BLINDFOLDED

By Emile Ashley Walcott

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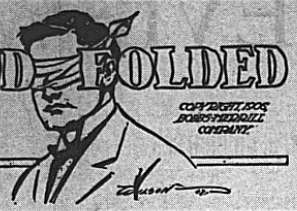


SYNOPSIS.

Giles Dudley arrived in San Francisco to join his friend and distant relative Henry Wilton, whom he was to assist in an important and mysterious task, and who accompanied Dudley on the ferry boat trip into the city. The remarkable resemblance of the two men is noted and commented on by passengers on the ferry. They see a man with snake eyes, which sends a thrill through Dudley. Wilton postpones an explanation of the strange errand Dudley is to perform, but occurrences cause him to know it is one of no ordinary meaning. Wilton leaves Giles in their room, with instruction to await his return and shoot any one who tries to enter. Outside there is heard shouts and curses and the noise of a quarrel. Henry Wilton comes in and at his request the roommates quickly exchange clothes, and he hurries out again. Hardly has he gone than Giles is startled by a cry of "Help," and he runs out to find some one being assaulted by a half dozen men. He summons a policeman but they are unable to find any trace of a crime. Giles returns to his room and hunts for some evidence that might explain his strange mission. He finds a map which he endeavors to decipher. Dudley is summoned to the morgue and there finds the dead body of his friend, Henry Wilton. And then Wilton dies without ever explaining to Dudley the puzzling work he was to perform in San Francisco. In order to discover the secret mission his friend had entrusted to him, Dudley continues his disguise and permits himself to be known as Henry Wilton. Dudley's mistaken for Wilton, is employed by Knapp to assist in a stock brokerage deal. "Dicky" takes the supposed Wilton to Mother Borton's. Mother Borton discovers that he is not Wilton. The fight ensues, turned out and a free for all fight follows. Giles Dudley finds himself closeted in a room with Mother Borton who makes a confidant of him. He can learn nothing about the mysterious boy further than that it is Tim Terrill and Darby Meeker who are after him. He is told that "Dicky" Nahl is a traitor, playing both hands in the game. Giles finds himself locked in a room. He escapes through a window. The supposed Wilton carries out his dead friend's work with Doddridge Knapp. He has his first experience as a capitalist in the Board Room of the Stock Exchange.

CHAPTER X.

A Tangle of Schemes.

Doddridge Knapp was seated calmly in my office when I opened the door. There was a grim smile about the firm jaws, and a satisfied glitter in the keen eyes. The Wolf had found his prey, and the dismay of the sheep at the sight of his fangs gave him satisfaction instead of distress.

The King of the Street honored me with a royal nod.

"There seems to have been a little surprise for somebody on the Board this morning," he suggested.

"I heard something about it on the street," I admitted.

"It was a good plan and worked well. Let me see your memoranda of purchases."

I gave him my slips.

He looked over them with growing perplexity in his face.

"Here's twelve thousand five hundred shares of Omega."

"Yes."

"You paid too much for that first lot." He was still poring over the list.

"It's easier to see that now than then," I suggested dryly.

"Humph! yes. But there's something wrong here." He was comparing my list with another in his hand.

"There!" I thought; "my confounded ignorance has made a mess of it." But I spoke with all the confidence I could assume: "What's the matter, now?"

"Eleven thousand and twelve thousand five hundred make twenty-three thousand five hundred; and here are sales of Omega this morning of thirty-three thousand eight hundred and thirty." He seemed to be talking more to himself than to me, and to be far from pleased.

"How's that? I don't understand." I was all in the dark over his musings.

"I picked up eleven thousand shares in the other Boards this morning, and twelve thousand five hundred through you, but somebody has taken in the other ten thousand." The King of the Street seemed puzzled and, I thought, a little worried.

"Well, you got over twenty-three thousand shares," I suggested consolingly. "That's a pretty good morning's work."

The King of the Street gave me a contemptuous glance.

"Don't be a fool, Wilton. I sold ten thousand of those shares to myself."

A new light broke upon me. I was getting lessons of one of the many ways in which the market was manipulated.

"Then you think that somebody else—"

The King of the Street broke in with a grim smile.

"Never mind what I think. I've got the contract for doing the thinking for this job, and I reckon I can 'tend to it."

The great speculator was silent for a few moments.

"I might as well be frank with you," he said at last. "You'll have to know something to work intelligently. I must get control of the Omega Company, and to do it I've got to have more stock. I've been afraid of a combination against me, and I guess I've struck it. I can't be sure yet, but when those ten thousand shares were gobbled up on a panicky market, I'll bet there's something up."

"Who is in it?" I asked politely.

"They've kept themselves covered," said the King of the Street, "but I'll have them out in the open before the end. And then, my boy, you'll see the fog fly."

