

BRITZ'S HEADQUARTERS

By MARCIN BARBER
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WATERS

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens with a scream from Dorothy March in the opera box of Mrs. Missioner, a wealthy widow. It is occasioned when Mrs. Missioner's necklace breaks, scattering the diamonds all over the floor. Curtis Griswold and Braxton Sands, society men in love with Mrs. Missioner, gather up the gems. Griswold steps on what is supposed to be the celebrated Maharane and crushes it. A Hindu doctor declares it was not the genuine. An expert later pronounces all the stones except the original. One of the rare duplicates of Mrs. Missioner's diamonds is found in the room of Elinor Holcomb, confidential companion of Mrs. Missioner. She is arrested notwithstanding Mrs. Missioner's belief in her innocence. Meantime, in an uptown mansion, two Hindus, who are in America to recover the Maharane, discuss the arrest. Detective Britz takes up the case. He asks the co-operation of Dr. Fitch, Elinor's fiancé, in running down the real criminal. Britz learns that Mrs. Missioner's diamonds were made in Paris on the order of Elinor Holcomb. While walking Britz is seized, bound and gagged by Hindus. He is imprisoned in a deserted house, but makes his escape. He is convinced that the Hindus are materially interested in the case. Pretending to be a reporter, Britz interviews the Swami as to the rare diamonds of India. Britz learns of an insane diamond expert on Ward's Island and decides to interview him. He learns enough to believe that either Sands or Griswold employed the insane man to make counterfeiters of the Missioner gems.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

"We've got the motive for the crime," the two men shouted in one breath.

Britz assumed an attitude of eager interest. The prosecutor looked significantly at him.

"What have you discovered?" he asked.

"That man Fitch is mixed up in the case just as I always thought," Donnelly informed him. "She stole those diamonds for his sake. It's another case of the girl turning thief to help her lover."

"We've run the whole thing down and we have it here in black and white." His fingers clasped three or four letters which he flaunted temptingly before the eyes of the prosecutor. "They confirm our suspicion that Fitch is at the bottom of the whole case. Rather, that he's the man 'higher up.'"

Mott gathered the contents of the missives in three or four sweeping glances as he handed them to Britz. He perused them closely, as if weighing their import while noting their contents. His impassive face masked the emotions they aroused in him, and he returned them to the assistant district attorney with an air of indifference.

"These letters are conclusive," Mott pronounced.

"Conclusive of what?" demanded Britz.

"That Miss Holcomb was the tool of her fiancé, and that the two have combined to enlist your sympathy."

"I guess it wasn't a bad bit of detective work to get those letters," Donnelly smiled.

"I guess not," agreed Carson, anxious to justify his partner's little outburst of self-adulation.

Britz turned to them abruptly. Their flippant tones irritated him. His nature revolted at the ill-bred rejoicing over the prospective degradation of a woman.

"How did you get the letters?" he asked brusquely.

Donnelly, ready to burst with the importance he had gathered, needed no urging to impart the desired information.

"I had Doctor Fitch shadowed from the day he appeared at headquarters to inquire about Miss Holcomb," he said. "That's how I got on that he was negotiating with a real estate agent. Luckily, the agent was a friend of mine, and he informed me that Fitch had purchased and paid for a site on which to build a modern sanitarium. Yes, sir, he put up \$50,000 for the ground; and the buildings and furnishings, I learned, are to cost nearly a quarter of a million. It wasn't easy to get the agent to turn over Fitch's letters, but I told him he'd have to produce them before the grand jury under a subpoena, so he handed them over."

"Have you tried to learn where he got the money?" Britz demanded.

"It's plain enough where he got the money. The individual stones of the necklace would bring all the money he needed for the deal."

"But have you tried to make sure that he sold the diamonds?" Britz persisted.

"I'll get all that without much trouble," was the confident reply.

"Well, go ahead and get it," Britz ordered.

When the two detectives left the room Mott found it impossible to restrain his gratification.

