

The Debut of "Pittsburgh" Williams.

BY CLEVELAND MOFFETT.



R. STANLEY RUSSELL, the millionaire proprietor of the New York *Chronicle*, was in his private office one afternoon, busy with some papers, when the boy brought in word that Mr. Williams wished to see him.

"Who is Mr. Williams?" he asked.

"Why, he's a new reporter, sir," said the boy.

"Can't he see the managing editor?" said Mr. Russell.

"No sir, he says it's something very important, and he's got to see you."

"Very well, let him come in," said the newspaper magnate, thereby establishing an unusual precedent, and sending a buzz of comment among the group of reporters lounging outside in the City Department.

"I wonder what that kid wants to see the chief about," said one of the men.

"'Pittsburgh' has got his nerve with him," said another. "I suppose he is going to ask the boss to take him off emergency duty and give him a raise from \$18.00 to \$20.00 a week."

There was a general laugh at this sally, for the speakers were all space men who earned from \$40.00 to \$60.00 a week, and naturally looked down on this young "colt" who had recently emerged from the smoky surroundings of 'Pittsburgh', (the city that gave him his nickname,) into the highly charged atmosphere of Park Row.

"I'll lay drinks for the crowd that he comes out of that room within three minutes," said one of the star reporters, looking at his watch.

"I'll go you," said another, and for the next few minutes they sat with eyes fixed on the door of the great man's sanctum, which, contrary to all expectations, remained closed.

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"Well, Williams," said Mr. Russell, as he saw before him a tall young man wearing glasses, "what is it?"

The reporter hesitated a little, and then said :

"I have an idea, sir, for a sensation, something out of the common—a sort of a fake, I suppose, but it might be a big thing."

"What kind of a fake?"

"An execution fake?"

"What?"

"It's a scheme, sir, to beat the other newspapers in getting some poor devil executed. One of the Philadelphia papers did it five years ago when that nigger Johnson was hanged at Harrisburg, and they 'scooped' everybody. Don't you remember it?"

"No," said Mr. Russell, amused at Williams' audacity. "Sit down and tell me about it."

"Why, the day before the hanging was to take place the *Universe* man arranged with the murderer and the sheriff to have the execution come off four hours ahead of the appointed time. Then he wrote up the story, and had it on the wire before the other newspaper men had reached the jail. The result was that the *Universe* scored a clean beat on the city."

"But how in the world did he persuade the sheriff and the condemned man to consent to such a change?"

"Very easily. A few drinks and some smooth talk fixed the sheriff, who did not mind advancing the hour so long as Johnson was willing. Then the reporter went to Johnson and convinced him that, as he had to die anyhow, it didn't matter much when the hanging took place. The difference of a few hours couldn't harm him any, while it might do a lot of good to his family. The reporter agreed to give Johnson a hundred dollars in cash for his wife, and to pay for all the man could eat and drink before he was executed. Johnson thought it all over and decided that the offer was too good to throw away, so he told them to get ready the rope and bring on their champagne, chicken salad and pie. By the time he came to be hanged he was stuffed so full of all kinds of things that he hardly felt it."

"And you wish me to go in for something of this sort?" asked Mr. Russell.

"No," said Williams, "my idea is an improvement, not an imitation. The scheme I have in mind is quite unique, and will make a stunning sensation, that is, if I am able to carry it out, for it will take some money."

"Well, let me hear your idea," said the *Chronicle's* proprietor, whose curiosity was becoming aroused.

"You know, sir, this murderer, Munsheimer, is to be electrocuted next week at Sing Sing. The case was the talk of the country for weeks. It was one of the most brutal murders on record, the mother and little child, you remember, up in Westchester County. Fiend though he is, Munsheimer is a man of brains and will look favorably, I think, on a plan that will postpone his execution for perhaps a week and result in financial advantage to his daughter, who is the only human being he cares anything about. I propose to fake up a brother for Munsheimer and then work the old scheme of an escape by means of a change of clothes, a false beard, etc. That will postpone the execution until such time as we are ready to have it come off, and the *Chronicle* will have an exclusive story."