"I've got a few men staked out," he continued slowly, "and I reckon I'll know something about it by this time to-morrow."

There was the growl of the Wolf in his voice.

"Now for this afternoon," he continued. "There's got to be some sharp work done. I reckon the falling movement is over. We've got to pay for what we get from now on. I've got a man looking after the between-Board trading. With the scare that's on in the chipper crowd out there, I look to pick up a thousand shares or so at about forty."

"Well, what's the programme?" I asked cheerfully.

"Buy," he said briefly. "Take everything that's offered this side of seventy-five."

"Um—there's a half-million wanted already to settle for what I bought this morning."

The bushy brows drew down, but the the King of the Street answered lightly:

"Your check is good for a million, my boy, as long as it goes to settle for what you're ordered to buy." Then he added grimly: "I don't think you'd find it worth much for anything else."

There was a knock at the door beyond and he hastily rose.

"Be here after the two-thirty session," he said. And the Wolf, huge and masterful, disappeared with a stealthy tread, and the door closed softly behind him.

I wondered idly who Doddridge Knapp's visitor might be, but as I could see no way of finding out, and felt no special concern over his identity or purposes, I rose and left the office. As I stepped into the hall I discovered that somebody had a deeper curiosity than I. A man was stooping in the keyhole of Doddridge Knapp's room in the endeavor to see or hear. As he heard the sound of my opening the door he started up, and with a bound, was around the turn of the hall and pattering down the stairs.

In another bound I was after him. I had seen his form for but a second, and his face not at all. But in that second I knew him for Tim Terrill of the snake-eyes and the murderous purpose.

When I reached the head of the stairs he was nowhere to be seen, but I heard the patter of his feet below and plunged down three steps at a time and into Clay street, nearly upsetting a stout gentleman in my haste. The street was busy with people, but no sign of the snake-eyed man greeted me.

Much disturbed in mind at this apparition of my enemy, I sought in vain for some explanation of his presence. Was he spying on Doddridge Knapp? What treachery was he shaping in his designs on the man whose bread he was eating and whose plans of crime he was the chief agent to assist or execute? I was roused by a man bumping into me roughly. I suspected that he had done it on purpose, and started by him briskly, when he spoke in a low tone:

"You'd better go to your room, Mr. Wilton." He said something more that I did not catch, and, reeling on, disappeared in the crowd before I could turn to mark or question him.

I thought at first that he meant the room I had just left. Then it occurred to me that it was the room Henry had occupied—the room in which I had spent my first dreadful night in San Francisco, and had not revisited in the thirty hours since I had left it.

The advice suited by inclination, and in a few minutes I was entering the dingy building and climbing the worn and creaking stairs. The place lost its air of mystery in the broad sunshine, and penetrating daylight, and though its interior was as gloomy as ever, it lacked the haunting suggestions it had borrowed from darkness and the night.

Slipped under the door I found two notes. One was from Detective Coogan, and read:

"Inquest this afternoon. Don't want you. Have another story. Do you want the body?"

The other was in a women's hand, and the faint perfume of the first note I had received rose from the sheet. It read:

"I do not understand your silence. The money is ready. What is the matter?"

The officer's note was easy enough to answer. I found paper, and, assuring Detective Coogan of my gratitude at escaping the inquest, I asked him to turn the body over to the undertaker to be buried at my order.

The other note was more perplexing. I could make nothing of it. It was evidently from my unknown employer, and her anxiety was plain to see. But I was no nearer to finding her than before, and if I knew how to reach her I knew not what to say. As I was contemplating this state of affairs with some dejection, and sealing my melancholy note to Detective Coogan, there was a quick step in the hall and a rap at the panel. It was a single person, so I had no hesitation in opening the door, but it gave me a passing satisfaction to have my hand on the revolver in my pocket as I turned the knob.

It was a boy, who thrust a letter into my hand.

"Yer name Wilton?" he inquired, still holding on to the envelope.

"Yes."

"That's yours, then." And he was prepared to make a bolt.

"Hold on," I said. "Maybe there's an answer.

"No, there ain't. The bloke as gave it to me said there weren't."

"Well, here's something I want you to deliver," said I, taking up my note to Detective Coogan. "Do you know where the City Hall is?"

"Does I know—what are yer givin' us? he said the boy with infinite scorn in his voice.

"A quarter," I returned with a laugh, tossing him the coin. "Wait a minute."

"Yer ain't bad stuff," said the boy with a grin.

I tore open the envelope and read on the sheet that came from it:

"Sell everything you bought—never mind the price. Other orders off.

D. K."

I gasped with amazement. Had Doddridge Knapp gone mad? To sell twelve thousand five hundred shares of Omega was sure to smash the market, and the half-million dollars that had been put into them would probably shrink by two hundred thousand or more if the order was carried out.

