

# The Case Book of a Private Detective

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

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## PLUGGING A LEAK

The Story of a Faithful Old Employee Who Was Faithless

A good looking young fellow of perhaps thirty-five, well dressed and prosperous in appearance, came into the office of the Burns Agency one day just as the office manager and myself were going to lunch.

"I want some help in a queer situation, and I came here, though what I have got is probably a little out of your line," he said.

"What is it?" asked the manager. "Well, it isn't anything that I would care to talk about here where anybody who entered might hear me," said the stranger emphatically. "If you can give me a few minutes of your time in a private, secluded office, out of sight and hearing of everybody, I may convince you that I've got a case you can take, and if I don't I'll pay you gladly for the time spent in hearing my story."

The manager promptly led the way to an ante room, and shutting the door, sat down and said: "Well, let's have it."

The man looked at me questioningly.

"One of our men," said the manager. "Go to your story."

"Well," said the man, "my name is Hillary Bronson of Bronsonville, Pa. You've heard of the Bronson Chemical engines? Well, we make them—the Bronson Chemical Engine company. My father started the business before I was born. He made a great success with it, as you know. He invented the Bronson engine, and not only invented it, but made a success at manufacturing and selling it. Two years ago, when he was seventy-two years old, he retired from business and turned the company—the management of it—over to me."

Mr. Bronson paused and looked nervously around the office and at us.

"Gentlemen, are you sure that nobody can hear us? And have I your word that what I tell you will be a secret between us?"

He regarded us both suspiciously. "Well," said the manager, "if you can't trust us absolutely it wouldn't be good sense on your part to tell us your story. But you know the reputation that this agency has. It never could have gained such a reputation, Mr. Bronson, if it ever—even once—had violated a client's confidence."

"No, certainly not," said Bronson, relieved. "But you understand, what I've got to unburden is something that absolutely puts me in your power. You could ruin me, understand, if you cared to use my story against me. So you see how careful I've got to be."

"Mr. Bronson," said the manager, "every day in the year we are entrusted with that same kind of story. You think you are an exception. Everybody does. You can trust us as fully as you can trust yourself."

"Thank you," said Bronson. "You'll pardon my caution, I'm sure."

"Here common sense," we said together. "Go on."

Bronson crossed his legs and began.

"It's a long story, but I'll make it as short as I can. I have told you that two years ago my father retired from business and turned the management of the Bronson Chemical Engine works over to me. But the story goes a long time further back than that. It goes way back to the time I was in college. I—I was a bad boy, a mighty bad boy, at school. I had been a sort of village pet at home—you know; son of the man who made Bronsonville and heir to the big factory, and all that. I came to school spoiled, completely spoiled. My father thought I was a little wild; but he didn't know what a bad kid it was he'd been raising."

"Well, when I came to college some of the prestige that I had gained among bartenders and gamblers in small towns around Bronsonville came with me. There was a bunch in school that was of about the same breed, and they hailed my arrival with considerable joy. I don't need to go into details; I suppose you know what these stories sound like too well to need to have them repeated. But, anyhow, I—I came out of school owing \$10,000, and owing it to the kind of people that I couldn't possibly tell my father about. Couldn't speak about them even."

"There were other debts that he squared when I graduated, plenty of them. But this \$10,000 I couldn't possibly mention to him. He would have kicked me out on my head, and rightly so, if he had known of them."

"Now, I'd got pretty sick of the wild young goat sort of existence by this time. The knowledge of those \$10,000 worth of I. O. U.'s hanging over my head had sobered me up good and plenty. All I wanted to do was to get back to the big works there in Bronsonville and work like a slave trying to make good the way a Bronson should. Oh, I was reformed, all right. You know how good black coffee tastes after a night of it. Well, I had had all the nights of it that I wanted in my life, and I was certainly hanging for the black coffee. I

didn't have another desire than to get to work in the Bronson plant and make good. And I wanted to do that—well, if I couldn't do it, life wasn't worth keeping. Oh, I was reformed, all right, good and plenty."

"Well, I went back to Bronsonville and went to work. And I made good. The old man offered to let me start in the office. 'No,' I said, 'plenty of time for that after I've gone through the works.' So I went in the works, worked in the foundry department, the machine room, the assembly department, paint shop—all through the place—for one solid year. I made good. I felt I had to. The old man was proud of me. He didn't know what it was that was driving me to make good."

"Then I went into the office and in a few months I was treasurer, and a good one, too—for a few months. You see, these people who held my I. O. U.'s were smart. They held off while I was working in the works. But the minute they heard I'd got to be treasurer of the company, down they came on me. They began to squeeze. Gad! gentlemen, you have no idea what I went through for the next six months. There I was, working my head off, making good, the pride of my father, an exemplary young man, and there, over my head, hung those awful I. O. U.'s that would make me an outcast the minute they were dropped."

"I couldn't raise \$10,000 without giving some explanation for it. I couldn't explain why I wanted it. I suppose you can guess what is coming? I was treasurer of the company. I had all its funds under my control without any supervision from anybody. My father trusted me as he did himself. Nobody to know it—and I always figured I would be able to slip it back before its absence was discovered. Yes, I—I took \$10,000 worth of the firm's money and paid up those I. O. U.'s that were driving me crazy."