"I guess you'll admit you're on the wrong lay," he jeered. "You've bewildered yourself with your own zeal. This is the sort of stuff I want," he declared, fanning the letters.

"You've been led astray. Now get on the right trail and accomplish something."

An attendant entered with a card. The prosecutor glanced at it and passed it over to the detective.

"He's an old friend," Mott remarked. "We were in college together."

A dark flush suffused Britz's countenance and deepened his yellow ivory complexion to a dull gray. He fixed a look of anxious interrogation on Mott, as if doubtful of the wisdom of

admitting the visitor into his back room of the temple of justice.

"I know he's one of your suspects," the prosecutor laughed, at the same time pressing a button which sounded a buzzer in the reception room. "Yes, he's one of the figures in this comedy of errors you're playing, but I'll not inform him that, in your eyes, he's one of the possible thieves. You may go ahead suspecting whom you will without interference on my part."

The swinging door opened, and Griswold sauntered into the room. The cordial smile he bestowed on Mott faded to superciliousness when he beheld Britz. He glanced at the detective as if resentful of his presence.

"I presume you can guess why I called," he said familiarly to the prosecutor.

"It requires no mind reader to fathom the object of your visit," Mott laughed back.

"Mrs. Missioner is on the verge of nervous prostration," Griswold informed. "She asked me to inquire about the progress of the case. Do you know, she can't get herself to believe Elinor guilty. Sands is inclined to agree with her to the extent of offering to go on Miss Holcomb's bond."

"Why doesn't he do so?" inquired the prosecutor.

"Because Mrs. Missioner objects," Griswold replied. "She believes that the swiftest way to clear Elinor is to permit her to remain in the Tombs. I confess I cannot see the force of her argument, but she is evidently acting under what she believes to be competent advice."

Britz cushioned his head against the back of the chair in the attitude of an indifferent listener to the conversation between the other men. If he had any views on the subject under discussion, he gave no audible indication of them.

"This man Sands," suddenly queried Mott, "seems to be an accepted suitor of Mrs. Missioner, doesn't he?"

A wave of red mounted to Griswold's forehead. An angry twitch of the corners of his mouth revealed that the prosecutor had touched a tender spot.

"He seems to divide his time between pursuing Mrs. Missioner and dropping his inherited millions in Wall street," Griswold replied. "I understand he has been hard hit in the street, and that his fortune is dwindling at a rapid rate."

"Is that so?" came a meaning query from Britz. He exchanged significant glances with Mott.

"Do you happen to know anything of his financial affairs?" asked the prosecutor. The question threw Griswold into a deep study, out of which he came gradually by slow stages of mental effort.

"I know he's been hard hit," he drawled. "And I know also that he's trying to conceal his reduced circumstances from Mrs. Missioner. In fact, I believe he needs money with which to carry his stocks."

Conscious of the shaft he had thrust and of the vague insinuation his words carried, Griswold stopped to watch the effect. Britz stared vacantly at the ceiling, as if unconscious of the hint conveyed by Griswold. Mott seemed interested.

"You don't think it possible he also is implicated in the theft?" he asked.

"I should regard such a supposition as absurd," Griswold declared. "But," he added, hastily, "I've had no experience with criminals."

With a sidy look at the detective Griswold arose and left the room. As the door swung behind him Britz asked:

"Mott, what do you know about Griswold?"

"Nothing that could be of any service to you in hunting down the Missioner thief."

"How long has he been in business here?"

"About ten or fifteen years I should say."

"He's been engaged in various enterprises since leaving college, hasn't he? Most of the ventures proved failures?"

"You seem to know something of his business affairs," Mott fired back.

"At present he's secretary of the Iroquois Trust company," Britz continued, disregarding the prosecutor's remark. "Do you know what salary he is receiving?"

"He gets \$10,000 a year," the attorney informed him.

"His fortune would be materially improved if he married Mrs. Missioner."

