

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES

THE CLEW OF THE CROOKED "W"

BY WILL IRWIN

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FLORENCE CAMPBELL was a professional nurse in the New York State Hospital for the Insane on Ward's Island, New York city. At the time when her case came to the attention of the New York Police Department she was assistant to Mrs. Jessly, the matron. She had been at this hospital about two years, and she brought a record for twelve years of excellent work.

Miss Campbell went on her annual vacation last September, returning on October 3. One morning a week after she was talking with the pharmacist, Mr. King, in the hospital dispensary, when an orderly brought her a package of mail. On top was a square parcel.

"Some one has been sending you some candy," said King.

"Oh, I guess not," said Miss Campbell. She opened the parcel nevertheless, found that it was indeed a box of candy bearing the mark of the Boston Candy Stores, New York. She held out the box to King as if to offer him a piece.

"Why, there's something wrong with that stuff!" he exclaimed. They examined it. The candy—gum drops, as it happened—was dusted over with a fine, white powder. Some of the pieces, too, were broken, as if to let the powder penetrate.

"It looks queer to me," said King. "Say, you want to be careful with candy that comes through the mails. You had better let me analyze some of that powder before you eat it." Miss Campbell laughed at his caution; but King was in earnest. She finally left the box, and the pharmacist proceeded with his analysis. He found that the white powder was arsenic.

When he made this discovery King became suddenly cautious. Evidently, here was a crime; he wanted to keep himself out of it. He returned the box to Miss Campbell, therefore, saying only that the candy looked suspicious and that she should certainly have an analysis made before she ate any of it. She handed it over to one of the resident physicians. He found arsenic; and as in duty bound he reported the fact to Dr. Maybon, the superintendent. Dr. Maybon, remembering certain anonymous letters which had been received in the summer by both Miss Campbell and himself, reported the case to the District Attorney's office. So, by the regular city routine, it came to the Central Detective Bureau; and Lieutenant Carey, an experienced man in poisoning cases, was assigned to the case.

"I want to see Miss Campbell the first thing," said Carey, and I put in a whole afternoon with her. She was a tall woman, in her thirties, nice spoken and sharp as a whip. I asked her who might be her relatives. She could think of no one who would want to "kill" her, but finally she did admit, after I had asked her the whole afternoon, that Mrs. Jessly, the matron, and a Mrs. Thorpe, another nurse on the island, had not been exactly friendly to her. They had given her particular animosity, she said, but Mrs. Jessly had just stopped speaking to her. Dr. Maybon told me about the anonymous letters. She had received two of them—three in typewriting and one in handwriting. But she hadn't thought much of them at the time and had destroyed them. I asked her if she had any friends or associates were. She named a few names, living in Manhattan. Three of them, she said, were the ones to keep your eye on: Mrs. Jessie Morrow, who lived at No. 118 West Eighty-fourth street.

At the time Miss Campbell seemed a little frightened. I left the impression that she was trying to shield some one, and made up my mind that we couldn't expect much help from her. In fact, she asked me once if I couldn't drop the case, seeing that no harm was done.

Having taken Miss Campbell's statement, Carey turned his attention to that important piece of evidence, the candy box. It bore the brand of the Boston Candy Stores, a firm having two branches, one in Fourteenth street, the other in Third avenue, near Twenty-third street, New York city. The wrapper was a plain piece of manila paper. The address, which was in handwriting, was scratched on a separate piece of notepaper and fastened on by the twelve two-cent stamps which had carried the package through the United States mails.

Carey spent some time with this address. The hand was plainly disguised. From every one who might be suspected he took samples of handwriting. The result was puzzling. Any one of three different persons might have written that address. The handwriting experts, called into court in important cases, are always cocksure of angles and speeds; the practical detectives know that this kind of expert testimony is characteristically unreliable. The most careful inspection of the handwriting only limited the field of suspicion.

