

The Case Book of a Private Detective

True Narratives of Interesting Cases by a Former Operative of the William J. Burns Detective Agency

By DAVID CORNELL

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A TRAIL OF INK

How a Clever Bank "Kiter" Was Run Down on a Slender Clue

The National Bankers' Protective association is an organization formed by the bankers of this country to protect themselves and the money in their care from the onslaughts of that considerable class of sharp-witted and reckless men who live by "working banks."

This class is divided into two minor classes—the "rough workers" and the "kiters." The former phrase is used in detective parlance to designate the gentlemen who travel around the country and blow bank safes. The "kiters" are the persons who obtain money by forgery, raised checks, altered drafts, false identifications, and other misrepresentations. Although the safe-blowers get more space in the papers, because of the spectacular character of their achievements, they are the least troublesome of these two types of criminals. A couple of yeggmen will blow a safe in a country bank in Painted Post, Neb., shoot the town marshal in the leg, and get away with \$5,000, and the press of the country will ring with the news. But all the time there is going on the shrewd, silent work of the "kiter," which seldom gets into the papers, but which continually is costing bankers and depositors thousands of dollars.

To catch a "yeggman"—a safe-blower—is nothing more or less than straight police work. To catch a "kiter" is a problem of intricate detective work, for the "kiter" is a man of brains, where the "yegg" is merely one of force, and the former knows better than anyone in the world how to cover his tracks to escape detection. There is living in California at the present time an old gentleman who retired on a pension granted him several years ago by a combination of bankers who calculated that it would be better to pay him to remain honest than to risk losses from his skillful methods of forgery.

It is hardly likely that banking history of this country will see such another incident. The National Bankers' Protective Agency employs the Burns Detective Agency to do all its work now, and no matter how shrewd a forger may be, how scientific his methods, the Burns system, backed by the Bankers' association, is sure to get him in the long run. At the same time there are hundreds of men—mostly young fellows in desperate financial straits—who tempt fate by passing bad bank paper. Such criminals are soon run to earth. It is the old scientific fox, the man who has made "hitting" a profession, who makes trouble; and the first one of these gentlemen that I ran down while working as a Burns detective was the best of the lot.

In Medillon, N. Y., there are three banks, the Old National, the First National and the Farmers' and Merchants'. One Monday morning the office manager of our agency came down to the office to find on his desk a telegram from each of these banks requesting that a man be sent up at once.

"A job for you, Cornell," said the manager, handing me the messages. "Beat it up there as soon as you can." I caught a Lackawanna train at 10:30, and at seven in the evening I was registering in the best hotel in Medillon, a town of 7,500 people. After three days' work I had unraveled the following tale of what had happened to the banks of Medillon:

A month before a man named Clawson, who conducted the most prosperous coal yard of the town, had decided to sell out and retire from business. He had advertised the sale in a retail coal trade publication that circulated among coal dealers throughout the country. In a few days, or to be precise, just three weeks before I arrived in town, a prosperous, energetic looking man had appeared in answer to the advertisement. He introduced himself as Milton K. Jenkins, said he had been in the coal business years before, in Chicago, had quit it and gone to New York, where he had been working as a coal salesman for the last five years. The death of an uncle, said he, recently had placed him in possession of a little money. He wanted to get into business for himself. He wanted to get out of the grind and worry of the city. He wanted to be his own boss. He had been in Medillon once before and liked the town. As soon as he had seen Clawson's advertisement he had said to his wife, "There's the place for us, Jennie, if the business is any good," and had hied himself straight away to the town.

"Now," said he energetically, "show me what you've got to sell."

The man's knowledge of the coal business was so complete as to assure Clawson at once that he was talking to an old and shrewd hand in that line. His bearing and address had all the earmarks of success and forcefulness. He knew how much coal cost at the mines down in Pennsylvania, how much freight rates were, and what coal ought to sell for in Medillon. He smiled appreciative-

ly when Clawson showed him his books and demonstrated that the people of Medillon were willing to pay even a little more than what coal ought to sell for in that town.

"I see you know the game, too," he said; and Clawson naturally was a little flattered.

Clawson named a price of \$5,500 on his plant as it lay then, in the early summer with little stock in it. This was an unreasonable price, and Jenkins said so at once.

"Five thousand is the top-notch price I can see myself paying for it," said he, "and probably \$4,500 will be what it looks like when I've looked it over carefully."

Clawson grumbled that \$5,500 was his only price, but inwardly he was pleased. He had set \$4,000 as what he expected to realize from his sale.

Jenkins began to go into the details of the business with him as no one but a man skilled in that line could do. He covered the field with his investigations and questions in a way that aroused Clawson's admiration.

"Mr. Jenkins," he said, "you can do twice as much business here as I did. You can teach them all something about the coal business."

