STAIRS OF SAND

A TALE OF A MYSTERY

BY

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"THE SECRET OF THE MARIONETTES," "A DANGEROUS QUEST," ETC.

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CHAPTER XVI.

On the day following the incident of the black coupe, Superintendent Barnes, the chief of police, was seated in his office, studying a mass of written reports that lay before him on the desk. Evidently what he read was not to his liking, for his generally smooth forehead wore a deep frown and now and then he uttered an exclamation that showed his anger and disgust.

Inspector Barnes, as he was better known in the city, looked more like a prosperous banker than a man who had spent the principal part of his life in investigating the undercurrents of society. He did not wear that worn and worried look we are accustomed to associate with a man who has so much work laid out for him. He was none the less a capable officer, and if his smile was "childlike and bland," he was feared and respected by the lawless world, and justly so.

Barnes was not in a good humor on the morning in question, and after he had finished his reading leaned back in the big chair and puffed for a moment on his black cigar, sending forth such clouds that he resembled a fat idol surrounded by incense. His glance fixed on the ceiling, it only changed to look now and then with a scowl at the pile of papers before him. Suddenly he leaned forward and rang the bell sharply at his elbow.

The folding doors in the center of the room opened and his personal attendant appeared.

"Send Mac here at once!" he said, and lolled back in his chair again, smoking more vigorously than ever and engaged in deep thought. The attendant bowed himself out and a moment later the chief of detectives entered, and, closing the door behind him, advanced to the desk where his superior was seated.

He was a small man, looking not unlike an overworked clerk, quick and nervous in his movements, with a long pale face and sharp eyes that almost glared from beneath bushy eyebrows.

"Want me, Super?" he asked, in a low voice. "Mac" was a man not given to eloquence or long speeches.

"I am thinking that this department—yours, mine, everybody's, is in a bad state," said the chief.

"Ah," but the little man's face was unmoved.

"Look at that stack of reports there," exclaimed the other, pointing to his desk. "Mostly made up of the hopeless attempts to find the fellow who is at the head of most of the robberies that have been committed in the city during the past year. And not one of our people has been able to get even a clew to his whereabouts. Now, that fellow must be caught or the department will stand forever disgraced. Never since I have been connected with the force have we been confronted with so many failures. Why, if things go on this way you and I will have to get out, that's all."

"I'm sure I wish it was different," sighed Mac, shifting nervously from one foot to the other. "After all, it may not be the work of one man. You know a thief gets a reputation, and then every other crime of note is set down to his credit, or discredit. Just like in our own business. We often get credit in the papers for unearthing a criminal, when it may be, like as not, entirely the work of one of our men."

Inspector Barnes looked at his companion to see if there was any personal insinuation intended, but the little man was busy eying the glass case containing criminal curiosities.

"Well, if these robberies are not the work of the same man, why don't you catch the ones who are guilty?" he said, in a voice of exasperation. "I tell you I still believe there is one behind it all, for these affairs bear the same stamp. It is, of course, possible that some one else has copied his methods. Whoever he is, he is a clever man, and we have not heard of the like since the days of George Leonidas Leslie. If I were not sure that Leslie was very dusty, I should believe that he had a hand in these matters. Now, Mac, why don't you catch him?"

"Why, indeed?" with a smile. "Why don't I capture a rainbow to make ribbons out of it for my wife. I tell you, Super, we are doing all we can. We have had some men who work for him in hand, but, though industriously pumped, they know little more about him than we do. To call the man a 'shadow' is wrong, for he never stays as long as a shadow in one place. But I have an idea."

"You are fortunate—so early in the morning."

"It is this, that the head of these affairs is not to be found in the under world, but higher up. For all we know, one who passes as a gentleman."

"That I have thought of myself," said the chief, thoughtfully. "Perhaps we have been working in the wrong direction all along. Well, I can only urge you to do your best, or we shall find ourselves disliked by the press and the public and in general disrepute."

"I'll try a new tack," and the detective brought his teeth together with a snap. "Don't think I haven't worked hard over this cursed affair. It worries me quite as much as it does you," but the chief did not seem to be listening, was leaning back in his chair as if half asleep, and the other, seeing him so preoccupied, took the opportunity to slip out of the room.

