

A Crooked Race

by Luke Sharp

“It isn’t so much the money,” said old Mr. Vanderhecken, “as the ingratitude of it. He has \$50,000 with him, but our firm is able to stand the loss of that without a wince, even if times *are* close. But you see we trusted Westhoff implicitly and now I would give a good round sum to land him in State Prison.”

“Do you know where he is?” said the Chief of the Detective Bureau.

“Oh, yes. He’s in Windsor. His agent here approached us on the subject of compromise. He offered to divide. He doesn’t like living in Canada, it seems. Oh, he’s a fastidious villain. He would rather have \$25,000 in the States than \$50,000 in Canada.”

The detective took down in his note book all the particulars Vanderhecken could give him about Westhoff. He even went into rather fine matters, found that he was fond of good wine and first-class cigars. He told Vanderhecken that the thing just resolved itself into bringing him over to the American side of the Detroit River, still it might cost a good deal to get him over.

“How much?” said the merchant.

“I don’t know!” said the chief, cautiously. “Put it this way. How much would you give to have Westhoff here in Chicago?”

The merchant thought for a few moments. “Well,” he said at last, “I’d give \$5,000, to see him convicted.”

“We can’t promise conviction, you know, but we can land him here and the rest will remain with you and the courts. I don’t want to be money out of pocket, but if you guarantee our expenses, hit or miss, and the \$5,000 if it is a hit I’ll send a man that I think can produce Westhoff here.”

To this the merchant assented and the conference ended.

Three days after this a young man with a valise supported by a leather strap over his shoulder wrote “John Drayton, St. Louis,” on the bulky register of the Crookton House, Windsor, and said with a sigh of relief, as he did so: “Thank God, I’m in Canada.”

The clerk smiled and assigned him a room. “Transient?” he asked.

“No, I guess not. Permanent, I hope. Does that room overlook the river? Thanks.”

John Drayton made no bones of the fact that the firm of Rodgers, Goode & Co. were out to the tune of many thousands of dollars on his account. He was evidently qualified to be admitted into the most select society of crooks. To add to his popularity, Drayton was fond of good living, and he had with him some of the finest brands of cigars and the choicest of liquors. Many a gay night

they had of it in Drayton's rooms in the Crookton House. Westhoff and Drayton became particular cronies.

"Gentlemen," said John Drayton one day, "how much is there in that roll of bills!"

Westhoff counted them over, and said:

"A thousand dollars."

"K'rect," replied Drayton, tipping his cigar ceilingwards. "I won that last night"

"No! Where?"

"In Sumpkins' faro rooms, Detroit."

"Detroit! Were you over?"

"You bet! Been over half a dozen times within the last week. I'm thinking of getting a season ticket on the ferry."

"Heavens," gasped Westhoff, "you take big risks The game's not worth it. Drayton, my boy, you'll be snapped up some of these times."

"Yes," put in Brownly, an old hand. "Going to Detroit grows on one. It's a bad habit. Look at Wilson. Grew quite reckless. Went over when he liked. Used to ride on the boats on a hot day. Had seats at the opera. Run right into the arms of his partner on Griswold street, and actually said: 'Hello, old boy! How's things in Springfield['] to the man he had ruined. Forgot till his partner called a policeman that he was not in Windsor. Got to be a habit, going over to Detroit, you see."

"Still there is very little risk," said Drayton. "I was at the races last week. Lots of fun."

The others groaned. There was evidently a strong yearning for their own land.

"I tell you," said Westhoff, "I don't care much for races. Give me good slugging match for real amusement"

"Me, too," echoed the others.

"Gentlemen," said Drayton, "if you come with me, I can show you the nicest bit of stand-up and knock-down you ever saw. Wednesday night. Tickets \$2. Doors locked. No kid glove affair. I'm going."

"By jingo," said Westhoff; "I'll risk it. What do you say?"

Some shook their heads. All would like to go.

“I don’t think we ought all to go together,” said Drayton. “But I don’t think there’s any danger in a few of us. The rest can take it in another night. What do you say?”

“I’m with you.” said Westhoff. Two others, rather bolder than the rest, agreed to see the slugging. Next morning, as Westhoff looked over the letter rack at the office of the Crookton House, he saw a letter addressed to Mr. John Drayton, and on the corner of the envelope was printed:

Return in ten days to
MUTUAL DETECTIVE AGENCY
Room 17, Kitchen Building
La Salle street, Chicago.

