The MAN in LOWER TEN

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CHAPTER I.

I Go to Pittsburg.

McKnight is gradually taking over the criminal end of the business. I never liked it, and since the strange case of the man in lower ten, I have been a bit squeamish. Given a case like that, where you can build up a network of clews that absolutely incriminate three entirely different people, only one of whom can be guilty, and your faith in circumstantial evidence dies of overcrowding. I never see a shivering, white-faced wretch in the prisoners' dock that I do not hark back with shuddering horror to the strange events on the Pullman car Ontario, between Washington and Pittsburg, on the night of September 9, last.

McKnight could tell the story a great deal better than I, although he cannot spell three consecutive words correctly. But, while he has imagination and humor, he is lazy.

"It didn't happen to me, anyhow," he protested, when I put it up to him. "And nobody cares for second-hand thrills. Besides, you want the unvarnished and ungarnished truth, and I'm no hand for that. I'm a lawyer."

So am I, although there have been times when my assumption in that particular has been disputed. I am unmarried, and just old enough to dance with the grown-up little sisters of the girls I used to know. I am fond of outdoors, prefer horses to the aforesaid grown-up little sisters, and without sentiment ("am" crossed out and "was" substituted.—Ed.) and completely ruled and frequently routed by my housekeeper, an elderly widow.

In fact, of all the men of my acquaintance, I was probably the most prosaic, the least adventurous, the one man in a hundred who would be likely to go without a deviation from the normal through the orderly procession of the seasons, summer suits to winter flannels, golf to bridge.

So it was a queer freak of the demons of chance to perch on my unsusceptible 30-year-old chest, tie me up with a crime, ticket me with a love affair, and start me on that sensational and not always respectable journey that ended so surprisingly less than three weeks later in the firm's private office. It had been the most remarkable period of my life. I would neither give it up nor live it again under any inducement, and yet all that I lost was some 20 yards off my drive!

It was really McKnight's turn to make the next journey. I had a tournament at Chevy Chase for Saturday, and a short yacht cruise planned for Sunday, and when a man has been grinding at statute law for a week, he needs relaxation. But McKnight begged off. It was not the first time he had shirked that summer in order to run down to Richmond, and I was surly about it. But this time he had a new excuse.

"I wouldn't be able to look after the business if I did go," he said. He has a sort of wide-eyed frankness that makes one ashamed to doubt him. "I'm always car sick crossing the mountains. It's a fact, Lollie. Seesawing over the peaks does it. Why, crossing the Alleghany mountains has the gulf stream to Bermuda beaten to a frazzle."

So I gave him up finally and went home to pack. He came later in the evening with his machine, the Cannonball, to take me to the station, and he brought the forged notes in the Bronson case.

"Guard them with your life," he warned me. "They are more precious than honor. Sew them in your chest protector, or wherever people keep valuables. I never keep any. I'll not be happy until I see Gentleman Andy doing the lockstep."

He sat down on my clean collars, found my cigarettes and struck a match on the mahogany bed post with one movement.

"Where's the Pirate?" he demanded. The Pirate is my housekeeper, Mrs. Klopton, a very worthy woman, so labeled—and libeled—because of a ferocious pair of eyes and what McKnight called a bucaneering nose. I quietly closed the door into the hall.

"Keep your voice down, Richey," I said. "She is looking for the evening paper to see if it is going to rain. She has my raincoat and an umbrella waiting in the hall."

The collars being damaged beyond repair, he left them and went to the window. He stood there for some time, staring at the blackness that represented the wall of the house next door.

"It's raining now," he said over his shoulder, and closed the window and the shutters. Something in his voice made me glance up, but he was watching me, his hands idly in his pockets.

"Who lives next door?" he inquired in a perfunctory tone, after a pause. I was packing my razor.

"House is empty," I returned absently. "If the landlord would put it in some sort of shape—"

"Did you put those notes in your pocket?" he broke in.

"Yes." I was impatient. "Along with my certificates of registration, baptism and vaccination. Whoever wants them will have to steal my coat to get them."