"And you believe the theft of her jewels would help his suit?" the prosecutor asked sarcastically.

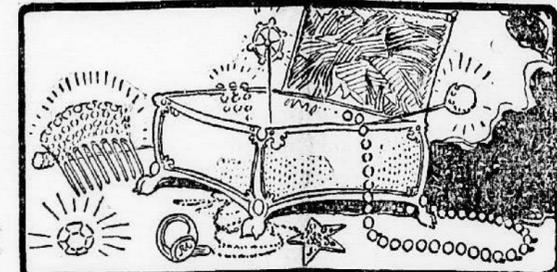
The detective vouchsafed no reply. With characteristic abruptness, he switched to Sands.

"If Sands has lost heavily in Wall street we ought to look into it. He had equal opportunity with Griswold to steal the collarette," he said.

"I have no objection," Mott smiled. "By the way," he suddenly asked, "have you obtained any trace of the truth as to who manufactured the Maharane?"

"I have found the manufacturer," Britz replied calmly.

"What!" The prosecutor bounded out of his chair as if released by a



spring. "And you've withheld the information from me?"

"The manufacturer of the stone is useless as a witness. He's hopelessly insane."

"Has he thrown no light on the case at all?"

"Yes, some light," Britz admitted reluctantly. He was not prepared to disclose his hand yet. In fact, he realized an abundance of work still was necessary before the result of the interview in the insane asylum could be shaped into tangible evidence against the man who had ordered the duplicate diamond.

"Doesn't he recall who ordered the duplicate?" the prosecutor asked.

"No," the detective replied. "He is in the last stage of dementia. But we searched his effects and found a sketch of the Maharane drawn on the back of a visiting card."

Triumphant beams shot from Mott's eyes. He faced the detective, one hand extended in congratulation.

"I take back everything I said about your having botched the case," he offered apologetically. "Whatever the outcome, you certainly are close to the heart of the mystery. Britz, was it a man or a woman who ordered the stone?"

The detective's hand slipped into the inner pocket of his coat. It produced a long envelope from which he took the card, passing it over to the prosecutor. Mott looked at the name engraved on the pasteboard with widening eyes. His lips extended until the mouth seemed a thin, shapeless slit. Suddenly his jaw opened and snapped, as if he had come to a quick determination.

"Sands!" he exclaimed. "So he ordered the fake Maharane! By George,

what do you make out of it?" he snapped.

"It is one of the gulpeposts to the diamond theft," Britz pronounced.

The look of inquiry which the prosecutor bestowed on the detective remained unanswered. As if fearful of having committed some indiscretion in giving even this meager hint of his thoughts, Britz rose hastily and with a parting hint as to the complexity of the case, swung through the door and hastened out of the building. Unconsciously, his footsteps took him to headquarters, and into Manning's presence.

"Griswold was down here to see me about the case," the chief informed him. "He tells me you induced Mott to postpone it for a month?"

"I'm reaching out for the real thief," Britz returned. "I've got him, Manning. He can't get away."

"Well, who's the thief?" the chief inquired tersely.

Britz averted his face to conceal the unwonted agitation that had suddenly sprung up within him. A new light gleamed in his eyes—a light not called up by the excitement of the chase. The mere tracking of criminals was part of the routine of his life; he followed the course of his trails unemotionally, like a well-oiled machine. But the contemplation of saving a human soul in distress, the consciousness of exercising his talents in behalf of a woman who had touched his utmost pity, the knowledge that he alone stood between her and the living death that awaited her in state prison, increased the pulsation of his heart, thrilled him with a sense of noble purpose that was a new and agreeable excitement. When he regained his customary nonchalance he

Broadway. Sands' man, when the detective announced he was there for an important talk with the millionaire, admitted Britz readily to Sands' suite.

