

# OUR STORY TELLER



## STORY OF A \* \* \* \* \* \* \* KLEPTOMANIAC.

A detective runs across a lot of queer things in his life, and somehow the queerest never find their way into the newspapers. It is difficult to say why; perhaps it is because they are too queer. For instance, I doubt if you have ever heard of a certain strange incident that happened only a season or two ago in that select section of the fashionable world known as "society."

A leader of fashion, Mrs. Register, requested me to call on her one morning when the season was at its height.

"I want your help, Mr. Lowe," she began, and then stopped awkwardly. "Perhaps you are not aware that at several balls and dinner parties this season there have been jewels and ornaments stolen. It has, of course, caused a great deal of unpleasantness. In several cases trinkets have even been actually taken from the wearers, without their knowing how it was done or who did it."

I had heard several wild tales of articles having been missed at fashionable gatherings, and there was much speculation as to who was the culprit. The articles were not, as a rule, of immense value, and they always disappeared singly, consequently no public notice had been directed to the matter. In one or two cases the police had been consulted, but it was impossible for them to help. There could be no doubt that the thief was a person who mixed in society as an equal; probably a woman, who had allowed her love of jewelry to tempt her to dishonesty.

"I presume, then, that the—er—thief is a guest—a person in society?" I said, inquiringly.

"I am afraid so. Two or three things were missed at a dance which I gave last week. Now, I am giving another dance next Thursday, and I am, of course, most anxious it should not occur again, at any rate in my house. I thought I would engage your services for the evening, to see if you detect anything suspicious. Of course, you would be treated as a guest."

We made arrangements about terms, and it was agreed that I should be introduced as an Englishman, by name Captain Burke.

"I suppose, Mrs. Register," I said, carelessly, "you don't suspect anybody in particular?"

"Oh, no," she said, but I noticed what I thought was a look of anxiety on her face, and made a mental note of it.

As I was leaving, Mrs. Register said: "Of course, Mr. Lowe, you quite understand, there must be no expose. If you make any discoveries, they must be treated as secrets. I can't have a scene of any kind. It must be hushed up."

I returned to the office impressed with two ideas. First, that my task was one of those delicate cases that require all your tact and yield very little credit; secondly, that Mrs. Register knew more, or, at any rate, guessed more, than she cared to tell.

Thursday evening arrived, and I went to the Register mansion. Practically, my duty was to mingle with the guests, enjoy myself, and keep my eyes wide open. Nothing seemed to me more improbable than that there should be a thief among the brilliant throng that crowded the rooms. Everything was conducted in the most luxurious style, a Hungarian band discoursed the sweetest of dance music, and the guests were among the highest in the land.

For a while nothing occurred of the smallest significance. But at about two o'clock in the morning, while I was sitting in a snug corner of the conservatory, where cigarette smoking was permitted, I noticed a couple take up a position in the opposite corner. They were both young, and evidently very much in love with one another. The girl was handsomely dressed, and wore some valuable jewels. In particular I noticed a pair of diamond ear-drops, which had just come into fashion again. Without being a connoisseur of precious stones, I understand them well enough to know that these were very valuable indeed, and likely to be worth several hundred dollars.

These two young people were sitting out during a dance, and they flirted all through a set of lancers, without any impatience at their length.

At last they got up and went into the ball-room again. On the chair, where the girl had been sitting, lay something shining. I strolled across and examined it. It was her vinaigrette, which she had probably left there by accident. I replaced it, thinking it might serve as a trap for our fashionable thief, if he were in the neighborhood, and withdrew to my corner, where I was almost invisible.

Presently an old gentleman strolled out to smoke a cigarette. He was a tall, handsome, intellectual-looking man, with the air of the true aristocrat. His name I didn't know, but I had noticed him chatting with the guests. He was evidently known to everyone, and was a man of social importance.

Presently his eye caught the little jeweled vinaigrette. He looked carelessly round the conservatory, to see if he was observed, and picked it up. He now had his back to me. I was on the point of stepping up to him, when he turned round, and replaced the vinaigrette and walked quietly away.

It was lucky I had not moved. I should have looked rather foolish. Some curious instinct bade me cross the conservatory, and look at the vinaigrette again. Without thinking about it, I put it to my nose.