The closing of the door roused the chief from his reverie, for he sat up and looked around as if wondering to find himself alone. Just then a timid tap sounded on the door and the attendant entered.

"Well, what do you want?" asked the chief.

"There's a heavy swell outside who says he thinks he has news of importance, 'bout this last robbery on de avenue."

"Some other fool-crank, I suppose, to take up my time," growled Barnes; then, settling back in his chair, with an air of resignation, "Well, tell him to come in."

The visitor tripped in gayly, as if bent on a pleasure mission. He was rather overdressed and wore a gardenia in his lapel. His face was smiling, but Barnes in an ill-humor frowned that down.

"You have some information—be brief. Sit down," motioning toward a chair. The visitor dropped into the seat.

"Inspector Barnes, I believe you are aware that a man known under the sobriquet of Will o' the Wisp recently escaped, with others, from the Auburn prison."

Barnes nodded stiffly.

"I have reason to know that he is still in this city. That he arrived here a few days ago."

"Are you sure of that?" eying his visitor keenly. "Our men have been looking for him, but I had no news of his whereabouts."

"Well, you see an amateur sometimes can beat a professional."

"But how do you know you have seen the man—do you know him personally?"

"Well, hardly, not being in the habit of associating with such people," with a laugh.

"Explain yourself."

"I need not go into details—in fact, I prefer not to. This man, it happens, called on us some time ago. He holds a paper—a document, which, if made public, would do a great injury to our family. Now, he could only have got hold of this paper through a fellow-prisoner—one Martin Frale—to whom it was confided many years ago."

"I see. Frale was the man who was killed when a crowd of them escaped from Auburn," and the chief examined a paper which he drew from one of the pigeon holes above his desk. "This Frale and Will, it seems, had struck up a great friendship in prison. Frale, I learn, saved his life from the assault of another man when they were working in the shoe shop. Since that time they were like brothers. It's rather a pity that this Frale was shot; because, you see, he had but a short time more to serve, if he had not attempted to escape." He replaced the paper in his desk, and looked to his visitor as if waiting for him to speak.

"By the way, you have not told me your name," as the other maintained silence.

"To be sure, I forgot that. Of course, I don't want to appear conspicuously in the matter."

"You need not."

"My name is Frank Ellison."

"And you think that perhaps this escaped prisoner may be the head of these recent robberies. The supposition is not a bad one, for when he was at large he conducted some pretty clever jobs."

He took a memorandum pad from his desk, and dipped his pen into the ink, at the same time assuming an attitude of attention.

"Now, then, where is this place where our man can be found?"

"There are reasons why I cannot tell you as yet," said Ellison.

The chief dropped his pen on the desk angrily.

"Did you come here to have fun with the department?"

"Nothing of the kind." And the visitor looked anxiously toward the door.

"Then explain yourself, and briefly."

"I must arrange a meeting with this man—if I can."

"What for?" snapped Barnes.

"It must be part of our bargain. I first of all wish to secure possession of this document. It would injure us if this fellow should be arrested and that paper in his hands. He would make it public, and that would be a poor reward for what I intend to do."

Barnes examined his visitor from head to foot carefully. For all the flippant, foppish air of the man, he felt when he looked into his eyes that he was far from being the weak character he appeared to be. That he was a man of strong passions and impulses, and not inclined to be overscrupulous.

"So you want to make a bargain with the police, eh?"

"You can put it in that light, if you please," replied Ellison, calmly.

"And if we refuse——"

"Why, then, you will have to find the man for yourself, that is all," and the other laughed, despite the superintendent's frowning face.

"What is the paper you wish to secure—you can speak to me in perfect confidence," said Barnes.

"I cannot tell you that."

"But if I demand that you tell me," for there was something about the manner of the man before him that roused his anger, and he was in a bad humor, anyway, that day.

"My answer would be the same," said Ellison, and as he said this he rose.

"Where are you going?" demanded the chief.