"Guard This with Your Life."

"Well, I would move them, if I were you. Somebody in the next house was confoundedly anxious to see where you put them. Somebody right at that window opposite."

I scoffed at the idea, but nevertheless I moved the papers, putting them in my traveling bag, well down at the bottom. McKnight watched me uneasily.

"I have a hunch that you are going to have trouble," he said, as I locked the alligator bag. "Darned if I like starting anything important on Friday."

"You have a congenital dislike to starting anything on any old day," I retorted, still sore from my lost Saturday. "And if you knew the owner of that house as I do you would know that if there was any one at that window he is paying rent for the privilege."

Mrs. Klopton rapped at the door and spoke discreetly from the hall.

"Did Mr. McKnight bring the evening paper?" she inquired.

"Sorry, but I didn't, Mr. Klopton," McKnight called. "The subs won, three to nothing." He listened, grinning, as she moved away with little irritated rustles of her black silk gown.

I finished my packing, changed my collar and was ready to go. Then very cautiously we put out the light and opened the shutters. The window across was merely a deeper black in the darkness. It was closed and dirty. And yet, probably owing to Richey's suggestion, I had an uneasy sensation of eyes staring across at me. The next moment we were at the door, poised for flight.

"We'll have to run for it," I said in a whisper. "She's down there with a package of some sort, sandwiches probably. And she's threatened me with overshoes for a month. Ready now!"

I had a kaleidoscopic view of Mrs. Klopton in the lower hall, holding out an armful of such traveling impediments as she deemed essential, while beside her, Euphemia, the colored housemaid, grinned over a white-wrapped box.

"Awfully sorry—no time—back Sunday," I panted over my shoulder. Then the door closed and the car was moving away.

McKnight bent forward and stared at the facade of the empty house next door as we passed. It was black, staring, mysterious, as empty buildings are apt to be.

"I'd like to hold a post-mortem on that corpse of a house," he said thoughtfully. "By George, I've a notion to get out and take a look."

"Somebody after the brass pipes," I scoffed. "House has been empty for a year."

With one hand on the steering wheel McKnight held out the other for my cigarette case. "Perhaps," he said; "but I don't see what she would want with brass pipe."

"A woman!" I laughed outright. "You have been looking too hard at the picture in the back of your watch, that's all. There's an experiment like that. If you stare long enough—"

But McKnight was growing sulky; he sat looking rigidly ahead, and he did not speak again until he brought the Cannonball to a stop at the station. Even then it was only a perfunctory remark. He went through the gate with me, and with five minutes to spare, we lounged and smoked in the train shed. My mind had slid away from my surroundings and had wandered to a polo pony that I couldn't afford and intended to buy anyhow. Then McKnight shook off his taciturnity.

"For heaven's sake, don't look so martyred," he burst out; "I know you've done all the traveling this summer. I know you're missing a game to-morrow. But don't be a patient mother; confound it, I have to go to Richmond on Sunday. I—I want to see a girl."

"Oh, don't mind me," I observed politely. "Personally, I wouldn't change places with you. What's her name—North? South?"

"West," he snapped. "Don't try to be funny. And all I have to say, Blakeley, is that if you ever fall in love I hope you make an egregious ass of yourself."

In view of what followed, this came rather close to prophecy.

The trip west was without incident. I played bridge with a furniture dealer from Grand Rapids, a sales agent for a Pittsburg iron firm and a young professor from an eastern college. I won three rubbers out of four, finished what cigarettes McKnight had left me and went to bed about one o'clock. It was growing cooler, and the rain had ceased. Once, toward morning, I wakened with a start, for no apparent reason, and sat bolt upright. I had an uneasy feeling that some one had been looking at me, the same sensation I had experienced earlier in the evening at the window. But I could feel the bag with the notes, between me and the window, and with my arm thrown over it for security, I lapsed again into slumber. Later, when I tried to piece together the fragments of that journey, I remembered that my coat, which had been folded and placed beyond my restless tossing, had been rescued in the morning from a heterogeneous jumble of blankets, evening papers and cravat, had been shaken out with profanity and donned with wrath. At the time, nothing occurred to me but the necessity of writing to the Pullman Company and asking them if they ever traveled in their own cars. I even formulated some of the letter.