Britz, sitting in a great leather armchair in an attitude of sybaritic ease, chose a panatela from his pocket case, and then, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling and his hands clasped up to as many moments of uninterrupted thought as the non-arrival of the unconscious host would permit. He had reached a point in his meditations that for an instant seemed to open a way for an explanation, for which he had come to see Sands, when a faint rustling in the adjoining room reached his acute ear.

A ribbon of subdued light between portieres of Moorish leather gave passage to his glance. He saw a shadow flutter at a far window and, in the next instant, rapidly and noiselessly, he had slid out of the armchair until he was on his knees on the rug behind the shelter of a library table piled high with books. Inch by inch, soundless, Britz lifted one knee until his foot rested firmly on the floor; inch by inch, still without a sound, he raised the other. When he was fairly on his feet, but in a crouching attitude, he half walked, half crawled, around the table by the longer way, until he was close to the portieres. Britz was too good a sleuth to make the mistake of looking between the portieres to get a glimpse of the inner room. It was no part of his program to be seen by Sands' other visitor, or visitors. He felt justified in giving way to his curiosity because it might be as much to the millionaire's interests as to his own—to say nothing of Mrs. Missioner's, and that of the public. In fact, the headquarters man did not waste much time in such reflections. He wanted to see and hear what was going on, and he took the readiest means of doing so. Instead of risking the danger of being seen between the parting of the portieres, he pierced with his scarf pin a tiny hole in the leather curtain behind which he stood, and applying one eye closely, he could see the whole inner room. It was the millionaire's bedroom, and he commanded everything except the angle in which was set the window where he had glimpsed the shadow. A slightly more vigorous twist or two of the pin enlarged the microscopical aperture, so that he could see even that detail of the interior. Britz almost grunted with satisfaction at what he witnessed in the next few minutes. The shadow man was still at the window, fluttering, fitting to and fro, rising and falling. It crouched outside the window in such a way as showed Britz it was on a fire escape or a balcony of some sort. The rustling sound increased, and it was followed by a faint "cheep," like a sparrow's call. A second shadow fluttered from a point above the window and melted into the outlines of the first. Then came a slightly rasping sound, and the lower sash, Britz noticed, trembled. By well-nigh imperceptible degrees the sash was lifted. The next instant two men noiselessly lowered themselves to the floor and glanced hastily about the room. Reassured by the swift lock, they tiptoed along the walls from right to left; one of them stopped at a chiffonier, the other continued his little journey of investigation until he arrived at the portieres. Then it was that Britz held his breath. He held it for seconds that seemed as tedious as hours, while the nearer of the strange visitors, separated from him only by the thickness of the leather, peered through the parting between the curtains into the library where the detective stood.

Britz had not obtained a good view of the intruder's face, for it was half hidden by a loose fold of the turban upon his head that indicated the stranger's nationality. Britz's eyes still were fixed at the hole, and by that time the stranger was out of his line of vision. Had such not been the case, it is possible that even the imperceptible Britz would have moved at least to the extent of a swift reach to a side pocket in his coat. For it was about as evil a countenance as one could expect to see anywhere, save under the shadow of the gallows. In its rapacity, ferocity, blood thirstiness and cruelty of every degree spoke loudly. If that savage face had advanced an inch or two nearer, those snaky eyes would have seen the man from Mulberry street who shrank into himself behind the shelter of the protecting strip of leather. But it did not; and, after a leisurely survey of the interior, the Oriental returned to the other end of the inner room and rejoined his companion.

Hardly had Britz begun to let the air seep out of his lungs, and before he had indulged in the luxury of an intake of breath, when he became an interested spectator in the gentlemanly art of searching a gentleman's room. The central office man was no Vidocq. It is doubtful if he had even read Poe's story of "The Missing Letter," and had he done so, it is by no means certain he would have adapted the methods of the French police to metropolitan detective work. Never-

theless, he had flattered himself that he usually made a pretty thorough search for anything he wanted; but what he saw through that tiny pin hole in the leather portiere showed him that he was the veriest tyro in that sort of thing. The two visitors went through the millionaire's furniture and other possessions with a minuteness that would have made a fine tooth comb look like a garden rake. There could not have remained anything—a nook or corner, any crack or crevice, not anything larger than a bacillus which they happened to covet. If an article no bigger than a pinhead had been the object of their hunt, their untrusting scrutiny would have brought it to light. Yet so deftly had they searched that, granting them a minute's respite, they could have left the room without any traces of their activity.

