

The Story of the Two Drowned Men

BY ROLAND B. MOLINEUX

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NEVER heard so mad a storm as raged that night. It flung itself against the death house walls with fierce abandon, as though the hungry future, to which we were individually consigned, had tired of waiting on the laws' delays and had come to take us all together. It is not absurd in the death chamber on such a night, even though we were entertaining company. Two of us, Frank Rohl and William Pallister, were soon to go through the little door into eternity, and so the death watch animated the scene.

The elder man, gaunt and yellow, was clothed in the meekness of a keeper's uniform. The guard was a young fellow, recently appointed, strong and tall, with the country tan of health upon his cheeks. The guard had eaten his supper and lighted his pipe. The keeper was restless. Every now and then he would go to the large double doors, unlock and open them and look out.

The emotions which affected him, however, were not akin to ours, although something had gone wrong with his affairs. Had he not known it from the position of the hands on his watch face, his stomach would have retched him. To speak plainly, the keeper was hungry. His supper had not come and it was nearly 9 o'clock.

It is strange from what trivial consequences mighty happenings will spring. Not that the keeper's appetite was a trivial matter. The size of the basket he awaited would have disclosed that, but because the storm had delayed its arrival he was impatient and went out to investigate.

The guard, left alone in charge, looked the door after the door. The key was on the inside. Then he started to stroll up and down the corridor. The guard was bored and tired. The storm had not on his nerves. He turned his head sharply at the sound of a slight cough, then went on again—indifferently. He had not noticed the soft signal in reply.

Perhaps it would not have told him anything if he had. There is not much danger in being left alone with 10 men all securely locked in 10 strong cells. Imaginative might make one afraid. Reality would demonstrate the absurdity of the fear.

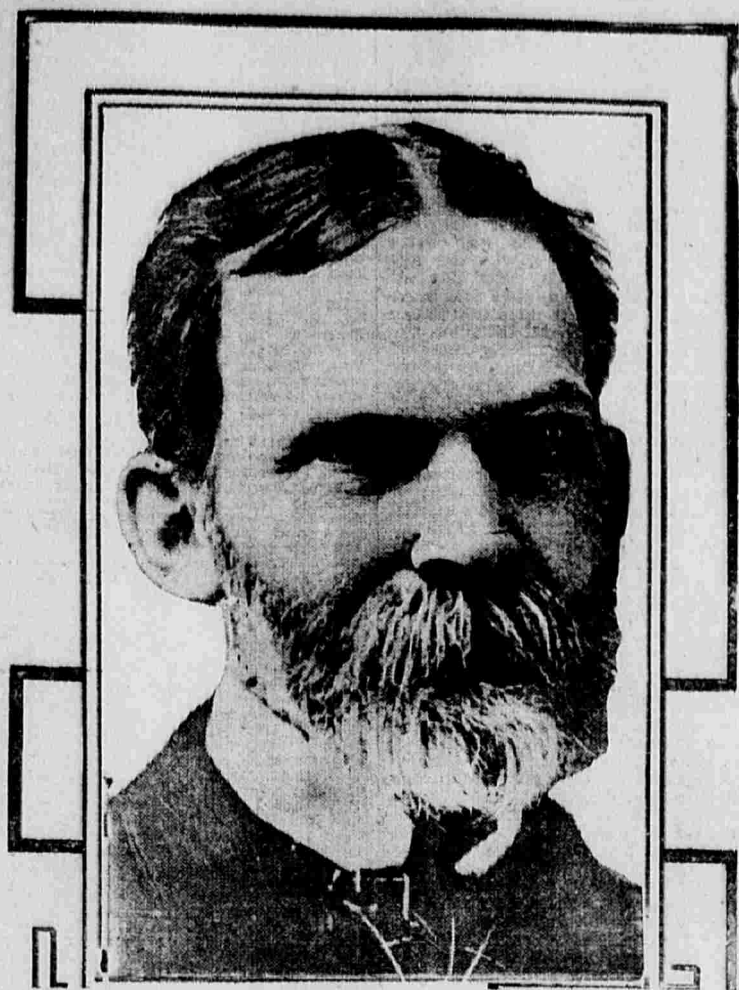
At the further end of the death chamber were the two men who must keep their eyes on. Both had been desperate characters. Both were still desperate. Of the two Frank Rohl was short and stout, thick of neck and heavy of jaw. His arms were like sledge hammers, his hands were enormous. When the doors had closed behind the keeper Rohl had filled his mouth with soap and the juice from a ripe red tomato; he threw himself upon the floor, screaming and frothing at the mouth.

The guard rushed to the cell. He was a new man, a nervous man, a feeling man, a kind man, not at all the sort of man to be left alone in a death chamber, and he was only a guard.

It was absolutely against the rules for a cell in the death chamber to be opened unless the guard was present. But Rohl appeared to be dying. His cries were piteous. There was bloody froth choking him. The guard hesitated no longer. He unlocked the door and entered the cell. He bent over Rohl and raised his head.

In an instant Rohl had him by the throat.

Never before has such a struggle taken place, and amid such strange surroundings. In the same room nine men condemned to death, each locked in a little iron cage, pressed their faces against the bars and listened. They could see nothing. And all the time



W. F. WALKER.

A reward of \$5,000 alive or \$10,000 dead body has been offered by the directorate of the Savings Bank of New Britain, Conn., for W. F. Walker, the bank's missing treasurer. More than \$505,000 disappeared with Treasurer Walker, and various stories have been current regarding his present condition. It has come to be believed that he pretended suicide and then disappeared on some steamer from New York or nearby port, but a large part of the funds which he took from the bank is known to have been lost in Wall street speculation. Some are charitable enough to say that he was insane and may be at this moment wandering about in an unbalanced state of mind. Whether or not he is insane, his work in liquidating the bank of a great part of its assets was that of a cunning mind and he laid his plans for getting away with marvelous skill.

