

# THE VICTIM OF AMNESIA

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### The Dictum of Amnesia.

The sergeant peered over the tons of his steel-rimmed spectacles. He twisted the huge blotter around on the slanting desk before him, and dipped his pen in the inkwell.

His bushy eyebrows drew together in a portentous frown, which could not, however, entirely hide the good humor in his blue eyes.

"What's the charge against the prisoner?" he asked.

Officer McCarthy grinned. "There ain't none, sergeant Ryan."

"Ah, the gentleman dropped in for a little social relaxation? Or is he here to make complaint against someone else? Introduce us, Officer McCarthy."

"That's just it," said the policeman. "He don't know who he is."

Sergeant Ryan adjusted his glasses. He shifted in his chair that he might get a better view of McCarthy's companion. He saw a well-built man of medium height, with extremely

keen gray eyes. They were deep-set beneath a well-shaped forehead above which grew black hair that was as straight as an Indian's. Indeed, the sharp-edged, high-bridged nose, and the high cheek-bone bore out the impression that here was some one in whose veins ran the blood of the American aborigines.

His mouth, though wide enough for good humor, was thin-lipped. His chin was bony and aggressive. And his skin had that leathery look which comes to those who live and labor out-of-doors.

But his clothing seemed to have nothing to do with the plains or hills from which he might reasonably have been assumed to come. For an expert tailor had cut the blue flannel lounge suit which he wore; an English tailor, Sergeant Ryan decided.

And the slightly brooked low tan shoes could have come from the British Isles. The hat which swung from his hand was a gray felt of delicate and expensive texture. His scarf was a golden brown, and beneath it Ryan could see a shirt of soft fine linen.

The sergeant added the face and the clothing together and reached the sum "wealthy sportsman, English."

"So you don't know your name?" he said wonderingly.

The stranger laughed embarrassedly. "Sounds jolly rot, doesn't it?"

Sergeant Ryan mentally complimented his own shrewdness. He had guessed the man's nationality correctly, for his accent was indisputably British.

"Well, it does seem strange for a young fellow in the pink of condition like you seem to be, to forget who he is. You talk like an Englishman. I don't know how it is in dear old Lunnnon, but it ain't exactly healthy to spoof the police over here. Not in my precinct, anyway. So, just out of the kindness of my great big generous heart, I'm telling you that if you came here for a laugh you picked the wrong spot."

The stranger smiled deprecatingly. "If there is any laugh in this, it's on me, not you. I assure you, I never felt less like laughing in my life."

"Well, it's a tough position you're in, young man," he said. "It'd give me the willies."

"It makes me feel a little gawny," said the young man.

"Gawny? Now, that's a new one on me. Does it mean the willies?"

The stranger smiled. "Something like that, I imagine."

"Well, I don't blame you," said the sergeant. "But suppose you tell me the whole story."

The stranger shrugged his well-knit shoulders. "There's very little to tell. I suddenly found myself walking on a broad avenue along the edge of a park. I don't know how I got there, where it was, or who I was." He smiled rather winningly. "It's a dreadful sensation."

"I believe you," declared the sergeant with emphasis. "You don't suppose you'd been drinking a little bootleg liquor? It does strange things to people, you know."

"Now, that's a funny thing," replied the stranger. "While I don't know my name, or where I come from, I do remember many things. For instance, I know that I never drink, and smoke only occasionally. No, it wasn't liquor."

"What did you do when you found out your memory'd gone?" asked the sergeant.

The stranger looked embarrassed. "Well, at first I went into a state of panic. Then I said to myself, 'Look here, old man, this will never do. Won't get you anywhere except completely gawny.'"

"That 'gawny' is a grand word," commented the sergeant. "Go on."

"Well, across the park I could see tall buildings, bigger than anything that I'd ever seen in London."

"You remember London then?" interrupted the sergeant.

"I seem to know somehow, that London is my home. But where I lived there, I couldn't possibly tell you. Also, I remember Paris and Brussels and the Riviera and Rome quite as well as I remember London."

"Dolly-voo Francis?" asked the sergeant.