The next thing I remember is, that I found myself sitting in a chair. Gradually, things became clearer. The vinaigrette lay by my side. It was drugged. For a few minutes I had lost consciousness. I still felt dizzy and sick, but knowing that everything depended on my being prompt and acute, I managed with an effort to pull myself together.

Then arose the question, What should I do next? Should I go straight to the man who had tampered with the vinaigrette? A moment's thought showed me that that would be worse than useless. I had no proof of anything. The situation must be allowed to develop itself before I interfered.

After some little reflection, I decided to go back to the drawing-room, where I could see what was going on. Under any circumstances I must not lose sight of the girl to whom the vinaigrette belonged.

For nearly half an hour I waited in vain. She danced with two or three different men, but did not seem to have missed it.

At last, after one of the dances, she appeared to be looking for something. With what was, I presume, an apology to her partner, she skipped across the room to a group of girls. Evidently she was asking if any of them had seen her vinaigrette. For some time she got no information, but presently a girl who was passing, leaning on a man's arm, turned round and made some remark, pointing with her fan to the conservatory door. The owner of the vinaigrette gave a little nod of thanks, and hurried across the room.

All this time I observed that the man who had drugged the scent bottle, and who was chatting with some of the people standing about watched the girl closely.

As soon as she had left the drawing-room he broke off his conversation, and strolled quietly toward the conservatory. As he passed through the curtains I noticed that he glanced around to see if he were being followed.

That settled it; I had found my man, and must act promptly. Mrs. Register was standing near the piano. Remembering her injunction that there was not, under any circumstances, to be an expose or a scene, it was necessary to proceed with caution. I caught her eye without much difficulty. She understood at once that I had something to say, and disengaged herself from her friends.

"Will you come with me to the conservatory?" I said, quietly. "I believe I have solved the mystery."

She turned pale. "Very well," she said. "Give me your arm. Be careful what you do, Mr. Lowe," she added, in a troubled voice; "it must be hushed up."

When we reached the conservatory we found, just as I expected, the young lady lying back in a chair unconscious. Her ear drops were missing.

"Miss Benton has fainted," said Mrs. Register.

"One moment," I said; "there is no cause for alarm. Do you see what has happened? Her diamond ear-drops have disappeared."

"Do you know who it is?" she whispered.

"Yes. Her vinaigrette has been drugged—not sufficiently to do her any harm. I saw it done."

"What shall I do? Fetch General Register, will you? He must advise me."

"Which is General Register?"

She came to the curtains and pointed him out to me.

"Very well," I said. "Chafe Miss Benton's hands, and try to bring her round, but don't send for any help at present."

I don't think I ever felt so reluctant to proceed with a case as I did at that minute. The man whom Mrs. Register had pointed out as her husband was the man who had drugged the vinaigrette—who had followed Miss Benton into the conservatory. In a word, General Register was a kleptomaniac.

"Will you come with me into the conservatory, General?" I said. As I spoke I looked him sternly in the face. He turned deadly white, and his eyes shifted nervously about the room.

"What's the matter?" he said, huskily. "Is anything wrong?"

"Miss Benton has fainted."

"Oh," he murmured with relief.

"And her ear-drops have disappeared," I added. For a moment I thought he was going to drop down. I put my arm through his, and led him toward the conservatory. He was trembling like a leaf.

When we got well into the shadow of the curtains I stopped. "General Register," I said, quietly, "take my advice, and give them up to me at once."

"What do you mean?" he said, hoarsely.

"The ear-drops. It will prevent a scene."

He put a trembling hand into the breast pocket of his dress coat and gave me the ear-drops. He did it like a man in a dream, and I really believe that for the time being he was unconscious. Then he turned away and left the drawing-room hurriedly.

"Will he not come?" said Mrs. Register, with an awful look of terror in her eyes.

"General Register is not well," I replied. "Here are the ear-drops."

The poor woman went scarlet. She knew what I meant, and I was deeply grieved for her. From the first she must have had a faint suspicion of the truth, and was anxious to save him from public disgrace and scandal.

She was thoroughly unnerved. Miss Benton showed signs of returning consciousness.

"Now," I said, "put the ear-drops back into her ears. She won't know what has happened."

Mrs. Register replaced them with trembling fingers.

"Send someone to look after this girl; I'll stop with her till help comes. But you must go and find your husband. Make haste," I added, significantly, "or you will be too late."