"I know something about it," admitted Jenkins. "You haven't hustled quite enough. Don't you know that you ought to get a couple of factories into this town? I do. I got an option now that I could bring here possibly. But you'll never get \$5,500 out of me for your business."

Finally he wrote a check for \$250 on the Twenty-fifth Street Bank of New York city for a five days' option at \$5,000.

At the same time that he was dickering for the business Jenkins began to make inquiries about a home. Here again his evident character as an experienced and forceful business man asserted itself.

Clawson, quite convinced that he would make his sale at a price satisfactory to himself, eagerly carried Jenkins over to a real estate man named Cross and introduced him as a new and valuable addition to the population of Medillon.

Cross, likewise, was deeply impressed by Jenkins. He had no doubt of his ability to pay for the best house for sale in town, and Jenkins was at once taken out and shown a desirable property. It was an old homestead with large grounds and in good repair, and the price was \$5,000. It was a fair price. Jenkins agreed at once to this. He went through the house carefully.

"Just about the kind of a place Jennie—my wife—would like," he said. "I'll get her up to take a look at it."

Cross had promptly begun the real estate man's old song: "Well, Mr. Jenkins, there are two or three other parties interested in this property, and I expect an offer for it almost any moment. If you want—"

"Anybody got an option on it?" asked Jenkins.

"No."

"Give me a three-day option on it for \$200," said Jenkins. "I'd close with you now, but my wife always wants a finger in the home pie." He wrote a check for \$200 on the Twenty-fifth Street Bank of New York city.

The third man in the net was Flink, the big furniture man of the town. He came in the third day, when Mrs. Jenkins, a prepossessing, well dressed woman, came to town. By this time the news had been printed in the town's little daily paper that Mr. Jenkins of New York was buying out Clawson's coal yard and purchasing the old homestead from Cross for a home. Also, it was rumored, Mr. Jenkins was connected with several manufacturing enterprises which were considering Medillon as a possible location.

Mrs. Jenkins came into Flink's Furniture Emporium, and with the good-natured assistance of Jenkins began to pick out furniture for their new home. She had taste and an apparently generous pocketbook. Flink rubbed his hands as he saw her pick nothing but the most expensive stuff in his store. He extended himself to please Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. The bill for the articles that Mrs. Jenkins had set aside ran up to \$1,200.

"It will be some days before we want them sent up," said she. "But when we do want them it will be in a hurry."

A deposit of one hundred dollars was made, and the pair departed. The deposit was in the form of a check on the Twenty-fifth Street Bank of New York.

Clawson, Cross and Flink hurried at once to their banks with their checks. Clawson banked at the Old National, Cross at the First National, and Flink at the Farmers' and Merchants'. The checks were taken for collection—and proved good.

Jenkins made such an impression that the Chamber of Commerce invited him as an honored guest to its weekly meeting. He was looked upon as a citizen to be welcomed with open arms. Said the president of the Chamber of Commerce in introducing him: "Mr. Jenkins is what we need and want: a thorough-going hustler." He was. At the end of a week's

dickering with Clawson, he agreed to buy the coal yard at \$4,750, \$2,500 to be paid at once, and the remainder on six months' time. He wrote a check as before for the \$2,500.

"And by the way, Clawson," he said, "Wish you'd take me down and introduce me to your banker. I'll have to transfer my account here in a few days."

Clawson accordingly introduced Jenkins to the Old National bank in a cordial manner. As soon as he had been properly identified Jenkins presented a draft issued by the Twenty-fifth Street bank for \$1,625. The cashier paid it without a murmur of suspicion.

From Clawson, Jenkins went to Cross, and within half an hour he had repeated his operation at the First National, there cashing a draft for \$1,510. From Cross he went to Flink, and Flink accommodatingly identified him at the Farmers' and Merchants', where he secured \$1,300 on a similar draft.

That night Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins left Medillon. Next day the banks discovered that the drafts were all forgeries. The forms on which they were issued were mere cheap imitations of the Twenty-fifth Street Bank's paper. Hurling telegrams went to the New York bank:

"How much is Jenkins' balance?"

The answer came: "Eighteen dollars and eleven cents."

The Medillon banks had been cleverly stung.

This was the story that I gathered thread by thread when I investigated the trouble in Medillon.

To trace Jenkins I had specimens of his hand-writing, excellent descriptions of him, and the knowledge that he was an expert in the coal business.

Protective association's business. We hunted through all the records we could find, and as near as we could judge, about once every twelve months a man appeared in some small town as Jenkins had appeared in Medillon, and put over about the same kind of a job. The man never had been apprehended or even located. Upon investigating these old cases we found that the "kiter" always used a different name, that he was sometimes shaved, sometimes bearded, sometimes splurgily dressed, and sometimes quietly—but always he was a coal man of forceful character and apparent success. It was obvious that he and our "Mr. Jenkins" were one and the same man.

