

SIMON IFF IN AMERICA

No. 7

A DANGEROUS SAFE TRICK

"Ladies and gentlemen! I have a confession to make to you. I am leading a double life! (Laughter) To tell you the truth, I got tired of being as ugly as you see me now. (Laughter) ('Opopo' was a singularly handsome man.) Fortunately one day as I was walking down Broadway, I met a benevolent fairy (Laughter) who offered, as a reward for my well-known nobility of character, to give me a wish. I asked to be allowed to become a beautiful girl for at least part of every day. We fixed it for 10:15; dear me, it's nearly 10:15 now. I thought you would like to see the change - and wo you shall. But fairies are very particular about their work; the actual operation must be done in darkness. Very thick darkness, ladies and gentlemen, for such powerful psychic force as this! So permit me to retire to the very complete seclusion of this excellent safe, which I perceive tasks the strength even of these four successors of Hercules." The audience in fact beheld a safe, just large enough to hold a man's body, borne from the wings by the staggering porters.

"Let me now introduce Mr. Nash, of the Manganese Safety Corporation."

Mr. Nash stepped forward with a bow. "Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "I represent the Manganese Safety Corporation. This is one of our latest pattern safes of the regular type. It is not a trick safe. I have inspected it to-night. It has not in any way been tampered with. I have here a thousand dollar bill." (he waved it) "Which I shall be pleased to present to any one who can prove the contrary, or to any yeggman in the theatre who without knowing the combination can open it in less than twenty-four hours, by drills, blowpipes, high explosives." Mr. Nash retired, with another little bow. 'Opopo' continued his address.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, it is of course quite obvious that anyone can get out of a safe, sealed as this will be by a committee from the audience with their own private seals, and covered with a tarpaulin, corded, and seals again placed upon the cords, and disappear by means of a trap-door. To obviate this, a large sheet of tinfoil will be placed beneath the safe. Hey, tinfoil, where are you? You're keeping the stage waiting. You'll hear of this on Friday!"

Two men entered with a square of quivering steel, three yards by three.

"Now, may I request half-a-dozen ladies and gentlemen to come upon the stage? I should like the audience to feel assured that there is no trickery about this plate. No sliding panels, secret doors, springs, hinges, or places of concealment! After the usual momentary hesitation, the required committee stepped sheepishly upon the stage, and took the chairs provided for them by the 'supers.'

"Welcome!" cried Opopo. "Roam freely where you will. Examine everything you see! Yes, sir," he addressed a man who was looking at the plate with what he

possibly supposed to be a knowing air. "Yes, sir, you are right again. That is how the trick is done!"

The men turned the edge of the steel sheet every way to the audience. It was obviously what it appeared to be. It was barely thicker than a sheet of paper.

The men laid it down carefully. Opopo picked up a roll of green baize, brought in with the safe, and tossed it with apparent carelessness on to the plate which it was large enough to cover completely. "Put the safe on the middle!"

"Excuse me!" said one of the committee. "I should like to examine that cloth!"

'Opopo' protested. "We don't want to draw out this examination; we're tied for time. Miss Frolic was furious last night because we kept her waiting."

"I apologize to the lady," said the committeeman sturdily, feeling like the elder Cato, but I must insist."

It was a perfectly ordinary piece of green baize in every respect, and the committeeman retired, with the Elder Cato feeling gone 'away in der ewigkeit'. Opopo replaced it. The tarpaulin was next produced and examined. It was shaped to the safe, and could be fastened by a cord running in and out through a series of rings. This cord, tied, and sealed from without, appeared a singularly simple and secure protection. Two men put this loosely about the safe, which they then placed in the centre of the steel plate. Opopo threw back the tarpaulin and opened it.

"You will now please rope and handcuff me as much as you like, and shut me in. I will ask one member of the committee, and one alone, to reset the combination, so that neither I, nor any possible confederate, can open the safe from without until it is done in full view of the audience. You will kindly seal the door with your own private seals. You will then be good enough to fasten the tarpaulin, and seal that. In order to make sure that I do not escape North, East, South, West, or above, as you have already arranged in the matter of the floor, you will please adjust the tent, which as you see is made of ordinary linen sheets supported on a light bamboo framework."