My work was not quite over. When Mrs. Register found her husband in his dressing-room he was, as I feared, on the point of committing suicide. She saved him. A number of trinkets, some of great value, were found in his safe. There is, of course, only one explanation. On that point the General was mad. There was no object in his stealing ladies' ornaments, as he is a very wealthy man, and had not put them to any use.

There was not much difficulty in finding their respective owners. I returned them myself, asking each one as a matter of courtesy to make no inquiries as to how they fell into my possession. —Buffalo Times.

### The Man and His House.

The ordinary polite inquiry, "How do you do?" calls for nothing but a conventionally polite response; but if a man is past "the allotted age," and a philosopher besides, it may elicit a reply full of meaning and worthy of record.

When John Quincy Adams was eighty years old he met in the streets of Boston an old friend who shook his trembling hand and said:

"Good morning! And how is John Quincy Adams to-day?"

"Thank you," was the ex-President's answer, "John Quincy Adams himself is well, sir; quite well, I thank you. But the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering upon its foundation. Time and seasons have nearly destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out. Its walls are much shattered, and it trembles with every wind. The old tenement is becoming almost uninhabitable, and I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon; but he himself is quite well, sir, quite well."

With that the venerable sixth President of the United States moved on, with the aid of his staff.

It was not long afterward that he had his second and fatal stroke of paralysis, in the Capitol at Washington. "This is the last of earth," he said, "I am content."

The Arkansas river was named from a nation of Indians; also called Quap-

### RUSSIA'S PENAL SYSTEM.

#### One of Its Principles Is Productive of the Greatest Good.

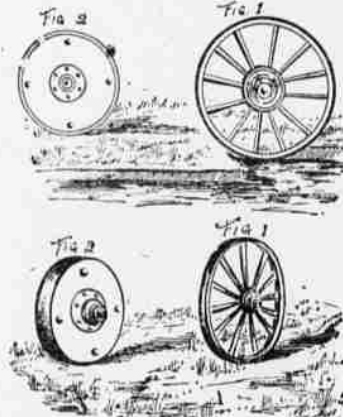
While the administration of the Russian penal system is very generally to be condemned, says Dr. Benjamin Howard, an English surgeon, who has made a study of the subject and who is an authority on penology, there is one of its principles that deserves to be copied, and that is the principle of productive labor. In so far as the administration of affairs rests with individuals, abuses very often creep in, and thus it is possible that one prison may be under humane principles while another may be an institution of horrors.

But the principle of productive labor bears good results. After a convict's term of two years' imprisonment is over there is nothing to prevent him, within three to five years, becoming—within certain geographical limits—a free man. A political exile or a murderer in Saghalien lives with his family in a well-built and often pretty, four-roomed cottage, with its court yard vestibule and garden.

The island is populated mostly by murderers or by persons guilty of similarly serious crimes. They work peacefully and quietly on their farms and walk about the streets with all appearances free men. Russian convicts, instead of being a heavy charge on the resources of the country, are a source of revenue. Convict labor has added to the Russian empire an island the length of England, not an acre of which was previously under cultivation, and it is only the population of Siberia by these people that has made possible the line of the Trans-Siberian Railway—the envy of the whole world.

#### Wide Tires vs. Narrow Tires.

I do not remember ever having seen any illustration which clearly shows why a wide tire wagon draws so much easier in general farm work than the ordinary narrow tire wagon, so I want to send you the sketches inclosed. Figs. No. 1 represent the wheel of my old farm wagon with two-inch tire. You see how it cuts into the ground when carrying a load over the ordinary fields upon the farm. Figs. No. 2 represent the solid wheel upon a wagon which I purchased recently. This wheel has a six-inch tire and, as you see, rolls over the surface of the ground while the



narrow tire in Figs. No. 1 is always climbing a hill or consuming an equal amount of draft in cutting a rut that works a great injury in many ways, perhaps needless to mention here, unless it be that one which is often lost sight of, namely, that after every little particular shower these ruts serve as drains to carry the soluble part of fertilizers (the only part that is of any value) off the fields, and into the dead furrows and from there into the road or some equally useless place.—C. M. Wheeler, Lounsbury, N. Y., in Farm, Field and Fireside.

"It is a startling fact that, almost without exception, the adulterated teas are dangerous to health. Some of them are actually poisonous."