"Ah, oui, Monsieur. Mais je ne suis pas Francis. No, I'm not French. I'm English."

The sergeant nodded. "I believe you, go on."

"Well, I looked for a sign, and discovered that I was on Fifth avenue. But after two hours I hadn't learned anything about myself. I couldn't go back of the moment when I found myself strolling on Fifth avenue. And so, finally, seeing this officer here, I walked up to him and explained my predicament. He advised me to come to see you. He said that you were not merely his superior officer, but a man of science."

Sergeant Ryan cast a glance of approval at Officer McCarthy. The latter hid a grin. He felt that he would be a roundsman soon if Sergeant Ryan's influence had any weight.

been under some heavy strain. You don't look as though you'd been sick."

"I feel fine," said the stranger. "I can't believe that I've been under any strain."

The sergeant shrugged. "Maybe—Sometimes a blow on the head—Are you hurt anywhere?"

The stranger shook his head.

"Have you any money?"

The young man pulled out a purse. From it he took several hundred dollars.

"Don't seem as though you've been robbed," said Ryan. "You haven't looked through your clothes?"

He greeted the Englishman courteously, and when Ryan had explained his presence, his protruding eyes looked interestedly at his new patient, and not without kindness or its close similes.

"Strip," said Conkling. The Englishman obeyed him. Twenty minutes later his physician ordered him to put on his clothes. While he was doing so, and for an hour thereafter, Conkling questioned him on every conceivable subject. At the end of

that time he confessed himself baffled.

"You're in a most unusual case. Ordinarily, in cases of amnesia or amnesia, there are abnormal symptoms that go along with the disease itself. But in your case there is absolutely nothing save the fact that you have forgotten your identity. I have questioned you in every possible way of which I can think. But none of those questions seems to strike a note upon the chords of memory. Physically, you are in perfect condition. Mentally, aside from this blank spot in your brain, you are one of the most alertly intelligent patients I have ever examined. I imagine that we must publish discreet advertisements, hoping in that way to find your family. The sight of your father, or a brother or sister, or even an ordinary acquaintance, would probably do more for you than all the medical treatment in the world."

"What reason do you assign for my condition?" asked the patient.

Dr. Conkling shrugged his massive shoulders. "A great grief, a prolonged mental strain, the after-effects of a severe illness, or a blow would induce your condition. That is why I'm puzzled. Your physical condition indicates absolutely that you have suffered none of these, except possibly a blow."

"But you can't find even the slightest trace of a blow upon me," objected the Englishman.

"That is true," admitted the physician. "But the blow might have been suffered a long time ago, and its effect be felt only now. You have nothing to worry about. I assure you that the trouble will go no deeper than it lies now. Unless my entire professional experience is at fault, your condition, if it changes in any way, will do so for the better."

"That's not very encouraging, is it?" commented the Englishman.

"I can't work miracles," said Conkling. "If you were highly nervous, or if your physical condition were bad, I would not hesitate to recommend an operation. Somewhere in the skull a piece of bone is pressing upon your brain. But, without knowing where the spot is—its approximate position—we would have to rely entirely upon X-rays. I would not care to do so in the case of a perfectly healthy man."

"Then you can do nothing for me?" asked the patient.

"I suggest that you advertise," said the doctor.

The patient started at him. "What sort of a man would you take me to be, doctor?"

"You mean your character?" asked the doctor.

"Exactly," said the Englishman.

Conkling's eyes half-closed themselves behind lids whose venous redness lent a terrifying aspect to his countenance.

"Your features would indicate that you are a man of imagination and recklessness. Your body bears two scars. Either or both might have been wounds received during the war. Unquestionably you were of military rank. My friend might have been received in barracks of one sort or another. My only reason for thinking this latter is the fact that your right hand has been broken in two places. They are exactly the sort of breaks that might have been caused by the delivery of a blow by the hand. Your eyes are greatly out of doors. I should sum up by saying that you probably have an adventurous and reckless nature."

"But my morals, doctor?"