The committee verified this statement. Opopo then removed his evening clothes appearing in tights, and they affixed ropes and chains to their hearts' content. He then got into the safe. "Good-night, ladies and gentlemen! When you next see me, I shall be a beautiful young girl. You will know when the change has been operated by my beginning to sing in a mezzo soprano which has been highly praised. You will then kindly release me from my imprisonment."

He closed the door. The committee went through the dreary formalities to the foregone conclusion; having removed the tent, and investigated the seals, which were intact, the safe was opened, and a charming young lady stepped out upon the stage. "I am sorry to bid you goodnight," she said. "Just one snatch of song while our friends here regain their seats; and then I will be off to dance at Yvette's."

She sang a pretty Italian air, and down came the curtain behind her. As she turned, Opopo advanced from the wings, and took her hand for the final applause. It was a very finished performance; fourteen minutes and seven seconds by Simon Iff's watch.

"Neatly presented," he remarked to Signorina Visconti, "but the method is a little too obvious."

"I don't see how it's done at all... But I rather suspect that steel plate."

"Delightful child! That's true imagination. The trickery is likely to lie in the simplest and surest precaution against it. Like a problem by Sam Loyd. You're probably right."

"Is that it, then? But how?"

"Oh, about a dozen ways of doing it suggest themselves."

"I think it is pure psychism," remarked a very fat lady on the other side of the magician, in a very loud harsh voice, meant to be languishing.

Iff's lips curled rather bitterly. "None of my dozen explanations involve hypnotism, double personality, brain storms, undeveloped thyroid, or the fourth dimension. What a pity! But I cannot rise to those ethereal heights."

The Visconti appreciated the remark.

"Some people are all soul," she murmured, with an eye on the fat lady's corset, which reminded her of the Last Stand of the Old Guard.

"Yes; we should have insisted on confining him in one of those," laughed Iff gently, in her much - too - highly - convoluted ear.

Miss Frolic was 'chronic'; Iff and his companion wandered out into Broadway, and sought supper.

II

It was a sweltering day in August. The air was utterly stagnant. The thermometer stood at 102°; but 102° in Manhattan can be worse than 120° elsewhere. The moisture was insufferable. The air was heavy with electricity. Those who had enough strength left to pray prayed for thunderstorms.

Simon Iff was at work on a mathematical - philosophical treatise. He wished to follow in the footsteps of Pythagoras, Raymond Lully, and the founders of Freemasonry; to do for the modern scientific conception of the universe what they had done for their own conceptions, the expression of all known relations synthetically in an arithmetical or geometrical notation. There were not many people at work in New York that day. Men and horses were dying like flies. Enormous crowds

lay gasping on the beaches, like fish taken from the water. The Mayor of the City was in the Adirondacks, fishing in the vicinity of cottages 'with a double coach-house' whose owners called him by his Christian name, and would do so long as he was Mayor, and could deliver the goods.

But Simon Iff stayed grimly with his folios. Nor did he spare his servants. He had three cars delivering ice on the East side, careless of their upholstery. Nor did his men complain that he asked them to put in twelve hours of that fearful day; they made it sixteen, of their own accord. They had it all to themselves no jealous millionaires jostled them in their errand.

It was a Monday, and far away in Chicago the bills of Helmuth's Sublime Vaudeville had Opopo for a top-liner.

The newspapers of Tuesday morning had the sensation. The trick had failed; Opopo had been found dead when the safe was finally opened. There were no details Opopo's wife, who had been present, forbade any of the assistants to say anything that might disclose the secret of the trick, which was her late husband's principal asset, unless and until official enquiry demanded it. The cause of death was beyond question, even before an examination of the body. As the door of the safe was opened the committeeman was sent staggering back, shocked almost out of life, by a gust of prussic acid.

Suicide! his last supreme achievement in advertisement. For to the first impression of the public any alternative appeared physically impossible. But the 'Chicago Pigeon' had telegraphed to New York for Wake Morningside, the famous expert in all manner of conjuring tricks and illusions, and exposé of many a fraudulent medium, to investigate the case. An hour after the despatch of the telegram Morningside walked into the office of the paper.