Westhoff looked sharply around him, slipped the letter among those he had received for himself, and went up to his room. A little moisture judiciously applied put him in possession of the letter, which read:

MY DEAR WILLIS— Old Van is getting impatient. He is here every day now, and says he wants results. I wish you would write out a sort of semi-official report of your proceedings with Westhoff so that it will kind of let him know how matters are progressing. Vanderhecken seems to think we are merely piling up expenses on him, and threatens to take the case to Pinkerton’s. You see the situation; help us out. Things are very dull here.

Yours, etc.,

A.K.HADDEM.

Westhoff drew his breath sharply and muttered: “I’m getting childish. By—— saved by a mere chance. A boy of 10 wouldn’t be such a fool.”

He sealed the envelope, went downstairs and slipped the letter in its place.

“Drayton down yet?”

“No,” answered the clerk. “Out with the boys last night I guess. Takes big risks, Drayton does.”

“He does that,” assented Westhoff significantly.

The crooks had a confab in Westhoff’s room. That evening Brownly asked the landlord if they could have an upper room for a little bout — with gloves — a room away from the rest at the inhabited rooms — where they could have some fun without disturbing anyone. The request was granted. The crooks were good customers.

That night a jolly crowd assembled in room 110. Drayton was one of the party and he opened a box of good cigars. Westhoff put on the gloves. He and Brownley had a friendly set-to. The former was evidently an adept at the sport he admired.

“Try them on, Drayton,” said Brownly as he took the cumbersome headgear off

“I can’t do it,” said Drayton. “Always rather look on than participate.”

“Come on, come on,” said Westhoff, “I’ll give you a few points. You’ll appreciate the show tomorrow night all the better for it.”

“Go ahead, Drayton,” cried the impatient crowd. Drayton reluctantly put on the gloves.

After a few playful taps on his shoulder and different parts of his upper anatomy, Drayton suddenly received a blow that made him think the universe had collapsed. He staggered blindly and fell. Rising to his feet he got a thumper square in the face that caused the blood to flow, and another on the side of his head that laid him flat again. Dazed, he reached around to his revolver pocket, then tried to tear off his gloves. Rising to his feet Westhoff promptly laid him on the floor again. All this time not a word was spoken by spectators or actors. Drayton, grinding his teeth in his fury, put his foot on the point of his glove and tore his hand out. He drew his revolver but was instantly overpowered and the weapon taken from him. Westhoff stood panting while Brownly undid his, gloves.

“Stand up, you whelp!” cried Westhoff, and as Drayton backed into the corner before him Westhoff showered blow after blow on him with his naked fists, till the unfortunate detective sank insensible to the floor.

“For two cents,” cried the excited crook, “I’d fling him into the river — or out of that window.”

“No, no,” cried Brownly, “he’s had enough. We mustn’t get into the clutches of the law on *this* side, you know. This you remember,” he continued, turning to his friends, “was merely a set-to with gloves and Drayton lost his temper, got out a revolver and Westhoff acted in self-defense. We can all swear to that, can’t we?”

“Certainly,” replied the distinguished company.

Drayton, who slowly came to himself, heard these remarks.

“How do you feel, Mr. Willis,” asked Westhoff with apparent concern. “I advise you to get out of this country and back to Chicago. Give my regards to the Mutual Detective Agency, and tell ’em you’ve come to report on Westhoff in person. Love to old Van, you know. Tell him not to get impatient. We can’t have everything we want, here below, can we, Willis?”

Willis, or Drayton, made no reply, but got up slowly and with difficulty. Some one handed him his hat and Brownly unlocked and held open the door.

“You can make a complaint for assault if you like,” he said, “but the weight of evidence will be against you.”

Drayton did not say what his intentions were, but walked sullenly downstairs, washed the blood from his face, cooled his bruises as best he could and paid his bill. There was no action for assault and battery. He left that night for Chicago. Slugging became quite a pastime for the boys in room 110.

Some weeks after an advertisement appeared in the papers in unobtrusive print. It said:

The steamer Fortune will leave Windsor at 9 a.m. on the 10th inst. for a point on the Canada shore. Tickets \$5. To be had from Geo. D Mowbury, Crookton House, Windsor.

It was well known among the sports that the Belfast Bruiser was to meet an unknown— perhaps Sullivan— for a regular, old fashioned prize fight on the lake shore sands where the police would not molest. Mowbury was a speculative sport from New York who was getting up the affair, and he was exceedingly particular to whom he sold tickets. When the boat started there were less than 100 on board, and among them were ten well known crooks. As the boat neared the fort she turned towards the American shore.