"Naturally, I was going home, since we cannot come to an arrangement."

"Who said we could not?" grumbling. "I merely wanted to find out all I could about the matter. Well, now, I must leave you to arrange a meeting with this fellow," and he made a grimace as if he did not like to think that the direction of the capture was to be taken out of his hands.

"Yes, I hope to perfect my arrangements so that he can be nabbed in a couple of days. When everything is fixed beyond the possibility of failure you shall hear from me."

"How very kind." The superintendent was talking to himself. Then, in a louder voice. "Well, I shall count on you. How do you mean to go about it? You know he is apt to show a vigorous fight. You will need help."

"I well know the desperate nature of the man from reputation. I shall ask you to post your men in the street. When I fire a pistol you can rush in. But the details can be arranged later. Now, it is too early in the day to think of everything."

"I shall be anxious until I hear from you," said the chief.

"For reasons it is unnecessary to mention I am quite as anxious as you that the affair should be terminated," and Ellison bowed and left the office.

"The deuce!" he exclaimed when he found himself in the street. "How Barnes did glare at me at times. I wonder if I have done well to put my head in the lion's mouth? Bah! the race is to the swift!" and with a careless laugh he went his way.

(To be continued.)

Chinese Conveyances.

The author of "Overland to China," in writing of his approach to Pekin, gives a graphic account of different carriages to be seen upon the way.

We begin to meet tinkling files of donkeys, evidently fresh from town; the little beasts pattering along resignedly, although often so much overtopped with Chinaman as to suggest the simile of "improper fraction."

Then a string of creaking wheelbarrows, pushed by perspiring coolies. The barrow resembles a miniature jaunting-car on a single wheel, and it is often used, especially in the south, for carrying passengers, farmer and pig sometimes balancing each other, one on either side. In the early Shanghai days English ladies are said to have used them when sedan-chairs were not to be had.

The wheelbarrows, employed in the north principally for goods, are occasionally to be seen with a rag of calico sail set. To them Milton may have referred when he wrote

"Where Chinese drive
With sailes and wind thir canie waggons light."

Too Effective.

The German proprietor of a sawmill in a Minnesota town used for fuel the refuse from the lumber. The fuel cost nothing, but it took four men to provide it, because the machinery was old-fashioned.

An agent for mill machinery persuaded the German to put in new equipment which would reduce the amount of fuel one-half. It looked like a good proposition, says the Duluth News-Tribune, and the agent, sure of success, called on the German after the machinery had been installed, expecting to be congratulated. But the German gave him a gloomy stare.

"What's the matter? Doesn't the machinery do all I claimed for it?" asked the agent.

"Ya, but I overlook sometings."

"What was that?"

"Vell, it dakes only dwo men to handle de fuel, but it dakes de udder dwo men to haul avay vat ve didn't use pefore, und a team pesides."

Different Now.

"Sadie, how are you getting along at school in your physiology?"

"All right, I guess."

"How many bones are there in the human body?"

"Two hundred."

"When I went to school, dear, there were 208."

"Well, people aren't as bony as they used to be when you went to school, mamma."—Chicago Tribune.

Upholsterers Needed.

Tambo—Mr. Banks, I see dat dey are going to send two tons of sawdust to England.

Interlocutor—Well, Tambo, why are they going to send two tons of sawdust to England?

Tambo—To upholster de thin peers dat's going to wear short pants at de coronation.

Very Suitable.

Smythe—No one has devised a special ping-pong costume as yet.

Pembleton—No, but if they do it should be a suit of overalls. After you chase the balls under every piece of furniture in the room you have enough dust on you to keep a whiskbroom busy for a week.

Practical View.

"They tell me your wife is inclined to be romantic," said the fool friend who is ever ready to butt in.

"Yes. I suppose that is what ails her," replied the victim of circumstances. "She sits and gazes into space for hours when she should be darning socks."—Chicago News.

Enjoyment.

Father—What is the use of my earning money if you spend it as fast as I can make it?

Son—That's all right, father. I enjoy spending it just as much as you do making it.—Brooklyn Life.

A Real Genius.