A hurried fitting around the country placed in my possession the various specimens of handwriting that had been left by the "kiter." At first I was amazed and disappointed to discover that they were all apparently the work of different men; but a few days' work on the part of our handwriting expert demonstrated that one man had written them all, but that he had so skillfully disguised his hand on each occasion as to make each specimen entirely different in appearance from the others. My respect for my quarry grew immensely at this revelation. The man was absolutely the cleverest forger I ever had heard of.

Now I knew that the Jenkins who had fooled the banks in Medillon was an old and expert hand at crime, that he had worked at it for at least six years, and that he seemed to do only one job a year. And still I was as far away from any apparent clue as when I started on the case. Somewhere in America this forceful, clever fellow was living on the proceeds of his crime. But what a task to look for

this paper ads offering for sale a coal business, which Jenkins had answered.

These particular ads had appeared in a space covering six years.

In three cases at least he had asserted that he had seen the advertisement in this publication.

He was so familiar with all the up-to-date news of the trade that he could hardly have obtained it any other way than reading closely the gossip of a trade paper.

Against this of course was the possibility that Jenkins had merely hit upon these particular coal yards by accident. At all events, this was the only clue that I had to work on.

In Philadelphia I found the publisher of the coal paper to be a crabbled old fellow who would have nothing to do with me at first. I looked around and found that he was head-over-heels in debt, and that his bank held two notes against him which they were threatening to call in, which action would have put the old fellow out of business. The president of the bank, on my request, wrote a little note, and upon its presentation the publisher was glad to turn over for my inspection all the letters that the old man had in the office.

Fortunately the old fellow was of a suspicious habit of mind. Whenever anyone sent in an order for a subscription he not only placed the order on his books, but he fled away the original letter, to produce if the subscriber denied payment. He had over 2,500 of these letters, and our task was to look at each one and compare the signatures with the various disguised hand-writings of Jenkins. For I had decided that about the only way of getting a line on our man lay in

Clawson went up and held out his hand.

"Hello, Jenkins," he said.

"You are mistaken," was the answer. "Cummings is my name."

"It is here," said Cross, stepping up, "but in Medillon it was Jenkins, all right."

"Yes," said Flink. "Why didn't you come back for your furniture?"

Cummings—Jenkins—looked around wildly. On every side of him he saw cashiers from the banks that he had swindled in the last six years. They greeted him by the different names he had used in their towns. Then I stepped up and showed him the letter he had written to the coal paper.

"But for this," I said, "we might never have got you."

Cummings was smart enough to see that the game was up. He made a complete confession, clearing up a lot of mysterious bank forgeries, and took 15 years in Auburn prison. His wife went free. She fought the case, alleging that Jenkins had forced her to help him by threats of death. She got a young jury, and she was a pretty, youthful looking woman.

We didn't care much about her, however. Jenkins—or rather Cummings—was the brains of the outfit, and we had put him where his brains couldn't do our clients any harm.

ADVENTURE WITH BIG SNAKE

Algot Lange's Description of His Encounter With a Fifty-Six Foot Boa Constrictor.

In his new book, "In the Amazon Jungles," (Putnam), Algot Lange tells of his encounter with a fifty-six foot boa constrictor: "On a soft muddy sand bar, half hidden by dead branches, I beheld a somewhat cone shaped mass about seven feet in height. From the base of this came the neck and head of the snake, flat on the ground, with beady eyes staring at us as we slowly advanced and stopped. The snake was coiled, forming an enormous pile of round, scaly monstrosity, large enough to crush us all to death at once. We had stopped at a distance of about fifteen feet from him, and looked at each other. I felt as if I were spellbound, unable to move a step farther or even to think or act on my own initiative.

"The snake still made no move, but in the clear moonlight I could see its body expand and contract in breathing; its yellow eyes seeming to radiate a phosphorescent light. I felt no fear, nor any inclination to retreat, yet I was now facing a beast that few men had ever succeeded in seeing. Thus we stood looking at each other, scarcely moving an eyelid, while the great silent monster looked at us. I slid my right hand down to the holster of my automatic pistol, the 9mm. Luger, and slowly removed the safety lock, at the same time staring into the faces of the man. In this manner I was less under the spell of the mesmerism of the snake, and could to some extent think and act.

"I wheeled around while I still held control of my faculties, and, perceiving a slight movement of the snake's coils, I fired point blank at the head, letting go the entire chamber of soft nose bullets. Instantly the other men woke up from their trance and in their turn fired, emptying their Winchesters into the huge head, which by this time was raised to a great height above us, loudly hissing in agony.

