

THE BLACK MASK

A MAGAZINE OF MYSTERY, THRILLS AND SURPRISE

Contents

| | | |
|---|----------------------------------|-----|
| BLUEBERRY PIE | Thyra Samter Winslow | 3 |
| <i>(complete mystery novelette)</i> | | |
| THE PHANTOM CHECK | George Bruce Marquis | 19 |
| THE VAULT | Murray Leinster | 30 |
| MURDER IN HASTE | John Baer | 37 |
| A WEAPON OF THE LAW | George W. Breuker | 44 |
| THE MONOLITH HOTEL MYSTERY | Lloyd Lonergan | 47 |
| EXTERIOR TO THE EVIDENCE (Part V) | J. S. Fletcher | 55 |
| THE FAILURE | Harold Ward | 72 |
| THE EXPLOSIVE GENTLEMAN | J. J. Stagg | 75 |
| THE WEIGHT OF A FEATHER | Carl Clausen | 81 |
| HIS THIRTEENTH WIFE | Herbert Raymond Carter | 89 |
| THE MISTAKEN SACRIFICE | Howard Rockey | 98 |
| THE POLICE SOMETIMES GUESS WRONG | Harold Ward | 107 |
| THE CATSPAW | Ward Sterling | 114 |
| THE FINGER PRINT BUREAU | J. H. Taylor | 123 |

F. M. OSBORNE, Editor

A. W. SUTTON, President

P. C. CODY, Vice-President and Circulation Director

F. W. WESTLAKE, Secretary and Treasurer

The entire contents of this magazine is protected by copyright and must not be reprinted.

Issued monthly by

PRO-DISTRIBUTORS PUBLISHING COMPANY, Inc.

25 West 45th Street, New York, New York

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$2.00

SINGLE COPIES 20 CENTS

Western Advertising Office, Wrigley Building, Chicago, Ill.

Copyright 1922 by
Pro-Distributors Publishing Company, Inc.

Entered as second class mail matter, March 1, 1920, at the Post Office
at New York, N. Y., under act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A.

Murder in Haste

By John Baer

I

OF the thousands of dentists in the city, Detective Carr chose to visit Dr. Raymond K. Perry on East Forty-eighth Street. A friend had recommended Dr. Perry; that was the only reason for the detective's choice.

The doctor was a small, bald, roundish, amiable gentleman with a pleasing personality. "Harmless" was the word which immediately occurred to you the first time you saw him. Nevertheless, the detective's eyes contracted rather sharply when he shook hands with the doctor. And a momentary expression of mingled doubt and surprise clouded his face. But he resumed his nonchalance immediately.

The detective's teeth were in a very bad condition. He had several cavities and a mild case of pyorrhea. The doctor made an examination and took an X-ray photograph. An appointment for two days later was made.

The intervening day was an extraordinarily busy one for Detective Carr. He spent the time running down the history and official record of the Kirven murder case, a crime which had been committed some ten months previously. The details of this case, with which he renewed his acquaintance, may be summed up briefly as follows:

At about ten-thirty in the morning Mr. Kirven was found dead in his room with his throat cut from ear to ear. A blood-stained razor was lying beside him. The body was discovered by his housekeeper, who had come to his house to do the cleaning.

That it was murder was plain, for there were signs of a furious struggle. Nor did the identity of the murderer remain long a mystery. William Lesser, the business partner of Mr. Kirven, disappeared, and for apparent reasons.

The books of the firm of Kirven & Lesser, brokers, appeared at first to be in good order. But an investigation revealed that several transactions involving large amounts had not been recorded. Bonds and securities which had been intrusted to Lesser by the firm's clients never reached the bookkeepers for entry. It was estimated that Lesser had absconded with some two hundred thousand dollars.

The direct cause of the murder was not known, but it was assumed that Kirven had discovered his partner's treachery, had accused or perhaps threatened him and had thus brought on a quarrel.