Blobbs—Harduppe is a pretty slick proposition, isn't he?

Slobbs—Slick? Why, I've seen him borrow money from a bill collector.—Philadelphia Record.

Information for Maude.

No, Maude, dear; when you buy eggs with the day of the month stamped on them it doesn't mean that the hens have been eating dates.—Philadelphia Record.

Its Origin.

Stubb—Great Scott, but those dental students have a terrible yell! Where did they get it?

Penn—They listened to some of their patients.

If They Only Would.

Biggs—I wonder where the flies go to in the winter?

Wiggs—I give it up, but I wish they'd spend their summers there, too.—Philadelphia Press.

Ladies' Night at the Lotos Club.

Ethel—Isn't he a grasping sort of chap?

Harold—Fierce! Why, he belongs to seventeen secret societies and knows forty-eight grasps.—Judge.

OUR BUDGET OF FUN.

HUMOROUS SAYINGS AND DOINGS HERE AND THERE.

Jokes and Jokelets that Are Supposed to Have Been Recently Born—Sayings and Doings that Are Old, Curious and Laughable—The Week's Humor.

"Oh, George," exclaimed the fair maid with the lemon-tinted bangs, as she accepted the bouquet, "what lovely flowers! And they look as if they had just been gathered, too. See, there is a little dew on them."

"Now, wouldn't that jar the filling out of one's back molars?" exclaimed George. "My dear girl, I paid 30 cents in good hard coin for those budlets, and I beg to assure you there isn't a cent due on them."—Chicago News.

Somewhat Different.

He (after buying the ring)—Were you ever in love before?

She—Well, not exactly. But I've been engaged to half a dozen men who really believed they were.

Neither One.

"I lost $50,000 on the Stock Exchange the other day."

"Were you a bull or a bear?"

"Neither. I was a donkey."—New York Journal.

Same Old Story.

"Say, pard, what put you on the bum?" asked one tramp of another.

"It's a short story," replied the other. "Once I was happy and tried to be rich. What is the answer in your case?"

"About the same," replied No. 1. "Once I was rich and tried to be happy."

Heard on the Lake Front.

He—My love for you, darling, is as deep and as pure as the lake at our feet.

She—Yes, and you are just as fresh.

Just Like a Woman.

"I picked this up in a pawnshop," said the head of the house as he proceeded to extract a piece of antique bronze from an old newspaper.

"Why, John," exclaimed the other half of the labor union, "how did you manage to swipe it without the pawnman seeing you?"

Inconsistency.

Some people compare the trouble of this world to a rainstorm, and then deliberately go out without an umbrella.

Appropriate.

Countryman—Please explain this here ship to me, sir.

Inventor—Don't say this here ship, my friend; say that air ship.

A Soiled City.

"And why don't you like living in New York?" asked the caller of little Johnnie.

"Oh, it's such a dirty city," replied Johnnie.

"That's true," admitted the lady.

"You bet," went on Johnnie; "why, sometimes I haf to have my face washed twice a day!"—Boston Post.

A Calldown.

Waiter—Any one take your order, sir?

Guest—Yes; the other waiter took it about an hour ago, but I forget whether I told him it was for this month or next."

Deadlock.

First Man (at summer resort)—Look here, sir, are you aware that I am engaged to that young lady you went out walking with this morning?

Second Man—Well, what of it? So am I.—New York Sun.

Real Rattled.

"Did you feel at all nervous when you got up to read your essay on 'The Essentials of the Essentially Essential' before that crowd?"

"Yes," the sweet girl graduate replied. "I was awfully upset. I had noticed just as I walked out upon the stage that my left shoe string was untied."

The Polite Passenger.

When the plainly dressed woman entered the crowded car all the young men were too busily engaged in reading their newspapers to notice her.

Seeing which, the somewhat elderly, but well-preserved bachelor near the door arose.

"Take this seat, madam," he said, touching his hat.

"Well, I should say not!" she replied indignantly. "You're old enough to be my grandfather. Keep it yourself."

Heroic Treatment.

