

# The Story of the Bishop's Ring

By George Barton

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It was just before Christmas that Barnes had the adventure concerning the bishop's ring. The Caledonia, a slow steamer, popular with passengers who loved the sea trip, had been docked and the voyagers were coming down the gangplank. One of them was the bishop, ruddy cheeked and benevolent—a confiding man who lived in an atmosphere which breathed Christian charity toward the weak and the wicked. A tall, slender, bright-eyed young man walked with the bishop. He was almost obsequious in his attentions. Indeed, the attitude of the youth and the older man suggested a singularly close degree of intimacy. They halted in the center of the pier to make their farewells. The bishop put his hand on the young man's shoulder in a fatherly way which was one of his characteristics, and at that moment a slanting ray of sunshine struck the ruby in his episcopal ring.

Barnes was standing a few yards away and the flash of color attracted his attention. The bishop's ring was unique and costly. The ruby was oval in shape and mounted without facets, while the gold band of the setting was delicately engraved and contained the initials and the coat of arms of the bishop. A customs employee stepped up to hand a report about the bishop and his ring. Presently the ring was recalled to his mind by the voice of the prelate himself.

"My dear chief," he said, in his exquisitely modulated voice, "I must thank you for your kindness in assigning that very agreeable young man to look after my landing."

Barnes looked at the bishop blankly. "Assigning—landing," he murmured. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

The bishop laughed pleasantly at the chief's apparent lapse of memory.

"Of course, you noticed the young man who came down the gangplank with me?"

Visions of those bright eyes, penetrating and opalescent, rose before the chief.

"Yes, yes," he said hurriedly. "What about him?"

"Nothing, except that he was the customs officer who was so very polite to me."

"Customs officer?" queried Barnes. "Why, yes," said the bishop with a trace of asperity in his voice. "Wasn't he an inspector?"

The chief's wrath exploded. "Inspector the deuce!"

He halted before the word was finished. He recognized the fitness of things. Profanity was scarcely the thing before a prelate. He became suave but emphatic.

"My dear bishop, you have been hoodwinked. The man is an impostor—probably a thief."

"Bless me!" exclaimed the bishop. "Don't jump to such cruel conclusions. At that moment the prelate happened to glance down at his hands. He gave a snap of his fingers. Barnes followed his glance inquiringly. The bishop spoke faintly:

"My ring; my episcopal ring; it's gone!"

"And so has your agreeable friend," retorted the chief grimly.

The bishop wrung his hands despairingly.

"It's my most precious possession; I'd give anything to get it back. Can't you catch the fellow?"

Barnes paused. Irresolute. Clancy came up, filled with his besetting curiosity.

"It's scarcely customs business, 'tis larceny of your ring," the chief said regrettably, addressing the atmosphere.

"But," he said, answering himself, "a fellow impersonated a customs officer; that's my business."

The idea inspired immediate action. "Clancy," he said, "did you see a tall, thin man, with eyes that make you feel creepy? He just left here. We need him."

"Sure," replied Clancy briskly. "The fellow jumped on a trolley car at the foot of the hill."

"Come!" shouted Barnes. They bolted from the wharf, leaving the bishop looking after them in amazement. When the prelate recovered his presence of mind he started to hunt for his niece, who had become separated from him during the confusion of landing.

"It's ten to one this interesting bunco steerer's gone to the New York Central station," said Barnes to Clancy as their trolley car sped in that direction.

"There was something very familiar about that fellow," resumed the chief. "I think so, too," agreed Clancy.

There was silence for several blocks. Presently Clancy grabbed his superior by the sleeve and almost shouted in his ear:

"I remember him now; he's the man that smuggled the Swiss watches last year."

"Hey!"

"I believe you're right, Clancy," assented Barnes, scratching his head in

an effort to refresh his memory. "If that's so this affair is bigger than we reckoned."

As they entered the station the tall, bright-eyed man was talking in animated tones to a beautiful young girl who wore a picture hat and a ravishingly becoming gown. A thickset man in a stern coat stood with them.

"Who's the girl?" whispered Barnes. "His girl," exclaimed Clancy promptly. "I'll bet they've worked many a confidence game together."

The girl's attractive face was framed in a mass of fluffy brown hair. Two rows of exquisitely shaped white teeth gleamed from between a pair of blood red lips. She appeared to be radiantly happy, but now and then glanced apprehensively, as if fearing pursuit.

"She's fine looking," remarked Barnes, judiciously.

"They're the worst," retorted Clancy, dogmatically.

Presently the young man left his companions and hurried over to the ticket office.

"Two to Troy," he said, tersely. "Now's your time to nab him!" cried Clancy, hoarsely.

"Not now. Haven't any evidence yet," replied the chief.

"What are you going to do?" came the petulant query.

"Follow 'em," replied Barnes, "before long we'll have enough to work on."

The bishop wrung his hands despairingly.

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themselves with difficulty, everything was in the pink of condition. "Looks a little old fashioned," ventured Barnes to his companion.

The fireman, who was polishing the piston rod with a big handful of cotton waste, passed. The blood mounted to his cheeks beneath the coat of grime. He patted the mass of iron and steel on the side with an affectionate gesture, as if it was a thing of life and blood, and he said, resentfully:

"When she gets a-going you won't think she's old fashioned."

He turned to his work again, rubbing more vigorously than ever as if relieved by this brief defence of his favorite. No housewife could have kept her domestic tidier than this man kept his locomotive. The name front on the nose of the monster was as brassy and as sparkling as the big brass plates that adorn the doors of our grandfather's glass on a sideboard.