The police, in tracing Lesser's history, discovered that three years previous to the crime he had entered Kirven's office as a clerk. He made good so quickly that Mr. Kirven took him into partnership. No clue to any fact of Lesser's life before he entered the employ of Mr. Kirven could be found.

The heirs of Mr. Kirven, a sister and a nephew, offered a reward of five hundred dollars for the capture of Lesser. But months of zealous searching bore no result. The police had only an old photograph (found among Mr. Kirven's effects) and the descriptions given by employes and clients to guide them. After several months, official interest in the case smouldered and finally lapsed altogether.

Detective Carr was one of the depart-

ment's famous camera-eye men. No disguise had as yet fooled him. He was able to penetrate almost immediately any artificial changes of appearance. He had never met the missing Lesser personally, but he had, of course, seen the pictures which had been published in the papers.

His first glance had convinced him that the man who was running a dental office on Forty-eighth Street under the name of Dr. Perry was the man who had disappeared under the name of Lesser.

And this in spite of the fact that Dr. Perry's appearance differed from Mr. Lesser's in several important respects. Lesser, to judge by his picture and the descriptions of him, was a man about five feet six in height, normal weight, clean shaven, light complected, with a thick crop of blond hair.

This description corresponded with Dr. Perry's in only one respect, the height. Dr. Perry was stout and at least thirty pounds above normal weight. He had a black mustache and goatee and was dark complected. Further, the hair on his head consisted only of a black fringe, which ran around his temples and the back of his neck. Under the circumstances, it was not strange that Detective Carr's conviction was a bit shaken and that he decided to keep his suspicions to himself until he had made a thorough investigation on his own account.

Neither of Mr. Kirven's heirs had ever seen the missing Lesser. However, the detective dug up two Kirven & Lesser employees and two of the firm's clients who had met Lesser personally a number of times. One of these men agreed to go up to Dr. Perry's office and have his teeth cleaned. The other three were posted by the detective at different times in the restaurant where the doctor took his lunch.

Three of the men were positive that

Mr. Lesser and Dr. Perry were not the same person. The fourth said:

"Well, the shape of his head is a little like Lesser's, but you couldn't get me to swear in court that they were the same person. No sir, not me."

Detective Carr then tried to get at the mystery from a different angle. He looked into Dr. Perry's past history. He discovered that Dr. Raymond K. Perry had graduated from the Horn Dental College in New York in 1914. The doctor, in accordance with the State law, had renewed his license every year. All of which was perfectly regular.

But—the doctor had rented his office on Forty-eighth Street ten months ago—or at just about the time that Mr. Lesser disappeared—and Detective Carr could find no record of his having practised his profession any time before that. Further, the records in the city bureau of taxes disclosed that Dr. Raymond K. Perry owned real estate to the value of one hundred and forty thousand dollars on East One Hundred and Fifty-seventh Street and that the property had been purchased at about the same time the doctor opened his dental office.

Dr. Perry lived on Claremont Avenue. No one at his address could shed the faintest light on his past career. He had rented the apartment ten months ago and had always been prompt in the payment of his rent. He never had visitors. When he rented the apartment he had remarked that he was living in Yonkers, but desired to live in the city in order to be closer to his office.

The detective consulted the city directories and the telephone books for the last seven years. He examined the membership lists of all the city and State dental societies. He telegraphed the national organization. He visited all the dental supply houses and manufacturers of dental instruments. The investigation yielded the name of Raymond K.

Perry but twice, and these Perrys proved to be senior and junior, with an office in Brooklyn. The Raymond K. on Forty-eighth Street was not related to them.

All this would not have been unusual if there had been evidence that Dr. Perry had lived in another State before opening his office on Forty-eighth Street. But the doctor had said he had moved down from Yonkers. That a man practising the profession of dentistry and worth upward of a hundred and forty thousand dollars could leave an absolutely recordless existence did not seem probable, and yet the most painstaking search had revealed but one fact in the career of Dr. Perry previous to his opening the Forty-eighth Street office. That fact, as has been stated, was his graduation from the dental college in 1914.