"Sir," began the youth with the cerulean tie as he stood in the stern father's presence, "I dote on your daughter and——"

"And I will proceed to administer an antidote," interrupted the old man, as he proceeded to get his best foot in position for a swift kick.—Chicago News.

Good Guess.

"He is a terrible woman hater."

"Yes; I suspect that he must at some time have been a floorwalker in a department store."—Puck.

Pa's Idea of It.

Little Willie—Say, pa, what does this paper mean by "blood money?"

Pa—I suppose, my son, it means the money in circulation.—Chicago News.

Their Troubles.

Muggins—The trouble with my wife is that she doesn't understand me.

Buggins—The trouble with mine is that she does understand me.—Philadelphia Press.

One Agent Squelched.

Agent—I am agent, sir, for the Great American Universal Encyclopedia of History, Biography, Art, Science and Literature, comple in 200 vol——

Business Man—Don't need it. I married a Boston girl.—New York Weekly.

Bad Case.

Mr. Joblots—I suffer dreadfully from insomnia.

Physician—Overwork, perhaps.

Mr. Joblots—I think so. Why, I can't even go to sleep in church!—Somerville Journal.

Experience in Salting.

"Did you ever salt sheep?" asked the farmer of the new hired hand who came from Colorado.

"No," replied the n. h. h., "but I've had considerable experience in salting mines."—Ohio State Journal.

Why She Worried.

Chimmie—Wot'cher worryin' about, gal?

Maggie—O Chimmie! I wuz a-t'inking—s'posen yer marry me like yer've promised to—and take me ter Paris like yer say yer will—and load me down wit' gowns and jewels, like yer've sworn to—h-how am I ever goin'ter smuggle 'em t'roo' de custom house w'en we gits back?—Puck.

A Lesson in Etiquette.

The Caller—You are never naughty, are you?

Margery—Well, I shouldn't think you'd ask me that! Mamma says it isn't good manners to hurt people's feelings.—Puck.

The Judge's Fault.

Judge—How dare you curse like that in this court?

Weary—Didn't yez jes tell me ter swear?—Chicago American.

Perfectly Eligible.

St. Peter—Were you a member of any church?

Spirit—No; but I bought tickets for all the church suppers and strawberry festivals.

St. Peter—Come in.—Norristown Herald.

Second Appearance.

"This meat," protested the boarder, "is overdone."

"Not exactly it ain't," replied the new waitress. "It's done over. This is the same meat you had yesterday."—Philadelphia Press.

He Hadn't Time.

First Chauffeur—Did you notice that man we ran over back there?"

Second Chauffeur—No, did he apologize?—Ohio State Journal.

One and One Only.

"He has a picture of his sweetheart inside his watch."

"Indeed! Well, he looks so happy lately, I thought there must be a woman in the case."—Philadelphia Bulletin.

Just Cries.

"Wha tmakes the baby cry?" asked the little visitor.

"Oh," explained Ethel, "our baby doesn't have to have anything to make it cry."—Chicago Post.

As to Leather.

Mr. Newliwed—I met Hussel to-day. He's making money in the leather business now. He says there's nothing like leather, but he'll find he's mistaken.

Mrs. Newliwed—Did you ask him to come and see us?

Mr. Newliwed—That's what I was going to tell you. I asked him to come to dinner to-morrow, and I want you to make a pie.—Philadelphia Press.

Self-Evident.

Mrs. Whyte—Mrs. Black can see the town clock from her house so easily that she doesn't need to have a watch.

Mr. Whyte—No. All she needs to do is to keep a watch on the clock.—Somerville Journal.

Hereditary.

Uncle Hiram—So yew air in bizness up tew the city, air yew?

City Nephew—Yes, uncle.

Uncle Hiram—Whare 'bouts air yew located in the city?

City Nephew—My business is principally at the stock exchange.

Uncle Hiram—Wa'al, I'll swan! Yew peer tew be a chip offen the ole block. When yewr ole daddy wuz a young feller I 'low he wuz one uv the best hoss swappers in these here parts.

ORIGINAL SHERLOCK HOLMES.

Dr. Bell Exercises His "Power of Deduction" on a Deserter.