"Say, some stunt!" was the editorial greeting. "How 'n 'll you get here? I wired an hour back, and nine hours after the story. Speak, mystic stranger!"

"Oh, I happened to be lecturing in St. Louis, and I stopped off here to see the show. I was one of the committee."

"Gee, some luck!"

"I made an extremely careful examination of the apparatus. I got the facts exactly as they occurred. I examined the apparatus again after the safe was opened. And I have a story for you, complete from A to Z."

"Gee-whiz, we've got the world beat!"

"I put the whole thing down from my notes; I worked all night on it; finished twenty minutes before your wire came, forwarded on from New York."

III

At the same moment as this interview, Miss Mollie Madison rang with timid desperation at the door of Simon Iff's apartment. She would have braved a Rocke-

feller in his lair with greater courage, so far as awe went; but she felt, as did everyone who knew him, the intensity of the mystic's loving kindness, so that with her shyness went an inexpressible confidence.

"I am un-feignedly glad to see you, my dear," he cried, coming forward with both hands outstretched; "you are an exquisite excuse for me to abandon my work. On a day like this too! It is a favour I shall not readily forget."

"You are the kindest, dearest man!"

"Well, tell me your sad story."

"It's the Safe Mystery, of course."

"What safe?"

"Haven't you seen the newspapers?"

"There isn't a word about it in the Tao Teh Ching."

"Oh, silly! I mean the New York papers."

"Better tell me!"

"Opopo is dead."

"All must die!"

"But not of prussic acid in a safe!"

"True, very true. Now I perceive a less altruistic object in your most timely visit than that of luring me from the blistering crags of transcendental philosophy to those primrose paths that lead to the everlasting bonfire of Titianesque Mollie Madison!" She blushed delightfully.

"The minute I saw it I called up the office and asked if I might cover the story, and mentioned you. They said there were no facts come through yet; I told them it was all the better; you didn't need anything so crude."

"Again I am betrayed!"

"I've told you practically the whole story already. Of course it's suicide, because it couldn't possibly be anything else; but there's no reason why he should have done it, except the stunt itself, and that's going a little far. His wife talks crazily, from grief."

"It isn't really a mystery, then; it's merely an eccentric action."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"But Oppo was not at all an eccentric man. He was prosperous, I imagine;

his wife was apparently devoted to him; he must have been a steady, sober person to hold down his job; he was always inventing new tricks; he has written three books on illusions. Let us consider if his wife's talk is as crazy as it sounds. What is it?"

"She claims Miss Max - the girl he pretends to turn into, you know - did it."

"Let us consider this hypothesis. How is the trick done, anyhow?"

"Nobody knows."

"Oh yes, I know. I saw the show when it was at the Gloria. Let me show you at least how it could be done, on what I saw that night.

"First, A very thin elastic steel plate is put on the floor. Over this a green biaz cloth is thrown, very carelessly. This action raised a protest, as the cloth had not been examined; time was occupied in the argument about it. Something important was certainly being done with that time. When ultimately replaced on the plate, it was not thrown loosely, but spread out carefully, leaving a yard of plate visible in front, and overlapping the bare stage behind. The safe was then placed on the centre of the plate, after being put in its tarpaulin.

"We can stop there, for the moment. We have a complete picture of the apparatus which is subsequently hidden by the tent for a few minutes. We need not worry about the cords and handcuffs; Opopo would have had them off before the echoes of the clanging door had died away. The safe is of a pattern which opens from within at a touch.

"It is sealed; but as he enters it, he affixes a strip of oiled paper to the jamb, so that the seal comes away whole. He can then remove the paper, heat the back of the wax with a special instrument, and reseal the safe so as to defy detection.

"Opopo, then, hearing the tarpaulin pulled into position, puts out a hand and offers a 'false end', as it is called, to the man who is tying the cord. This cord is then not fastened at all till Opopo fastens it, later on. This he must do, lest the fraud be discovered during the opening.

"While the biaz is lying on the plate, a second plate, containing an orifice large enough for a man to pass, is pushed, under cover of the biaz, through a slit in the stage, beneath the first plate. While the biaz is being spread - after the little controversy - he would always find a new way every night, no doubt, to distract attention - the first plate is pulled back through the slit.

