

# JENNIE BAXTER JOURNALIST

BY ROBERT BARR

## VI. The Explosion of the Treasury.

(Copyright, 1899, by the Author.)

When Jennie returned to Vienna and was once more installed in her luxurious rooms at the Palace Steinhelmer, she received in due time a copy of the Daily Bugle, forwarded to her under cover as a registered letter. The girl could not complain that the editor had failed to make the most of the news she had sent him. As she opened out the paper she saw the great black headlines that extended across two columns, and the news itself, dated not from Venice, but from Vienna, was in type a shade larger than that ordinarily used in the paper and was double leaded. The headings were startling enough:

### PHANTOM GOLD.

The Most Gigantic Robbery of Modern Times.

The Austrian War Chest Dynamited.

Twenty Million Pounds in Gold Looted.

Appalling Disaster at the Treasury in Vienna.

Four Men Killed and Sixteen Others More or Less Seriously Injured.

"Dear me," the princess cried, in looking over Jennie's shoulder at these amazing headings, "how like home that looks! The Bugle doesn't seem at all like a London journal. It reminds me of a Chicago paper's account of a base ball match, a base ball match when Chicago was winning, of course, when Anson had lined out the ball from the plate to the lake front and brought three men in on a home run at a critical point in the game."

"Good gracious!" cried Jennie. "What language are you speaking? Is it slang or some foreign tongue?"

"It is pure Chicagoese, Jennie, into which I occasionally lapse even here in prim Vienna. I would like to see a good base ball match, with the Chicago boys going strong. Let us abandon this effete monarchy, Jennie, and pay a visit to America."

"I'll go with pleasure if you will tell me first who looted the war chest. If you can place your dainty forefinger on the spot that conceals 200,000,000 florins in gold, I'll go anywhere with you."

"Oh, yes, that reminds me. I spoke to my husband this morning and asked him if he could get you enrolled as a special detective, and he said there might be some difficulty in obtaining such an appointment for a woman. Would you have any objection to dressing as a nice young man, Jennie?"

"I'd very much rather not. I hope you didn't suggest that to the prince." The princess laughed merrily and shook her head.

"No! I told him I believed that you could solve the mystery if any one could, and, remembering what you had done in that affair of the diamonds, my husband has the greatest faith in your powers as an investigator, but he fears the authorities here will be reluctant to allow a woman to have any part in the search. They have very old fashioned ideas about woman in Austria and think her proper place is presiding over a tea table."

"Well, if they only knew it," said Jennie, archly, "some things have been discovered over a tencup within our own memories."

"That is quite true," replied the princess, "but we can hardly give the incident as a recommendation to the Austrian authorities. By the way, have you noticed that no paper in Vienna said a single word about the robbery of the war chest? It must have been telegraphed here very promptly from London, and yet they do not even deny it, which is the usual way of meeting the truth."

While they were talking a message came from the prince, asking if he might take the liberty of breaking in upon their conference. A few moments after the prince himself entered the apartment and bowed courteously to the two ladies.

"I have succeeded," he said, "beyond my expectations. It seems that a newspaper in London has published an account of the whole affair, and the police, who were at their wits' end before, are even more flustered now that the account of the robbery has been made public."

"Jennie has just received a paper from London," said the princess hurriedly, "which says the war chest of Austria has been robbed of 200,000,000 florins, but there is nothing about it in the Vienna press."

"No," replied the prince, "nor is there likely to be. The robbery is now known to all the world except Austria, and I imagine nothing will be said about it here."

"Is there, then, any truth in the report?" asked the princess innocently.

"Truth! It's all truth; that is just where the trouble is. There is little use in our denying it, because this London sheet is evidently well informed, and, to deny it, we should have to publish something about the robbery itself, which we are not inclined to do. It is known, however, who the two correspondents of the London paper are, and I believe the police are going to make it so interesting for those two gentlemen that they will be glad to leave Vienna, for a time at least. Of course nothing can be done openly, because Englishmen make such a fuss when their liberties are encroached upon. One of the young men has been lured across the frontier by a bogus telegram, and I think the authorities will see that he does not get back in a hurry; the other we expect to be rid of before long. Of course we could expel him, but if we did it would be thought that we had done so because he had found out the truth about the explosion."

"How did you learn about the explosion?" asked the princess.

"Oh, I have known all there was to know ever since it happened!"

The princess gave Jennie a quick look, which said as plainly as words, "Here was the news we waited in our own household and we never suspected it."

"Why didn't you tell me about it?" cried the princess indignantly.

"Well, you see, my dear, you never took any interest in politics, and I did not think the affair would

have any attraction for you. Besides," he added, with a smile, "we were all cautioned to keep the matter as secret as possible."