Now that Sherlock Holmes has appeared, this time in a long story, it is interesting to recall his original. This is Dr. Joseph Bell, who was one of Dr. Conan Doyle's medical instructors, in Edinburgh. Many anecdotes are told by his former pupils illustrating his powers of deduction. The latest is concerning a man who, evidently in great distress, walked into the hospital for treatment.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" asked Dr. Bell.

"I don't quite know, sir," replied the man.

"What's your business?"

"Cobbler, sir."

"Ever been anything else?"

"No, sir; I've been a cobbler all my life."

"Well, take him in and examine him. That," said Dr. Bell to his class, when the patient had been taken into the examination room, "is a very odd case. The man is a deserter from the Indian army. He knows perfectly well what's the trouble with him, but he's afraid to tell us for fear we'd know he contracted it in India. Yet he's in so much pain that he risks coming to us, trusting that we won't find out what's the matter with him, but still be able to relieve him without finding out. Strange case."

Just then the patient was brought back from the examination room.

"Well," said Dr. Bell, "did you find any bullet wounds or saber cuts on him?"

"Why, yes, sir," the doctor who had made the examination replied, in great surprise. "There were two bullet wounds and he had a long scar across his left shoulder."

Dr. Bell turned to the patient.

"This disease you have," he said, "was contracted in India while you were in the army. You left the army. Why didn't you go back?"

The man hung his head.

"Why did you say you'd been a cobbler all your life? Deserter, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," faltered the patient.

But that didn't surprise the class, says the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Dr. Bell was always correct in his deductions.

WATER RIGHTS INVIOLATE.

Springs and Wells in Palestine Are Protected by Severe Laws.

As in New Mexico and Arizona, water is the most precious thing in Palestine, and the laws which protect springs and wells are very severe. Most of the wells are artificial. Rich men at very great expense have chiseled basins and reservoirs out of the rocks to receive the flow from springs, and in many places where no springs could be found they have drilled through the limestone a hundred feet, and sometimes twice that distance, to the artesian basin. None but very rich sheiks can afford such an expenditure; nevertheless, they have not only been the greatest benefactors of their fellow men, but those who have sunk wells and built fountains have erected monuments to their fame more enduring than palaces or temples or shafts of granite, writes William E. Curtis in the Chicago Record-Herald. The Temple of Solomon has vanished forever, but the pools which he walled up with masonry and filled with water still remain. The wells that Abraham and Jacob drilled in the rock as acts of piety as well as power are as immortal as their names, and will live forever, as long as men feel thirst.

According to a just custom of the country, water rights could never be forfeited. No man who owned a well might refuse his neighbor water for his family or his flocks, but the lord of the spring was inviolate; no creditor or enemy could take his water rights away from him. To injure or fill up a well was an unpardonable crime. When the Philistines threw earth and stones into the well of Abraham they intended to challenge him to war of extermination. These customs and regulations remain to-day.

How High Birds Fly.

The height to which different birds attain in their flight has often been the subject of dispute, especially among sportsmen. From observations lately made in Germany it would appear that the highest flier, as has always been supposed, is the eagle. This bird was seen at a height of 3,000 yards.

Crows also fly very high, though not to be compared with the king of birds, the greatest heights at which aeronauts have encountered them being 1,400 yards. The lark, says London Country Life, which is usually supposed to reach great heights, in reality only soars to about 1,000 yards above the ground, while pigeons which were allowed to escape at altitudes between 900 yards and 3,000 yards quickly descended to lower regions of the air.

Could Not Speak English.

One of the most common faults among those who speak incorrectly is the misuse of English prepositions. "Different from" becomes "different to" in the popular speech of England, and, too often, "different than" in America. The New York Times mentions a queer juggling of prepositions, the achievement of two small boys.

"William," asked the teacher, "why were you absent from school this morning?"

"Oh, some 'un stole me coat on me."

"What's that? Stole your coat 'on you?'"

"Aw, he can't talk English," said William's brother James. "He means some 'un stole his coat off 'im."

When the officeholder loses his grip he does less handshaking.