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**Potash, Perlmutter and Others**  
By MONTAGUE GLASS

**IV.—THE TRAIL OF THE SILK**

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**B**ARNEY GREENBERG, foreman in the cutting room of Potash & Perlmutter's cloak and suit establishment, boasted a distinction that falls to few of his race in New Orleans. His brother was a policeman, a circumstance which luppelled Potash & Perlmutter to pay him \$2 a week in excess of a foreman's normal wages as a sort of insurance premium against theft. Nor was this a poor investment, for the thought of Barney's brother had prevented many a piece of silk from going home with one of the twenty odd operators who labored in the cutting room.

In manner Barney was calm and self-possessed, not to say superior, and therefore it came as a distinct shock to



"We are missing in six pieces black silk," he announced.

his employers when he burst into the firm's show room and sank panting into a chair.  
"O! gewold!" he cried and ran both his hands through his thick black hair.  
"What's the trouble now, Barney?" Abe Potash asked.  
It was at least five minutes before Barney was calm enough to reply.  
"We are missing in six pieces black silk," he announced finally, "at \$50 the piece, or \$300."  
"Three hundred dollars!" Abe cried. "Schaafkopf, make no jokes with us!"  
"I'm making it," Barney moaned, appealing to Morris Perlmutter. "He says I make jokes, Mr. Perlmutter. It ain't so, believe me. We are missing in six pieces black silk."  
"Maybe it's a shortage in delivery, ain't it?" Morris suggested.  
Barney shook his head.  
"Yesterday we got it, and today we ain't got it," he said. "Some one pinched it on us."  
Abe sat down heavily and set his hat back from his forehead.  
"Yes, Mawruss," he said bitterly, "that's a foreman for you! We are missing in silk \$300. Where is it? He don't know. All he could say is some one pinched it, and mind you, Mawruss, his brother is a policeman!"  
Barney rocked to and fro and clutched his hair with both fists.  
"If you expect you should find it that way," Abe continued, "you don't need to get a policeman for a brother."  
"Enough's enough, Barney," Morris broke in. "You mourned good and plenty by now, Barney. Tell us who you think done it."  
Barney stopped rocking.  
"Rifkin," he said.  
"Rifkin!" Abe exclaimed. "What are you talking nonsense? Rifkin! I know his people from the old country yet. His father was a rabbi."  
"I know it," said Barney, "but his brother, Aaron Rifkin, is in the remnant business—all kinds of remnants from silk, wool, velvet—on Hester street."  
He rocked to and fro for three minutes, and then stopped again.  
"Near the corner of Eldridge," he said, and resumed his rocking.  
"Stop it!" Abe yelled. "You make me dizzy in the head. Why do you think Rifkin done it?"  
"Why?" Barney repeated in blank astonishment. "Why? A question! I am just telling you Rifkin's brother is in the remnant business."  
"Sure, I know," Abe concluded, "but your brother is in the policeman business, so Mr. Perlmutter and me, we figure it out like this—either you would find the silk by Monday, or you would find another job, and that's all there is to it!"  
Max Greenberg, Barney's brother, had never read the works of Gaboriau or Conan Doyle, but he was thoroughly conversant with the methods of detection in vogue with the metropolitan police.  
"Leave it to me, Barney," he said on the following morning, when Barney

confidentially acquainted him with the circumstances of the theft.

It being Max's day off, he accompanied Barney to the cutting room of Potash & Perlmutter. When they entered Pincus Rifkin was laying out his cloth in long, smooth folds on a cutting table, preparatory to chalking out the pattern on the upper layer. He was humming a psalm to the traditional Hebrew melody, for Pincus was a pious man, as becomes the son of a rabbi.

By token of that same piety, his whiskers had never known the refining influence of scissors since they first sprouted. They gave him a venerable, peaceful aspect, and in contemplating their profusion one was apt to lose sight of the well developed chest over which they cascaded. Moreover, Pincus had a jaunty way of carrying himself that made the other cutters and operators treat him respectfully. But Max saw only the flowing whiskers, and he winked confidently at his brother.

