

What Happened to the Messenger Boy and the Two Fur Coats

Startling Experience Near Fashionable Riverside Drive, New York, When a Pair of Hands Stretched Forth from a Closet and Smothered His Face with an Ether-Soaked Towel

"KEEP in that chair—and sit still!" The messenger boy had turned over his bundle with two fur coats in it to the young man who was to pay the \$535 C. O. D. charges.

Instead of drawing a wallet from his pocket the man brought a pistol to the level of the boy's head. At the same instant the sliding door of the closet opened behind the boy. A pair of hands reached forth from the closet holding a towel saturated with ether. Firmly the hands pressed the cloth over the boy's face—he sank into unconsciousness.

It was a tragic moment in the very quiet, humdrum life of young Nathaniel Rosenblum, a clerk and messenger boy in Brill Brothers, Broadway and Forty-ninth street, clothing store. Nathaniel had seen just such things in the "movies," but he never dreamed that he himself would be the central figure of a real-life hold-up by two desperate thieves.

It happened on a Friday morning a few days before Christmas. Just at 10 o'clock Mrs. Jennie Tallman, who operates an attractive looking rooming house on fashionable West End avenue—No. 507, near Eighty-fourth street—received a call from two well-dressed, gentlemanly looking applicants for a room that she had vacant. Mrs. Tallman had advertised her room and was very much pleased that such nice-looking "gentlemen" should be the first to consider it. One of her visitors carried a prosperous-looking black patent leather suit case and the other a smart cane and a lawyer's brief bag. They walked with Mrs. Tallman up the two flights to the vacant apartment—a rear one—and after looking it over most carefully decided that it would do. They paid her the first week's rent, assuring her that only one would occupy the apartment. Their names, they said, were Messrs. Duplessis and Snider, and they gave a plain impression that they wanted the quarters for some important conference dealing with a law suit of considerable magnitude.

Half an hour later these same two men walked into Brill Brothers' big store, on the corner of Broadway and Forty-ninth street, and became interested in the firm's best fur coats. There had been just time enough for them to leave Mrs. Tallman's apartment house, take the subway at Eighty-sixth street, get off at the Fifth street subway station, and arrive at Brill's.

The two customers were extremely fastidious. They tried on a number of coats and finally selected one apiece. The prices of the garments were \$350 and \$185, making a purchase of \$535 in all.

The salesmen were pleased. Their customers were pleased, but the latter regretted that they had not brought with them sufficient funds to pay for the coats. Could not the garments be delivered at their home that afternoon between 2 and 3 o'clock? They would pay a small deposit as a guarantee of good faith, say, \$15. Why, of course, this could be done. Where did they live? Why, at No. 507 West End avenue. The location of the house was in itself almost a guarantee that the transaction was entirely a bona fide one. Messrs. Duplessis and Snider should have their purchases at exactly the time they wanted them. Messrs. Duplessis and Snider paid their \$15 in a careless sort of fashion and left the store.

The customers had been most polished and urbane. There was not the slightest suspicion of them or their motives, but the manager of Brill Brothers, nevertheless, instead of sending an ordinary messenger, decided to pick out a more responsible person to deliver the goods on which such a considerable amount of money still had to be collected. He therefore summoned his assistant shipping clerk, Nathaniel J. Rosenblum, who is nineteen years old, thoroughly trustworthy, ambitious, and a student outside working hours at the New York University Law School.

"Do not accept any checks, Nat," he said, "and don't let the coats out of your sight for a moment."

There were simply the usual instructions in such cases. The manager went back to his duties convinced—as why should he not have been?—that in the hands of a thoroughly trustworthy messenger and under such instructions the coats were safe from any accident.

Young Rosenblum departed with the



A—" \$535 to collect, C. O. D.," they said to young Nathaniel, as he packed up the fur coats and started uptown.



B—"Yes, the gentlemen are in the third floor, rear," said Mrs. Tallman, the landlady, looking at the package.



C—"By the way," said the man in the rear room, "how much is the balance?"

packages, arriving at the West End avenue address at ten minutes after two o'clock. Mrs. Tallman, who was just about to go out on a shopping trip, answered his ring, and when he asked for Messrs. Duplessis and Snider, told him that the gentlemen were in their room on the third floor rear, and to go right up. As he reached the door the shorter of the two—Snider, he had named himself to the landlady—met him, ushered him into the apartment and told him to sit down while he examined the coats.

At one side of the room was a wide closet, its door closed. Just in front of it stood a very comfortable looking easy chair. It was the kind of a chair that instinctively one picks out to sit upon and that causes a decided feeling of dislike for the person who beats one to its coziness. There were no other chairs around it—in fact, nothing to distract the eye from its inviting arms. Young Rosenblum did not think at the moment that this isolation was curious. Why should he have? Promptly he walked over to it and seated himself. "Mr. Snider" had already put the packages on the bed and had removed their contents.