The candy was what is known in the trade as royal gum drops. This in itself had a bearing on the case, for that was Miss Campbell's favorite candy. Plainly the sender knew her habits. Carey visited the Boston Candy Stores and discovered that the royal gum drops were sold only at the Twenty-third street shop. Further the wrapping paper was of the kind used in this branch. The package had been mailed in the Madison square station of the Post Office Department, only two blocks away. One part of the transaction, therefore, became plain as day. Either the sender lived near Twenty-third street and Sixth avenue or he had done his work in a great hurry.

The next thing that specially claimed Carey's attention was one of the anonymous letters received by Dr. Maybon—he had kept only this one—a scurrilous attack upon him and his methods. It was typewritten, and it was mailed on August 4 from Station W, Manhattan. The writer, evidently unschooled in the cautions of crime, had made three slips. In the first place the paper had been an ordinary letter size sheet, carrying a letterhead. The writer to avoid detection had torn off the letterhead, but he had incautiously left the printed date line. There it was, and in singular black face type—"New York, ———— 1920—"

He had forgotten, too, to tear off the part bearing the water mark, which read "Victor." Further, he had used a very old typewriter, slightly out of alignment and showing certain peculiarities in the worn letters. Most conspicuous of these was the capital "W," repeated several times in the Maybon letter. From this the upper left hand corner was torn away. Typewriter experts, called into consultation, said that it was the work of a very old, worn-out Remington.

But that letterhead—Carey started there one of those elaborate, the tooth investigations of the thorough city detective. He found first the jobbers who handled the paper water marked "Victor." It is the product of the Victor mills. These jobbers reported that they sold such paper to about three hundred printers in New York. There opened before the de-

tectives a chase of appalling magnitude—to see every one of those printers and to find who, using Victor paper for his letterhead orders, used also that peculiar black type. Carey had half a dozen plain clothes men on this tedious search, when the developments in another line caused him suddenly to drop it.

The anonymous letter, as I have said, was mailed from Station W, Manhattan. This is at Eighty-fourth street and Columbus avenue. One evening, going over the notes he had taken from Miss Campbell, Carey suddenly stumbled on the address, "Mrs. Jessie Morrow, No. 118 West Eighty-fourth street," only a half block from Station W. He saw Miss Campbell again on some pretext or other and wedged in among a hundred impertinent questions some inquiries about Mrs. Morrow. She was a bosom friend to Miss Campbell, it appeared. On the nurse's day off the two women usually went to the theatre together. Carey went to No. 118 West Eighty-fourth street to see what he could see.

But Mrs. Morrow, the janitress said, had moved away from that house in August. She had gone somewhere up the Hudson. Carey stopped to chat with this janitress, an intelligent Irish woman. Mrs. Mor-

NOT SO BLOOD AND THUNDERY NOW

"YOU can't commit so many merry little murders nowadays as you could a few years back; the boys don't care so much for this form of violence," said the man in charge of the detective outfit of the biggest New York publishing house given over to cheap weekly literature. "The tendency is toward the unravelling of crimes by scientific methods. In the days of Old Broadbent, Old Steath and Old Cup Collier you couldn't get out a successful detective story unless you had an average of one kill to every three pages, but this is being gradually done away with."

The half dozen men who write detective stories for the weekly libraries—and by the way, these are nickel novels, not dime novels, though I suppose the older term always will cling to them—are appreciating the fact that the schoolboy of to-day is an intellectual advancement over his daddy, and, consequently, you couldn't hold his interest by introducing the gun, the knife and the poison bottle whenever you run short of a sensible plot.

"The boys want mystery stories, and the detective who can solve these mysteries quickest and most effectively is the sleuth the youngsters will remember with their five-cent pieces on publication day. Why, it has got so that in one of the recent detective stories, which centres around the doings of the present day favorite, the bone ferretter worked out the entire problem without leaving his office, getting at the truth by the question and answer process and applying his deductions until they fitted the facts. This is a good deal healthier for the boy reader—and, incidentally, the change has resulted in attracting to the detective story another class of readers made up of lawyers and professional men, who find plenty of mental relaxation in following the fortunes of the chief makers who hold the public attention to day."

