

The Quagmire Bank Robberies

By George M. A. Cain

Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

Jarvis, a young detective in Philadelphia, is not receiving encouragement from his superior officers. While reporting a case at 2 o'clock in the morning a terrific explosion occurs and it is found that the Cosmopolitan National bank, a few squares away, has been wrecked. Messages from Washington, Baltimore, and Boston tell that a national bank in each of these cities has been blown up at the same time. The losses are small, except in the Boston institution, which is robbed of a million dollars. Anarchists are accused of the crime. Jarvis is detailed to recover a safe belonging to Miss Heath, daughter of the bank president, who is interested in the wrecked banks, and gets the jewels in a short time. While reporting to the police sergeant, there is another explosion, and another national bank is wrecked. Reports from Washington, Baltimore, and Boston show that the previous crime has been duplicated, the Baltimore bank in this case losing a million and a half dollars. Mr. Heath, the financial magnate, impressed by the manner in which Jarvis recovers his daughter's necklace, sends for him, tells him to discard the anarchistic theory, and unravels the mystery. Jarvis takes up his residence in the death house and falls in love with the daughter. He finds that Howard Heath, the banker's son, is an anarchist and a member of the ranks of the explosion occurred. Miss Heath's father is a member of the ranks of the explosion occurred. Jarvis refuses to tell her what he knows of him. He goes to Washington to see what Howard Heath is doing and finds him dissipating with Vanderburg. He hears young Heath say he has just lost \$100,000 on the race, and he knows his father has loaned him money for some time. Where did he get it?

CHAPTER XVII.

A TALK WITH THE COMPTROLLER. JARVIS did not sleep when he went to his room in his own hotel. His brain seemed to be whirling with a lot of intangible things which he was a thousand times anxious to keep as intangible as possible. For once he regretted the clues that he had been coming his way the last few hours. He wished heartily that he had never taken into the employ of Mr. Robert Heath. He wished that something might turn up which would remove the last vestige of his doubt as to the professions of the silly anarchists. He would have hugged himself for joy at hearing the news that the million and a half dollars had been found buried under some secret meeting place of these men of distorted views. He thought of young Heath and cursed the folly of the misguided youth. He thought of Vanderburg and was silent because such a crime as he would not have allowed his lips seemed inadequate to the occasion. He thought of Alice Heath and his heart ached. It ached only a little less poignantly for the old man who was the father of the weak-minded youth and the ill-fated girl. After a while he got up, took a hot bath with a cold shower at the end, dressed himself and went down to breakfast. He sat for a long while over his breakfast, contemplating miserably the scene was confronting him. He was trying to decide whether it would be better to view the scene in the comptroller himself or some one in the nearest bank. In view of the fact that the latter course would afford him all the knowledge he really had expected to seek in Washington, he had to admit to himself that it was Alice Heath's mission rather than her father's which had brought him. He could have asked his questions in a "five-minute" interview. Finally, he decided that, seeing he was in Washington, he might as well go to the Comptroller's Office in the Treasury Building.

The fact that he was in Mr. Robert Heath's employ brought him an interview with the Comptroller himself. He had asked only for one of the minor officials. "So you are a detective for Mr. Heath?" the shrewd man in the inner sanctum asked when Jarvis was seated beside the end of the desk. Mr. Walker was a little man with a smile that was decidedly agreeable, quite unexpected in one who had the reputation of getting results, and getting them quickly. "What can you say for you?" he asked again, without waiting for a reply to his first question. "To be real quick," Jarvis said, "I want to know what is your opinion as to the thoroughness of an ordinary Federal examination of a bank." "Um-m-m-m," he said, "I guess you'll have to make that a little more explicit," Mr. Walker said. "Well, I want to know if it would be possible for pretty big thefts to get through one unnoticed." "How big?" "Say a million dollars from a bank ordinarily carrying six or eight million." "I see what you're driving at now," Mr. Walker smiled. "I will give you a double answer—one theoretical, the other practical, and applying to the particular case you have in mind, namely, the banks which were recently blown up in Boston and Baltimore." "Theoretically, of course, but highly improbable. Of course, a bank examination isn't like having the auditors thrust their things. It is done by one

man and his assistant, and is usually accomplished in two days. An auditing company will find five or six experts and they will work a month or six weeks. "Now, obviously two men cannot do everything in two days. They can hardly count six to ten millions of dollars in regard to the stealing of actual cash, they could only be fooled on the supposition that a large number of bundles of cash were really only stuffed with green paper, and that they chanced to miss all such bundles in taking random ones for counting. You see, it would be pretty hard to do that with a million dollars, don't you?" Jarvis admitted that it did not look probable.

"Going farther into this matter of theoretical possibilities of stealing—you know I have authority to call four experts, an examination of a bank which is less than a year old is called a 'sweeping' and is conducted the least bit slovenly. I give the extra calls. And, lately, I have a man in Baltimore that I use for this purpose. He is the most trusted, most accurate, keenest man of his race. He has been in the business for years."