Conkling lifted his lids. "I would say, my friend, that you are not a man scrupulous in the ordinary sense of the word."

not constructive. But his manner, bland and soothing, asserted better with his profession than his appearance.

The Englishman nodded. "That's what I'm getting at, doctor. Suppose that advertising for my friends should bring me enemies?"

"You are not speaking at random," said the doctor.

"I don't know what I'm driving at," was the other's reply. "I only know that I woke up last night, thrived to the door of my room, opened it, and found myself trying the door of the room next to mine. I wasn't walking in my sleep; I was wide awake. I intended to rob that next room. Now, I know that is wrong. I may not have been a thief before I lost my memory. But how do I know? Wouldn't it be better for me to abandon any effort to re-establish myself under my own name? Might it not be possible that I would find the police waiting for the owner of that name?"

Conkling ceased his drumming. "You have, of course, no plans. And you interest me. You are a rare type. A man of evident culture who is apparently completely normal. I believe that I would be overlooking a scientific opportunity if I did not keep you near me. I have need of a sort of secretary-companion. The pay will be ample for your needs. You will live here with me. As you work for me you will also be under my medical observation. What do you say?"

"I may be the most vicious criminal at large; I may be a murderer," objected the Englishman.

The physician smiled, exposing great white teeth, sharp like those of some carnivorous animal.

"You are an extremely well-built young man," he said. "But though I am at least twenty years older, I

The duties of McFarlane were not at all onerous. They consisted for the most part in accompanying the doctor on long walks after office hours, and in affording an audience to the physician in the evening when he ordinarily played the violin for a couple of hours. The new secretary had plenty of leisure and he improved it in an odd fashion.

He studied the habits of the whole household. He learned what servants were light sleepers, what they did on their nights off, at what hours they were expected to return. Also, he learned by heart the plans of each floor. And he took it upon himself to oil certain locks and hinges that had a habit of squeaking. And exactly three weeks after his entrance into the Conkling household he crept, at two o'clock in the morning, into the bedroom where his employer slept. With an uncanny deftness he took a bunch of keys from the pair of trousers which Conkling had hung over the back of a chair. Kneeling before a house-safes in one corner of the bedroom, he opened it. He had abstracted a great wad of bills when a slight noise from the bed made him turn. His employer was awake.

He leaped for the door; Conkling intercepted him. The two bodies dashed with a noise that woke the household. Savagely McFarlane tried to break the grip of the giant who had grappled with him. Working free, he struck his employer a half-dozen triphammer blows in the face. The physician shook them off, his great arm circled through the air, his fist collided with McFarlane's jaw, and the secretary went to the floor completely knocked out.

He awakened some time later to find himself seated in an arm-chair, his feet and hands bound, while before him, drinking coffee from a cup that stood upon a table, sat Conkling. The physician grinned, he seemed, in his pajamas, with his hair and beard awry from the recent struggle, like some great hairy ape.

"Feeling better?" he asked cheerfully.

"What are you going to do with me?" demanded McFarlane.

"The doctor's grin grew broader. "The butler, his wife, who is the parlor maid, the cook and myself are all witnesses to your attempt at robbery and your assault upon me. What do you think I'm going to do?"

"Send for the police, I suppose," said McFarlane hoarsely.

Conkling set his coffee-cup down. "You interested me from the moment you came here. My interest has been increased by your activities of the past week. It was a touch of positive genius, oiling the doors."

"You knew that?" cried McFarlane.

"Certainly. Exactly as I knew why you were questioning the servants. You thought the cook and the butler would be out tonight, didn't you?"

"Why didn't you discharge me, let me go, when you knew what I planned?" demanded McFarlane.

The doctor shrugged. "Wherever you went you would be a criminal."

"What can I say, except that I am extremely grateful," replied the Englishman.

"You are very frank," said the doctor.

"A doctor's office is like a confessional, isn't it?" retorted the patient.

"This one is," said Conkling grimly. "But I have told you that I would not risk an operation."

"And I'm not sure that I'd consent to one," said the patient. "I'd like to know who I am, but I'd like to find out quietly. I don't want to stir up any hornet's nest."

