

History of the Precious Diamond

BY GEORGE BARTON

BARNES had just finished his second cup of coffee and was lying back in an easy chair in his Washington square apartment when he received a telegram stating that Abernethy, who evaded the customs with the South African stones, was on the Pelican. The Chief Inspector lit a stogie and stood at his window looking down at the marble arch in the square in a reflective manner. The metropolis was asleep yet, but the old man realized that if he was to accomplish any results that day he would have to be out and doing.

With a sigh and a fast glance at his comfortable room the chief hurried out into the cold air of a January morning. Clancy joined him on the boarding tug, and the little craft, though hampered on all sides by ragged blocks of ice, ploughed its way bravely toward the sea.

Barnes wore a fur cap and a seasonable ulster which reached down to the tops of his fashionably clad feet. There was a luster in his eyes which might have been caused by the nipping air or the subdued eagerness which he always felt at the prospect of a clash with his natural enemy—the smugglers. Clancy looked at him inquiringly once or twice but forebore to ask the question which quivered on the end of his tongue.

"Who are you after?" finally queried the curious assistant, after a long silence.

"Abernethy," said the old man shortly.

The name was Greek to the young one, but he persisted.

"Is he a professional?"

"Yes," said Barnes, meditatively.

"He's got a specialty—it's unset diamonds."

"Does he anticipate trouble?"

"Well, he's not the chap to hunt for it, but he'll get his wits to work the moment he sees that warning. And the chief pointed significantly to the blue and white revenue flag which floated commandingly from amidships."

"Abernethy might know you'd spot his name on sight."

"True; but I'm told he's dropped his distinguished cognomen and is now travelling under the alternative of not allowing names of William Woodside."

However, that's to be proved. Hello there! I believe the Pelican's in sight."

A great mass of black bow, obscuring the horizon, was bearing down upon them slowly and majestically. The tug piped out three shrill, tenor like shrieks. The steamer replied with three rumbling roars. For a moment there was danger of a collision. The great unwieldy steamer, like a huge bully of the sea, seemed about to crash the diminutive government craft. But the pilot on the boarding boat was not idle. He gave his wheel a sudden twist, the tug executed a flank movement and drew up saucily alongside the Pelican.

For a middle aged man, careful of his dignity, Barnes went up the rope ladder with amazing swiftness. Clancy was at his very heels. Salutations had scarcely been exchanged with the captain before the chief was examining one of the printed passenger lists. He nodded triumphantly to Clancy and placed his finger on a particular line. It read thus:

"Stateroom No. 13 (outside), William Woodside."

A half dozen inspectors, following the chief and his assistant, seated themselves at the heads of the tables in the diningroom, prepared to take the declarations of the passengers. Men from the stewards' mess went through the vessel ringing dinner bells and calling on the travellers to appear before the customs officers. The inspectors sat expectantly. The vessel moved swiftly, too, but by the time the spires and roofs of the city appeared in sight the declarations were finished. When they were completed with the steamer list one name was missing—William Woodside.

Barnes looked significantly at Clancy. The captain's attention was called to the omission. He swore softly.

"He's a queer chap. He's acted mysteriously all the way over. Scarcely ever appeared in the diningroom or on deck. Come with me and I'll hunt him out."

Barnes and Clancy accompanied the captain to room 13, which was located near the stern of the boat. The door was locked. The chief gave three vigorous knocks.

No response.

Clancy kicked with the heel of his boot.

Nothing but the echo of the blows.

The captain called out at the top of his lusty voice.

Only dead silence.

The three men looked at one another. Barnes answered with a characteristic.

"Break down the door!"

Three pairs of sturdy shoulders effected immediate results. The lock broke and the door flew open. They all rushed in. The next moment the three faces were a study.

The room was empty!

Barnes was the first to recover his wits. He made a hasty survey of the stuffy little apartment. The upper berth was undisturbed. The lower one was in disorder, showing that it had been occupied the night before. A soft hat and a coat lay on the bed. A pair of rough looking shoes were beneath the bunk. A dress suit case of cheap material was spread out on the floor. It contained a few pieces of soiled linen. The large window of the stateroom was wide open. The space between the window and the rail on the side of the boat was less than two feet in width. The iron bar on top of the rail held a bit of torn cloth, corresponding in texture and pattern to the coat in the stateroom. These things were apparent at a glance. A newspaper, crumpled up, lay in a corner of the room. Barnes examined it minutely and then placed it carefully in his inside pocket. He turned to the washstand and noticed a sheet of newspaper partly covered with writing. The chief picked it up. Clancy and the captain peered over his shoulder anxiously while he read as follows:

"O magic sleep! O comfortable bird! That broodest o'er the troubled sea of toil is hushed and gone!"