"And wonderfully well you have managed it!" exclaimed the princess. "That shows what comes of trusting a secret to a lot of men. Here it is published to all the world."

"Not quite all the world, my dear. As I have said, Austria will know nothing about it."

"The princess tells me," said Jennie, "that you were kind enough to endeavor to get me permission to make some investigation into this mystery. Have you succeeded?"

"Yes, Miss Baxter, as I have said, I have succeeded quite beyond my expectations, for the lady detective is comparatively a new thing in Vienna. However, the truth is the police are completely in a fog, and they are ready to welcome help from whatever quarter it comes. Here is a written permit from the very highest authority, which you are not to use except in a case of emergency. Here is also an order from the chief of police which will open for you every door in Vienna, and, finally, here is a badge which you can pin on some not too conspicuous portion of your clothing. This badge, I understand, is rarely given out. It is partly civil and partly military. You can show it to any guard, who will, on seeing it, give you the right of way. In case he does not, appeal to his superior officer, and allow him to read your police permit. Should that fall then play your trump card, which is this highly important document."

"The director of the police, who is a very shrewd man, seemed anxious to make your acquaintance before you began your investigations. He asked me if you would call upon him, but seemed taken aback when I told him that you were my wife's friend and a guest at our house, so he suggested that you would in all probability wish first to see the scene of the explosion and proposed that he should call here with his carriage and accompany you to the treasury. He wished to know if 4 o'clock in the afternoon would suit your convenience."

"Oh, yes," replied Jennie. "I am anxious to begin at once, and of course I shall be obliged to him if he will act as my guide in the vaults of the treasury and tell me how much they have already discovered." "You must not expect information from the police—in fact, I doubt if they have discovered anything; still, if they have, they are more likely to keep it to themselves, and I imagine they will hold a pretty close watch on you and be more anxious to learn what you find out and thus take the credit, if they can, than to furnish you with any knowledge of the affair they may happen to possess."

"That is quite natural and only what one has a right to expect. I don't wish to rob the police of any credit there is to be gained from this investigation, and I am quite willing to turn over to them whatever clues I may happen to chance upon."

"Well, if you can convince the director of that, you will have all the assistance he can give you. It wouldn't be bad tactics to let him know that you are acting merely in an amateur way, and that you have no desire to rob them of their glory when it comes to the solving of the problem."

Promptly at 4 o'clock the director of the police put in appearance at the Palace Steinhelmer. He proved to be a most obsequious, highly decorated old gentleman, in a very resplendent uniform, and he could hardly conceal his surprise on learning that the lady detective was a woman so young and so pretty. Charmed as he was to find himself in the company of one so engaging, it was nevertheless evident to Jennie that he placed no very high estimate on the assistance she might be able to give in solving the mystery of the treasury. This trend of mind, she thought, had its advantages, for the director would be less loath to give her full particulars of what had already been accomplished by the police.

Jennie accompanied the director to that extensive mass of buildings of which the treasury forms a part. The carriage drew up at a doorway and here the director and his companion got out. He led the way into the building, then descended a stair, entered an arched corridor, at the door of which two soldiers stood on guard, who saluted as the chief passed them.

"Does this lead to the room where the explosion took place?" asked Jennie.

"Yes."

"And is this the only entrance?"

"The only entrance, madam."

"Were the men on guard in this doorway injured by the explosion?"

"Yes. They were not seriously injured, but were rendered incapable for a time of attending to their duties."

"Then a person could have escaped without their seeing him?"

"A whole regiment of persons might have escaped. You will understand exactly the situation if I compare this corridor to a long cannon, the room at the end being the breechloading chamber. Two guards were inside the room and two others outside the door that communicated with this corridor. These four men were killed instantly. Of the guards inside the room not a vestige has been found. The door, one of the strongest that can be made, somewhat similar to the door of a safe, was flung outward and crushed to the floor the two guards who stood outside it in the corridor. Between the chamber in which the chest lay and the outside entrance were sixteen men on guard. Every one of those was thrown down, for the blast, if I may call it so, traveled along this straight corridor like the charge along the inside of a gun barrel. The guards nearest the treasure chamber were, of course, the more seriously injured, but those farther out did not escape the shock, and the door by which we entered this corridor, while not blown from its hinges, was nevertheless forced open, its strong bolts snapping like matches. So when you see the great distance that intervenes between the chamber and that door you will have some idea of the force of the explosion."

"There is no exit, then, from the treasure chamber except along this corridor?"