"Dis here is a pipe," he muttered. "Come here," he growled, advancing toward Pincus.  
Pincus smiled and shrugged his shoulders. His English was rather weak, and he relied a great deal upon gesture.  
"You're Rifkin, ain't yer?" Max went on.  
"Sure," said Pincus.  
Max thrust his chin out until it was at least six inches in advance of the rest of his body.

"Who pinched the silk?" he belittled. "Silk?" said Pincus. "What silk?" "Gwan!" Max roared. "You ain't never seen no silk, have you? You don't know narten about it, do you? Maybe dis'll make you remember!"  
He threw back his right arm and, clinching his fist, aimed straight for the point of Pincus' jaw. Unfortunately for Max and fortunately for Pincus, the patriarchal beard obscured a receding chin, and what was intended for a crashing blow glanced harmless past the side of Pincus' neck and nearly dislocated Max's shoulder.

Then it was that the spirit of Judas Maccabeus became reincarnated in the frame of Pincus Rifkin. With a shout that echoed through the cloak and suit establishment of Potash & Perlmutter, he leaped upon the astonished Max Greenberg. After the dust settled, it required the combined efforts of the twenty odd operators in the cutting room.

They sent around the corner for a doctor, who resorted to artificial respiration before Max Greenberg recovered sufficiently to go home in a cab at Potash & Perlmutter's expense, but the moral influence of having a policeman for a brother was dissipated, perhaps forever, in the minds of those twenty odd operators in the cutting room.

"Of course he stole the silk, Mawruss," said Abe the next morning, as they discussed the affair. "Otherwise why should he try to murder Barney's brother? Ain't it?"

"Maybe Barney's brother hit him first, Abe," Morris suggested.  
"Barney's brother is a policeman, Mawruss," Abe went on; "and you know as well as I do, Mawruss, that a policeman is a loafer. But Rifkin comes from decent, respectable people in the old country, and his father is a rabbi. Ain't it? So why should Rifkin fight like a policeman fights? A feller which he acts like a policeman is a thief, too, I bet yer."

Morris lit a cigar and puffed away with a sour expression on his face.  
"I guess, Abe," he said, "we'd better forget all about this here silk and get down to business."  
"Forget about it, Mawruss?" Abe repeated. "Forget nothing! I suppose, Mawruss, \$300 ain't nothing to you, Mawruss. I suppose you pick \$300 up in the street, Mawruss. No, sree, Mawruss, I ain't no policeman, and I ain't no rabbi's son, neither, Mawruss. But I guess I got a little gumption, too, and I'll get back that silk if I have to take Rifkin's brother myself and shake the silk out of him."

The exterior of Aaron Rifkin's store little betrayed the prosperity of the business transacted within, for entrance was had through a narrow slit between a soda water stand and a fish stall. Above this aperture, however, hung an elaborate sign, on which appeared in gilt letters the English word "Remnants," spelled phonetically in straggling Hebrew characters. If this had not been sufficient to guide Abe's footsteps squarely in the entrance stood a replica of Pincus Rifkin, with flowing beard and apologetic smile complete.  
Abe elbowed his way past Pincus' brother into the dark store and made straight for the counter.  
"Nu," said Aaron, "what can I do for you?"  
"Some silk I want to see it," Abe replied.  
"Silk?" Aaron murmured. "What for silk you would like?"  
"Black silk," said Abe.  
Aaron went behind the counter and pulled down a roll of silk.  
"Here is black silk," he said; "good black silk."  
"How much is there here?" Abe asked.  
"Dreissig yard," said Aaron.  
"Thirty yards, yer?" Abe rejoined.  
"What you done with the rest?"  
"The rest?" Aaron exclaimed. "What d'ye mean—the rest? There ain't no rest. That's all there is of it."  
Abe picked up the silk and put it under his arm.  
"Half a loaf of bread," he said, "is better as no bread at all," and he turned and walked calmly out of the store.  
"Hey, mister!" Aaron yelled frantically, but Abe kept steadily on, and he had reached the corner of Eldridge street before Aaron could scramble over the counter.  
"Po-lee-eece!" Aaron howled. "Po-lee-eece!"