"These are all right," he said. "Really splendid value. By the way, how much is the balance?"

"Five hundred and twenty dollars," answered the messenger, consulting the bill he held.

"Mr. Snider" dropped his hand into his right coat pocket; young Mr. Rosenblum prepared to receipt the bill after he had counted the money that he felt sure that hand was about to draw out.

Then his heart jumped quickly, for instead of money he found himself looking into the black barrel of a capable automatic pistol! And as he stared at it "Mr. Snider" stepped close to him and stuck the barrel close to his nose.

"Keep right in that chair and sit still and do not open your mouth," said the man with the pistol. "If you don't I'll blow a hole through you. Remember, this is no joke."

Rosenblum was a very sure it was no joke! He obeyed instructions. He heard a noise behind him like that of a door being slid aside. There came a faint hospital smell. The hands holding a white towel dropped past his eyes. The towel was pressed to his mouth and nostrils. He inhaled the reek of ether. The towel was saturated with it! Swiftly the cloth was tied behind his ears. Who was operating behind him the messenger could not see.

But he could see "Mr. Snider," run held firmly and menacing him! There came a buzzing in Rosenblum's ears. His muscles began to relax, his head to sag.

Through his numbing brain floated strange thoughts. It must be a nightmare that he was undergoing! Surely this could not be reality—this melodramatic situation that was like things he had seen at the movies! It was absurd that such a thing should happen in broad daylight and in a fashionable house in one of the most fashionable and best policed sections of

the city. That must be it—he was in a nightmare and his dream was a reflection of some motion picture that he had seen! He struggled to awaken.

He half opened his heavy eyes. The man with the gun seemed to be terribly little and far away, as though he were looking at him through the large end of an opera glass. There seemed to be a green light all about him. Through the noise in his ears he heard the far-away figure say:

"Arg you asleep?" Then the shape seemed to lift his chin up and let it fall back. The buzzing in his ears grew into a rush of many waters. He felt himself being lifted up and carried away on the breast of the flood. Then he dipped under it into unconsciousness.

He had been lifted—but not by any flood. When, after a few minutes, consciousness began to struggle back, he found himself in a closed closet. The fumes of the ether were heavy within it. He tore away the cloth from his nose and writhed against the closed door. It slid away a fraction of an inch and he found strength to push back the sliding panel and creep out into the room. The man with the gun had disappeared.

And so had the two fur coats! Rosenblum crept down the stairs, meeting no one, and into a tearoom on the basement floor, which is run by Miss Marjorie Holton, a friend of Mrs. Tallman's. He was still stupefied and almost incoherent from the effects of the drug, but he managed to tell the essential facts of his identity and what had happened to him. Miss Holton sent for Mrs. Tallman, but she had left the house some minutes before, thus probably escaping by the narrow margin encounter and deadly peril at the hands of the two thieves. For they had taken with them suitcases, lawyer's brief case and cane, as well as the two coats, and it is a certainty that their going so laden would have aroused her suspicion and led to questions. That the pair who had proven by their treatment of the messenger that they had little regard for human life would undoubtedly have had no compunction in silencing her immediately is certain.

What had happened was, in fact, an extraordinarily dramatic, daring and wickedly clever bit of active criminality. The thieves had picked out Mrs. Tallman's house because of its unimpeachable character and the exclusiveness of the section in which it is. The address would at once far to disarm any probable suspicion which they might encounter during the further working out of their plan. They had manipulated the equipment of the room with sinister intelligence. The closet had served as a perfect hiding place for the confederate with the ether.

The comfortable chair had been placed just in front of it and the rest of the furniture in the room arranged so that the attention of one entering would at once be focused upon the chair. The thieves had been fully cognizant of the value of the suggestion. Gamblers use this same expedient in "forcing" cards upon their dupes by making such cards "stand out" a little from the rest of the pack. They were familiar with the use of ether; lifting up of the relaxed chin of the person



D—"Now sit still!" said the man, as he suddenly drew a pistol from his pocket and pointed it at Nathaniel's head. At the same moment the sliding door of the closet opened behind the boy. A pair of hands reached forth from the closet holding a towel saturated with ether. Firmly the hands pressed the cloth over the boy's face—he sank into unconsciousness.

under the anaesthetic and the letting it drop, is a hospital test to see whether the drug has actually taken effect.

The placing of the young man's body in the closet showed that they did not scruple to step short of murder, for in that confined space, with the fumes about him, it was by merest chance that Rosenblum did not sink into a coma from which he could not be revived.

At the risk of murder then, and the expenditure of about \$30, the two thieves had gotten coats valued at \$500 more than their financial outlay.

But before a representative of Brill Brothers, telephoned to by Miss Holton, could arrive another extremely curious thing occurred. An ambulance from the Knickerbocker Hospital drew up at the door of the West End avenue house. Out of it jumped a doctor and a patrolman.