"No, madame. The walls of the chamber are of enormous strength, because, of course, it was expected that if an attempt at robbery were ever made it would be from the outside, and it is scarcely possible that even the most expert of thieves could succeed in

passing the two guards at the door, sixteen guards and officers along the corridor, two outside the treasury door and two in the chamber itself. Such a large number of soldiers were kept here so that any attempt at bribery would be impossible. Among such a number one or two were sure to be incorruptible, and the guards were constantly changed. Seldom was either officer or man twice on duty here during the month. With such an enormous amount at stake every precaution was taken."

"Are there any rooms at the right or left of this corridor in which the thieves could have concealed themselves while they fired the mine?"

"No; the corridor leads to the treasure chamber alone."

"Then," said Jennie, "I can't see how it was possible for a number of men to have made away with the treasure in such circumstances as exist here."

"Nevertheless, my dear young lady, the treasure is gone. We think that the mine was laid with the connivance of one or more officers on duty here. You see, the amount at stake was so large that a share of it would tempt any nine human beings out of ten. Our theory is that the train was laid, possibly electric wires being used, which would be unnoticed along the edge of the corridor and that the bribed officer exploded the dynamite by bringing the ends of the wire into contact. We think that the explosion was a great deal more severe than was anticipated. Probably it was expected that the shock would break a hole from the treasure chamber to the street, but so strong were the walls that no impression was made upon them, and a cabman who was driving past at the time heard not a sound of the explosion, although he felt a tremble of the ground and thought for a moment there had been a shock of earthquake."

"You think, then, that the thieves were outside?"

"That seems the only possible solution."

"The outside doors were locked and bolted, of course?"

"Oh, certainly! But if they had a confederate or two in the large hallway up stairs they would see to it that there was no trouble about getting in. Once inside the large hallway, with guards stunned by the shock, the way to the treasure chamber was absolutely clear."

"There were sentries outside the building, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Did they see any vehicle standing or driving near the treasury?"

"No; that is the strange part of it, and, moreover, the sentries, although pacing outside the walls of this building, heard nothing of the explosion beyond a low rumble, and those who thought of the matter at all imagined an explosion had occurred in some distant part of the city."

"Then the outside doors in the large hall above were not blown open?"

"No; the officer reported that they were locked and bolted when he examined them, which was some minutes, of course, after the disaster had taken place, for he, the officer in charge, had been thrown down and stunned, seemingly by the concussion of air which took place."

As Jennie walked down the corridor she saw more and more evidence of the convulsion. The thick row bound door lay where it had fallen, and it had not been stirred since it was moved to get the two men from under it. Its ponderous hinges were twisted as if they had been made of glue, and its massive bolts were snapped across like bits of glass. All along the corridor on the floor was a thick coating of dust and debris, finely powdered, growing deeper and deeper until the entrance to the room was reached. There were no windows either in corridor or chamber, and the way was lit by candles held by soldiers who accompanied them. The scoria crunched underfoot as they walked, and in the chamber itself great heaps of dust, sand and plaster, all finely powdered, lay in the corners of the room and on one side was piled up higher than a man's head. There seemed to be tons of this debris, and as Jennie looked up at the arched ceiling, resembling the roof of a vaulted dungeon, she saw that the stone itself had been ground to fine dust with the tremendous force of the blast.

"Where are the remnants of the treasure chest?" she asked.

The director shook his head.

"There are no remnants; not a vestige of it is to be found."

"Of what was it made?"

"We used to have an old treasure chest here made of oak, bound with iron, but some years ago, a new receptacle being needed, one was especially made of hardened steel, constructed on the modern principle of those burglar proof and fireproof safes."

"And do you mean to say there is nothing left of this?"

"Nothing that we have been able to discover."

"Well, I have seen places where dynamite explosions have occurred, but I know of nothing to compare with this. I am sure that if dynamite had been used or any explosive now generally obtained there would have been left at least some remnant of the safe. Hasn't this pile of rubbish been disturbed since the explosion?"

"Yes; it has been turned over. We made a search for the two men, but we found no trace of them."

"And you found no particles of iron or steel?"

"The heap throughout is just as you see it on the surface, a fine, almost impalpable, dust. We had to exercise the greatest care in searching through it, for the moment it was disturbed with a shovel it filled the air in suffocating clouds. Of course we shall have it removed by and by and cart it away, but I considered it better to allow it to remain here until we had penetrated somewhat further into the mystery than we have already done."

Jennie stooped and picked up a handful from the heap. Her action caused a mist to rise in the air that made them both choke and cough, and yet she was instantly struck by the fact that her handful seemed inordinately heavy for its bulk.

"May I take some of this with me?" she asked.

"Of course," replied the director. "I shall have a packet of it put up for you."