Barnes smiled grimly at these unfinished lines, and ejaculated one sarcastic word:

"Clancy, laboring under great excitement, threw up his hands, and, unable to restrain himself, cried out:

"Suicide!"

The captain's rage was terrible. The profane things he said need not be recorded here. It should be remembered that he was a rough seafaring man, as jealous of the reputation of his ship as any landman could possibly be of his good name. The Pelican had reached its landing place, and the work of looking her was now in progress. The captain hurried to the pilot house, annoyed at being away from his post for even those few minutes. Clancy had the air of a man whose day's work was finished. Barnes was still pottering about stateroom No. 13.

"Unlucky number that?" said Clancy, suggestively.

Barnes smiled in a way that meant nothing.

"Probably remorse," insisted Clancy, "or he thought that jig was up and decided to end it all in Davy Jones' locker."



"A MAN WAS CROUCHING IN THE CORNER OF THE WARDROBE,".....

Barnes shook his head, but the motion conveyed no more information than his enigmatic smile. The passengers were collecting their small baggage and the deck hands preparing to lower the gangplank.

"Get the name of every passenger and see that each one is identified," came sharply from the chief inspector.

To make doubly sure, Barnes stood on the wharf and shrewdly scanned each person. As the last tourist alighted he heaved a sigh of disappointment and slowly made his way back to the deck of the vessel.

"Chief," said Clancy meekly, "there don't seem to be any doubt about this being a suicide."

Barnes stamped his right foot in angry impatience. But almost instantly he recovered himself and was the suave gentleman.

"We will look a little further into the matter, Mr. Clancy," was his formal reply.

Was about to speak when the chief broke out suddenly with:

"What's that?"

Following the range of his pointed finger Clancy saw a rope gangway near the stern end of the steamer. The foreman of the deck hands, responding to the call of Barnes, came up and saluted.

"What's that for?" repeated the chief, pointing to the offending rope.

"For the deck hands."

"Any of 'em gone ashore?"

"Only one, sir."

Barnes growled aloud. It was an unusual manifestation of emotion on the part of this self-possessed man.

"Why did you let him go?"

"He complained of being ill, sir, and I gave him leave of absence without pay."

"Who was he?"

"His name was Brown, sir."

"Did you know him?" What did he look like?"

"Well, sir, we take so many of 'em on at every port that I confess I didn't know this one. As to his looks, sir—well, he was suffering from neuralgia and his face was covered with bandages."

"Did he take anything ashore?"

"Only a package of cigars, a bundle of old clothes and a pound cake."

"The devil!" ejaculated Barnes.

"Oh, sir," cried the foreman, "there was nothing dutiable, sir; I can take oath to that. I gave a personal examination, and can assure you that he only had the old clothes, the cigars and the cake."

"What did he want with the cake?"

"Well, you see, sir, his mother was a Devonshire woman and he was taking home a cake made in her old home. A bit of sentiment, sir. That was the explanation he made to me, sir."

"Summon all your men on the after deck," said Barnes tartly.

Clancy looked on with some curiosity. The old man often did queer things and he wondered what this last move meant. In five minutes all of the deck hands were lined up like man-of-war's boys. The chief turned to the foreman and said in his curt way:

"Count 'em."

The foreman did so, wondering, as he concluded a look of perplexity clouded his face. He counted them a second time.

"All there?" queried Barnes, sarcastically.

"Yes," stammered the foreman; "all here, sir."

"Brown, too?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Call Brown."

The foreman obeyed. An unkempt looking man stepped forward.

"You see," said the chief, with a sardonic laugh, "Brown didn't go ashore. All your men are here."

"But, sir," said the man, haltingly, "if any of 'em ever go ashore it's always without pay."

Barnes muttered the word. He hurried to the end of the wharf, Clancy by his side. A passing cab was hailed. They entered. The chief pulled his head out of the window.

"To the office of the New York Daily Banner—hurry like hell!"

The vehicle rattled over the rough stones along the wharf side. Barnes sat with his eyes closed. Presently remembering that Clancy was with him, he put his hand in his pocket, and, pulling out a newspaper, handed it to his assistant. The young man thought that under the circumstances this was an act of extreme courtesy. Suddenly it dawned on him that this was the newspaper that had been picked up on the floor of stateroom No. 13. He glanced over the journal carefully. It was a copy of the Daily Banner of June 15, 1905. It did not seem to have any particular significance. To make sure, Clancy went over it page by page and column by column. Barnes, sunk in the cushions of the carriage, watching him with a quizzical smile. Suddenly Clancy gave an exclamation of surprise. A little section of the fourth column of the fourth page about an inch deep was missing. It had been neatly cut free, a column of small advertising headed "Personal." Clancy turned to his companion.

"Did you notice this?"

"Certainly," Clancy was silent for a moment; then he turned to his companion:

"What made you suspicious about the suicide? The evidence was conclusive."