"We had a telephone message to send an ambulance to this house," said the doctor, "by somebody who said that a man had been drugged here."

"Somebody has been drugged—but no one here sent any message," said Miss Holton, in amazement.

It then turned out that at 2:35—less than ten minutes after Rosenblum's body had been thrust into the closet—Police Headquarters had gotten the telephone call described. The sender would give no name, but gave the telephone number as Academy 2645. This number is that of a residence on One Hundred and Third street, from which, of course, no call had been sent and whose occupants knew nothing whatever of the West End affair. What had happened, however, was that one of the thieves, fearing to turn the case of robbery into one of murder, had boldly called up the Police Department and sent in the call to aid the young man he had maltreated.

Description of the two thieves made by the salesman who sold the coats; by Mrs. Tallman, and the description of the smaller of the two by Rosenblum, the messenger, all agree. Duplessis, who looked like a Frenchman of excellent breeding and spoke with a decided accent, is described as follows: Five feet nine and a half inches tall; slender, with a black stubby mustache; dark complexion and hair. On the day of the robbery he wore dark clothes and a dark velour hat of the alpine variety. He was quick and nervous in his actions and seemed to be of the dancing type.

Snider was apparently of German origin. He was short, being about five feet six

inches in height, light hair, clear shaven, blue eyes, rather florid complexion, apparently about twenty-eight years old, neat and well dressed and weighed about 135 pounds. He wore a dark brown suit, dark overcoat and hat on the day of the robbery, and carried a light-colored cane and a black lawyer's brief bag.

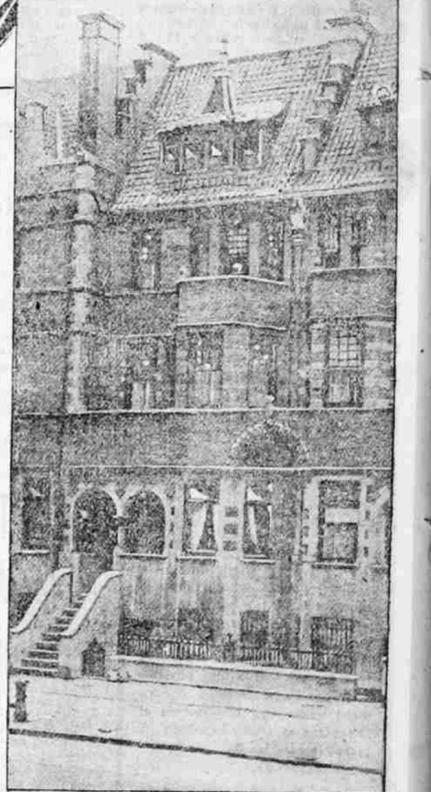
Rosenblum, the shipping clerk, is above any suspicion. He has been in the firm's employ for three years and holds a responsible position for one of his age. Besides, as has been said, he is a studious and ambitious boy and in the afternoons attends lectures and classes at the New York University Law School.

Again, it would be almost impossible for any one to enter into any plan with an employee of the store, for there are a number of boys who are sent out from time to time to make C. O. D. deliveries of goods, and any one of the number may be assigned. Thus, no one delivery clerk knows in advance where he may be sent.

In this instance Rosenblum was taken from his regular duties and sent to make the delivery because of the amount of money involved and his reputation for responsibility and carefulness.

Descriptions of the pair have been sent to other cities, for it is believed that the same trick will be tried again at some point distant from New York. Some months of December and January constitute the open season for forgers, shoplifters and gentlemen crooks of the type who victimized Brill Brothers.

Their operations are made easier and more likely of success through the press of business attending the holiday season and shortly thereafter. It would seem that the criminals now operating in New York and other large cities have determined that they stand better chance of getting away with the goods by essaying the unexpected and the apparently impossible. It was the boldness of the fur coat robbery that made it successful in the same way the entirely amazing robbery at the Hotel Knickerbocker, at Forty-second street and Broadway, recently had the same elements of surprise. Here two Spaniards



The house, No. 507 West End avenue, near Eighty-fourth street.

boldly registered at this hotel, right in the very heart of New York's most crowded district. They were assigned a room, went to it and spent an hour leisurely looking about.

Having selected their victims they entered their room, knocked out the man, tied his wife to a bedpost and looted them of valuables!

After this they calmly walked down a fire-escape in plain view of thousands, and making their way into the bustling throng vanished.

Quite naturally the guests who were so maltreated by these two miscreants were off their guard in the Knickerbocker. Just as in the case of the messenger from Brill's, they felt entirely secure in this busy place. In the same way, no one seeing two men coming leisurely down a fire-escape at Forty-second street and Broadway in full daylight would even think that they did not have a right to be doing this. The traditional burglar is one with a dark lantern, a mask and a jimmy, skulking in the shadows. It seems that people will have to get rid of this visualization of him. The up-to-date burglar has learned to operate in full publicity with the aid of the important element of surprise.