I read the note again.

Then a suspicion large enough to overshadow the universe grew up in my mind. I recalled that Doddridge Knapp had given me a cipher with which he would communicate with me, and I believed, moreover, that he had no idea where I might be at the present moment.

"It's all right, sonny," I said. "Trot along."

"Where's yer letter?" asked the boy, loyally anxious to earn his quarter.

"It won't have to go now," I said coolly. I believed that the boy meant no harm to me, but I was not taking any risks. The boy sauntered down the hall.

"Well, I must look like a sucker if they think I can be taken in by a trick like that," was my mental comment. I charged the scheme up to my snake-eyed friend and had a poorer opinion of his intelligence than I had hitherto entertained. Yet I was astonished that he should, even with the most hearty wish to bring about my downfall, contrive a plan that would inflict a heavy loss on his employer and possibly ruin him altogether. There was more beneath than I could fathom. My brain refused to work in the maze of contradictions and mysteries, plots and counterplots, in which I was involved.

I took my way at last toward the market, and, hailing a boy to whom I intrusted my letter to Detective Coogan, walked briskly to Pine street.

CHAPTER XI.

The Den of the Wolf.

The street had changed its appearance in the two or three hours since I had made my way from the City, a change through the pallid, panic-stricken mob. There were still thousands of people between the corner of Montgomery Street and Leidesdorff, and the little alley itself was packed full of shouting, struggling traders. But there was an air of confidence, almost of buoyancy, in place of the gloom and terror that had lowered over the street at noon. Plainly the panic was over, and men were inspired by a belief that "stocks were going up."

I made a few dispositions accordingly. Taking Doddridge Knapp's hint I engaged another broker as a relief to Eppner, a short fat man, with the baldest head I ever saw, a black beard and a hook-nose, whose remarkable activity and scattering charges had attracted my attention in the morning session.

Wallbridge was his name, I found, and he proved to be as intelligent as I could wish—a merry little man, with a joke for all things, and a flow of words that was almost overwhelming.

"Omega? Yes," chuckled the stout little broker, after he had assured himself of my financial standing. "But you ought to have bought this morning, if that's what you want. It was hell popping and the roof giving way all at once." The little man had an abundant stock of profanity which he used unconsciously and with such original variations that one almost forgot the blasphemy of it while listening to him. "You ought to have been there," he continued, "and watched the boys shell 'em out!"

"Yes, I heard you had lively times."

"Boiling," he said with coruscating additions in the way of speech and gesture. "If it hadn't been for Decker and some fellow we haven't had a chance to make out yet the bottom of the market would have been resting on the roof of the lower regions." The little man's remark was slightly more direct and forcible, but this will do for a revised version.

"Decker!" I exclaimed, pricking up my ears. "I thought he had quit the market."

As I had never heard of Mr. Decker before that moment this was not exactly the truth, but I thought it would serve me better.

"Decker out of it!" gasped Wallbridge, his bald head positively glistening at the absurdity of the idea. "He'll be out of it when he's carried out."

"I meant out of Omega. Is he getting up a deal?"

The little broker looked vexed, as though it crossed his mind that he had said too much.

"Oh, no. Guess not. Don't think he is," he said rapidly. "Just wanted to save the market, I guess. If Omega had gone five points lower there would have been the sickest times in the Street that we've seen since the Bank of California closed and the shop across the way"—pointing his thumb at the Exchange—"had to be shut up. But maybe it wasn't Decker, you know. That's just what was rumored on the Street, you know."

I suspected that my little broker knew more than he was willing to tell, but I forbore to press him further, and gave him the order to buy all the Omega stock he could pick up under fifty.

In the Exchange all was excitement, and the first call brought a roar of struggling brokers. I could make nothing of the clamor, but my nearest neighbor shouted in my ear:

"A strong market!"

"It looks that way," I shouted back. It certainly was strong in noise.

I made out at last that prices were being held to the figures of the morning's session, and in some cases were forced above them.

Forty-five— forty-seven —fifty-five—Omega was going up by leaps. I blessed the forethought that had suggested to me to put a limit on Wallbridge at fifty. The contest grew warmer. I could follow with difficulty the course of the proceedings, but I knew that Omega was bounding upward.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Abstemiousness Pays.

The future is to the people who are strictly sober. The Japanese officers and soldiers, fed on rice, and during the great war from which they issued victorious had only water to appease their thirst.—Henri Rochefort in L'Ile transigeant.

LOOK FOR PHANTOM

SPIRIT LOCOMOTIVE COMES AS FRIEND.

California Railroad Men Firmly Believe in Supernatural Appearance —How It Saved One Train from Certain Destruction.