"You are a very remarkable man," said Conkling. "May I ask what you intend to do when you leave this office?"

"I would back myself in any contest of skill or strength with you. For your own sake, I would advise you to restrain any homicidal impulses toward me."

The Englishman grinned. "I was only suggesting something."

"I was making more than a suggestion; I was uttering a warning," rejoined Conkling. "What do you plan?"

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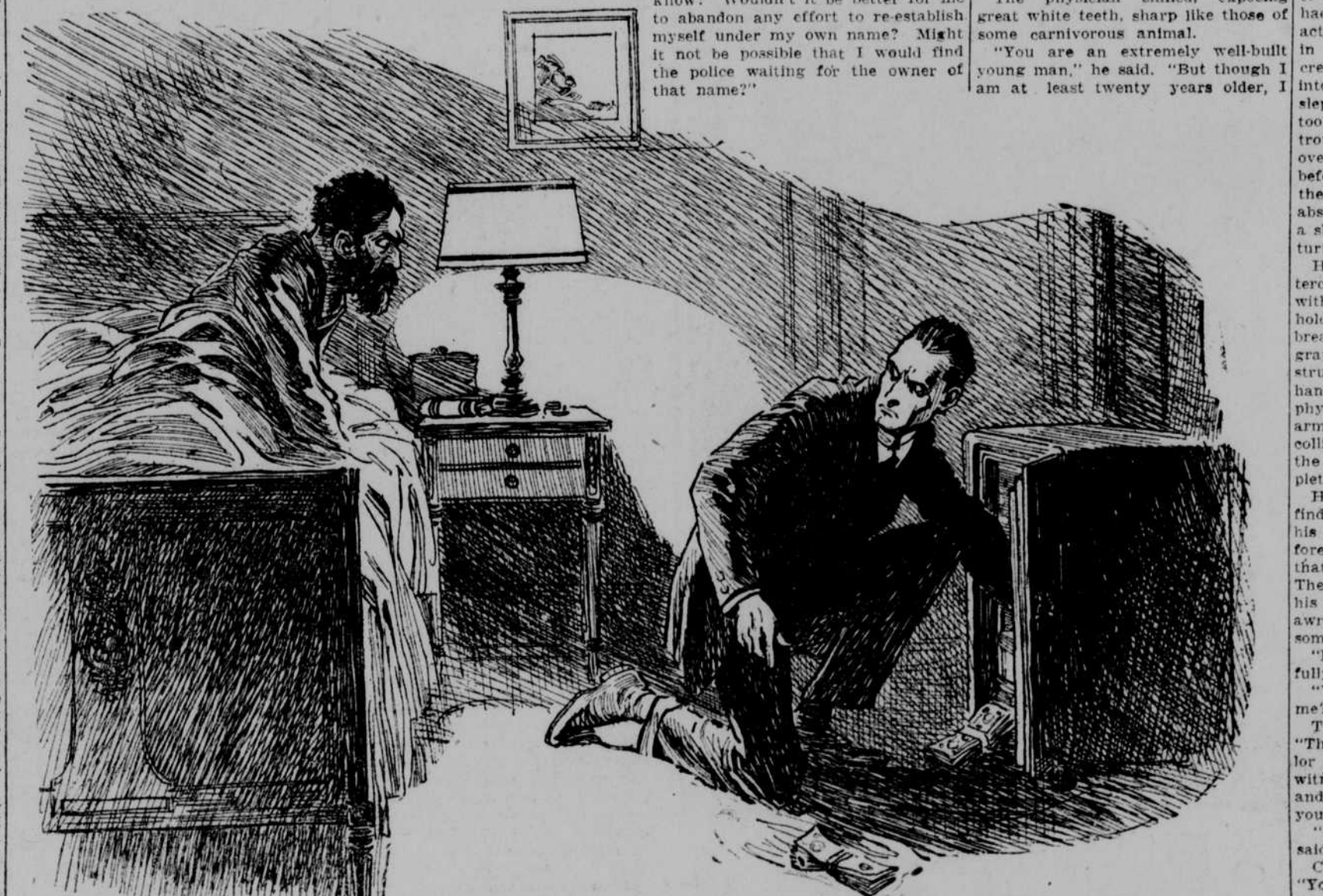
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"So you don't know your name?"

