

True Detective Stories
FOURTH DEGREE

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THERE was but little doubt in the mind of Thomas Byrnes, superintendent of police in New York city, that Louis Hanler had been murdered for the sake of the money that he was carrying with him at the time. The little Frenchman had been the proprietor of a cafe, and, having a fear of the banks of America, had the habit of carrying hundreds of dollars in his wallet until the opportunity presented itself of purchasing an international money order.

One morning he was found dead in the vestibule of his home, a .38 caliber bullet through his heart, and his pocketbook missing.

That was all Byrnes had to work upon, for there were no indications whatever of the persons who had committed the crime. The dispatch with which the matter had been handled, appeared to point to a professional criminal, so Byrnes gave orders that all the pawnshops in New York were to be closely watched, and reports made to him of the pawning of any .38 caliber revolvers.

Investigation of the dozen or more .38's pawned during the week which followed the Hanler shooting, showed that all but one of them had been pledged by persons who very evidently had no connection with the murder. The single exception was one Michael McGloin, whom the pawnbroker in question identified by means of his photograph in the Rouges' gallery. McGloin's gun had been pawned on the morning after the murder, and, while the police had little difficulty in locating the man himself, there was not a shred of evidence to connect him with the Hanler case, beyond the fact that he had been absent from home on the night of the shooting in the company of four of his boon companions.

Quietly, and without allowing a word of his intentions to leak out, Byrnes rounded up the quintet one at a time, none of them knowing that the others were being arrested. Each of them was lodged in a cell by himself and questioned closely as to his actions and his whereabouts at the time of the murder. In spite of the fact that Byrnes had definite information that the five men had been together, each of them told a different story, and each claimed to have been alone, at a considerable distance from the Hanler house.

"It's no use, inspector," said one of the policemen who had been working on the case about a week after the five men had been picked up, "you can't get a thing out of 'em. They know, all right, but you can't convict any of 'em without a confession—and we've tried everything, including the 'third degree.'"

"Very well," said Byrnes quietly, "we'll have to try the fourth degree."

"Fourth degree? What's that?"

"Just a little way of getting at the truth when a man wants to hold out on you," was Byrnes' answer. "You think there's no doubt that McGloin's the man? Have him brought to this office tomorrow morning, promptly at ten o'clock."

At the time specified, McGloin, sultry and resentful at what he claimed was an illegal detention, walked into the inspector's office, alone. Had he been interested in such details, he might have noted that Byrnes was seated so that he could watch the window of his office which looked out upon a corridor, and also keep an eye upon the occupant of the only chair in the room, bolted to the floor in front of the desk. But McGloin wasn't worrying about such trifles. He was there to demand his release, and he told the inspector so in measured terms.

"That's all right, McGloin," replied Byrnes. "Sit down a minute. I've several things to attend to," and he motioned to the chair, placed so that it too commanded a view of the corridor window. A moment later the office door opened and a man came in. Byrnes, watching the gunman closely, saw that he was barely able to suppress a start—for the visitor was the pawnbroker with whom McGloin had pledged his revolver. Without saying a word, the pawnbroker crossed the room, laid McGloin's gun on the inspector's desk, and walked out.

"Not little boy," remarked Byrnes, picking up the revolver. "Ever see it before?"

"Never," growled McGloin. "I thought not," was the reply. "It's the gun that Hanter, the Frenchman, was shot with. We've finally got a line on that case, after working on it for over a month. Found a man who was a witness of the shooting—"

At this moment, by a prearranged signal, one of McGloin's partners was marched past the corridor window.

"Yes," continued Byrnes, appearing not to notice the gunman's agitation, "and we've also found a man who was present"—at which the second of the quintet was ushered past the window—"and two others who have confessed their part in the robbery but who claim that the man who fired the shot was . . ."

"Stop it, for God's sake, chief!" cried the half-crazed man in the chair, his nerves shattered by the solitary confinement and the marshalling of evidence under his very eyes. "Stop it! I didn't mean to do it, but—I shot him!"

"Score one for the 'fourth degree,'" mused Byrnes.

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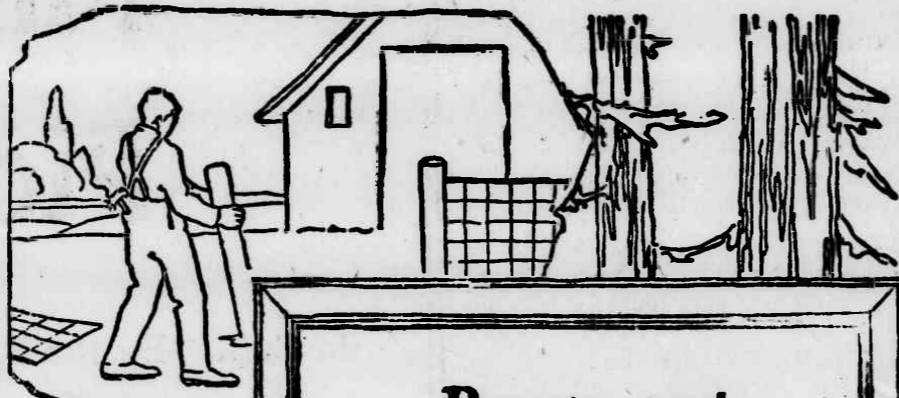
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