“You’re not going to land here,” said Westhoff to Mowbury in alarm.

“Yes. Why not? There are a couple of dozen people coming on there.”

Westhoff protested and said he would speak to the captain. He sprang up to the pilot house deck and there in the wheelhouse talking to the wheelsman he saw Drayton, who smiled cynically as he caught the appalled look of Westhoff.

“How do?” said the former.

“This is your game, is it?” cried Westhoff.

“This is my game,” answered Drayton.

“Who commands this boat?” Westhoff asked the wheelsman.

“I do,” said Drayton.

“Who commands this boat?” demanded Westhoff again. “This person is no captain.”

“I’m under his orders,” answered the wheelsman; “Where he says ‘go’ I go.”

“Get him to slow up. Don’t turn in for a moment. I want to speak to you.”

“Slow up,” said Drayton. “Keep her down stream. If there is a shot or any fuss and I am not here to give an order, head her for Detroit for all she is worth.”

“All right, sir.”

The two enemies walked aft and Drayton, leaning back against one of the life-boats, looked at Westhoff and said:

“I give you five minutes.”

“How much do you expect to make out of the capture?”

“A fair sum of cash, a big reputation, and a chance to get even for your lesson in the noble art of self-defense.”

“How much will you take in cash and land us in Windsor?”

“Couldn’t do it, my boy.”

“I make you a fair offer. If you don’t accept it I’ll chuck you overboard, and send the wheelsman after you if don’t take us back.”

“That would merely insure your being taken to the States for murder or hung in Canada; besides, it wouldn’t work. I have twenty officers on board in plain clothes and a pistol shot is the signal. You are all marked men. I have only to snap off this revolver and in a twinkling the handcuffs are on the ten of you.”

Westhoff walked up and down for a few moments, then he turned sharply to Drayton, who was polishing the barrel of his revolver with his handkerchief.

“Are you open to a liberal proposal?”

“Yes.”

“How much?”

“Twenty thousand dollars.”

“If you say ten it’s done.”

“Westhoff, I’ve got you just where I want you. You can’t help yourself. I’ll give you all the time you want to think about it, but for every minute you take it’s a thousand dollars more. Ten minutes from now, after you have consulted with your friends, the sum will be \$30,000.”

“I accept the \$20,000 offer now, but I want to speak to the rest.”

“All right, call them up here. I can’t trust you out of my sight, my dear Westhoff.”

“It comes to this,” said Westhoff to his nine friends: “We’re in a hole. It will take \$2000 apiece to get us out of it.”

They sorrowfully agreed that that was the situation.

“How is this to be paid?” said Westhoff, as they approached Drayton.

“In cash on this boat. Send some one you can trust to Windsor for the money, and when it is handed to me I’ll order the boat back to the Canada shore.”

“And how are we to know that you’ll do that after you have the money?” put in Brownly.

“You’ll have to take my word for it, that’s all.”

They held another consultation. The fact was that they were afraid to trust any of their number to go and get the cash. They felt that it was hardly the square thing to throw temptation in the way of a person who was so poorly equipped for standing it. The chances were that the cook sent ashore for the cash would collect the amount and stay there. Honor among thieves was all right enough in theory — practice was a different thing.

“I tell you,” said Westhoff to Drayton, “we will each give you a cheque for \$2,000. You go ashore and draw the money and we will remain on board till you return.”

“Give me your check for \$2000. Westhoff, and you may collect the \$2000 each from your friends. You know them better than I do.”

“How do you know I have \$20,000 in a bank?” said Westhoff who didn’t seem to care to trust his brethren.

“You have at this moment \$42,841 and some odd cents to your credit in the Consolidated Manufacturers’ Bank, Windsor branch,” replied Drayton. “Come, Westhoff, I can’t stand fooling here. Shut up or put up.”

Westhoff, with a curse, followed Drayton to the wheel-house, where the latter produced pen and ink and Westhoff made out a check. Drayton compared it minutely with one he took from his pocket-book and then folded both and placed them in the book, and the book in an inside pocket, buttoning the coat over it.

He said to the wheelsman: “Touch at that wharf and let me off. Go down the river at half speed for an hour and then come back. I’ll be here.”