"We thus have a simple means of exit. It is merely necessary to open a trap beneath the hole in the plate. The moment that the tent is in place, Miss Max comes up from beneath, and helps, if necessary, to adjust affairs plausibly. Possibly she is really needed to assist in the unfastening, though I doubt it. Opopo shuts her in the safe, attends to the resealing, and vanishes through the hole. The trick is turned.

"On the night I was there the time between the rise and fall of the curtain

was fourteen minutes and seven seconds; between the veiling and unveiling of the safe thirty-eight seconds and three-fifths. That is, the safe was actually hidden from my sight for that period. It is a splendidly smart performance. Of course; I cannot be sure that they do it in the way I have indicated; but it is not far out. The escape is certainly through the stage, not in any other direction.

"If follows that every action must be done with incomparable verve and snap. They have to drill for weeks. Of course there's a little lee-way, but that's in case of a hitch. The brilliant effect depends entirely on the shortness of the time of veiling. Take sixty seconds, and people would begin to be bored.

"Now then - whom have we here? Opopo himself, Miss Max, and a man to work the exchange of the plates, unless she did it herself, as is possible. These people hate to multiply assistants; each one means a chance to let their secrets get out. The porters are mere supers, of course,

"However, it doesn't matter if there were twenty assistants. One person, and one only, had access to Opopo during that forty seconds more or less when the safe was veiled. At any other time, no one had access. Of course, Opopo was alone after he had shut her into the safe, but a third person could hardly have killed him and put him back and taken her out, without her noticing something unusual! We must therefore take our choice between suicide, and murder by Miss Max.

"We know nothing about Miss Max; but would any human being choose to commit murder in such a way? Her only chance of escape is the suicide theory, which she must have known to be unlikely - else why murder the man, for one thing? It would be sure to strike some one to suspect her, as the one person with access to Opopo; the prussic acid would soon be traced to her; and so - Good-night, good-bye! as Swinburne says. She must have had a dozen better opportunities daily. Bring me motives by the wagon load, circumstantial evidence by the rod, pole, or perch, and I shall still say that she didn't do it, unless she is an epileptic maniac."

"I may print that?"

"Yes; but add that I think it is a case of murder."

"You just proved it wasn't!" cried Miss Mollie Madison in comic despair.

"Never in the world! Read over your notes! Also add this. My opinion is provisional; but it is the best that I can do without having any facts at all to guide me."

And so it came about that Wake Morningside's article and the interview with Simon Iff were printed in parallel columns under the heading:

'Opposite Opinions: the man who saw and heard everything, and the man who saw and heard nothing.'

IV

Wake Morningside's article was a feather in Simon Iff's cap in one respect. He agreed entirely as to the method of the trick. The second plate of steel,

which of course was exposed by the authorities as being part of the apparatus, made that clear.

But what was new was actually the record of the events of the fatal night. Morningside had been on the committee.

The trick had passed off normally up to the moment of the veiling. The 'green-biase argument' had been started by a voice from the gallery, an accomplice stationed for the purpose in case the committee failed to challenge Opopo on the subject.

Morningside took out his watch to time the period of veiling. Ninety-two seconds elapsed; he thought 'What a badly worked trick!' Then the curtain came down suddenly, cutting off the committee from the audience. He heard the stage manager apologizing, and a singer coming on in front of the curtain as the orchestra struck up. At the same time as the manager began his little speech, Miss Mas ran in from the wings. 'There's something wrong! she said; open the safe quick!

Of course she had not the combination; only the committeeman knew that. The man fumbled; Mr. Nash ran up, got the word from him, and spun round the wheel. Both he and the committeeman were overpowered by the fume of the acid, and had to be treated medically.

Morningside kept his head, and examined the safe, discovering the trick by which the seals were affixed to a 'camouflage' strip of paper instead of to the steel jamb. He also discovered the 'false end' of the tarpaulin cord. Nothing had been touched from within; it was certain that Opopo had died almost immediately on entering the safe. In fact, he was still partially bound; his legs were tied firmly; his left arm still wore a handcuff. Only the right forearm was wholly free.