"Heaven knows. I have nearly five hundred dollars. After that's gone— I have no trade, no profession, no means of earning a livelihood, and no friends."

Dr. Conkling drummed upon his desk with great spatulate fingers.

"You interest me," he said at last. "I gather that you do not look with equanimity upon the prospect of starvation."

"You're exactly right," said the other. "According to what little I've found out about myself in the last 14 hours or so, your diagnosis of my case, my friend, that you are not a man scrupulous in the ordinary sense of the word."

"It is settled then. One of the servants will show you your quarters. You will dine with me. Your other meals you will take in your room. You will be paid fifty dollars a week. I will explain your duties in a few days. In the meantime, I would suggest that you familiarize yourself with the city. That will be all for now."

He made a gesture of dismissal, then called the patient back.

"Oh, I can't call you 'you' all the time. Have you any choice of names?"

The Englishman shook his head.

"I'll call you, then, McFarlane. Philip McFarlane. That will be all, McFarlane."

way McFarlane bought some papers from a newsboy. It looked all right, but Deegan followed the boy. He says that the boy went to Madison Avenue, stepped in a taxi and drove to the offices of the Holland detective agency."

McFarlane was standing by a window; he backed into the embrasure his left hand shattered the glass, and his right raised a revolver. Conkling broke his silence.

"Clever, exceedingly clever, the whole business, especially taking all the boy's newspapers. I suppose that meant that we'd all be here tonight."

McFarlane bowed. "Your deductions do you credit, Doctor?"

"And you are young Holland, son of the founder of the agency, eh? The young man who was supposed to have served the cattle business in South America."

McFarlane bowed again. "You are a brilliant man, Doctor, and it was necessary to take elaborate precautions."

Conkling sighed. "You would have been so admirable an asset to us. It is too bad."

His mild speech had been assumed to hide his almost insane wrath. That he could think with calm cunning at such a moment proved his marvelous self-control. He received the young man standing in the window. For when Conkling drew a revolver, McFarlane thought that he intended to use it against his captor.

He ordered Conkling to drop his weapon. The doctor never raised it. He simply pressed the trigger as the muzzle pointed stantly downward. The bullet hit, McFarlane later discovered, the electric light switch in the wall, the box-like closet where were the fuses that regulated the lighting of the house. The room was plunged into darkness. And in that darkness the mischievous genius who headed the Malbrun gang, who had foreseen this or a similar situation, and knew exactly how to meet it, escaped. The rest were captured. For as the shot sounded, detectives in the street broke down the outer door, and Conkling's associates surrendered without a struggle.

But it was a barren victory. For while Conkling kept his freedom the Malbrun gang could be reorganized and led into new degradation.

"Son," said the elder Holland that night, "I'm going to retire. You were right and I was wrong. You said that the Malbrun gang must be composed of men unique in criminal annals. You were right. I thought you were bizarre in your methods, and mad to suspect a man like Conkling. But you've proved your case. I wish that Conkling had been captured. I'd like to talk to him. What would you have done if he had wanted to operate on you for your mental trouble?"

Young Holland laughed. "A perfectly good example of an Englishman suffering from amnesia would have been transformed instantly into a Yankee detective, dad."

Old Holland shook his head. "The world is filled with madness. Old police methods will not avail against the brilliant minds that have gone in for crime. What next, son?"

The younger man shrugged. "Sleep," he said emphatically. "I've been on my guard for three weeks. Tonight I sleep without fear of talking in my slumber, and betraying myself to a watching and listening man of genius."

"I think I can," replied McFarlane boldly. "For instance, your idea of deceiving the police in the neighborhood away from the scene, is not feasible."

The servant who had admitted McFarlane and Conkling to the house, entered the room without knocking, with the appearance of great haste.

"Deegan has just telephoned. He says that he followed Dr. Conkling and McFarlane to the house. On the

## Tanlac puts flesh on scrawny folks

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