Detective Carr's weaknesses did not include the lack of persistence. He had great faith in his camera-eye quality and Dr. Perry's past—or seeming absence of a past—only stimulated his activities.

The detective began the tiresome task of canvassing those dental offices of New York City which were large enough to employ additional dentists. Carr spent eight hours every day for seven weeks at this work; but finally his quest bore fruit.

The payrolls in Dr. Kiekbush's office showed that in January, 1918, a Dr. Raymond K. Perry had been discharged for drunkenness. Nobody in the Kiekbush office recalled the appearance of Dr. Perry. Detective Carr, however, considered it significant that only one month later—February 1918—Mr. William Lesser had entered the employ of Mr. Kirven.

The chain of evidence, though circumstantial, removed all doubt from the detective's mind.

Still, although Detective Carr was perfectly convinced of Dr. Perry's guilt.

he knew that his evidence was not conclusive enough to persuade a jury. The fact that he could offer no direct identification was the weakness of his case. He felt that he had two lines of attack open to him. There was a chance that he could find some person or persons whose memory for faces was good enough to enable them to identify Dr. Perry as Mr. Lesser. His other hope lay in a direct attack upon the doctor himself.

This attack, of course, would have to be subtle. The doctor would have to be "squeezed," prodded and annoyed by a series of seemingly innocuous questions and insinuations into betraying himself by some word or act. The work on the detective's teeth was to be finished in three weeks. There were to be two appointments, each of an hour's duration, every week. Detective Carr was to have six hours more of personal contact with the suspect.

II

DETECTIVE CARR was keeping his last appointment with Dr. Perry. The doctor was putting a root canal filling into the first molar on the upper left-hand side. The "nerve" or dental pulp had been removed and it remained only to seal the cavity with gutta percha and insert the amalgam filling.

The detective was seated comfortably in the dentist's chair. Dr. Perry was standing nearby preparing his instruments.

"Not at all, Doctor," said Carr in answer to a question by the dentist. "Detective work is not nearly as exciting as it is commonly supposed to be. It's mostly dull, routine labor. Of course there are exceptions.

"I was working on a case not so long ago—quite an ordinary affair. A murder had been committed and the suspect had disappeared. My job was simply to

tramp the streets and keep my eyes open. Hard work, Doctor, and not exactly exciting. I met the fellow by accident and arrested him. But when at headquarters the man removed his hat, I received the shock of my life. The prisoner was almost completely bald and yet it had been definitely proved that five days previous—when the crime had been committed—he had a crop of long, thick, brown hair.

"But this circumstance which at first seemed to ruin our case—the prisoner of course denied he was the wanted man—eventually proved his undoing. Men don't usually lose a thick crop of hair in five days, we were sure of that. We consequently deduced that the prisoner had made himself bald by some artificial method. Rather unique, eh? You frequently hear of men disguising themselves by putting on wigs, but they seldom effect a disguise by pulling out their natural hair.

"Well, while the entire department was trying to puzzle out a way of proving that the suspect had removed his own hair, nature herself solved the mystery for us. The man was held in jail without bail. After three weeks the entire top of his head blossomed out like grass in the spring. That clinched it, of course. He confessed that he had first cut his hair short and then removed the hairs with an electric needle. This process required a couple of days, but his trick would have worked, if he could have applied the needle again on his hair as soon as it grew."

The doctor, keeping his back turned to the detective, replied:

"A unique case, Mr. Carr. You might call it a bald murder."

The detective laughed.

Then after a pause:

"We were talking last time of the murder of Mr. Kirven. Have you changed your mind and accepted my theory that the missing Mr. Lesser in all

probability remained in the city and made the bold stroke of adopting some mode of life which brings him into contact with many persons daily?"

The doctor stiffened perceptibly. "An ingenious theory, Mr. Carr. But to judge from the newspaper accounts of Mr. Lesser, he was probably not clever enough to work out so subtle a scheme."

There was little conversation after that. Dr. Perry worked in almost complete silence on the tooth until the task was completed. The detective noticed that the dentist's hands were a trifle unsteady.