An Inspector of Police now appeared on the scene. The manager wanted the stage cleared; the inspector insisted that the audience be informed of the nature of the accident - so far as that it was not a fire - and the house closed for the night, so that the coroner might view the body. The Inspector took the names and addresses of the committee, that he might call them as witnesses.

Morningside dismissed the suicide theory as incredible.

The evidence of Opopo's wife was extremely sane and strong. He had bought a house only a month before; he was spending every day with her in delighted purchase of old furniture and pictures, in which he had always revelled. That very morning he had received a telegram informing him that the Supreme Court had confirmed a judgment in his favour relative to certain breaches of his copyright in the 'act'; and he ordered a supper after the performance, to celebrate it. He was entangled with any woman; his marriage was only six months old; a baby was on the way, and his great wish had always been for a son to carry on the Opopo tradition, he himself being the third of that dynasty. Friends and colleagues confirmed this statement on many points.

Morningside then proceeded to prove that in the ninety-two seconds at her disposal Miss Max could easily have accomplished the murder. She had almost certainly some quick method of learning the combination of the safe. There were fifty

ways of informing her. It was probably necessary, since now and again Opopo might fail to free himself from the cords, and she would then have to help him. Therefore, she had but to open the safe, administer the poison, readjust it and the seals, do the same with the tarpaulin, and give the alarm. The closed safe was her alibi.

As to the motive, that was not the affair of Mr. Wake Morningside, and he was always the servant of the public.

The 'Chicago Pigeon' had not been content with one angle of the case. Another reporter had got after Miss Max; and Morningside's article was followed by her biography.

She was of poor parents of doubtful character, both dead or disappeared. Her mind was amazingly precocious; she had gained a scholarship at Bryn Naur and specialized in chemistry (Chemistry, pray observe). She had led a wild life there and had been expelled for an outrageous escapade. For two years, it seems, she had walked the streets, and on three occasions narrowly escaped convictions as a thief. She then fascinated a photographer - in whose studio, remarked the reporter, potassium cyanide abounds, and only needs distillation with sulphuric acid to produce the poison that killed Opopo. This photographer had died under suspicious circumstances. Miss Max disappeared for awhile; she was next heard of in connection with a gang of coiners, but the police could get no evidence against her. She began to have plenty of money, however; and, with the help of an 'angel' appeared in a cabaret as a dancer. She next tried vaudeville in a Japanese juggling act, but failed lamentably. Here, however, she met Opopo. This was a year before his marriage. He engaged her as his assistant. She set her cap at him, but in vain. Shortly after his engagement to the lady whom he married, somebody threw vitriol at them, which luckily missed. She was suspected, but proved an alibi by three wealthy men, probably all of them under her spell. Recently she had renewed her advances to Opopo. Her extraordinary cleverness in the 'act', which was making big money, prevented him from discharging her. But ten days before his death he had interviewed another girl, it is said, and engaged her from the end of the following month. Miss Max might or might not have been cognizant of this fact, but it was natural to suppose that he had given her a notice to quit.

An hour after the publication of this issue an 'extra' was being cried on the streets. The coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of murder against Miss Max, and she had been arrested.

"This," said Simon Iff, "is where I become the darling of the Great American People. Rise, Sir Simon Iff! My arms, thou gallant squire! My battle-charger, Eustace! Hie thee to King Arthur, Clarence, and lout thee low, and say Sir Simon is afield. Beauty and innocence in danger! By'r Lady, the varlets shall rue it!"

This singular outburst was entirely unintelligible to Iff's Japanese servant, but he judged from his master's tone that brandy would fit the cause; so he placed on the table a bottle of date eighteen hundred and eleven.

"Pack! commanded Iff, "and telephone for berths to Chicago on the first good train we can conveniently catch."

It is to be regretted that Simple Simon now becomes a character more infamous

than Benedict Arnold. He telephoned Miss Mollie Madison, and told her his intentions. She was not going to miss that chance, and she followed him to Chicago on the very next train. Thus simply and without effort do we incur fifteen years' imprisonment in the Land of the Free.

The wretched woman, now completely in the toils of the vilest of mankind, had breakfast with him at the Hotel Obsidian. He drank neat brandy like a fish, and became more sober and more angry every moment.