As the boat left the wharf Drayton began to doubt whether he had done the correct thing or not. He asked a boy who was fishing to get him some sort of rig to go up town in, anything with a fast horse do—dray, express wagon, cab. Then he watched the retreating Fortune. As the boy did not return he borrowed a glass from the mate of a schooner lying there. Turning it towards the ferry he saw that the ten were around the pilot house apparently in a discussion with the wheelsman. As he looked he saw the man whirl round the wheel and the boat slowly answer the helm.

She was turning up the river.

“They’ve bribed him by—. It’s a race for that check,” he cried as he threw down the glass and ran as if for life up the wharf. On the street he met the boy returning with an express wagon.

He sprang in.

“Twenty dollars if you are at the foot of Woodward avenue in ten minutes. Ten dollars a minute for every minute you save under that.”

The man put his horse to a gallop and Drayton held on as best he could.

They reached the ferry dock just as the boat was leaving. He threw \$20 to the man, and without waiting for the formality of going through the gate, sprang on the red posts and leaped after the departing boat, saving himself by clasping a round support that helped to sustain the upper deck.

“You take big risks to save ten minutes,” said a passenger.

“Minutes are valuable with me,” said Drayton, as he went upstairs.

“How long before the boat will land?” he asked the wheelsman.

“The Fortune?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I dunno; she’s a humping it, you bet. About seven or eight minutes, I guess.”

“Couldn’t you shove this boat over faster? It’s a matter of life and death.”

“All right,” said the obliging wheelsman, and the next instant the “Vic.” was quivering under the increased motion.

The Fortune was piling up the foam like a snowdrift before her and the quick panting of the escape pipe sounded sharp and loud even at that distance.

Drayton sprang ashore before a rope was thrown and dashed along the street to the Consolidated Manufacturers’ Bank. The teller glanced at the check and said briefly: “Last window but one.”

A man was there ahead of him. “Will you let me have your place, please?”

The man gave way. The bookkeeper, scrutinized the check with exasperating slowness and glanced once or twice at the one who proffered it.

“It’s all right, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but I shall have to have you identified.”

“Nonsense; it’s payable to bearer; I had it made out so; it’s not an order check gasped Drayton, who felt a chill creep over him at the possibility of the thing being to order.”

“It’s to bearer, but the amount is unusually large, and I cannot pay it to a man I don’t know.”

“You have no right to refuse.”

“I take the risk of refusal. You had better see the manager.”

“I’ll proclaim that your bank has suspended payment,” cried Drayton, who every moment fancied he heard the Fortune grating against the wharf.

The book-keeper turned to the next man. Drayton thought of the landlord of the Crookton House, who could identify him. As he rushed down the steps he ran into the arms of Westhoff, coming up in an equal hurry.

“Got the money? No! I see you haven’t. Sold again, my boy. Come in and see how easy I’ll stop the payment of that check. Then we’ll have a drink. You look haggard and worried, old fellow. You shouldn’t let little things trouble you. Willis, how’s old Van?”

“Westhoff” said Drayton, going very close to him, “do you feel that?”

“Yes, and I’ll thank you to keep your thumb out of my ribs.”

“Westhoff it isn’t my thumb, it’s the muzzle of my six-shooter. It is in my coat pocket. It is a self-cocker. If you stir or make a sign the six bullets will be through your body before anyone can raise a hand to save you. Do you understand?”

“You know they hang for that sort of thing here.”

“I know it. I’d hang with pleasure for the satisfaction of shooting you. But I am an officer, remember, and you are a criminal. That will make some difference with a jury. Now take my arm. Come into the bank and identify me, and bear in mind that I only want an excuse for blowing your heart out, you villain.”

Westhoff looked into his eyes and saw that he meant it.

“Come, my pure and unbribable detective, I will identify you.”

They went to the bookkeeper together.

“This is my friend, Mr. Drayton,” said Westhoff.

“It was such a large amount, you see, that —”

“No apologies,” cried Drayton. “Business.”

A few moments after, the sum was in the hands of Drayton.

“Come with me to the ferry dock,” said the detective.

“Not over,” cried Westhoff in alarm.

“No; I’m a man of my word.”

“But you can be bribed all the same.”

“My dear Westhoff, this is all a little scheme of my own. I am a detective no longer. The Mutual and I quarreled over that letter which you were so good as to read and I left. I had no twenty men in buckram on the boat; no one but myself and Mowbury. I was on the make entirely. Did Mowbury give you back your \$5 each?”

“Yes.”

“I told him to. How much did you give the wheelman?”

“I *promised* him \$500,” said Westhoff.

Detroit Free Press, August 10, 1884

Hamilton [Ontario, Canada] Spectator, November 15, 1884