Detective Carr left the office determined to proceed quickly and openly against Dr. Perry. He had reached the conclusion that he had succeeded in tormenting the doctor into such a state of "nerves" that he would be unable to stand up under a grilling at headquarters. It was Carr's intention to consult the district attorney about the advisability of obtaining a warrant for Dr. Perry's arrest.

While Carr was on his way to the district attorney's office both of his shoe laces became loosened. He bent over to tie them. He held his head down for several minutes.

Then, just as Detective Carr entered the district attorney's office, a strange phenomenon occurred. The detective was suddenly seized with a convulsion; he fell to the floor and his body became rigid.

A doctor was immediately summoned, but although Carr lived for almost an hour and a half, he could not be again brought to consciousness.

The symptoms—the rigid muscles, the stiffness at the back of the neck, the asphyxia, the wide open and fixed eyes, the *risus sardonius* (drawn aside mouth)—convinced the doctor that Detective Carr had been poisoned with strychnine. The post-mortem investigation, however, only added another

element of mystery to the tragedy. A chemical analysis of the stomach contents showed positively that no strychnine was present.

If the doctor's diagnosis proved to be correct, it followed that strychnine must have been injected by a hypodermic syringe. But no needle was found on the dead man. It was also not clear why Carr—assuming it was suicide—had gone about it in this queer fashion. Symptoms of strychnine poisoning usually appear within twenty minutes or less after the poison is taken. Where had Detective Carr been before he came to the attorney's office? Before the mystery could be solved that question had to be answered.

III

DR. RAYMOND K. PERRY experienced a queer feeling even during the first visit of Detective Carr. He had the premonition that the detective had penetrated his disguise. When, a few days later, the dentist was visited by a former client of Lesser & Kirven—who came ostensibly to have his teeth cleaned—Perry's fears increased.

A short time after, three of the former clients of Lesser & Kirven were in the restaurant in which the detective took his lunch. Dr. Perry was then certain.

Detective Carr had identified him as the missing William Lesser. Dr. Perry knew that his arrest was imminent. Had any doubts remained, the actions of the detective himself would have cleared them away. The detective began referring—casually—to the Kirven case. He somehow managed to bring up this matter during every consultation. And he spoke of artificially induced baldness as an effective means of disguise.

The doctor was aware that in the beginning the detective was a trifle uncertain, but with each visit the uncer-

tainty gradually resolved itself into conviction. Dr. Perry was in a continuous state of suspense.

It became obvious finally that the detective would arrest him. The dentist knew that an arrest would be his ruin. He would be unable to account for any of his actions previous to the last ten months. And if they held him in jail without bail—as is customary in murder indictments—his hair would start growing and that would expose him.

The dentist, of course, could have fled. But that would be equivalent to a confession of guilt. He would invite a man hunt. Also he would have to sacrifice all the money he had gained by the murder of Kirven. This money was tied up in real estate. If he attempted to make a sale, he would be merely inviting immediate arrest.

There seemed to be but one other alternative. From the fact that he was never shadowed, the dentist reasoned that Detective Carr had not mentioned his suspicions to any other police officials. There was every indication that only Detective Carr was privy to the secret.

If, therefore, a way could be found to dispose of Detective Carr, the *status quo* would be maintained and Dr. Perry could keep living in comfort the rest of his life. As the dentist figured it, nothing could be lost by a second murder. They can't do more than electrocute a man. The murder certainly seemed to be an absolute necessity. . . .

During the detective's last visit, the dentist made him an amalgum filling for the first molar on the upper left-hand side. The dental pulp or "nerve" had been killed with arsenic and removed previously. It remained only to put in the gutta percha point, seal it with liquid gutta percha and close the top of the cavity with amalgum.

But the dentist did not use gutta percha. *Instead he inserted a paste made*

of strychnine and rammed it into the root canal. Strychnine acts rather rapidly, especially when it may be absorbed easily into the blood. The dentist was consequently in somewhat of a hurry when he put in the amalgum. He was a trifle nervous and anxious; cold-blooded murderers exist for the most part only in fiction.