"I would like to take it with me now," said Jennie. "I have a curiosity to know exactly of what it is composed. Who is the government analyst, or have you such an official?"

"Herr Feltz, in the Graubenstrasse, is a famous analytical chemist. You cannot do better than go to him."

"Do you think he knows anything about explosives?"

"I should suppose so, but if not he will certainly be able to tell you who the best man is in that line."

The director ordered one of the men who accompanied him to find a small paper bag and fill it with the debris of the treasure chamber. When this was done, he handed the package to Jennie, who said:

"I shall go at once and see Herr Feltz."

"My carriage is at your disposal, madame."

"Oh, no, thank you! I do not wish to trouble you further. I am very much obliged to you for devoting so much time to me already. I shall take a fiacre."

"My carriage is at the door," persisted the director, "and I will instruct the driver to take you directly to the shop of Herr Feltz. Then no time will be lost, and I think if I am with you you will be more sure of attention from the chemist, who is a very busy man."

Jennie saw that the director did not wish to let her out of his sight, and, although she smiled at his suspicion, she answered politely:

"It is very kind of you to take so much trouble and devote so much of your time to me. I shall be glad of your company if you are quite certain I am not keeping you from something more important."

"There is nothing more important than the investigation we have on hand," replied the chief grimly.

A few minutes later the carriage stopped in front of the shop of Herr Feltz in the wide Graubenstrasse. The great chemist himself waited upon them and conducted them to an inner and private room.

"I should be much obliged if you would tell me the component parts of the mixture in this package," said Jennie as she handed the filled paper bag to the chemist.

"How soon do you wish to know the result?" asked the man of chemicals.

"As soon as possible."

"Could you give me until this hour tomorrow?"

"That will do very nicely," replied Jennie, looking up at the director of police, who nodded his head.

With that the two took their leave, and once more the director of police politely handed the girl into his carriage, and they drove to the Palace Steinhelmer. Here she bade him good-bye and thanked him cordially for his attentions during the day. The director answered with equal suavity that his duty had on this occasion been a pleasure, and could he have her permission to call at the same hour tomorrow afternoon and take her to the chemist? To this Jennie assented and cheerily bade him good night.

The princess was waiting for her, wild with curiosity to know what had happened.

"Oh, Jennie," she cried, "who fired the mine, and who robbed the government?"

Jennie laughed merrily as she replied:

"Dear princess, what a compliment you are paying me! Do you think that in one afternoon I am able to solve a mystery that has defied the combined talents of all the best detectives in Austria? I wish the director of police had such faith in me as you have."

"And hasn't he, Jennie?"

"Indeed he has not. He watched me every minute he was with me, as if he feared I would disappear into thin air, as the treasure did."

"The horrid man! I shall have my husband speak to him and rid you of this annoyance."

"Oh, no, princess, you mustn't do anything of the kind. I don't mind it in the least; in fact, it rather amuses me. One would think he had some suspicion that I stole the money myself."

"A single word from the prince will stop all that, you know."

"Yes, I know; but I really want to help the director, he is so utterly stupid."

"Now, Jennie, take off your hat and sit down here and tell me every incident of the afternoon. Don't you see I am just consumed with curiosity? I know you have discovered something. What is it?"

"I am not going to take off my hat, because I am going out directly again; but, if you love me, get me a cup of that delicious tea of yours."

"I shall order it at once, but dinner will be served shortly. You are surely not going out alone tonight?"

"I really must. Do not forget I have been used to taking care of myself in a bigger city than Vienna, and I shall be quite safe. You will please excuse my absence from the dinner table tonight."

"Nonsense, Jennie! You cannot be allowed to roam round Vienna in that Bohemian way!"

"Then, Princess, I must go to a hotel, for this roaming round is strictly necessary, and I don't want to bring the Palace Steinhelmer into disrepute."

"Jennie, I'll tell you what we will do—we'll both bring it into disrepute. The prince is dining at his club tonight with some friends, so I shall order the carriage and you and I will roam round together. You will let me come, won't you? Where are you going?"

"I am going to the Graubenstrasse to see Herr Feltz."

"Oh, I know Herr Feltz, and a dear old man he is! He will do anything for me. If you want any favor from Herr Feltz, you had better take me with you."

"I shall be delighted. Ah, here comes the tea! But what is the use of ordering the carriage? We can walk there in a very few minutes."

"I think we had better have the carriage. The prince would be wild if he heard that we two went walking about the streets of Vienna at night. So, Jennie, we must pay some respect to conventionality, and we will take the carriage. Now tell me where you have been and what you have seen and all about it."

Over their belated decoction of tea Jennie related everything that had happened.

