

A Model Detective
by Judge Clark

We had been two days at work on the case, and had not even found a starting-point. In fact, when we met to compare notes on the second evening, it was discovered that the sum total of our knowledge was precisely what it was before.

The difficulty was, it was such a *commonplace* crime. It is when criminals do something unusual that their detection becomes comparatively easy. There is something then to work upon. The experienced detective is at once able to limit the field of his inquiry. "Who," he asks himself, "was able to contrive a plan like this?" And very often ingenuity exercised to conceal the authorship of crime, most clearly points the way to its discovery. But when it is a thing any one of thousands might have done, it is easy to see how greatly the difficulty of laying your hand upon the real perpetrator is increased.

That is just what made the case in hand so hard to unravel. Mr. Zane was a rich, retired merchant, in the habit of carrying a liberal supply of money about him, and given to wearing expensive jewelry. He occupied an elegant suite of bachelor apartments where he was found murdered in his bedroom one morning.

The manner of the crime was as little mysterious as its motive. The victim's skull had been beaten in with some blunt instrument, and his money, watch, and jewels had been taken. Any brutal ruffian might have done such a deed, there was no particular clew to follow; and even Orville Thoms, confessedly the shrewdest man on the force, whose scent on the trail of a criminal seldom proved at fault, was obliged to acknowledge he didn't see his way. Mr. Thoms had won his spurs a year before, as an amateur, in ferreting out a formidable gang of forgers, around whom he succeeded in weaving a web of circumstances that left not a loophole for escape; and when the whole band, after their conviction, wagged their tongues against him, denouncing him as their ringleader, who had betrayed them for a price, there was a general smile of derision—and, as a mark of the public confidence in Mr. Thoms, he was given a place on the detective force of which he was a member at the time of Mr. Zane's murder.

The mayor offered a large reward for the apprehension and conviction of the murderer. Mr. Thoms noticeably pricked up his ears at this. He was not the man to let such an amount of money slip through his fingers.

"He'll get it," more than one of us whispered.

And sure enough, on the third morning, when we met for consultation, Mr. Thoms sauntered in with a smirk of satisfaction on his face, and took a seat at the table.

The rest of us had nothing new to tell, whereat Mr. Thoms smiled contemptuously.

"I have a report to make," he remarked quietly.

"Proceed, sir," said the chief, eyeing him sharply.

“At an early hour this morning,” Mr. Thoms continued, “I noticed a shabbily dressed man entering a pawnbroker’s office. His manner was lurking and suspicious. I followed him in, making a pretext of wishing to pawn a ring I had taken from my finger.

“Whilst higgling with one of the clerks, I kept a keen eye on the man I had followed, who was offering a handsome gold watch to another clerk.

“‘Let me see it,’ I said, turning up my lapel and displaying my official badge; and placing myself between the customer and the door, I examined it. Inside the case was the maker’s name and number. No doubt was possible. It was the murdered man’s which I had a full description. “The man gave no satisfactory account of himself, or his possession of the stolen property, and, of course, I arrested him at is found in the possession of the prisoner, a circumstance which he fails to explain. What proof could be stronger?”

“Bravo!” we exclaimed. “The reward is yours, Mr. Thoms. It’s a fortune you might afford to retire on and give the rest of us a chance.”

Mr. Thoms beamed benignantly, and the meeting broke up.

I was leaving with the others when the chief touched my arm and desired me to remain. Our brief conference was strictly confidential and it would not be proper to reveal it here. At the end of it, I hurried out. My way and Mr. Thoms’s lay along the same street; but he had so much the start that I was barely in time to see him enter his own door.

Bright and early next morning I was met by our chief at the principal railway depot, whither I had cautiously followed a gentleman in an iron-gray wig and blue goggles, whom I lost no time in pointing out to the chief.

The latter approached and touched the gentleman’s shoulder.

“A word with you, if you please,” said the chief.

“I’m in a great hurry,” returned the other; “the train is about starting, and I cannot afford to miss it.”

“Do not force me Thoms,” the chief whispered, “to strip you of your disguise here. Your plan was cunningly laid, but, unluckily for you, it has not succeeded.

“It was a shrewd device of yours to sham intoxication night before last, and take an exposed seat in the park. From a concealed spot I saw a thief approach and pick your pocket of a watch, as you designed should be done. As he hurried away you rose and followed him stealthily, whilst I, unobserved, kept in sight you both. We all three sauntered up and down till morning came and the shops began to open. I saw you and your man enter a pawnbroker’s place, and there is no doubt that it was Mr. Zane’s watch which was offered to be pledged, and quite as little that it was the same which I saw taken from your pocket by the thief whom you now would bring to the

gallows with the double purpose of screening yourself and securing the proffered reward. The object of your present journey, doubtless, is to convey to a place of safety the rest of your ill-gotten gains.

The new prisoner was taken to a private room and searched, and on his person were found a number of articles readily identified as having belonged to Mr. Zane.

And so, after all, it was our model detective who was tried and hanged, and not the wretched pickpocket who had been purposely enticed into stealing the tell-tale watch, that he might suffer for another crime of which he was not guilty, and enable the real culprit to escape and pocket the reward.

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