The nickel novel is now got up in more attractive form than was its predecessor. For one thing, there is a colored cover in place of the old black and white

row had lived in the house about a year. She had some kind of work at home—writing and attending to accounts for an old gentleman who came to that house sometimes.

"I suppose that she was at her typewriter most of the time," said Carey offhand.

"Yes," said the janitress, "she was always typewriting."

"A good Smith Premier typewriter is a great help," said Carey.

"I don't know nothing about typewriters," said the janitress.

She could not remember just when Mrs. Morrow moved. The real estate agents who rented that house could tell. And, having satisfied myself that Mrs. Morrow owned a typewriter—although he had failed to establish that it was a Remington—Carey saw the agents. Mrs. Morrow had moved on August 8, four days after Station W, at the corner, had stamped that anonymous letter.

The agents furnished another fact, a great deal more pertinent. Some of the correspondence regarding the rent had been conducted by William H. Hall, and William H. Hall wrote on a sheet of note paper water marked "Victor," and the date line on his notehead

"BUT GIVE ME THAT PAPER," SAID HALL.

wood cut that was for long such an artistic horror. The publishing houses pay a good deal of attention to externals, and it pays to give the boys something neat and tasty, for they are a very important part of the reading public, and their support of a nickel library is not to be sneered at by the business office."

"Who is writing the detective stories of to-day?" "We have one man who does nothing else. His mind has been trained along these peculiar lines, and he has acquired a style that the boys seem to delight in. We keep him about a dozen numbers ahead of normal publication, for we can't afford to slip up in our weekly output. Sometimes, when he is indisposed, we assign the job to another member of the staff, but as a rule it is one man who does the work."

"The detective story, however, is not the one that heads the list of popular productions for young fellows. As a matter of fact, the library that sells best is one that exploits the doings of a boy. That is what the boys like most to read about—something another boy just like themselves has done. Of course they are filled with admiration for the achievements of the great detectives of fiction, but they always feel that they'll have to wait until they grow up before they can successfully emulate these heroes. In the case of the boy hero it is different. Every young reader feels he can emulate the performances of this youthful paragon, and that is why the weekly sales of the library are enormous."

"What does this boy hero do?" "Everything a healthy boy ought to do. He is the champion baseball player and the best football player and the most satisfactory all round athlete his country can produce. He is the sort of a lad Jack Hark-

Popping the Question

"To-night I speak to your father, dearest. What had I better say?" "Well, hadn't you better first call his attention to the penalties for assault, manslaughter and murder?"



WILL IRWIN

to a tree. Neither could he get sight of any William H. Hall letterheads. He pretended to take measurements and asked Mrs. Morrow for a sheet of paper to note down his figures. She produced a plain piece of notepaper, and the policeman was baffled again.

Two days later, while Carey was still watching the house and meditating new plans, Mrs. Morrow suddenly began making preparations to move. Carey found from the transfer company that she was going to the neighboring town of Peekskill, a haul so short that she intended to take her goods by wagon instead of by train. The detectives watched the case of that typewriter go into the van at Mamaroneck; watched it taken out at the new house in Peekskill. Two days afterward, when she was getting settled, they saw Hall, with whose face they had got acquainted, walk up the front path, ring the doorbell and enter the house.

The psychological moment had come. Carey spent his time. Accompanied by MacConaughy, a detective, who can use a typewriter, he called on Mrs. Morrow and stated the whole case plainly to her.

"And the best thing you can do," said Carey, "is to let me look at all your letter paper and give me samples from that typewriter." Mrs. Morrow became a volcano of wrath, then an iceberg of angry reserve. The police might do as they pleased, she said; she knew nothing of any poisoned candy; they had no rights outside of New York; she could thank him to leave the house at once. As Carey stood at the door, "jollying her," he says, Hall entered the room. Carey, who had been waiting for this, stepped up and slapped Hall on the shoulder.

"Why, Mr. Hall," he said, "don't you know me? I used to know you when you were in the hat business on Beaver street. Remember?" And Carey laid off a string of reminiscences of Hall's early life.

