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A Puzzling Case

Setting a Detective to Catch a Detective.

By ETHEL HOLMES

They say a woman can't keep a secret. I can testify to the fact that one woman I have known could keep a secret so well that she guided me, a detective with a reputation for shrewdness, to the detection of the real criminal, I having been set upon her to expose her. And this she did without revealing to me the fact that she knew him to be the man I should have been after.

One day I was directed by my chief to call upon the president of the Third National bank. I did so, and he said to me:

"Mr. Williams, we have a woman in our employ whom we suspect of embezzling our funds. The case is a singular one, and I must give it to you so far as it has already developed. There is a mystery connected with it which is very puzzling.

"We had in our employ a man whom we esteemed very highly. One day he failed to turn up at the usual time for the day's work. His wife was telephoned to know if he was ill. She re-

plied that she was about to telephone the bank for information concerning him. He had not come home the day before nor during the night. She was terribly worried for fear that something had happened to him.

"The person among our employees who had last seen the man—Walter Pixley—said that Pixley had told him that he was going to see a man who owed him a hundred dollars. He had hurried away from the bank to catch his creditor at his office before the close of business hours. We learned from Mrs. Pixley the name of the debtor and sent a man to him for information concerning her husband. The party said that Pixley had visited his office in company with a veiled woman, who had waited for him without. The money had been paid him, and he had been seen to go away with the woman.

"This information communicated to Mrs. Pixley threw her into hysterics.

"The next phase of the case was the report of one of our bookkeepers that funds were missing from the bank. My informant, Mr. Carter, told me that he had suspected Pixley for some time, and as soon as Pixley disappeared Carter had made an examination of certain books kept by Pixley and had fallen upon proof that he was a defaulter. Carter is an expert accountant. I have always had great faith in him. He brought me his proofs of Pixley's guilt, which I examined, and, although Pixley had been doing all he could to render the accounts confusing, Carter convinced me that he was a defaulter.

"Now I come to the third act of the drama. Mrs. Pixley, who had undoubtedly been deserted by her husband for another woman, came to me and begged for some employment in the bank. She claimed that as a girl she had attended a commercial college and had

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studied bookkeeping. I pitied her and gave her the position made vacant by her husband.

"The end of my story and the point at which I wish you to take it up is a report this morning from Carter that more funds are being taken from the bank and that he suspects Mrs. Pixley of being the thief. You see from what I have told you that the case is a very complicated one. While I do not propose to lay out a course of action for you, I would suggest that you watch Mrs. Pixley. This of course you cannot do in the bank. You can only do it outside of the bank."

I confessed to the president that the matter did look rather puzzling. Had Pixley not deserted his wife for another woman I would have suspected that Mr. and Mrs. Pixley were in league to rob the bank. And yet, Pixley having done so, it did not seem likely that Mrs. Pixley would work on the same ground as he. I told the president that I would first find out something about Mrs. Pixley. When I had done that I would proceed to the next step in the premises.

I sent a party to Mrs. Pixley's home to sell her something, to draw her into conversation and to ask her at what

institution she had studied bookkeeping. My emissary returned to me with the information that Mrs. Pixley had looked at the questioner concerned, but had given the Merton Business college as the place where she had received instruction. I at once went to the Merton college and asked to see a record of the students. The maiden name of Mrs. Pixley did not appear as having been a pupil there, and Mr. Merton declared that at the time Mrs. Pixley claimed to have been there he did not receive women students.

So far so good. I had nailed Mrs. Pixley in a lie. This tended to confirm me in considering her as guilty. But why she should steal from the same bank as her husband was a puzzle. The only reason I could think of was that she was enabled through sympathy to secure a place there, which she could not do elsewhere.

Another complication bothered me. Mrs. Pixley was reported by her fellow employees to be a pretty good bookkeeper. She must have received some

(Concluded on last page.)

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