"I came near getting away with it. I would have done it but for old Carberry. Carberry is the manager of our office. He started in as an office boy for my father when father was making engines with his own hands. That was 45 years ago. He's been there ever since, Carberry has. He's father's confidential man."

"He never had the brains to get into the firm. He had hoped to become manager some day, but he didn't have the ability to force himself into the job. That soured him, but he didn't let father see it."

"Well, Carberry got next to my taking the \$10,000. There wasn't anything in the office that he wasn't next to. And just as soon as he got next to it, he had a club over me that he could brain me with."

"When I was made manager of the company two years ago, Carberry saw his chance. He would have been made manager himself, probably, if it hadn't been for me, and it was his ambition to get that job before he died. He had me by the horns now, of course. He could make me whistle to his tune, and whenever he wanted to. He went about it in a foxy manner; he is making me fall down on my job as manager."

Bronson stopped and sat back in his chair, the moisture standing out upon his forehead. The manager and I looked at one another in surprise. "Well," said Bronson, "what do you think of it?"

"Smooth work," said the manager. "But how does he do it?"

"Easiest thing in the world. Comes into my private office—my private office as manager of the company—and makes suggestions. Suggests that we handle such and such a matter so and so. I know perfectly well that the suggestion is hopelessly rotten, but what can I do? Every once in a while the old ghoul will come in and remind me of what he knows. Yes, sir; he throws it right up to my face that he is in possession of the secret that could ruin my life and break my father's heart. So I've got to act on his suggestions—put them through as my own ideas, you understand—and then things go wrong, and then I've got to stand the blame for it, of course. Then Carberry comes into the scene, puts in his oar and straightens things out by doing just what I or any intelligent man would have done in the first place if I'd been free, and when things are straightened out its this place would be up against it if we didn't have old Carberry to straighten out young Bronson's bull-headed mistakes."

"I'm being discredited, absolutely and hopelessly. I'm made to appear as a sort of an idiot who sits in the manager's chair because my father owns the works; but Carberry—Carberry is the fellow who keeps the plant from going on the rocks. Can you beat that for a pleasant little situation? I—I'm beginning to understand why some men commit murder."

"Getting desperate?" said the manager easily.

"Well, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, no. You don't have to worry. Why don't you engage us—take Cornell here—to go over to Bronsonville and clip this Carberry's claws?"

"Great heavens, man!" cried Bron-

son. "Do you mean to say you think it can be done?"

"Why not?"

I was in Bronsonville two days after this conversation had taken place. Bronsonville is a little manufacturing hamlet in the middle west, a busy little place, with a hotel, too good for its size, which Bronson, Sr., had built and maintained with his own money. The whole town was a family affair to a certain extent. The whole Bronson family, and all the officers of the company, lived in the better portion of town; the employees made up the rest of the population. The town didn't have much to do with the rest of the world, except to sell it chemical engines. It was an isolated, self-centered little hamlet. When I had seen this I knew it wouldn't be hard to get Carberry. He had proved that he was a crooked character, and no man of such tendencies lives forty-five years in a small town without leaving some loose ropes dangling to hang himself with.

My first impression of Carberry strengthened my confidence. Even if I had never heard Bronson's story of the man's fiendish cunning I would have picked him out of a crowd as a man who would be found on the wrong side of the law sooner or later. He was not "right." To an experienced man his face was like a book, and "crook" was written all over it. Yet he had worked forty-five years for one man and had managed to keep a reputation for squareness. He was a smart crook, but since he was a crook I knew I would get him in the end, just as surely as a horse running off the beaten road will sooner or later wind up in a wire fence.

They had a little club in that town to which the officers and higher salaried employees of the company belonged, and young Bronson had me put up there on a visitor's card. I was posing as a prospective purchaser of a large order of engines. Then I sent for Cluffer and left him to mingle among the workmen. I kept my ears open for anything and every-



One night at about ten he came back.

thing that might be said about Carberry, and Cluffer did the same. We discovered that he was universally disliked by about everybody in town except old Bronson, but beyond that there wasn't much said about him. He kept to himself entirely, living in an old stone house on the side bill with only an old housekeeper for company. He was a bachelor and had neither kin nor friends in the town. He went from his house to the office, from the office back to the house. This was about all that anybody but his housekeeper saw of him.

"You'll never get anything on that old bird," said Cluffer, after a month of it. "He's a crook all right; anybody in the business would pick him out as being wrong, and there ought to be something to get on him; but he's been too foxy to leave any loose ropes dangling, let me tell you that."

"I'll get him if it takes a year," I said. And that is just about what it did take to get Carberry."

I had to locate myself in Bronsonville. It was impossible to keep up the pretext of purchasing engines week after week, so I went away for a while, then came back as an applicant for a position with the Bronson company. Young Bronson gave me a place as a salesman on probation, and while I was around the place pretending to learn the business I had a good

chance to poke my nose into all sorts of corners.