Hall started like a man caught in the act. Carey pressed his advantage. Mrs. Morrow was in a very unfortunate position. It would be best for her to be frank, else the New York police would have to use other methods.

Hall turned to Mrs. Morrow.

"I think you had better let them see everything," he said.

"Then show me all the paper you have in the house," said Carey.

They went from room to room. Mrs. Morrow over-looked all the places where paper might be kept and Carey pointed them out to her. In a bureau drawer at the top of the house he found a pad, letter size, with the letterhead of William H. Hall. Tearing off a sample, Carey hustled Mrs. Morrow into the parlor and asked her to open the typewriter.

"It is locked," said she.

"That's easily remedied," said Carey, and he tore off the hasp. Before either she or the hesitating and troubled Hall could get breath MacConaughy was seated and was running off capital W's. By a gesture Mrs. Morrow invited Hall outside. Carey immediately drew out the Maybon letter and dictated its text to his assistant. When MacConaughy had finished it Carey sat down to the typewriter and began to stab the keys, imitating with unpracticed hand the sound of the machine at work. At the same moment he winked at MacConaughy. The latter, taking the cue, stepped to the door and listened. And he heard Mrs. Morrow say:—

"Quick! Don't you know that it will be used in court?"

A minute later Hall, evidently lashed to courage, burst in and ordered the detectives out.

"Oh, very well," said Carey, carelessly.

"But give me that paper," said Hall, snatching at the typewritten sample. Carey eyed him, thrust the paper in his pocket, and hurried out to the nearest telephone. On the way he compared the sample with the Maybon letter. The resemblance in the broken W's and the faulty alignment was perfect. Any one could see that they came from one and the same typewriter.

And here I begin to spring the solution. Arrived at the telephone, Carey called up the hospital on Ward's Island, got Dr. Maybon, and asked him not to let Miss Campbell leave the island nor get to a telephone.

For Miss Campbell, not Mrs. Morrow nor yet Mr. Hall, had been his suspect from the very first. Probably you are surprised at this. I hope that you are, because I have been doing my best to expose it. The writer of the Sherlock Holmes school would admit one strong psychological factor—ignorance—and one practical factor—experience."

The intuition of Carey told him, as soon as he had talked half an hour with Miss Campbell, that her attitude wasn't straight; that she was concealing something. His experience had taught him that in detectives of such cases the sleuth is also the criminal. One who has never done police work as a detective or reporter does not know how many hysterical women and girls accuse others of desperate attempts at crime which they have "planned" themselves. When it is reported that this or that young girl has been found lying unconscious in a shed, exhausted from her struggle with bandits who have held her captive, the experienced police captain never looks for the bandits until he has run the girl through the third degree. The anonymous letters, the candy poisoned with arsenic, all, to an experienced policeman, pointed to Miss Campbell as the sole perpetrator of this attempt at crime. Besides, I have purposely omitted one fact which came out late in the investigation.

On August 4, the day when the anonymous letter to Dr. Maybon was mailed, Miss Campbell was off the island on leave.

Carey proceeded at once to Ward's Island and called on Miss Campbell. She came down in a fresh evening dress, in all through three hours of the third degree. Slowly Carey worked it out of her. She admitted the letter first. She had written it surreptitiously on Mrs. Morrow's typewriter. Stage by stage she admitted buying the candy. But Carey would not let her stop there. He put her over to the Detective Bureau the next afternoon. There they sat from ten to nine before she said the word. Even then she gave few details. She had got the arsenic from the hospital dispensary "to poison rats." She had taken the candy, just after she brought it to the woman's room of a department store, unwrapped it, sprinkled it with arsenic and wrapped it up again. There was a writing desk "for the convenience of patients" next to hand. She had written the address on a piece of store paper, cut it out and fastened it on with the staples.

"But why did you do it?" asked Carey.

"I don't know," said Miss Campbell. "I just don't know."

And although Carey has his own explanation for it this is probably a better reason than any that he gives. They never do know.