That individual never looked at them. He seemed unconscious of their presence. He gave hurried orders to several men who had entered the room and were standing, caps in hand, before his desk. They disposed of, he picked up the receiver of another phone.

"Hello! Is that the round house? Are you carrying out the order I gave you a little while ago? Yes, I want the engine on track 11. Certainly, give us No. 6. I want something that can make time. Place Gillieuddy on the box. That's the idea exactly. I want a man who knows how to put on steam. Give him a good fireman. Yes, there will be only one. It's a combination baggage and smoker. It's on the track now waiting to be hitched up to your engine. Have it there in 15 minutes sure. If you manage it in 10 minutes it will mark you as a man worthy of promotion some day. That's all. Good-by."

Again Barnes and Clancy looked at each other. This time with wonder and admiration. The imperturbable station master was unconscious of the pantomime. He did not feel that he was doing anything worthy of special notice or praise. It was simply an incident in a busy day's work. They sat there quietly while he went on with the needless routine of his office.

Presently he pulled out his watch, looked at it quickly, replaced it in his pocket and going to a wardrobe pulled out his hat and coat and put them on.

"Now, gentlemen," he said briskly, "come with me."

He hastened down the stairway and they followed him. He pushed his way through the throng in the waiting room, looking neither to the right nor the left. Soon they came to a gate which he unlocked with a key.

"Special." Before entering it he turned quickly to the two men.

"Are you both provided with tickets?"

"Yes," they replied, almost in the same breath.

They hurried through the gate. Far down the track was a locomotive to which was attached a solitary day coach. The engine was puffing and snorting as if it were something endowed with human life. Unconsciously it reminded the two passengers of some spirited race horse that had been trained and groomed for the dash of its life. It was a camel backed engine, with a sloping firebox and the cab located in the center of the enormous boiler. From the top of the shed over the cab down to the grinding wheels, which seemed to restrain

his curiosity was amply satisfied. Albany was 105 miles from the starting point, and under the schedule the pursuers were booked to reach there in three hours and a quarter. The limited was due to stop at Albany for ten minutes. This seemed to give them a margin of 24 minutes. But 22 minutes had elapsed before the limited left New York until the special pulled out of the station. That left only three minutes to spare. The thought that the result of his work hung upon such a slender chance brought the cold sweat out upon the chief inspector's brow.

The special had been going for some time when Barnes, who was in the cab with the engineer, hustled into the car. He was laboring under great excitement. Rushing over to Clancy, he shouted:

"Bad news! Our train is ten minutes behind time."

The young man groaned. Ten minutes! That might be just enough to ruin their enterprise.

"Can nothing be done?" he asked, feebly.

"I think so," was the reply. "I've talked to Gillieuddy, and he has promised to let her go for all she's worth as soon as we pass Frisco."

The two men went out front and crawled into the cab of the engine. The train passed Tarrytown. Gillieuddy never said a word. He did not look up, but gave a jump as if the wheels could scarcely keep the track.

They knew it by the vibration of the engine. It swung from side to side—at intervals it gave a jump as if the wheels could scarcely keep the track.

Barnes, with his head out of the cab window, was like a man fascinated. He had often thought of the sensation of riding in a locomotive, but the reality far outstripped the dream. The sound of the drumming wheels was sweet music in his ears. Now and then there was a mighty roar, followed by blinding flashes of light. The noise came from the suction of the train, while the light was the quickly appearing and disappearing sides of some great white-washed barn, mere specks in the horizon. Barnes glanced down once to get a look at the revolving wheels, but the sight made him dizzy.

No. 6 seemed maddened, frenzied. The velocity of the train became so great that it careened from side to side like a drunken man. Half unconsciously Barnes waited for the engine to resume its normal speed. But he was disappointed. It went on and on, its violent agitation increasing with every mile, until finally it appeared to have reached a state of complete madness.

The fireman shoved coal into the mouth of the yawning engine like a man possessed. The excitement even infected the imperturbable MacWilliams. His dull eyes lighted up as if he had taken a strong tonic. A dog tried to cross the track at one of the way stations. It was ground up beneath the ponderous wheels quicker than coffee beans in a mill. Clancy experienced sensations akin to seasickness. But still No. 6 dashed on as if glorying in its record breaking speed. Barnes, elated at the mad race, pulled out his watch and attempted to time the train. He held the open face repeater for two miles, and found that it registered a minute and a half.

The fever of the chase began to show itself in Gillieuddy's eye. It sparkled with an unwonted fire, and on either cheek, beneath the grime, could be seen a little flush of red. The residents of the country-side, attracted by the antics of this insane engine, rushed from their homes and stood in open mouthed wonder while the great iron giant thundered past them. The train was going against the wind, and the breeze came through the cab with the fury of a cyclone. Barnes had blown off, and he managed to save it only by a dextrous outstretching of his right hand. From that time he stood there bareheaded, with each particular hair standing on end. Clancy's face was white and ashen.

It was dangerous for him to get back into the car, so he was given a seat on a stool in the bottom of the cab, where he gradually recovered his color and his self-possession.

Everybody was wondering how long this madness would continue, when MacWilliams opened his lips and uttered the one word "Peekskill!" The train shot by so quickly that it was impossible to read the sign board at the station, but the faithful MacWilliams knew every foot of the ground between New York and Albany, and he recognized the country-side, attracted by the antics of this insane engine, rushed from their homes and stood in open mouthed wonder while the great iron giant thundered past them. The train was going against the wind, and the breeze came through the cab with the fury of a cyclone. Barnes had blown off, and he managed to save it only by a dextrous outstretching of his right hand. From that time he stood there bareheaded, with each particular hair standing on end. Clancy's face was white and ashen.

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