"We are up against it, little one," said he, lighting a Florida cigar in order to become still angrier; "we have Idiocy and Malice to contend with in the person of Wake Morningside and this dog Walter Gale - whose name I should prefer to pronounce in the French fashion.

"There isn't a hint of any investigation, or evidence of any desire to discover the truth. It's the most blasted balderdash from one, the foulest libel from the other. Let's run through it! Here! Evidence of the wife. Very anxious to prove how much her husband loved her, isn't she? Methinks the lady doth protest too much. Well, never mind her; she's nobody; wives often are.

"Evidence of Mr. Expert Wake Morningside. Wake is either 'lucus a non lucendo' or short for quack. Hear him! 'She had almost certainly a way to get the word of the safe.' Almost. 'There were fifty ways of informing her.' Why not say one way, and mention it?

'It was probably necessary.'

"Opopo might fail.' He hasn't failed in thirty years on the stage, with the whole world, and his enemies in the profession, out to make a fool of him.

"She had but to perform a most complicated trick, which would certainly convict her. The wife, at least, would know how easy it would be for her, and her alone, to do it. And she is to do this, if you please, when Opopo is already out of his bonds, and free on the stage. She is to kill him and pick him up again, is she? The safe would certainly be open before she ever reached the stage. Thirty-eight seconds and three-fifths, for the whole transfer, the night I was present. Opopo didn't read any novels to pass away the time!

"So much for Mr. Morningside and his conjugation with may, might, could, should, and would. Now for the unspeakable Gale!

"She was of poor parents' - pah! poor! how disgusting! 'of doubtful character' - of course, no money. 'dead or disappeared' - disgraceful of them! Then comes a fact, a fact in her favour. She gained a scholarship. That fact can be tested. 'She was expelled for an escapade.' Was she judged fairly by those arbitrary dons? A poor girl with no pull? And what's an 'escapade?' An innocent freak, or an assassination? Mr. Gale doesn't trouble to find out.

"She then walks the streets - 'it seems'. Where else would anybody walk?

"She 'narrowly escapes conviction as a thief.' In English, she was acquitted.

Pretty good for a poor girl, I think.

"She then fascinated a photographer' - English, she got a job.

"In the studio potassium cyanide abounds' - there's no English, thank God, for this filthy type of innuendo.

"He died 'under suspicious circumstances.' Who suspected what?

"She is 'heard of in connection with a gang of coiners.' What's the connection? 'The police could get no evidence against her!' Those miserable police - we reporters could teach them something! Then she dances in a cabaret - dreadful. Then she goes into vaudeville - more dreadful still.

"She set her cap at him, but in vain.' Who says so? The jealous wife, again? 'Somebody throws vitroil - and misses. Who was it? Miss Max, of course, a girl who has been in a Japanese Juggling Act. Yet she misses two people completely, not with a rifle at a thousand yards, but with vitroil!

"She was suspected,' and her alibi is so good that it must be false. The three men were 'probably all of them under her spell' - when the theory is that she is crazily in love with Opopo, and would have to explain the object of the alibi to the false witnesses. 'Wealthy men' have to be under all kinds of a spell to take a long chance of prison for the sake of a girl in love with another man!

"Then she 'renews her advances' to Opopo after his marriage. The wife again? And then he engages another girl, 'it is said?' Green room gossip.

'And it all ends up 'it is natural to suppose.'" I suppose it is natural to suppose, to some people! The long and the short of it is that this whole article is a most damnable tissue of malicious lying and guessing. There's not one single proved fact to her discredit. And is it 'natural to suppose' that this debauched harlot keeps herself clean and keen, every muscle taut, every nerve alert, as she must do to go through that act? I saw her. She's as swift and slender as Artemis, her eyes a-glitter, her lips firm, not an ounce of waste flesh; as you would perhaps say in an outburst of frankness, 'Gee, what a peach!" I may be an old do-tard, but I thought her a perfect type of woman. She may be 'immoral' in your vile Puritanical sense; but she's mistress of herself, if I ever saw one. Why, it's Love that gives strength and courage and vitality to those that serve Him wisely and gaily and with passion!"

"I'm feeling ever so much better, Mr. Iff!"

"If you're through breakfast, 'suppose we go and hunt up some real evidence!"