Their search seemed fruitless until they arrived at a desk under a hanging incandescent lamp, at which Britz assumed Sands was in the habit of writing his more personal letters. From one of the pigeon-holes, one of the intruders drew something that crackled slightly as the man stuffed it into the folds of his tunic. From a neighboring compartment of the desk, the second stranger drew another find, which he in turn hastily hid in the same way. With lightning rapidity, they went through every part of the desk. In that same instant Britz felt rather than heard a footstep behind him, and, jerking a glance over his shoulders, saw Sands advancing upon him angrily. With a quick uplift of his hand, the detective stopped the millionaire in his tracks, and then drew him quietly toward the portiere and motioned for him to look through the hole in the leather. Sands bent a little, and then glanced wonderingly into the bedroom. He raised a face of astonished inquiry to Britz. He was answered by another silencing gesture from the sleuth. He looked once more through the tiny hole just in time to see the Hindus straighten themselves from their crouching attitude over the desk and turn toward the window. His hand thrust itself into his coat pocket, he slipped into the opening in the portieres with a single stride, and, leveling an automatic pistol that looked more like a block of steel than anything else, he cried: "Hands up!"

The men did not turn; instead, they leaped for the window, followed by Britz and Sands. Quick as they were, they were not quick enough for the Headquarters man. Launching his wiry form as a tiger springs, Britz, pistol in hand, hurled himself between the foremost Indian and the open window and seized him in his strong grasp. Sands, almost as rapid in his movements in spite of his bulk, flung a powerful arm about the throat of the other intruder, and with his other hand closed the window with a crash.

Britz and Sands dragged the prisoners to the other side of the room and forced them down upon a couch. Then the sleuth, slipping his pistol back into his pocket, seized the Indian Sands was holding by the throat, and, more as an order than a request, asked the millionaire to bind the captives.

"I think I recognize you, my dear young friends," he said. "You are two of the dark jugglers who had fun with me in Central Park and Riverside Drive last evening. I think it's about time for me to return the compliment with a merry little jest of my own." Turning his head to the millionaire, he said again: "If you have any silk handkerchiefs to spare, Mr. Sands, please use them as handcuffs. These gentlemen are accustomed to silk, and I would not like to use anything cheaper on them than they used on me. I suppose if we trussed them up with cotton or hemp, they'd die of mortification."

The detective's sarcasm was lost on Sands until he thought to recount in a few brief words his abduction in the park and the struggle for life that had followed it. It was evident that, in spite of the detective's coolness, he had some feeling on the subject. In fact, his manner toward the now cowering Hindus was more or less revengeful. Sands fell in with the humor of the situation, and in a very few minutes the Easterners were bound with silk handkerchiefs as soft, yet strong, as any scarf they could have produced in the bazaars of Calcutta or Cawnpore. When the task was done, and it was done pretty neatly, Britz relaxed his hold on the half-struggling men's throats and pushed them against the back of the sofa until they half-sat, half-lay there, head to head. Then he stepped back, rested his hands on his hips, and eyed them mockingly.