At once the cry was taken up by a hundred voices until it was borne to Max Greenberg, who was sunning himself in front of the public school a block away. He secured a fresh grip on his club, and taking push-button two at a jump, bounded toward the corner of Eldridge street.

At this juncture Abe committed a breach of judgment. Had he proceeded down the street as deliberately as he had quitted Aaron's store, no one would have suspected him to be the quarry of the ensuing chase. The impulse to run was too strong, however, and he took to his heels just as Max Greenberg hove into sight. The next moment he tripped over a rejected head of cabbage, and his nemesis, in the person of Max, was literally upon him.

If Max's aim had been poor on the previous day, there were at least no errors of marksmanship on this occasion, and when Abe was arraigned before the desk sergeant in the Eldridge street police station, one of his eyes was completely closed, while the other was reduced to a mere slit.

"Comes this here loafer into mein store," said Aaron, "and says he wants to see some silk, and before I could stop him at all, he quick takes the silk, and runs away from mein store."  
"What d'ye want to take his silk for?" the sergeant asked Abe.  
"Not his silk," said Abe. "My silk! His brother Pincus stole it from my factory already, and gives it to him. Six pieces black silk worth \$300."

"Black silk!" Aaron exclaimed. "Why, I ain't got not one piece black silk in mein store. The store was dark, and this here loafer thinks it was black silk. It ain't no such thing. It's blue silk!"  
"Blue silk!" Abe cried. "That's a fine swindler. Why, actually the feller told me it was black silk."

"Swindler, hey?" the sergeant commented. "That's certainly tough on you. He cheated you into stealing blue silk instead of black silk. Next time you steal black silk you want to see that it's in the daylight, so that you won't get stuck. Take him back, officer."

"Hold on dere, sergeant," Max broke in. "I know sumpin about dis case meself. I tink dere's some mixup here. Me brudder works for dis gentleman."  
For the first time since his arrest Abe turned and recognized his captor.  
"So," he said bitterly. "So I am paying for you and—"

"Chop it!" Max commanded out of the corner of his mouth. "And so, sergeant, I tink dis here case now ought to be straightened out. I didn't get on to who dis party was at first, but now dat I get a good look at him!"  
"Take 'em both into the back room," the sergeant interrupted, "and come out here yourself. I want to talk to you."

Max grabbed accuser and accused by the arm and led them none too gently into the back room, where he thrust them into adjacent chairs.  
"Don't nuder of yonse but an eyelash till I come back. See?" he said in parting and returned to the front room.  
Aaron was the first to break the silence.  
"Mr. Potash," he said, "I give you my word as a gentleman I ain't never



"Blue silk!" Abe cried. "That's a fine swindler."

seen your silk, and mein brother, Pincus, neither, he ain't never seen your silk."  
Abe made no reply. He was gingerly exploring the new and enlarged outline of his nose with the tips of his fingers.  
"Also I don't know you, Mr. Potash, when you come by mein store; otherwise you are welcome to take the silk. Any time, Mr. Potash, you should want anything in mein store you are welcome to all which I got there, ninty days, net, or two off, thirty days. Any time at all, Mr. Potash, just tell mein brother, Pincus, and he will tell me."  
"Tell your brother Pincus!" Abe exclaimed. "Wait till I get back to my store, and I'll tell him something he won't want to hear at all. Out he goes, also Barney Greenberg!"  
"Wot's dat about Barney Greenberg?" cried Max, suddenly re-entering.  
"That's what I said," Abe mumbled sulkily. "Barney Greenberg too. He

gets fired along with Pincus Rifkin. You could take it from me."  
"Oh, no, he don't!" said Max. "Oh, no, he don't! Stealin' a bolt of blue silk wot costs \$26 is grand larceny, and it rests wid me whether or not you go up for dis. See?"  
Abe stared at him in stolid misery.  
"Wake up!" Max cried, poking him in the ribs with his billy. "D'yer understand de proposition?"  
Abe nodded slowly.  
"Den come on, both of yonse," said Max, and once more the trio faced the sergeant.