Will the phantom locomotive visit the new roundhouse at Visitacion? That it will do so is the secret hope nourished in the breast of more than one hard-headed old railroad man, who would scoff at the idea that he was superstitious—and yet—well, there must be something in all those stories told by lifelong friends and comrades of the rail.

Never heard of the phantom locomotive? More than likely. Men do not lay bare to the casual acquaintance these vague yet tenacious beliefs. But in the cool shadows of the roundhouse, the smug seclusion of the caboose, among old and sympathetic railroad cronies, the mysterious appearances of this apparition of good omen, are soberly discussed.

Old Michael Flaherty believes in it, as, indeed, why should he not, since Quinn of the R. S. & P.—who was running old number 870 long before there was such a type as the big mogul—told Flaherty, who was firing for him, all about the affair at Platte junction. That was years ago. Quinn is dead now, and Flaherty has had his day at the throttle—lost his nerve—and, a railroad man still—is reduced to the post of watchman of the new roundhouse at Visitacion. But he has not forgotten Quinn's story, nor the evidence of his own eyes—for he, too, has seen the phantom locomotive.

Quinn had the night run from Reno west over the Sierras—300 miles of heavy grades, sharp curves and creaking trestles, with deep and rocky gorges upon the one hand and frowning crags upon the other. He was a bluff, two-fisted man with a sort of calm, good-humored independence, which was the bane of train dispatchers and division superintendents. He was afraid of nothing, not even of authority, but he was a good engineer and he usually pulled No. 7 into the station at Oakland mole so nearly on time that his little furries of independent retort were overlooked.

There had been a freight wreck at Gold Run, and the overland was held for two hours while the wrecking crew cleared the rails. When she pulled slowly between the piled-up tangle of splinters and scrap iron which had been fast freight No. 56, Quinn was in a mood to force the big compound engine to the limit. Signal lights were but a quick blur in the darkness—Quinn was running on his nerve and the chance that all was well ahead. As No. 7 neared Auburn she rounded a sharp curve in a deep cut, and into Quinn's startled eyes there flashed the gleaming headlight of a locomotive—on the same track.

There was little time to think. The cab rocked and swayed with the tremendous speed, the wheels screamed with the sudden setting of the brakes; the great yellow headlight, like an evil eye bore down upon him. He clutched the sill of the cab window, whispered a word of prayer and—the headlights met. There was a sensation of rushing air and the phantom locomotive passed through or over No. 7, which came to a grinding stop with a shock which threw the frightened passengers pell-mell out of their berths, and sent the conductor rushing, with his twinkling lantern, to see what had gone wrong.

"There's something wrong ahead," said Quinn, seizing the lantern from the conductor's hand. "No, I don't know what it is. Just sensed it, I guess. You come with me and I'll show you."

Together they walked some hundred yards or more around the curve. The trestle over Hog gulch was gone—washed out by a cloudburst higher up the Sierras, and which had shown no sign below. Quinn was complimented by the D. S. on his keen sight and quick nerve. He said nothing about the phantom locomotive, but the fireman, who had seen it, too, was not so reticent. Quinn always laughed at the idea, except when he knew his man. It was Quinn himself who told the story to Flaherty.—F. J. Cagy, in San Francisco Chronicle.

Woodman, Spare That Tree!

The Lackawanna railroad and the Crocker-Wheeler Electric company have given a fine example to the people of the country by going to the trouble and expense of transplanting a great oak tree which it was necessary either to cut down or remove because of the building of a new railroad station. It took one of the Lackawanna's wreck-cranes to remove the tree, but it was worth the exertion.—Wall Street Journal.

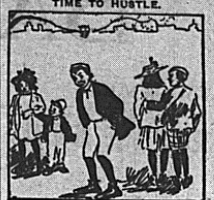
Pay of Canadian Railroad Men.

Engineers and firemen on Canadian railroads are paid by the mile. Rates vary according to the class of trains to be handled, such as passenger, freight, or way-freight. Engineers make from $3.25 to $4.25 per 100 miles and firemen from $2.20 to $3 per 100 miles. When busy, a good month's total run is about 3,500 miles.

Stopped Train to Shoot Bear.

The conductor on the Merced river Canyon train in California stopped the train long enough to kill with a rifle a brown bear 200 yards away.

TIME TO HUSTLE.



Kid—Gee whiz, but er feller feels lonesome in de spring if he ain't got er gull!

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Another Ruse.

Eva (pouting)—There, now, see what you have done. Your cigar has left a spot of ashes on my cheek.

Jack—Don't be angry, dear. I'll fix it.

Eva—How?

Jack—Why, I'll kiss you on the spot.

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On the Country Picnic.

She hung her head.

"Really, Mr. Mannering," she stammered, "this—er—is so—so sudden—"

"For goodness sake," cried Mannering, "stop blushing so. Here comes a bull!"

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