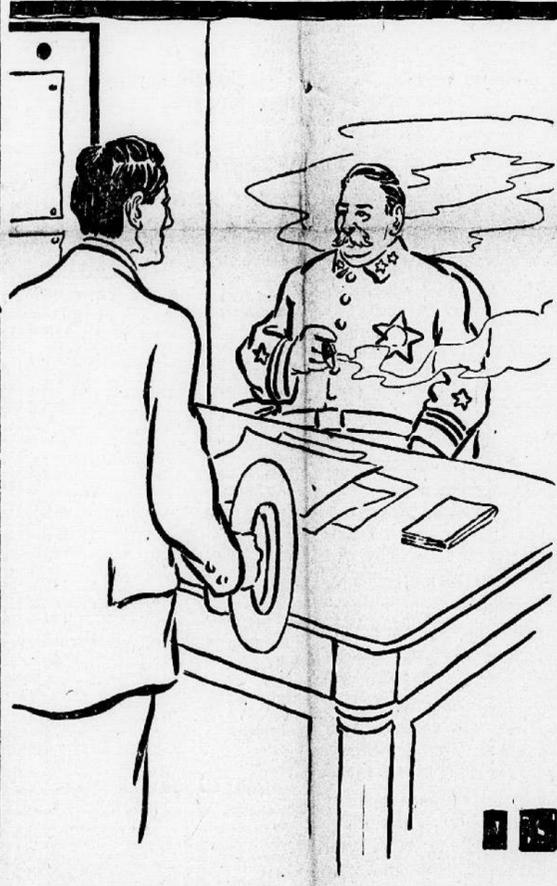
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Among the Cannibals.

"In my most successful novel," said Upton Sinclair, at a vegetarian banquet in New York. "I aimed at the public's heart and hit it, with my head talk in the stomach."

"I was rather like the Bangala missionary, who said:

"I failed, alas, to bring tears to those cannibals' eyes, but at least I made their mouths water."



"Griswold Was Down Here to See Me About the Case."

I now see the importance of Griswold's information with regard to his financial affairs. Sands is hit hard in the market," he continued, slowly as if gleaning the case from a new angle. "He's hard up. Needs cash to cover his margins! Has a duplicate necklace made! Of course, if he had the Maharane counterfeited, he also had the rest of the paste gems manufactured." Mott was talking half to himself, but his words kindled a pleasant light in the detective's eyes. "Sands has a motive for the crime, and he has the opportunity to commit it." The prosecutor's hand closed about Britz's palm. "I congratulate you," he finished.

From the pocket of his coat Britz drew a newspaper and pointed to the big headlines of the first column. "MORE THAN TWO MILLIONS FOR TUBERCULOSIS CURE."

"What has that to do with the diamond robbery?" Mott inquired.

"The committee for the Prevention and Cure of Tuberculosis," the detective read, "acknowledges receipt of the following amounts from the following donors." He pointed halfway down the column, and emphasizing each syllable, he said:

"Bruxton Sands—\$200,000."

It was the second largest individual donation and Mott grasped its significance instantly.

"He certainly didn't steal the necklace to raise money for the cure of tuberculosis," he commented. "And he certainly couldn't have afforded that big check if he needed money for stock speculation." He turned sharp-

fixed his gaze on the chief and, in a tone of cold indifference, said:

"The thinnest of veils is drawn between the thief and his complete exposure. I am not prepared to draw the veil aside yet. But it will be torn away shortly—very shortly. And then he'll stand revealed before the world."

"As mysterious as ever," the chief commented with a show of impatience. "Go ahead in your own way."

CHAPTER XVII.

A Pair of Thieves.

Two men, late on that February afternoon, were hastening eagerly along converging routes to the bachelor home of Braxton Sands. One was Sands himself. The other was Lieutenant Britz of Headquarters.

Every detail in the millionaire's suite in the St. Barnabas and of his private room in the Bowling Green office was known to Britz even more minutely than to the owner. That had been among the early activities of the sleuth in connection with the case. He was able to assure himself, therefore, that no matter how much Sands might admire the Maharane diamond, especially when it encircled the white throat of the wealthy widow, it would be nonsensical to suppose this admiration could descend to covetousness. Clearly, Britz was in some sort of blind alley.

As the two men left their offices almost to the minute, Britz, many blocks ahead of Sands, had arrived at the St. Barnabas before the millionaire turned the Grace church bend in