"Now, Mr. Heath told you, just as I tell you, knowing that I can rely upon your proper use of the information, that the examination which was made at the Boston North Harvard Bank was an extra one. It was not had for the slightest reason to suspect anything wrong. It was only that the manager had grown a little careless, and I wanted to brace them up. I sent the Baltimore man. Everything went all right this time before the explosion. Of course, such an examination that could not be foreseen by an expert."

CHAPTER XVIII. A STOP IN BALTIMORE. JARVIS plans included a short stay in Baltimore. He wanted to see the scene of the explosion and find out more about it than had been learned by the detectives of Philadelphia. While the first set of simultaneous explosions had been pretty thoroughly described to the police of every city in the country, the certainty that that gentleman of the first bank was the man and the ease with which the alleged criminals had been taken had prevented a description in outside cities with any degree of real accuracy. As the young detective boarded the train he felt a certain amount of relief in the thought of the words the paying

teller had just said. The discoveries about Howard Heath and Vanderburg had started in certain channels of thought that were extremely unpleasant. Anything that seemed to throw doubt upon the theories which had been working themselves out in his brain, almost against his will, was a comfort. And the paying teller had told him that, for an examiner or his assistant to rob a bank, collusion on the part of the teller was practically necessary. It had been a dark suspicion that he pieced together the bits of information that told him young Heath had been inside the two successfully robbed banks shortly before the supposed robberies. This, together with the evidence that the banker's son was in most evil company, and spending large sums of money, had seemed almost proof of the guilty connection with the explosions.

Now, it was certain at least that Heath could not have robbed the banks alone. If he had done so at all, it had been known by the tellers of the ruined banks. Heath was not quite the sort of man to whom a dishonest teller would care to intrust a share in his guilt. Even a dishonest teller is apt to serve some duty of his position. He would hardly be mixed up with a scapegrace weakling hardly out of college. Wherefore, the teller inclined to drop the whole idea of the examiner having anything to do with the robberies. Comptroller Walker had explained that the scene of panic, the stairs, elevators, fire-escapes were jammed with

people who raved at each other for being in the way. Jarvis was the first to get out of his room and had got down to the second floor from his own place on the fourth before the passages were much blocked. He wasted little ceremony in pushing his way through the crowd that remained between him and the street doors. And then he turned in the direction from which the noise had come. From the sound, as compared with what he had experienced in the last explosion at home, he expected to find a much larger distance between himself and the center of things. But two blocks brought him to where the police were already widening a circle around a black hole in the paving. With quick discernment he noted that the back of the bank building at which the explosive had evidently been directed was damaged only by smoke and a slight crack which extended upward a little way toward the second-story windows. Of course all the windows in the vicinity were smashed. The building opposite the bank, being more flimsily constructed, seemed to have suffered worse than the bank itself. He was giving way before the ever-pushing backward force of those nearest the nightsticks of the police when his attention was attracted by a bit of yellow paper which came fluttering downward apparently from one of the adjoining roofs.

Instantly the whole building and all the other buildings around it became the scene of panic. The stairs, elevators, fire-escapes were jammed with people who raved at each other for being in the way. Jarvis was the first to get out of his room and had got down to the second floor from his own place on the fourth before the passages were much blocked. He wasted little ceremony in pushing his way through the crowd that remained between him and the street doors. And then he turned in the direction from which the noise had come. From the sound, as compared with what he had experienced in the last explosion at home, he expected to find a much larger distance between himself and the center of things. But two blocks brought him to where the police were already widening a circle around a black hole in the paving. With quick discernment he noted that the back of the bank building at which the explosive had evidently been directed was damaged only by smoke and a slight crack which extended upward a little way toward the second-story windows. Of course all the windows in the vicinity were smashed. The building opposite the bank, being more flimsily constructed, seemed to have suffered worse than the bank itself. He was giving way before the ever-pushing backward force of those nearest the nightsticks of the police when his attention was attracted by a bit of yellow paper which came fluttering downward apparently from one of the adjoining roofs.

He then turned his efforts to securing photographs of the explosion as soon as possible after it had happened. Of these there were plenty. And, by going again to the scene of the explosion, he was able to form a more definite idea of the manner in which it had been wrought. He had already secured copies of all the papers printed during the two or three days immediately following the explosion. One and all commented on the freakish action of the nitro-glycerin. It seemed that it had simply shot out in a comparatively concentrated direction from the vault. Thence it had spread its force in the manner of a fire, the rear wall and the floor adjoining this wall. It seemed to seek the outer air with something akin to a living instinct. One paper put it. "At the start it might have been expected to drive pieces of the vault's roofing straight upward. Instead, the fearful force bent its energies to escape at a shallow angle."

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