

# OUR GOVERNMENT ORDERS

# True Tales of the SECRET SERVICE By an Ex-Operative

## NO. 10. "THE GLASS-HEADED PIN"

EDITED BY WM. J. BACON

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"WHAT do I consider the most important things to notice when first investigating a crime?"

Captain Dickson, a retired secret service officer, had repeated the words of my question. We sat beside the open window of his library and watched the white smoke from our pipes drift out into the summer night.

After some moments of thought, he replied:

"Well from my own experience, it has become a fixed conviction with me that no crime is ever committed where the criminal fails to leave behind some clue. That, if it is only found and its worth appreciated, will invariably lead to the detection of the culprit. I remember a case that never would have been cleared up, probably, if it had not been for a pin which I found in the crack between two planks of the floor. Therefore, in answer to your question, I will say that I consider the insignificant things that generally escape notice the most important to search for wherever a crime has been committed.

"I have a case in mind, a postoffice robbery. It happened when I was connected with that Department, before I was transferred to the broader field of the secret service. I will never forget the village where it occurred. It was a town of some 300 or 400 souls in the Green Mountains. It had only one hotel, and in three weeks that I was detained there I almost destroyed my digestion endeavoring to support life on its abominable fare. I believe that I felt a keener satisfaction in the royal meal I secured at Boston, on my return to Washington, than I did in capturing the author of the robbery."

"The postoffice safe had been tapped for a large quantity of stamps, about \$50 in money and a brand new money-order book. This was of great importance to the case, because a book of money-order blanks in the hands of a clever crook can cause the Government more trouble than a session of Congress.

"The safe was a crude iron affair which was fastened by means of a clumsy brass key. The key was too large and too heavy to be lugged about, and after the safe was locked it was hid away in a corner of the cash-drawer. A peculiar circumstance of the robbery was that the safe had been found locked and the key was in its place of concealment. The culprit had possessed an intimate knowledge of the habits of the postmaster and his assistant, Miss Lundy, a young woman of fine appearance and charming personality.

"Mason, the postmaster, had a theory that the tramps had committed the theft. He said that two suspicious characters had come into the office the afternoon before the robbery and had bought five 2-cent stamps. He considered this a suspicious circumstance, as he said that persons of their type always bought stamped envelopes—no more than that needed at the time—and that they always mailed their letters before leaving the office, addressing them with the dilapidated pen maintained by the post-office at all country offices for victims who have no alternative than to use it.

"At the back of the building, a window-glass had been broken and the fragments especially directed my attention to it, as he said it must have been by this means that the robbers gained entrance to the building. All of the doors had been securely locked.

"The windows were without shutters, and they were fastened by means of a click set diagonally across the upper sash and resting on the lower one, a device commonly employed in country towns where weights have not come into use.

"Mason displayed entirely too much nervousness in his conversation, and it was evident that he was anxious to impress me with his theory of the case. I began to form a vague suspicion of him at the very outset. A circumstance that strengthened it was the fact that the window had been broken by some one inside the building. The fragments of glass lay scattered upon the ground just in front of the window. Mason assured me that they had not been disturbed. The most careless observer could not fail to see that the window had been broken from within. All the fragments had fallen outside and there was not a particle of glass on the floor of the office.

"I didn't let Mason suspect my doubt of him, but, on the contrary, took particular pains to impress him with the belief that I had perfect confidence in his theory and that I would immediately set about following the clue that he had furnished. Nevertheless, I made a minute examination of the premises, and the only thing I found was a small steel pin with a green glass head. It was in a crack of the floor immediately in front of the rifed safe. Without attracting attention, I secured the pin and stuck it beneath the label

of my coat. I thought it might prove of value. It did. It was the key to the situation.

"My examination showed that the robbers had entered the postoffice through the front door and that the broken window was merely a blind or else it had been broken by accident. I didn't take much stock in this last theory, but put the window down as a deliberate effort to muddy the water. There were two doors, a front and a back one. The rear one was kept locked and the key to it hung on a nail in the office. Only Mason and Miss Lundy had keys to the front door.

"I now set about learning where Mason and Miss Lundy had been on the night of the robbery and also to sift out the matter of the two tramps. It didn't take much work to establish to my own satisfaction that Mason had deliberately deceived me about the tramps. I questioned many persons and none had seen them, although several loafers had been on the porch of the general store next door at the very time that Mason said the men had visited the office. Tramps were rare in the village and I knew that a town as that without attracting attention than could two white elephants. This made things look a bit bad for Mason.

"It was not so easy to trace Mason and the young lady on that evening. After some considerable work I learned that neither of them had been at home the early part of that particular evening. No one knew where they had been nor what they had done during that period. Mason had left his home and Miss Lundy her boarding-house early in the afternoon on that night on the pretext of taking a walk. Mason had returned sometime after midnight. The hour of Miss Lundy's return was uncertain.

"Already sorely puzzled over the evidence which was accumulating, one morning, upon arising, I was more than ever mystified by finding a slip of paper under the door of my room. In a sprawling, ungrammatical hand, four words were written upon it:

"Mason robbed the safe."