I was more cheerful after I had had a cup of coffee in the Union station. It was too early to attend to business, and I lounged in the restaurant and hid behind the morning papers. As I had expected, they had got hold of my visit and its object. On the first page was a staring announcement that the forged papers in the Bronson case had been brought to Pittsburg. Underneath, a telegram from Washington stated that Lawrence Blakeley of Blakeley & McKnight had left for Pittsburg the night before, and that, owing to the approaching trial of the Bronson case and the illness of John Gilmore, the Pittsburg millionaire, who was the chief witness for the prosecution, it was supposed that the visit was intimately concerned with the trial.

I looked around apprehensively. There were no reporters yet in sight, and thankful to have escaped notice I paid for my breakfast and left. At the cabstand I chose the least dilapidated hansom I could find, and giving the driver the address of the Gilmore residence, in the East end, I got in.

I was just in time. As the cab turned and rolled off, a slim young man in a straw hat separated himself from a little group of men and hurried toward us.

"Hey! Wait a minute there!" he called, breaking into a trot.

But the cabby did not hear, or perhaps did not care to. We jogged comfortably along, to my relief, leaving the young man far behind. I avoid reporters on principle, having learned long ago that I am an easy mark for a clever interviewer.

It was perhaps nine o'clock when I left the station. Our way was along the boulevard which hugged the side of one of the city's great hills. Far below, to the left, lay the railroad tracks and the seventy times seven looming stacks of the mills. The white mist of the river, the grays and blacks of the smoke blended into a half-revealing haze, dotted here and there with fire. It was unlovely, tremendous. Whistler might have painted it with its pathos, its majesty, but he would have missed what made it infinitely suggestive—the rattle and roar of iron on iron, the rumble of wheels, the throbbing beat, against the ears, of fire and heat and brawn welding prosperity.

Something of this I voiced to the grim old millionaire who was responsible for at least part of it. He was propped up in bed in his East end home, listening to the market reports read by a nurse, and he smiled a little at my enthusiasm.

"I can't see much beauty in it myself," he said. "But it's our badge of prosperity. The full dinner pail here means a nose that looks like a flue. Pittsburg without smoke wouldn't be Pittsburg, any more than New York prohibition would be New York. Sit down for a few minutes, Mr. Blakeley. Now, Miss Gardner, Westinghouse Electric."

The nurse resumed her reading in a monotonous voice. She read literally and without understanding, using initial and abbreviations as they came. But the shrewd old man followed her easily.

As the nurse droned along, I found myself looking curiously at a photograph in a silver frame on the bedside table. It was the picture of a girl in white, with her hands clasped loosely before her. Against the dark background her figure stood out slim and young. Perhaps it was the rather grim environment, possibly it was my mood, but although as a general thing photographs of young girls make no appeal to me, this one did. I found my eyes straying back to it. By a little finesse I even made out the name written across the corner, "Alison West."

Mr. Gilmore lay back among his pillows and listened to the nurse's listless voice. But he was watching me from under his heavy eyebrows, for when the reading was over, and we were alone, he indicated the picture with a gesture.

"I keep it there to remind myself that I am an old man," he said. "That is my granddaughter, Alison West."

I expressed the customary polite surprise, at which, finding me responsive, he told me his age with a chuckle of pride. More surprise, this time genuine. From that we went to what he ate for breakfast and did not eat for luncheon, and then to his reserve power, which at 65 became a matter for thought. And so, in a wide circle, back to where we started, the picture.

"Father was a rascal," John Gilmore said, picking up the frame. "The happiest day of my life was when I knew he was safely dead in bed and not hanged. If the child had looked like him, I—well, she doesn't. She's a Gilmore, every inch. Supposed to look like me."

"Very noticeably," I agreed soberly.