—N. Y. Herald.

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# JOLLY JOKER

She boasts a pretty, gold-trimmed purse. The envy of the host. But shopping leads from bad to worse. It is an empty boast. —Washington Star.

She—You seem to forget yourself, sir. He—How could I do otherwise to your presence?—Judy.

Friend—I suppose everything you write now goes? Author—Yes, but most of it comes back.—Harlem Life.

"I know now," remarked the young man who was sued for breach of promise, "why they call it 'courting.'"—Tit-Bits.

Editor—Your story is flat. Author—Yes? Editor—I wish to compliment you. Most stories we get are rolled up.—Puck.

"Uncle Simon, what is a phenomenon?" "A phenomenon is a man who gets so rich that he won't accept a pass on a railroad."—Chicago Record.

Rubbies—My wife and I met by accident. Thrown together by chance, as it were. Wheelwoman (eagerly)—Did you break the bicycles?—Buffalo Times.

"I fared pretty well on Christmas," said the man with the blue coat—"I did?" "Yes; you know I'm a street car conductor."—Philadelphia North American.

Mrs. Newlywed (in tears)—You used to say that you would be glad to die for me. Mrs. Newlywed—Well, I would now. Mrs. Newlywed—Well, you may now.—Judge.

"I'll wager that woman submarine diver doesn't stay under the water more than ten minutes at a time." "Why?" "Nobody down there to talk to."—Chicago Record.

"Pugilism isn't what it used to be." "No; the advances made in implements of modern warfare have thrown it into the shade somewhat."—Philadelphia North American.

Hungry Higgins—All dis here hand-out lacks is finger-bowls. Weary Watkins—Yes, I think I could get away with about a three-finger bowl myself.—Indianapolis Journal.

Reporter—Three men fell on live trolley wires to-day. City Editor—Run 'em in the current events column. (Chorus of groans from the force.)—Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.

She—Mr. Fullback never boasts of his football exploits, does he? He—No, I understand that he has nearly killed half a dozen men, but he never says a word about it.—Puck.

"Called any to-day?" "Only once, and then I was left out in the cold." "You don't mean it; where?" "Down at Bagsley's. He held four aces."—Cincinnati Commercial Tribune.

Alethea (blushingly)—Now, don't, Mr. Dunsap! I know little Ferdinand is watching at the key-hole. Dunsap—Well, let's gratify his curiosity, and then he may go away.—Puck.

"I am sorry to hear that Allwold, the clothing merchant, has failed in business." "How did it happen?" "Over-confidence. He brought on a carload of ear-muffs."—Chicago Tribune.

Judge (to a couple sentenced for fighting)—Have you anything to say? Male Defendant—I would like to have my wife commence her term in prison after I am released.—German exchange.

She—Do you believe in long engagements? He—Well, I think an engagement should be long enough to test a man's constancy and to give the girl time to learn to cook.—Brooklyn Life.

He—I'm waiting for the interesting woman of 30 that the novelists talk about. She—Well, you won't find her in Vienna. All the women here under 60 are not over 22.—Illustrated Bits.

"You know that old gag of telling the beggar that you are 'working this side of the street?' I tried it the other day." "Did it work?" "No; he licked me for getting on his beat."—Chicago Record.

Cholly—It would be queer, doncher know, if the Theosophists were right, and if we came to life again in some other form. She—Yes, Cholly; some folks might expect better luck next time.—Puck.

Mrs. Mulligan—Do yez feel better this morning, Mrs. O'Toole? Mrs. O'Toole—I do, and then again I don't. Mrs. Mulligan—That's bad, for it's hard to know whether to say I'm sorry or glad.—Harper's Bazar.

"They must have had a cyclone over at Newriches' last week." "What makes you think so?" "Mr. Newriches said they had their monogram blown into every piece of glass in the house."—Detroit Free Press.

"What kind of goods, ma'am?" asked the salesman. "I think," replied the young woman who had just bought a wheel and was about to order her first riding suit, "you may show me some of your early fall styles."—Chicago Tribune.

Neil—Miss B Jones uses French phrases in the most peculiar manner. Bell—Does she? Neil—Yes, indeed! Why, at breakfast yesterday I asked her how she liked her eggs, and she said they were very chick.—Philadelphia Record.