"When I visited the postoffice, I noticed that Mason was pale and haggard and he was as nervous as a caged leopard."

"When I went to the hotel at noon, I found a tiny note on the table in my room. It was a dainty, perfumed bit of paper, just the kind that refined young ladies employ in their polite correspondence. I jumped to the conclusion that it must be a further message of the same character as the morning's note. It was, but there was a decided conflict in the news it contained. In a cramped, disguised writing, evidently a woman's, were these two words:

"Miss Lundy is the robber."

"Frankly, I didn't know what to think. Suspicion and these mysterious notes pointed to the postmaster and his hand-picked assistant. The letters were written by different persons and it was easy to imagine that Mason and the young lady had robbed the safe and that such a person as she left the building; that these persons were a woman and a man and that they had taken the stamps to advise me of what they had seen by means of the brief, unsigned notes. And yet, I couldn't entirely bring my mind to accept the theory. I liked Mason on the short acquaintance and in spite of the short, suspicious circumstances which pointed to him. He was a fine fellow and a man of chivalrous instincts, as was shown by the courteous demeanor he invariably exhibited toward his pretty assistant, Miss Lundy, too, didn't seem like a criminal. She was far too wholesome and natural and frank and sweet.

"The situation puzzled me more than ever and I didn't fall asleep until late that night, having tossed away many restless hours upon the instrument of torture which did service for a bed in the stuffy room of the hotel. Involuntarily, next morning, I glanced at the crack beneath the door as soon as my eyes opened. It was there, a third note, on the same paper, in the same hand and of the same purport as that of the morning before. The only change was in the wording of it.

"Why don't you arrest Mason? He robbed the postoffice. Ask him if he didn't break the window-glass. He won't deny it."

"I worried through the morning somehow, never trusting myself to show up at the postoffice. At noon I was forced to go back to the hotel, as it was the only place of public entertainment in the village. I heard straight for my room, expecting to find a fourth note on the table. I was not disappointed, for there it was, as big as life, the exact counterpart of the day before:

"Miss Lundy is the robber."

"Here was a pretty kettle of fish. Persistent informers were implicating two separate persons, either of whom from the unsatisfactory evidence then secured,



"SHE DIDN'T DO IT, CAPTAIN DICKSON—I ALONE AM GUILTY."

might have been the thief. I didn't eat a morsel of the meal that was placed before me, strewed about my plate like the cards in some curious game of solitaire. "I questioned the proprietor and his servants about the hotel, but none of them knew anything about the notes, nor had they seen any person enter my room. This was what I feared, and it was not strange, either, for the hotel was the most public place in the village and any one of a hundred people could have entered my room, deposited the notes and never have attracted the slightest attention.

"More than ever puzzled, I strolled over to the postoffice after lunch. Mason was there and alone. Miss Lundy had not returned from her dinner. The postmaster's face was piteous to behold. He shrank from me as I greeted him and put his hands over his face. His hands shook like a man's with the palsy. Before I could find a seat he arose and went into his private office, beckoning me to follow.

"I seated myself and watched with patience while he strode back and forth across the limited space of the office. Suddenly he stopped squarely before me, and, bracing himself with a painful effort, blurted out a jumble of words, confessing that he had robbed the safe. I was struck all of a heap, but never for an instant did I believe him. There was something about the very language of his incoherent confession and his manner in making it that told me that Mason was not the thief.

"See here, Mason," I answered, when he paused as if he had completed what

he intended saying, "you'll have to give me something more substantial than your confession before I will believe what you have just said. I don't really think you did the job, although I am satisfied that you broke that window to draw suspicion from the real criminal, and although I know that you deceived me about the two tramps."

"I did it, I tell you, and I shall be convicted of it. I can't restore the stamps and the money-order book because I have destroyed them, but here is the money, every penny of it."

"He threw a roll of bills in my lap and continued:

"My confession is sufficient to convict upon. I will repeat it in court and I want you to arrest me and get me away from here just as soon as you can."

"At this juncture the depot-agent entered the office with a telegram for me. It was from the department. Taking out my code book, I translated it in a moment and the contents of it, in the light of Mason's confession, was nothing less than unerring.

"Without a word I wrote the message out and passed it over to Mason:

"Money orders being passed Waco and other Texas towns.

"What does it mean?" he cried.

"Before I could answer him Miss Lundy came into the office. With a woman's intuition she saw that something was wrong. A look of terror, which smote me to the heart, swept over her face. She sprang forward and stepped between Mason and me, who stood staring at each other like wooden images.

"What is it?" she pleaded.

"I have confessed to robbing the postoffice," Mason replied in a voice that was utterly devoid of hope.

"Oh, Captain Dickson," she sobbed, "don't believe him. He didn't have a thing to do with it. I did it myself. The money is in my trunk. I have burnt the stamps and the money-order book."

"She didn't do it, Captain Dickson," ranted Mason, like a man demented. "She's lying. I could answer him Miss Lundy came into the office. With a woman's intuition she saw that something was wrong. A look of terror, which smote me to the heart, swept over her face. She sprang forward and stepped between Mason and me, who stood staring at each other like wooden images.

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