to do so, for the church was filled with people, who had come to hear the farewell discourse.

The preacher arose and took his text, which I think read as follows: "By ye holy, for I am holy." The discourse was a splendid one, in which his talents shone with all their brightness. He concluded by exhorting his hearers to take him as an example, and follow him as he followed Christ!

When the services were concluded, he descended from the pulpit to receive the farewells of his congregation. The ladies gathered around him to receive the parting kiss. At length he started towards the door.

"Now's your time, Harry," whispered Charley Ross, as Newton neared me.

I stepped up to the pious robber, and grasping his arm, cried out:

"Mr. Newton, in the name of the Commonwealth of New York, I arrest you."

"What for?" he stammered out.

"For the Bond street robberies."

He turned pale as death, and many of the women fainted. His hand moved toward his coat pocket, but it did not reach it.

"Quick; Charley, the bracelets!" I cried.

The next moment Charlie Ross sprang forward and clasped the handcuffs on, and Mr. Newton was marched off amid the shrieks and groans of his congregation. When his trial came off he made a full confession, and went to Sing Sing for a term of fifteen years.

All the fruits of his robberies were recovered save the money, and Anna Rodman willingly gave up the widow's ring. The Philadelphia detectives were so beat at my success, that they did not come inside of our headquarters for a long time.

A few weeks later, I was presented with a fine gold watch by the people of Bond street, whose church is in charge of a man who is not a wolf in sheep's clothing.

The Ottawa [IL] Free Trader, August 15, 1868

This story was reprinted as "The Pious Robber" in
Warren [PA] Mail, June 1, 1869

The M'Kean Miner [Smethport, PA], June 10, 1869