I had produced the notes by that time, and replacing the picture Mr. Gilmore gathered his spectacles from beside it. He went over the four notes methodically, examining each carefully and putting it down before he picked up the next. Then he leaned back and took off his glasses.

"They're not so bad," he said thoughtfully. "Not so bad. But I never saw them before. That's my unofficial signature. I am inclined to think"—he was speaking partly to himself—"to think that he has got hold of a letter of mine, probably to Alison. Bronson was a friend of her rapscallion of a father."

I took Mr. Gilmore's deposition and put it into my traveling bag with the forged notes. When I saw them again, almost three weeks later, they were unrecognizable, a mass of charred paper on a copper ash tray. In the interval other and bigger things had happened: The Bronson forgery case had shrunk beside the greater and more imminent mystery of the man in lower ten. And Alison West had come into the story and into my life.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HAPPENINGS IN THE CITIES

Dives from Brooklyn Bridge for $250

NEW YORK.—A sharp-featured, undersized youth in ragged swimming trunks, with a skimpy coat and an old pair of trousers thrown over them, dived successfully from the center span of Brooklyn bridge to the East river, 135 feet below, for $250 in cash, two new suits of clothes and whatever renown the world may hold in store for a bridge jumper.

The late Steve Brodie acquired fame as a bridge jumper and long ran a Bowery saloon on the strength of it, but many say it was never really proved that Steve really jumped. Several would-be suicides have been fished out of the river unhurt after jumping, but Otto Eppers is the first to jump with unquestioned witnesses as part of a prearranged plan.

The boy's first words when he was fished out of the river by the crew of a passing tug were: "Gee! But I hit hard!"

His next were: "Say, whose got the makin's of a cigarette?"

Eppers is seventeen years old and the son of a lithographer. He weighs about 110 pounds and has been unofficial swimming champion of the East river ever since he got into the big boy class. Recently he heard that a Brooklyn merchant was willing to pay $250 out of his advertising appropriation to the first man who would jump from any one of the bridges over the East river.

Otto was the boy for the job. He had jumped 104 feet from a bridge once before and the addition of a few more feet never caused him so much as a thought. "Sure, I'll do it," he said, and he did.

Otto meant to dive from the new Manhattan bridge, because he thought it was higher. The height in reality is the same for all the East river bridges. The police, however, were too watchful. He meant to shed his coat and trousers, but he didn't have time. He meant to take off his heavy boots, but the river did that for him. He meant to dive in one long sweeping arc, "but somehow," he told afterward, "I started to twist, and then I couldn't stop." Passengers on the ferryboats who saw him said he turned like a pinwheel.

"I wasn't scared a bit until I jumped," he continued, "but I don't remember anything after I hit until I came up again." He was found floating on his back, half stunned and paddling feebly. "I could have swum to shore," he boasted, and in the next breath he admitted, "but I wasn't feeling very spry."

A rubdown and two hours of rest in a hospital found Eppers fit to appear in police court, where he was promptly discharged for lack of evidence that he had attempted suicide.

Elusive Tooth Puzzle in Chicago Court

CHICAGO.—"The mystery of the Missing Tooth," a novel exposition of how seven and three (sometimes) make eleven, was staged for a large and appreciative, not to say quizzical, audience recently in Municipal Judge Torrison's court.

Plot theme: "Can a dentist recover damages for a swallowed tooth?"

Leading characters: Dr. James L. Blount, Oak Park, praying a monetary revenge, and Mrs. Alice Andrews, heroine in the tragedy of "The Missing Molar."

Dr. Blount demanded his fee for 11 teeth, false if you please, while the heroine pleaded but ten—seven in hand and three hidden by rosy lips.

"The teeth not only were false in material, but they were false to their trust and fell out," said Mrs. Andrews.

"One at a time they began falling out. The first one went on a round steak which cost 25 cents a pound. I thought it merely a coincidence. But when No. 2 fell into the soup one noon, I knew there was something wrong.