"And what do you expect to learn from the analysis at the chemist's, Jennie?"

"I expect to learn something that will startle the director of police."

"And what is that? Jennie, don't keep me on tenterhooks in this provoking way. How can you act so? I shall write to Lord Donald and tell him that you are here in Vienna, if you don't mind."

"Well, under such a terrible threat as that I suppose I must divulge all my suspicions. But I really don't know anything yet; I merely suspect. The weight of that dust, when I picked up a handful of it, seemed to indicate that the gold is still there in the rubbish heap."

"You don't mean to say so! Then there has been no robbery at all?"

"There may have been a robbery planned, but I don't think any thief got a portion of the gold. The chances are that they entirely underestimated the force of the explosive they were using, and, unless I am very much mistaken, they are dealing with something a hundred times more powerful than dynamite."

"And will the chemical analysis show what explosive was used?"

"No; it will only show what the debris is composed of. It will settle the question whether or not the gold is in that dust heap. If it is, then I think the government will owe me some thanks, because the director of police talked of carting the rubbish away and dumping it out of sight somewhere. If the government gets back its gold, then I suppose the question of who fired the mine is merely of academic interest."

"The carriage is waiting, your highness," was the announcement made to the princess, who at once jumped up and said:

"I'll be ready in five minutes. I'm as anxious now as you are to hear what the chemist has to say, but I thought you told me he wouldn't have the

analysis ready until 4 o'clock tomorrow. What the use of going there tonight?"

"Because I am reasonably certain that the director of police will see him early tomorrow morning, and I want to get the first copy of the analysis myself."

With that the princess ran away and presently appeared with her wraps on. The two drove to the shop of Herr Feltz on the Graubenstrasse and told that the chemist could not be seen in any circumstances. He had left orders that he was not to be disturbed.

"Disobey those orders and take in my card!" said the princess.

A glance at the card dissolved the man's doubt and he departed to seek his master.

"He is working at the analysis now, I'll warrant," whispered the princess to her companion, a short time Herr Feltz himself appeared. He greeted the princess with most deferential respect, it seemed astonished to find in her company the young woman who had called upon him a few hours previously with the director of police.

"I wanted to ask you," said Jennie, "to find your analysis somewhat earlier than 4 o'clock tomorrow. I suppose it can be done?"

The man of science smiled and looked at her a moment, but did not reply.

"You will oblige my friend, I hope?" said the princess.

"I should be delighted to oblige any friend your highness," replied the chemist slowly, "but, unfortunately, in this instance I have orders from authority not to be disputed."

"What orders?" demanded the princess.

"I promised the analysis at 4 o'clock tomorrow, and at that hour it will be ready for the young lady. I am ordered not to show the analysis to any one before that time."

"Those orders came from the director of police, I suppose?"

The chemist bowed low, but did not speak.

"I understand how it is, Jennie. He came here immediately after seeing you home. I suppose I visited you again within the hour after he left you with this young lady. Is that the case, Herr Feltz?"

"Your highness distresses me by asking questions that I am under pledge not to answer."

"Is the analysis completed?"

"That is another question which I sincerely hope your highness will not press."

"Very well, Herr Feltz. I shall ask you a question or two that you will not be frightened at. Have told my friend here that you would do anything for me, but I see I have been mistaken."

The chemist made a deprecatory motion of his hands, spreading them out and bowing. It was plainly apparent that his seeming discourtesy caused him deep regret. He seemed about to speak, but the princess went impetuously on.

"Is the director of police a friend of yours, Herr Feltz? I don't mean merely an official friend, but personal friend?"

"I am under many obligations to him, your highness, and, besides that, like any other citizen in Vienna, I am compelled to obey him when he commands."

"What I want to learn," continued the princess, her anger visibly rising at this unexpected opposition, "is whether you wish the man well or not?"

"I certainly wish him well, your highness."

"In that case know that if my friend leaves the shop without seeing the analysis of the material brought to you the director of police will be dismissed from his office tomorrow. If you doubt my influence with my husband to have that done, just try the experiment of sending us away unsatisfied."

The old man bowed his white head.

"Your highness," he said, "I shall take the responsibility of refusing to obey the orders of the director of police. Excuse me for a moment." He retired into his den and presently emerged with sheet of paper in his hand.

"It must be understood," he said, addressing Jennie, "that the analysis is but roughly made. I intended to devote the night to a more minute scrutiny."

"All I want tonight," said Jennie, "is a rough analysis."

"There it is," said the chemist, handing her the paper.

She read:

Calcium.....	2
Iron.....	2
Quartz.....	2
Feldspar.....	2
Mica.....	2
Gold.....	