"Our wild yelling echoed through the deep forest. The snake uncoiled itself and writhing with pain made for the water's edge. By this time we were relieved of the terrible suspense, but we took care to keep at a respectful distance from the struggling reptile and the powerful lashing of the tail, which would have killed a man with one blow."

BELASCO STRONG ON REALISM

Theatrical Producer Insists That Everything on the Stage Shall Be in Perfect Harmony.

David Belasco is famous for his attention to minute detail in the staging of the plays which he produces. He even passed on the kinds of nails and tacks used in the building of his scenery. But he surpassed himself this season when he put on "The Case of Becky," a play which deals with hypnotic suggestion. The first and second acts of the piece take place in the office of a sanitarium and the physician in charge is noted as a great authority on hypnotism.

Soon after the first production of the play Belasco was showing a friend all the scenic effects of the production. On the desk of the physician was stationery stamped with the fictitious name of the sanitarium.

"This," explained the producer, "is merely a small detail to create the impression in the minds of the actors that they are in a real sanitarium instead of on the stage."

He then threw open the door of a large bookcase which ordinarily would have contained dummy volumes.

"There," he explained in a matter-of-fact tone, "is the best library in this country on hypnotism and suggestion. It contains 400 volumes on those subjects, and I have been collecting them for the past two years. It is much better to have the real books in the book cases. It makes the man who plays the specialist believe that he really knows something about the subject."

A Serious One. "What do you think is the real, most vital problem of the race?" "That's easy. To pick the winners."



Cummings—Jenkins looked around wildly.

Beyond that—nothing. He had come to Medillon, stayed a little, and fitted away from \$4,435 of the bankers' money. He had left no trail to follow. He was a thorough-going "kiter."

Back in New York I found that Jenkins had been a depositor of the Twenty-fifth Street Bank for only a short time. Nothing was known of him there. He had left no trace. So far as any trail was concerned the existence of Jenkins began with his appearance at this bank and ended with his disappearance from Medillon. None of the clumsy little tracks left by the crude criminal were to be found in this case. He had just come, had got the money, and had gone. He was an artist.

"Well," said Chief Burns, "it looks as if a new 'kiter' had begun work among the banks in dead earnest. But I've seen work that resembles this before."

We hunted through our records, and sure enough, the same methods that had worked in Medillon had been used in Michigan about a year before. A coal man had advertised his business for sale, a prospective purchaser had appeared, had established his credit, had cashed drafts through introductions to the local banks, and had fitted, no one knew where. And no one had discovered.

Going back still further we found that about a year before another case of the same sort had been reported from Iowa. This was before the Burns agency began to handle the Bankers'

him! For this Jenkins was not of the criminal type. He would not be found by hunting among crooks. He might be anywhere and in almost any plane of society.

The only physical proof that I had of the existence of Jenkins was his variously disguised hand-writing. This was the only trace that he had left of his presence. But this was enough, as it proved.

I will not tire the reader with telling about the weary weeks of futile toil I spent at first on the Jenkins case. They were weeks of searching and researching without finding anything. Nothing interesting happened in that time. But in the end, I finally unearthed the salient fact that all of the coal men who had been the means of attracting the fatal Jenkins to their towns had advertised their business for sale in the same coal trade publication.

This publication was a small weekly issued at Philadelphia. It went only to retail coal dealers. It was not for sale on newsstands, nor was it to be found in any library in the country. It had 3,752 subscribers, and these were about the only people in the country who knew that such a publication existed. Reasoning the thing out it seemed possible to suppose that Jenkins for years had been a constant reader of this paper.

The case for this theory summed up thus:

Six certain men had published in

the possibility that he was a subscriber to the coal trade paper, and that he had written a signed letter to the editor.

As the expert was looking over the 1,300th letter he jumped up with a shout.

"Here's our man!" he cried, and threw over to me a letter signed "A. J. Cummings, Neria, Ohio."

To the layman this signature was totally different from any of those we had found left by Jenkins, but the expert quickly proved that it was from the same hand.

The letter was written on Cummings' letter-head—he was in the coal and wood business in Neria—and was for a five years' subscription to the paper. Trains didn't run fast enough to suit me after that. I raced up to Medillon and got Clawson and Cross and Flink together. I wired the cashiers of banks in other towns who had been fleeced by Jenkins. I went to Neria, Ohio, a tiny town of 1,500 people, and got a spot on Cummings. He was a coal merchant—but I found that he was frequently absent from Neria for weeks at a time. And nobody knew where he went on these occasions.

I wired my bankers and the trio in Medillon:

"Come on to Neria and look him over."

They came as fast as trains could carry them. I pointed Jenkins out to them as he walked down the street. They recognized him, every man Jack of them, as "Jenkins."