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ing back, but the key was on the in-

side. Would the guard be able to

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We could hear their heavy breath-

ing, the sounds of blows and curses,

trapped together, they rolled out into

the corridor. Then we saw them as

they swayed in front of our cells—

prisoners, all the man gone from

them in this last fight for exist-

ence. The guard was trying to get

his revolver out of his pocket, while

Rohl was biting and striking him.

The crying man. Slowly

but surely we saw that Rohl was

forcing him, inch by inch, toward Pal-

lister's cell, where Pallister, with a

terrific exertion, was trying to work

lean arms, the arms of a gorilla,

stretched out through the bars, wait-

ing to grasp the victim. They caught

him at last. The guard slipped

around the guard's neck and under his

chin. They clasped in front of his

throat and drew him back against the

iron bars and began to garrote him.

Vainly the guard sought to break the

hold. Then Rohl, released, took the

revolver and the keys from the guard

and opened Pallister's cell. Together

they bound and gagged the guard with

a sheet. While doing this the keeper

returned and knocked on the outer

door.

Inside the death house it was

silence now. Rohl and Pallister crept

down the corridor and opened the

door. The keeper entered. He car-

ried the large key containing his

delayed supper. They slammed the

door behind him, and while Rohl held

the guard's pistol to the keeper's head

Pallister locked the door. Then the

bound and gagged the keeper and

locked him and the guard in the cells

they had just vacated.

It was 9 o'clock. There would be

no relief until six in the morning. They

had the night before them in which

to work.

Chance plays strange tricks with

some men. Rohl had been a convict

in Sing Sing prison shortly before he

arrived as a candidate for the honors

of the "frying pan." As a convict he

was put to work. The warden assigns

the men to those duties which they are

best fitted to perform. Rohl was a

bricklayer, so they put him to work on

the new death chamber then in course

of construction. Consequently he

knew it from the first brick to the last.

He knew of one weak spot in the

roof. For that weak spot the two outlaws

made their plan. They were on top of the

cell in a moment. Rohl, lifted on Pal-

lister's shoulders, began to pry the bricks

from the top of the wall, just under the

beams which held the ceiling. When

the hole was large enough they crawled

down and ate the keeper's supper.

There was enough for two, and with

the crusts and apple cores left over

they passed the night. They were

the blackness of the night and the

noise of the storm preventing their

discovery. From the warden's

house they took a boat and got away.

Truth is stranger than fiction, but

truth is stranger than even that. So far

I have described exactly what occurred.

No official will dispute the facts. They

are matters of record. But as to how

the warden captured these two men

there are conflicting versions. This is

the official account, the one the warden

tells.

While Rohl and Pallister were going

down the river in the stolen boat they

were seen and followed. Shots were

fired after them. The overturned boat

was found. A few weeks afterward

their decomposed bodies were recovered

from the Hudson river. They were al-

most unrecognizable, but the warden

had them taken to the prison morgue.

There were the bullet holes in their

backs—this was the warden's proof.

But there is another story which is

only whispered along the gray corridors

when no official is near. It is one of the

choicest traditions of the hospital,

which could tell many tales if it only

would. The version has been denied

many times, but it lives still.

Rohl and Pallister had accomplished

the impossible. They had "beat" the

death chamber. For the honor of the

prison they must be caught somehow.

But they had gone. What would the

public say—that public which decrees

that there shall be a death chamber

and demands that there shall be only

one way of exit from it, and that by

way of the little door? What would

those in authority do—these at Albany

who looked after the workings of the

"chamber" for the great and generous

public?

The warden sat down in his office and

pondered over these things. He was in

an unpleasant state of mind. His sub-

ordinates had no wish to intrude upon

him. The principal keeper, however,

had to make his daily report. Very

glibly he entered, mopping his fore-

head, and laid the prison census before

his chief.

So many in the prisons, carefully

counted—all correct.

Death chamber—two escaped. The

warden swore.

Hospital—one death.

The warden arose and threw his arms

about the "P. K." neck and wept for

joy upon his bosom.

That night they prepared the man

who had died for the part he was to

play in the comedy. They shot his

back full of holes. They treated his

features with a rasp file. Then they

threw his body into the river—with a

string to it.

They buried a coffin in which the

hospital patient should have been. They

filled it with the proper weight of rocks.

They put his number on the empty

coffin, and interred it in the prison

graveyard.

But there must be two bodies, and

two the warden would have.

That night the warden passed through

the hospital wards many times, scan-

ning the patients with unheeded

interest. He looked long and anxiously

at several of his charges. Now it is

very well to play off ill for the sake of

getting out of a few days' work, but

when men are needed for river jobs like

the one just mentioned it looked like

lying in the face of Providence to be

ill. Miraculous were the recoveries.

It was all right, though. Another

wretch died in time—after being help-

ed a bit—which was considerable of him.

He received the same careful treatment

and went to join the first in the river

and there was another merry little

funeral over an empty coffin.

When the matter had done its little

work they fished them up. I mean they

recovered Rohl and Pallister's bodies.

Just to make the identification com-

plete, satisfy reporters and stop the

public clamor, the warden sent for Pal-

lister's old mother. She came. The