

THE STORY

By Frank Condon



WE WERE sitting around the big, shining table in the famous billiard-room off Broadway. Scores of men were clicking ivory balls within hearing, and Lyon, the man who writes, was talking about something or other. There sat at the table, besides Lyon, Chick Miller, the general advertising man; Bill Miller, the street car advertising man; Frank Walton, the composer, and the transmitter of this mystery.

"I'll tell you a story," said Lyon, without preface. "You can write it or not. It comes straight from a diamond salesman."

"Go ahead," rejoined the crowd in a critical tone.

"This diamond salesman," Lyon continued, "was brought up with Gibboney's. You know Gibboney's. Every diamond ring in the world tries to pretend that it once came from Gibboney's."

"Well, this boy—mind you, his name is Ellis—told me the story himself, having witnessed it with his own eyes. On a sunny afternoon a motor car drives up to the front door and out steps a dignified woman of great wealth, judging from her appearance. She was perhaps 50, faultlessly gowned in black silk, and looked like \$30,000 in yellow money. Young Ellis adjusted his silk cravat and prepared to wait upon her.

"Her demands were simple. She wanted to select a diamond or two, and Ellis brought forth a tray of velvet containing a dozen or more sparklers. Not a stone in the tray was worth less than a thousand, but the dowager duchess looked them over somewhat haughtily and pronounced it as her opinion that they were a somewhat inferior cluster of gems. Young Ellis explained to the empress that one would have to walk a long walk before coming upon better gems; but there was nothing doing.

"With a sigh of disappointment he prepared to put the tray back in the case, and in doing so he noticed that one of the

diamonds was missing. Believing that his eyes had deceived him, he gave the gem tray a quick recount and proved it. He looked at the dowager, who was calmly putting on her gloves.

"Ellis wriggled his left ear, which is the house signal summoning the head detective, and in a few moments a conference began which included young Ellis, the detective, and the strange lady in black silk.

"Ellis explained the circumstances briefly, being withered meanwhile by the glances of the outraged queen. There were eighteen expensive and unset diamonds in the tray before the lady pawed them over, and at the conclusion of her examination there were seventeen.

"Therefore, it followed that she must have been perniciously active. The strange lady called young Ellis a low person and froze him into a state of speechlessness; but it is somewhat difficult to freeze a head detective at Gibboney's. This latter person, who was of Irish descent, and whose jaw protruded some distance, decided that the society leader must be searched, and without further formalities she was led away to the ladies' searching department, where a couple of expert female feelers went through her from Alpha to Zed, exploring herself and her garments to such a fulsome extent that one blushes to write it down.

"In an hour the lady searchers opened the door and announced to the officials that if the lady had a diamond about her it must be buried in her heart. Three or four head bookkeepers had spent the searching hour looking over Gibboney's books and had found out that the missing diamond was No. 6789, valued at \$1,400, and resembling in size a small chestnut.

"There was nothing to do but release the strange lady in black silk. Gibboney Company sent downtown to a defective agency for a man. Detective Ratty listened gravely, and finally gave orders.

"He explained that no person should be permitted to enter the aisle upon which the case of jewels was located. He ordered that scrubwomen, floorwalkers, customers and salesmen be kept away from the particular section of the store from which the \$1,400 worth of unset diamond had disappeared, and the Gibboney Company gladly followed his instructions, feeling mightily unhappy, but seeing a ray of hope in the mysterious air of the detective and his strange commands.

"For three days nothing happened. Detective Ratty stood guard, in company with the head store detective. On the third day a dapper young man in a light blue suit, wearing gray spats and carrying a white cane, pushed open the swing door and entered. He walked straight down the forbidden aisle and paused to converse with young Ellis.

"Five minutes later Detective Ratty walked up to the newcomer, placed his hand on his shoulder and arrested him. The stranger was instantly searched and immediately the expensive diamond was found!

"Now," said Lyon, pausing and casting a triumphant glance upon the group of cynical listeners, "how did the detective know that this strange young man had the diamond? Of course, the detective knew where the diamond was; but in order to make the arrest legally and to get the thief with the diamond on his person, the arrest had to be made just that way. But how did he know?"

"All of the crowd, except Chick Miller, looked mystified and inquiring. During

the latter part of Lyon's sketchy recital Chick Miller had picked up an evening newspaper and had scribbled upon the margin two words in pencil writing. He tore off the bit of margin and handed it to Frank Walton, who read it uncomprehendingly.

"You don't know, so it's a story," Lyon went on after a slight pause. "The woman in the black silk lifted the diamond, rolled it up in a piece of gum she had been chewing and stuck it under the jewelry case. The young man had come to retrieve the piece of gum and its valuable kernel. Is that a story or not?"

Frank Walton held up the piece of paper on which Chick Miller had scribbled. "Chewing gum," he read.

"Certainly," Chick Miller said. "I knew the answer when you got halfway through the story. The point is, I read the same thing a long time ago, and to prove it I wrote down the answer and handed it to Frank Walton."

"But this man Ellis told me that it happened to him," Lyon argued.

"And I tell you I read it somewhere," Chick Miller answered. "There was an article somewhere telling about the various smooth tricks swindlers use to cop the coin. That was one of them."

"Well," Lyon replied, "if you read it somewhere, I suppose it isn't a story."

"No," I put in, studying the whole thing out carefully, "it isn't a story if I don't write it. If I do write it—well, you never can tell."

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Games of Japanese Children

ONE of the most popular games among Japanese children is otedama, played with small cloth bags filled with red beans. The number of bags used is seven or ten. The game consists in throwing the bags into the air, one after another in quick succession, and trying to catch them before they reach the ground. The idea is to keep all the bags in motion.

Another popular game is ishikeri, or stone-kicking. Chalk lines are drawn on the street, making squares, in which pebbles are placed. The game is to hop from one square to another on one foot, kicking the pebbles.

In the game of mimihiki, or ear-pulling, two boys sit opposite each other with loops in their hands and try to lasso an ear of the opponent. Another boys' game is kubhiki, or head-pulling. Two boys are tied together by the neck and then they try to pull each other about, the one yielding being defeated.

In niramekkura, sides are chosen. Each side stares at the other, and the side none of the members of which laugh is the winner. Even to show the teeth is to lose.

Udeoshi is a game wherein two boys sit opposite, and push hand against hand until one yields. In yubizumo, or finger-wrestling, two boys match finger against finger, the fingers of the opposing hands being locked together, thumbs free. The fingers are pressed against each other until one boy's hand is pressed back or down.

Ikusa-gokko is a war game in which the youngsters dress in paper uniforms, with swords and knapsacks, and parade.—[New York Times.

Old Clothes, Too?

A man once was talking about hard luck, and his friend was listening with a sour expression.

"Why, you don't know what hard luck is!" said the friend. "I have always had it. When I was a kid there was such a bunch of us in the family that there had to be three tables at meal times, and I always got the third one."

"What's hard about that?"

"Why," says his friend, "it was fifteen years before I ever knew a chicken had anything but a neck."

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