"I gave too conclusive; that made me doubtful."

"Did this cut newspaper influence you?"

"Sure. A man may write poetry when he is in the queer state of mind which precedes self-destruction, but he is hardly likely to cut advertisements from a newspaper. Now, the important thing to me was that what was clipped from this paper. Don't you feel curious?"

"Curious," cried Clancy, "why, I never in my life saw a mutilated newspaper like that. I wasn't filled with the most intense longing to find out what had been cut from it."

The cab pulled up in front of the Daily Banner office. Clancy, eager to participate in the search, reached the counter first.

"Have you a copy of the Daily Banner of June 15, 1905?"

The clerk, engaged in writing, made no answer; he did not even look up. Clancy repeated the question with some emphasis. The young man tugged at an impatient muscle, and, pausing for a moment, smiled indulgently at his questioner.

"Why, that's last year."

"You don't have to tell me that," said Clancy, irritably; "I want to know if you have it?"

The clerk drew himself up haughtily. "We only keep papers for a week back."

Barnes stepped up to the counter. His voice was polite, but it was positive. "Of course you keep the Banner in bound files. I would like to see the file for June of last year."

"Certainly," with alacrity; "we keep the bound copies up stairs. I'll see if I can find June. You see some of our files were destroyed by fire."

Barnes heart sank. If he failed to find that paper he might as well give up the chase. But he said nothing. He waited with infinite patience. Five, 10, 15 minutes passed. When the tension was becoming unbearable the clerk returned with the bound volume for June. The chief's face brightened. He turned to the book, opened it hasty-

ly and began turning the leaves feverishly. The fifteenth of June was reached at last. He turned to the fourth column of the fourth page and scanned it line by line with the clipped copy in his possession. His search was rewarded. This is what he read:

"Personal—Money advanced and highest prices paid for silver and gold and for diamonds, set or unset; transacting business conducted in the strictest confidence. Apply to W. Wicker, 1387 Hilbert St., city."

"Copy it!" he shouted to Clancy in exultant tones. A hurried word of thanks to the astonished clerk, and they were in the cab, scurrying post haste toward 1387 Hilbert street.

The driver lashed his horses, but even that did not satisfy the two men, burning with impatience. Not a word passed between them until they came in sight of their goal, and then Barnes said simply:

"I hope we're not too late."

Hilbert street was a curious little thoroughfare, where a great deal of unique business was transacted with very little ostentation. Jewelers, opticians, money lenders and lapidaries were most conspicuous. Many of them occupied but one apartment. Indeed, some were content with desk room. No. 1387 was a store and dwelling combined, and it was evident that the entire building was occupied by "W. Wicker" for business and domestic purposes. Beyond the name the only thing to distinguish it from its neighbors was a small, rusty tin sign, which notified the passerby that "We buy, sell and exchange jewelry of all descriptions."

The windows were dirty and the interior quite dim. A dull gas jet threw a yellowish light over a showcase containing watches and diamonds. A tall, thin man, with parched skin and a faded brown wig, stood behind the counter. As Barnes and Clancy entered the shop they heard the scuffling of feet, and some one disappeared in the little living room behind the showcase. The tall man leaned over the showcase, and, rubbing his hands together, inquired blandly:

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"W. Wicker, if I mistake not?" interrogated Barnes.

"At your service," was the smiling reply.

"What are you paying for diamonds today?"

"That depends entirely upon the size and quality of the stones," was the professional reply.

"But you buy 'em?"

"Oh, yes."

"Your transactions are perfectly confidential?" queried the advertisement.

"Oh, perfectly."

"Have you bought any this morning?"

"No," with a curious stare.

"Have any been offered to you?"

The man drew himself up to his full height and frowned—which did not add to his style of beauty.

"Sir," he said, angrily, "I have no time to trifle with you."

He was walking away when a movement on the part of the chief caused him to halt. Barnes opened his ulster and unbuttoning his inside coat threw back the lapels and disclosed to the astonished dealer a glistening badge. The man peered at it closely, noted the gold eagle and the monogram of the government.

"From the customs?" he whispered in a husky voice.

Barnes nodded.

"I beg your pardon," said the other, abjectly, and his lips trembled as he spoke. "I'll give you any information in my power."

As he spoke the scared, white face of a woman peered from between the dark curtains behind the counter. The dealer saw her and at the same moment noted an object on the end of the counter.

"Hannah!" he cried sharply, "take that cake into the dining room. The store is no place for it."

"Such carelessness is inexcusable," the woman frowned at the visitors, and, picking up the cake, carried it into the rear room. Almost simultaneously Barnes hurried around the end of the counter and followed her into the apartment.

The dealer clutched him by the sleeve, his face as pallid as a sheet.

What do you mean by this—this intrusion?"