Mr. Russell frowned. "You would be blocking the wheels of justice, Mr. Williams, and performing a criminal act. Do you suppose I would for one moment consider aiding a murderer to escape from prison?"

"You don't quite get my idea, sir," said Williams, and then, talking very fast and with increasing confidence, he went into an explanation that caused Mr. Russell, when he finally understood it, to purse his lips into a long whistle of astonishment.

"And do you really think such a scheme can be carried through?" he asked.

"I am sure it can, sir, if you will get me the passes to the prison and furnish money to pay this French doctor. You know his charges are pretty high."

"Oh, there will be no trouble about that," said the newspaper autocrat, and then coming to one of those quick decisions for which he was famous, he added: "You may go ahead on these lines, Williams, and report to me personally from day to day."

An hour later Williams was in the office of Dr. Mazagrin, a queer little Frenchman who lived on Waverly Place. His specialty was the making of death masks, artificial noses, etc., and it was his boast that he could work such a transformation in any man that not even his own wife would know him. He accomplished this by building upon the client's face false features of wax or plaster so perfectly concealed by means of a secret preparation, a sort of enamel, that there was no possibility of immediate detection.

"I want you to get up a face for this man that will make him look like some other man," said Williams, producing one of Munsheimer's photographs.

"Vaire ees zee ozaire man?" asked the Doctor.

"Any other man will do, pick out the one you want. You and he will have to go up to Sing Sing together to see your dear relative, who is a murderer. You'll be his uncle, and the man you're going to hire will be his brother. See?"

"Thees ees a vaire peculaire case," remarked the Doctor, whereupon Williams produced a large roll of bills, and the Frenchman's hesitation was disposed of forthwith.

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The day of the execution came, and in the city of Sing Sing there was great excitement. Although none save a favored few could witness the final act in the tragedy, the streets about the prison were crowded with people from the surrounding district and even from a distance, who had gathered for the mere satisfaction of seeing the black flag shoot up from the death chamber at the moment when the deadly current was turned on.

The hour came and passed, but no black flag appeared. Presently messengers were seen hurrying from the prison to the telegraph office, and in a few minutes the exciting news spread from group to group, that Munsheimer had escaped and another man had been substituted for him. The wires carried this news all over the country, and within a few hours extras were out in many cities, detailing under flaring headlines the most extraordinary conspiracy to evade justice that had been known in years. Enterprising correspondents described minutely how, on the morning of the execution, the condemned man had, through special influence, been allowed to receive a last visit from his brother, and how he had disguised himself in the clothes and false beard of the latter, and made his escape a few hours before the fatal moment.

The discovery had been made only when the jailers entered the murderer's cell to prepare him for the chair; then it was seen at once that the man who had been intrusted to their custody was gone, and that another man was there in his stead. There was no possible doubt that a change had been made; this was apparent at a glance, and the prisoner himself admitted as much, declaring that he was Munsheimer's brother, that he had worn a false beard on his visits to the prison, that his brother had put on this beard as well as his clothes, and had thus been able to leave the prison without exciting suspicion. It was evident

that the escape had been planned and executed with masterly skill.

Wide discussion followed in the newspapers as to the proper disposition to be made of the brother, who had thus sacrificed his freedom to save his brother's life. Legal opinions differed as to the precise nature of his crime, and as to the charge which should be brought against him. It was clear, however, that he could not be sentenced to more than a few years' imprisonment, and the ends of justice were plainly baffled. It is true the police of New York City declared that they would soon capture the escaped Munsheimer, and made wise announcements of clues that could not fail to deliver him into their hands. It all ended, however, in talk, and after a four or five days' sensation, the subject was dropped.

On the sixth day after the escape, the warden of Sing Sing Prison received a visit from a young man, who said he had come on urgent business.

"I have a proposition to make to you, sir, that may relieve you of a grave responsibility."

"And what is that, please?" asked the warden.