He managed, however, to get the detective out of the office alive, and when that was accomplished most of his worries were over. For there seemed to be not the slightest chance that the murder could be proved against him. There would indeed be no way of proving that it was murder and not even the most careful autopsy would be likely to probe into the cavities of Detective Carr's teeth.

The X-ray pictures which Dr. Perry had taken of Detective Carr's mouth showed that the apex of the root of the molar in question extended into the antrum, which is a "pocket" extending from the nasal cavity into the bone. This is not at all an unusual condition. Dr. Perry knew that the strychnine would be absorbed into the blood by way of the antrum. Death would then be a matter of minutes. Under normal conditions it would take several hours for the action to start. By then the detective would no longer be near the dental office and the chances were that even if he lived long enough to give information, he would not associate the tooth filling with the poison.

The next morning's papers, perhaps, would have the news of the detective's death. It looked safe—absolutely safe.

IV

As Dr. Perry expected, the next morning's papers contained the news of Detective Carr's strange death, and according to the accounts, headquarters was at a loss to explain the mystery.

It was difficult to reconcile the known facts with either a murder or a suicide theory. The doctor smiled as he read the reports; they were very satisfying—to him.

He had been in his office about an hour when three men, who introduced themselves as Detective Sergeant Elm, Detective Mosher and Medical Examiner Richards called on him.

"From one of Detective Carr's friends we learned that you have been treating Carr's teeth," said Detective Sergeant Elm. "Was Carr in here yesterday for an appointment?"

Dr. Perry, afraid that a trap was being laid for him and that he would betray himself by lying, was slow to reply. "Why—I'm not sure—that is he may have been—I'll have to consult my records."

"Never mind. The point is you have been treating Detective Carr. And in that case it is extremely unlikely that Carr was receiving treatment from another dentist also."

Then after a pause:

"Do you know that Detective Carr died yesterday from strychnine poisoning?"

"No. Well, I did read something in the papers—"

"It was very mystifying—at first," interrupted Detective Sergeant Elm. "A most careful chemical analysis discovered no strychnine in the stomach. However, we found the strychnine. Does that interest you?"

The dentist flushed.

"It evidently does," said Elm. "You're a mighty clever man. Dr. Perry. However, you overlooked the fact that *strychnine poisoning causes convulsions*. You made a mighty sloppy job of filling Carr's upper molar. Murder in haste and repent at leisure; that will be a good proverb for you to remember. During Carr's fit of convulsions the amalgum filling was jarred loose and fell out of

his mouth. Detective Mosher found it this morning under the desk in the district attorney's office."

Detective Sergeant Elm took a small glass vial out of his pocket and held it out toward Dr. Perry. "Your amalgum filling is in this bottle, Doctor, *and there are traces of strychnine on it!* Also the medical examiner here afterwards found traces of the poison in the root canal of the tooth. That makes it pretty conclusive, doesn't it?"

V

DETECTIVE CARR'S story of the man who had disguised himself by artificially inducing baldness was a myth. However, the official records now include the case of one Dr. Raymond K. Perry, alias William Lesser, who grew a beautiful crop of hair while awaiting his execution. Furthermore, the doctor's dark complexion paled noticeably under the regular prison baths. As for his stoutness, he had been one of those not

altogether uncommon men who can put on or take off an appreciable amount of weight by change of diet.

It was thus that Perry, after murdering Mr. Kirven, had been able to effect a great change in his appearance within a week. He had then made the bold stroke of opening a dental office and practising the profession right under the eyes of the police. Perry, it must be explained, was actually a dentist. After graduating from a dental college, he failed to make good with Dr. Kiekbush and was discharged. He then applied for a position as clerk in the office of Mr. Kirven and assumed the name of Lesser because he intended to re-enter the dental profession again and did not want it to be known that he was an ex-clerk.

Detective Carr, it transpired, had not mentioned his suspicions concerning Dr. Perry at headquarters. But after the doctor had been convicted for murdering the detective, he confessed his former crime.