Simple Simon had bethought him to ask Teake to telephone the Chicago police to help him, and the Commissioner had gladly complied. In fact, he was cursing fate that his duties would not let him leave New York. He would have dearly loved to hunt with Simon Iff.

He found Rogers, the 'Whip of Chicago' as they called him! in consultation with the District Attorney. They greeted him warmly, but were not particularly

pleased when he announced his belief in the innocence of Miss Max. "You're but-
ring into an impossibility", began Rogers. The truth was that both men were ex-
tremely sore over a wrongful arrest, which had let the city in for heavy damages;
and a fiasco in the matter of a raid, which had made the administration ridiculous.
Their political existence was at stake; they could afford no more blunders.

Iff, with matchless tact - the wrong way round - tackled them directly. "Go
slow!" he said, "the longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home, and
kind hearts are more than coronets, and all that. Give that poor girl every court-
esy and comfort that you can; with a little luck, I'll have the right man for
you in four-and-twenty hours, and you'll be glad you did it."

"That's a bet," said Rogers, heartily, clasping Iff by the hand; "she shall
have champagne and caviar till to-morrow morning."

"Done!" cried Iff, "and now may I have an hour with the exhibits?"

Rogers conducted Iff to a vast room where the apparatus was stored. It had
been set up in position; the corpse of Opopo was replaced by a wax model, the
cords and handcuffs replaced exactly as they were when he was found.

"Beautiful!" cried Simon, "you really merit your success. This is true ima-
gination. Beautiful, beautiful!"

Rogers was much gratified.

"But where," asked the mystic, "is the phial containing the poison?"

"She destroyed it, obviously."

"You looked for it?"

"Everywhere."

"Beneath the stage?"

"Especially there."

"Good."

"She wasn't arrested til yesterday; she had plenty of opportunity to get rid
of it."

"But she didn't know that; she might have been arrested at once - with Mrs.
Opopo in the house. She would have got rid of it before giving the alarm."

"An accomplice under the stage?"

"Possibly. But do you mind if I look for it myself?"

"Sure. But where?"

"Here - and now."

Simple Simon inspected the inside of the safe with extreme care. He had the model removed, and renewed his effort. His delicate fingers seemed to caress the steel. Presently he withdrew, and began to examine the bonds that held the model. He seemed less interested than before; he was languid and distracted. "What's the use," he said slowly after a few minutes, "when one knows?"

Rogers was not at all impressed.

"Let's get down to business," suddenly snapped Simon, an entirely different person, "I want to see that committee. I may get some sense out of them."

"Wake Morningside's here now, as it happens; he wants leave to go on to New York."

"Lucky; let's see him! Here, for choice!"

"I'll send for him."

Morningside arrived in a few minutes. After the usual phrases of commonplace. Simon Iff began his attack.

"Forgive the impertinence of an old man to a young one, won't you? But you should always stick to the indicative mood. The subjunctive's poison to you. I think I may say that I've never known you wrong in a fact, or right in a theory. You've got observation skinned to a whisper (isn't it?) but your imagination is absolutely on the blink." He looked mildly to Rogers for encouragement in his efforts to talk the vernacular, but that deity was wholly occupied in chewing a cigar. Simon Iff thought of the priests of Baal, and wondered if he would do any good by crying and cutting himself with stones. Morningside was making his defence, and it would have been impolite to interrupt. Consequently, his mind was absolutely free to roam.

The moment Morningside concluded, he began, "This, Morningside, is why I rely absolutely upon your memory to solve this mystery. Which of the numerous fools on the committee brought those card cords to tie a man up with?"

They came from the theatre. Opopo provided them himself. Most people don't know how easy it is to slip the knot up with such stuff as that."

"I thought so. You, of course, are the wily old bird who supplied that soft cotton cord, and tied it properly?"

Morningside, pleased, nodded assent.

"There's one cord, thicker than yours and nearly as soft, with a curious knot behind the man's back that has pulled very tight."

"Yes." Morningside began to take interest. Rogers chewed his cigar like a cow with its cud.

"A cord which is neither quite right, nor quite wrong, for its purpose. A knot which implies considerable knowledge of knots, and quite wrong for its purpose."

"Now you mention it, that's so."

"Remember who brought that cord?"