"I am in a position to give valuable information about the murderer Munsheimer. Before I make any statement, however, I wish to furnish you with proper credentials as to my responsibility, and to exact from you the formal pledge that, whether you agree to my terms or not, the subject of my visit shall remain an absolute secret between us two. In other words, if you refuse to accept my terms, I leave this room without interference, and matters remain exactly as they are at present."

After some hesitation, and after reading a strong letter of introduction from a man of great influence in New York City—no less a person, in fact, than the Chief of Police—the warden agreed to the stranger's terms.

"Very well, sir," said the young man. "My mission is to prove to you that the murderer Munsheimer can be captured. In other words, I know where he is."

The warden looked up incredulously and shook his head.

"It is hardly likely, sir, that you know more than the entire police force of New York City."

"Not likely, I admit, but true, nevertheless. I can prove to you that I know where Munsheimer is and can insure his capture. And I will do this if you will consent to a very simple condition."

"Name your condition."

"It is that after Munsheimer is delivered into your hands, the execution take place without loss of time, and that no one, except myself and the necessary officials, be informed of the fact. Of course, I must also insist that absolute secrecy be preserved as to my connection with the case, and that no effort be made to discover my identity or to investigate my motives. You may imagine what you please, but you must know nothing, and must remain as silent as the tomb."

After an hour's argument and thought, the warden finally consented to the young man's condition. There seemed to be nothing else for him to do.

"I know, sir, that you are a man of honor," said the stranger, "and now that you have pledged me your word, I am sure you will keep it."

"I will keep it," said the warden. "Now tell me where Munsheimer is."

"Before I do that, I desire to put a few questions to his brother. I must ask you to have him brought here."

The warden touched an electric bell and instructed the keeper who answered the summons to bring the murderer's brother into his private office. A little later the prisoner stood before them, looking from one to the other with something of uneasiness in his glance, something of dogged defiance.

"Do you know where your brother is?" said the stranger, addressing the prisoner.

The latter remained silent.

"Answer the gentleman," said the warden, sharply.

"Yes, I know where he is."

"And do you refuse to tell us where he is?"

"Certainly I do," said the prisoner, smiling contemptuously at the question. The stranger drew himself up to his full height, which was over six feet, and adjusting his glasses, said impressively:

"And yet the fact is, strange as it may seem, that within two minutes of this moment you will be perfectly willing to tell us everything."

The prisoner started in surprise, and the warden looked at the young man as if he had taken leave of his senses.

"I know what I am doing, sir. Have you a penknife with a sharp blade?"

"I have this one," said the warden.

With the utmost deliberation the young man opened the knife, ran his thumb along the edge, and then said quietly: "Thanks, I think that will do."

Then, stepping toward the prisoner, with a quick movement he made an incision lightly along the bridge of his nose and drew away in two fragments a wax mask that had been adjusted with wonderful art over the man's face.

"There, now look for yourself. Do you recognize Munsheimer, the murderer?"

In speechless amazement the warden beheld the transformation wrought under his very eyes. The man who had entered the room had a prominent nose, with downward curve; the man who stood there now had a flat nose turned up at the end. The man who came in, had a strongly marked chin and jaw, while the one they were now looking at, had rather a weak lower face. There was no possibility of doubt, the man before them was Munsheimer himself, the genuine murderer.

"Are you really the murderer Munsheimer?" asked the warden, so astonished that he forgot to be severe.

"I am, sir," answered the man.

"But your voice is not the same as Munsheimer's; he spoke in gruff tones, while your voice is high pitched. How is that?"

"Do you see this mark on my neck?" asked the prisoner, plainly delighted with the success of his masquerading. "There are two of them—one on either side, and they mark the point where a hyperdermic injection of some very unpleasant stuff was given me on the morning of my escape. That was a good joke on you, Mr. Warden."

The man pointed to two slight punctures of the skin just beneath the line of the collar, and exactly over the vocal cords. Then he continued: "After I received these injections my voice was strangely affected, and has remained shrill ever since. The man who gave me the injections said that their effect would last about ten days. You would have been surprised to find my voice changed back to its normal gruffness if you had waited two or three days longer."