He was now flanked by a stout, peak-browed person, whose most salient features were a curled mustache and a diamond breastpin. In consideration of a ten dollar bill from Abe the peak-browed person furnished bail in the penalty of \$500 to insure Mr. Potash's appearance in the Essex Market police court that afternoon to answer to the charge of violating a corporation ordinance.  
"And now get out of here, all of you," said the sergeant after the transaction was complete.  
Abe lost no time in making for the door, but Aaron lingered.  
"Mein silk," he said, with a conciliating smile. "Please, mister!"  
"What silk?" cried the sergeant. "I ain't seen no silk!"  
"Blue silk," said Aaron, showing no disposition to leave.  
"Officer," thundered the sergeant, "put this man out!"

Max grabbed the shrinking Aaron by the collar and rushed him to the door. Then with one mighty kick he propelled him to the gutter.  
"Give dat to your brudder Pincus," he called after him, "and tell him it was from me!"

Several days elapsed before the cloak and suit establishment of Potash & Perlmutter assumed its normal hive-like activity. Barney Greenberg again held sway over the twenty-odd operators, with the perfect discipline that is engendered of one's brother being a policeman, for the whole story of Abe's adventure on the east side had leaked out, and not a man of all Potash & Perlmutter's employees but knew that Abe's discolored eyes resulted from the prowess of Barney's brother, the policeman.

As for Abe, after he paid a fine of \$50 in the police court, he went home to bed and stayed there for two days. During the next week the skin around his eyes varied chameleon-like in tones of purple, plum color and green, until it gradually faded to a smoky brown, which bade fair to last for months.

Morris viewed these badges of his partner's misfortune with marked disapproval.  
"Ain't I told you, Abe," he said for the twentieth time, "you should forget about that silk and get down to business? We not only lost the silk, but you lost two days from the store, and \$10 you had to pay that loafer what bailed you out. Also you pay \$50 by the court for nothing, and now Rifkin's brother says you should pay him \$25 for his silk which you took and which he ain't never got from the station house yet."

"I'll pay him \$25, Mawruss!" Abe replied with ironic emphasis. "Wait till I get a chance at that sucker. I'll fix him, that thief!"  
Morris shrugged impatiently.  
"Schmoo-es, Abe!" he broke in. "You ain't got no proof that he stole the silk."  
"I'm surprised to hear you, Mawruss, you should talk that way," said Abe. "After all the trouble what I got in. If he ain't took that silk, who did took it? I suppose I took it, Mawruss, or maybe I gave it away as a present—what?"  
Miss Cohen, the bookkeeper, poked her head into the show room doorway.  
"Murray, the packing box man, wants to see you," she said.

"That's another robber for you, Mawruss," said Abe. "Two weeks ago already I sold him a dozen empty packing cases from the cutting room while you and Barney was out to lunch, and he ain't sent us a check yet. I suppose he comes around now to claim deductions. Tell him to come in, Miss Cohen."

Two minutes later a short red faced man entered, bearing a large parcel wrapped in brown paper.  
"Good morning, gentlemen," he said. Then for the first time his eye rested on Abe's discolored face. "Well, well," he went on, "I see you was to a weddin' lately. I been to some rousin' old weddin' when I was a lad. Many a good crack I got at a weddin' myself. Although maybe it was a wake you was at?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Abe growled, "but if you mean I got a couple blue eyes I may as well tell you I got 'em for not minding my own business, Murray. And anyhow, Murray, what's the matter you ain't sent us a check for them packing boxes already?"  
"It's like this, Mr. Potash," Murray explained, starting to unpack the parcel: "I kept them packing boxes for my honesty. You sold me them boxes for empty packing cases, but one of 'em had some goods in the bottom of it, and here they are."

He tore away the brown paper wrapping from the parcel and disclosed the missing silk in all its glossy perfection, six bolts of it, and fifty yards in each bolt.  
"Now, what d'ye think of that, Mawruss?" Abe gasped at last.  
"Think!" Morris cried. "Think! I think you'd better tell Miss Cohen to charge you up with a cab ride for Barney's brother, \$60 for the fine and the bail, \$25 for Aaron Rifkin and \$6 for them packing cases what Murray here keeps for his honesty."

He handed Murray a couple of cigars. "When a man's a sucker, Abe," he concluded, "he's got to pay for it himself!"

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