"Yes, a tall man of about thirty."

"Because, when we pull that knot open in court, at the critical moment, we shall find a film of paraffin wax, or some very similar substance."

Rogers chewed his cigar with unabated determination; he spoke through his teeth.

"Very pretty work, Mr. Iff. I'll go get Professor William Henry Stubbs, born in Cincinnati, Ohio, May twenty-nine, eighteen hundred and eighty, educated at public schools and at the University of Cornell, travelled in Europe from June nineteen hundred and one to October nineteen hundred and five, took degree of doctor of science at Heidelberg nineteen hundred and five, inherited four thousand three hundred and sixty dollars in August nineteen hundred and six through the death of his mother, his father having died in infancy; lectured in Middle West and around the Coast during nineteen hundred and seven and nineteen hundred and eight; November of that year met Emma Susan Cooper, aged thirty-one and married her - January third, nineteen hundred and nine; obtained post of Professor of Physics in the Hazelrigg Simons University, Botts, Colorado, in March of the same year; separated from his wife May nineteen hundred and ten, she visited the east under the name of Miss Madeline Adams, and exchanging constantly letters of affection with; met her in Denver, Colorado, and spent a week with her at Christmas of that year; ceased to correspond with her in February of this year, but left Botts, Colorado, for this city, on Tuesday of last week on receipt of an unsigned telegram, giving the Dyer's Convention as an excuse for his absence, which convention he has punctually attended; was present at Helmuth's Sublime Vaudeville on Monday night of this week, and joined the committee on the stage at the presentation of the act of the late Opopo, alias John Drew Wescott, which was the true name of that performer."

He recommenced a more active mastication of his cigar. During his whole speech he had never faltered, or changed his tone or his expression.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" cried Simon, as delighted as he had been with the reconstruction of the stage scene. "And I take it that you will also get Emma Susan Cooper, or Stubbs, alias Madeline Adams, or Wescott."

"I shall," said the Sphinx, stolidly. "She put him up to it. Plenty of property, all settled on her; and twelve thousand plunks from the Insurance people."

"Why didn't you act?" put in Morningside.

"Couldn't see the possibility, same as you couldn't," retorted Rogers, rather cruelly. "Simple, ain't it, when you get on to it?" Paraffin capsule in a knot.

His first jerk for freedom, and the knot pulls tight, and the capsule crushes, and it's up the Golden Stairs singing Glory Hallelujah! Say, Mr. Iff, that was bully work, though when you didn't know. Gee! I was sore on you this morning; I thought you'd stall me off by proving that girl didn't do it, and scare the game!"

"We've both gone wrong," murmured Iff, "through taking each other for quite unpardonable fools!"

"How'd you get wise?"

"Easy," said Simple Simon. "Miss Max couldn't have done it. The man was dead before she reached the stage. Then somebody else did it. One of the committee, for certain. Morningside had examined everything, and found no prussic acid. I just ran over the walls of the safe, on the chance of some attachment there, which he might have overlooked. Nothing. Then who could have introduced what into that safe? Only a committeeman; only a cord. It was then merely a question of which cord. One couldn't easily fix a delicate capsule - a mere film of wax, in order to escape detection - in a hard cord, or a thin one. I knew the kind of cord Morningside would bring, and it wasn't he that did it. He hasn't got the imagination. Only one cord remains. Morningside's admirable faculties at once enabled us to discover who brought it. And then you opened with all that heavy artillery. Great work!"

"It's rather shocking," said Morningside, "Mrs. Wescott, or rather Stubbs, being enceinte."

"Now, they all try that. Ovariectomy, following disease, in September, nineteen hundred and nine."

"And it's been a terrible experience for Miss Max," was morningside's final broadside.

"Wish I had a cent for every dollar she gets out of the 'Pigeon'. Gee, but she'll pluck that bird! Guess I'll fix Old Man Stubbs and Missis Emma Susan now. You can hike right on down East, Mr. Morningside. We'll want you for the trial; you'll get a wire, all right! Might I have the pleasure of your company at dinner, Mr. Iff; I'd like you to meet my wife. She keeps my records."

"Thanks, I'd like to. And may I bring Miss Mollie Madison? She keeps mine."

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