"Who was the man who gave you these injections?—and why did he do it?"

"I have no more idea about that than you have. He came with my brother and said he was my uncle, but I will swear I never had an uncle, so he must have been mistaken. Between you and me, I never had a brother either."

Munshheimer chuckled to himself at this attempt at humor.

"Why did you let him do this to you?"

"What did I care. I was going to die anyhow within a few hours, and I thought I might as well give somebody a little pleasure before making my exit. The gentleman said he would consider it a special favor if I would submit to his experiments, so I submitted."

"And did he put on the false nose and false chin you have been wearing?"

"Yes, he was very much interested in altering my physiognomy. I'm sure I don't know why, but it seemed to amuse him and I had no objections. Besides that, it gave me the satisfaction of making fools of the amiable gentlemen who have kept me locked up behind iron bars."

"Enough of this nonsense, Munshheimer," said the warden, sternly. "You have been a party to this attempt to save your life, there is no use denying it. If you refuse to tell us of your own accord who were your accomplices, we shall take the proper steps to find out."

"I wish you joy, sir, in the undertaking," said Munshheimer, bowing with mock politeness. "When you discover the name of my self-sacrificing relative, I shall be exceedingly obliged if you will inform me who he is."

"Take this man back to his cell," said the warden to the keeper.

When the two men had left the room, the warden turning to the stranger said, his whole manner having changed: "I shall keep my pledge to you, sir, although in so doing I am false to my duty to the State. You are in possession of facts that should belong to the police. There has been an extraordinary conspiracy here, the nature of which I cannot understand, but which should certainly be laid bare. My tongue, however, is tied by the promise you have exacted from me. Munshheimer will be electrocuted this afternoon at three o'clock, and no one outside of the prison officials and yourself will be informed of the fact or allowed to be present. Are you satisfied now? And will you not, of your own accord, throw some light upon this mystery?"

"That, sir, is impossible. I can assure you, however, as a gentleman, that I am shielding no criminal, nor am I by my silence in any way obstructing the course of justice. The murderer is here, he has never left his cell, his execution will avenge the crimes he committed. As for the delay of a few days, that has

harméd no one, and instead of blaming me, you should thank me for having put you in possession of facts relieving you of the charge of negligence. Your instructions were to execute this man within the week beginning April the 13th. Instead of executing him on the first day of that week, you will have done so on the last day. In that you are acting within the limits of your own discretion, and if any one asks you why you did not deny the sensational reports in this case, you have only to say that you did not deem it incumbent upon you to consider seriously the product of reporters' imaginations. They said that your prisoner had escaped and cheated the electric chair: you produce the doctor's certificate that the prisoner was duly executed as prescribed by the law. If any one doubts your statement, they have only to come and look at the corpse, which I advise you to keep for a few days, and also to have photographed. Now, Mr. Warden, it only remains for me to thank you for your honorable action, and to leave you to your duties. I shall remain in the prison until the execution has taken place."

"Very well, sir," said the warden, who did some hard thinking during the next few hours.

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The next morning the Daily Chronicle came out with a two-page article, that startled New York and the whole country, as no newspaper article had done for years. It was an exclusive account of the conspiracy to save the murderer Munsheimer, of the way that conspiracy had been baffled, and of the man's final execution. The method by which the murderer had been so wonderfully disguised, was explained in detail, opinions being given by experts, who stated that it is possible to prepare the face so cunningly, by building up the nose, the chin, and the cheek bones with wax additions, and then covering the whole with liquid enamel, that such a fraud would not be detected for several days, possibly weeks, not until the enamel had worn off sufficiently to expose the edges of the added parts, or until it had begun to crack. Then followed a statement made by Munsheimer, giving full details of his crime, and making absolute confession of his guilt.

On the night of the day when the Chronicle secured this greatest "beat" in its history, "Pittsburgh" Williams found in his box, in the City Department, an envelope containing a check for one thousand dollars, and the congratulations of Mr. Stanley Russell.