"Nos. 3, 4 and 5 came out in unison and Nos. 6 and 7 when a boy set off a firecracker under my feet the last Fourth of July. It was becoming so common then, I lost track of the cause and scarcely noticed the effect. I couldn't even chew butter.

"I refused to pay the dentist's bill unless he did the work all over again, and he wouldn't. He said I must have been trying to chew rocks. Then he sued me."

As proof of the deciduous nature of the teeth, Mrs. Andrews began counting them out on Judge Torrison's desk, while court bailiffs looked on agape. Then as she reached "seven," Mrs. Andrews said:

"Three I have in my mouth. He put in 11 for me in February, 1909. Most of them came out and I had three put back."

"But where is the other tooth? Three you still use, seven you have shown the judge, now where is the other one?" was the insistent query put to Mrs. Andrews.

"Where is the other tooth?" The woman faltered. "I don't know where it can be; I thought I had it, but I must have swallowed it while asleep."

"Give the others to the bailiff; let them he preserved as evidence," said Judge Torrison.

The bailiff kept the teeth; the jury found its verdict for the woman.

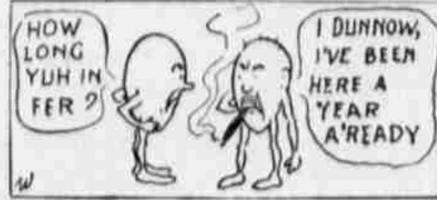
Zoo Bear Trades Laughs for Peanuts

NEW YORK.—Old Ben, the big Alaskan bear at the New York zoological park in the Bronx, understands human nature well indeed, and he makes his knowledge pay him. The other day a woman from Middletown, who had happened to see the animals, paused before the den of Old Ben and tossed in a shelled peanut. Instantly there was a stampede on the part of Little Ben, Brown Bess, Old Ben's wife, and Karnak, his nephew. Old Ben walked back to the rear of the cage while the others fought for the peanut and then crowded to the bars for more.

The visitor was about to toss in another when she was astonished to see old Ben standing on his hind legs, making motions to her to throw it high over the others' heads to him. At least that was what it looked like. He was standing up on his haunches, waving his right front paw over his head as a boy does when he means you to throw a ball high. The lady threw the peanut high and Old Ben got it—caught it in his mouth, at a distance of 20 feet, while the other bears in the cage raged over missing it. The woman threw more, and kept throwing the peanuts till they were all gone, and every one she threw over the heads of the other bears, just to see Old Ben stand on his hind legs and motion for more.

Ben learned this trick years ago, the keepers say, when he was a dancing bear. When he finally was put in the zoo he astonished the keepers by making signs to them to throw the best food over the heads of the other greedy animals to him. He always takes up his position in the background, motioning the keepers and letting the other bears fight at the iron bars. The result is that he gets the biggest part of the dinner because it is so funny to watch his secret signals to the feeders.

Help! 45,000,000 Eggs Are Imprisoned



CHICAGO.—Faithful hens of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Ohio have since April laid 45,000,000 eggs for the cold storage man, according to farmers who have sold their product to representatives of Chicago cold storage houses.

The eggs will remain in the warehouses until the high prices of last winter are duplicated.

Housewives feel that the usual corner in eggs will take place next year.

South Water street commission merchants admitted that warehousemen have canvassed the four states for the last three months, buying up fresh eggs from the farmers and egg commissioners.

"Chicago cold storage houses are filled with fresh eggs," declared a merchant today, "and I have been told that 45,000,000 eggs are now stored away in warehouses, to remain there until next winter when the men who form the egg pool can demand high prices for the product."

The millions of eggs bought up by the cold storage representatives will not be put on the Chicago markets for sale until there is a scarcity.

The eggs were purchased from the farmers at an average price of 23½ to 24 cents a dozen. Two cents a dozen is added to cover insurance, storage costs, etc., which brings the total cost up to about 26 cents a dozen.

If the eggs can be retailed in Chicago next winter at 45 cents a dozen, at which they were sold last winter there will be a profit of 19 cents a dozen or a total of something over $700,000.