"Pardon the impertinence," said the chief, bowing low, "but my friend and I," pointing to Clancy, "want to impose on your hospitality for a moment."

"Yes, yes," murmured the dealer, feebly. "Hannah, get—the—the gentlemen a glass of wine. They look—look—cold."

As they seated themselves at a small round table there was a clatter from the yard in the rear. It sounded as if some one was sealing the fence. Clancy rose impulsively and started for the back door. Barnes detained him with a look.

"Stay here; this is more important."

The man and the woman, thoroughly alarmed, stood as if petrified. The jeweler was the first to recover.

"Hannah," he said irritably, "I asked you to get the gentlemen some wine."

The woman went to the sideboard and with trembling hands poured wine into two tiny glasses. She was so nervous that drops of the red liquid fell and discolored the white linen covering. Still shaking, she curried the glasses over to the round table, and placed one in front of Barnes and the other before Clancy. The man had partly recovered his possession by this time. He filled a glass for himself and, lifting it, said, with assumed jocular-ity:

"Gentlemen, your health; I hope this will warm you a bit."

Clancy drank down with one gulp, but Barnes did not touch his glass. He looked up and spoke in his smoothest accents:

"I dislike to impose on your hospitality too much, but really a small piece of cake would go good with this wine."

The dealer was so startled by this request that he laid his glass on the table unattended, and gazed at the guest in a dazed sort of fashion. The next moment the eyes of every one in the group turned to the sideboard, where the cake lay. It was of medium size and artistically frosted on top. As no one moved, Barnes arose, as it to reach for it.

The dealer ran over and stood in front of him, exclaiming excitedly:

"No, you can't have any of that."

"Why, I just love Devonshire pound cake."

"You can't have it."

The chief looked him in the eye with a cold, relentless glance. Outwardly he was unmoved. When he spoke it was to say:

"What a miserly host."

Without pausing any further, he thrust the man aside and going over to the cake, picked it up and laid it on the center of the table. The others stood about as if transfixed. Clancy found voice to say:

"Would you like a knife?"

"No." The voice rang clear and triumphant.

Barnes stood ceremoniously before the table. He leaned over and extending his open hand laid his palm flat over the center of the cake. He gave a quick glance about him and then pressed with all the strength of his wrist upon the frosted confection. It must have been very stale, for it dissolved instantly into a mass of crumbs. The result was truly amazing, for mingling with the crumbs and sparkling in the gloom of the dimly lighted room were hundreds of little diamonds, unset and of the most exquisite cut.

Clancy gasped for breath.

The man and the woman stared until their eyeballs protruded from their sockets.

Barnes alone was calm. He pulled a big chamolais bag from his pocket and, tossing it to Clancy, said in businesslike tones:

"Gather the gems carefully and leave nothing for our hospitable friend but the crumbs."

Clancy began his unique task immediately. The dealer turned to the chief, with hands clasped, and cried out in a supplicating manner:

"I swear that I'm not concerned in this."

"No," said the chief cynically, "you don't quite have the chance."

Clancy put the last diamond in the bag. He turned to his superior.

"What about the chap that jumped the fence?"

Barnes laughed and waved his hand toward the gems.

"He was superfluous; we have all we need in this room."

After that the chief was still, as if in deep thought. From time to time

his gaze wandered to the other side of the room. Presently he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a little fragment of cloth. He examined it carefully and then exhibited it to Clancy. The young man recognized it instantly.

"The bit of cloth we found on the rail outside of stateroom No. 13 on the Pelican."

The chief nodded and, turning to the dealer, said:

"That's a fine piece of furniture over there."

The article was a large wardrobe, reaching from the floor almost to the ceiling.

The tall man was too much agitated to talk. He merely nodded his head in assent.

The chief walked over to the wardrobe. It was closed, but the tail of a coat protruded from beside the hinges. Barnes held his sample of cloth against the fragment of garment.

"A perfect match," he murmured insinuatingly.

The next moment his whole appearance changed. His face became hard and stern. He grasped the handles of the doors and threw them open.

A man was crouching in the corner of the wardrobe. He came shambling out in a dazed sort of fashion. Instantly the chief had seized his wrists and fastened them with a pair of silver handcuffs.

"Now, Mr. Abernethy," he exclaimed, "your professional career is ended."

"You've got me!" sullenly retorted the smuggler.

"I have," was the triumphant reply, "and you can thank yourself for overplaying your part."

Clancy looked at the dealer and his wife.

"Any arrests here?"

"No," replied Barnes. "We'll treat 'em as dupes, although they showed a willingness to become accomplices."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you!" came in a duet from the man and woman. The chief made no reply.

The dealer summoned a speck of courage. He pointed to the two ill-dressed men on the table. He spoke timidly:

"Barnes, in the doorway with his prisoner, smiled ironically.

"You and Hannah," he said, "may drink it to my health."

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