I also tried to get into Carberry's house and have a look around, but failed. He kept the place as closely guarded as if it had been a citadel. The town put this up to his eccentricity, but it wasn't; it was the instinctive fear of a crooked man.

In the meantime Carberry was ruining Bronson's reputation as a manager. The young man was being made to appear more and more in the light of an incompetent. Things went wrong in the sales department, and it was due to orders which Carberry forced Bronson to put through. The manufacturing department began to go to pieces, due to the same reason. Every once in a while Carberry would step in and do the right thing at the right moment, and the whole place would ring with his praises—though nobody liked him—and with pity for poor Bronson.

As the weeks went by it looked as if poor Bronson was bound to be forced out and Carberry finally put in his place.

Bronson himself began to feel this way about it, too.

"I guess it's all off," he said. "You were mistaken; you couldn't deliver the goods. I don't think it's worth while trying any longer."

"Well," I said, "you would be a darn fool to run up this bill without seeing it through. I tell you that I'm going to get that man. I know it. It's taking long because he's so smart. But sooner or later the raw spot will show, and he'll be ours."

"Oh, well, keep on then," he said. "I don't believe it's much use, but I might as well keep on paying you now that I've handed you so much."

He was dissatisfied with my failure to accomplish anything, and justly so. But I would have told him long ago to discharge me if I hadn't felt as sure as breathing that I'd land Carberry sooner or later. I was sure that Carberry had not confined his crookedness to the unique feat of terrorizing Bronson. And any piece of crooked work can be found by any good detective if he is only given time.

to be shown their engines. I examined half a dozen of them. Every one of them had the same number of Bronson parts as the one I had seen up in Albany.

I went away and started back to Bronsonville.

"Have you been missing parts out of the factory lately?" I asked Bronson.

"Oh, we've been doing that for the last two years, ever since I became manager," he said wearily. "Of course they aren't missing; Carberry merely dopes up the books and says they're missing, and everybody thinks I've bailed up things; and then Carberry looks through the books and pretends to find the missing parts, and proves that I was responsible for the error. That's an old story."

"All right," I said. "Put me to work in the shipping room."

He did. I stayed there two months. Nothing went wrong in the daytime. Then I began to hide myself there at night. The shipping clerk was an old, taciturn fellow. One night at about ten he came back, filled two large cases with valuable parts and stencilled them to go to somebody in Genesee Junction.

I followed those two cases. At Genesee Junction they were received by a man who scraped the stencilling and re-shipped them to the Dorler company, Philadelphia.

I went up to the man and took him by the scruff of the neck and made him look me in the eye. "Who told you to do this?" I said. "Don't get rash; I'm a detective and the game is up."

"I ain't done anything wrong," he whimpered, after trying in vain to break loose. "See the shipping clerk; he's the fellow who's doing this."

"Good," I said, and I had the local police put him in jail.

I went back to Bronsonville and caught the shipping clerk when he was alone.

"Who put you up to shipping parts at night to the Dorler company?" I asked.

He stared.

"Oh, don't put on side," I said. "I

"Has he?" cried the man. Search his house. He's got the cellar packed full of parts that I've carted up there nights."

Bronson called his car. We dragged Carberry with us. The clerk came willingly. We forced our way in past the old housekeeper. The clerk showed us a trapdoor and we found the cellar literally full of valuable parts from the factory.

"Oh, well," said Bronson, straightening his shoulders as if a load had been taken off them. "I guess there won't be much trouble. You feel like retiring from business, don't you, Carberry? Suppose you resign on a pension and—leave me to run the business. I'm willing to forget this, forget all about it, if you forget something about me."

Carberry is still living in his old stone house. He never leaves it now. He never sees anybody. He is in constant terror.

Bronson is making good down at the works. He and I are good friends; but he says: "Well, it was luck. You were lucky or you'd never have seen that engine up in Albany."

"No," I said, "it wasn't luck—it was simply a matter of time."

## MISSED HER DAYS OF LOVE

With Professional Success, Spinster Still Considers That Her Life Has Been an Empty One

In Harpers Bazar a very intelligent spinster tells readers why her life is empty, notwithstanding her professional success. Her words should give pause to some of the ambitious girls plining for careers. Read these, for example:

"Even intellectually I became somewhat of a mental outsider. While other women chatted of opera, dress and current happenings, I sat in a corner minus any conversational equipment. For I had nothing in my head except my business, and how could I manufacture interesting chat out of the auditing of the month's books or the delinquencies of my stenographer? If I had only realized how richly a few magazine subscriptions and a few theater tickets would have repaid me I would have invested therein. But I was blind to everything except my goal of business success."

"Another thing—rather hard to own—but since I have begun confessing I might as well go on. Although I did not look for love—Love has passed me by. And I sometimes wonder, as I glance at the left hand resting ringless on my desk, if the reason has been that I allowed myself to be altogether too much of a 'good fellow' among the men I met. Oh yes, it was necessary to be jolly and good-tempered and able to see a joke, but I think sometimes I allowed myself to be—well, a little bold. And it is my belief that many a bright, earnest, affectionate woman eats her heart out longing for love and home without a bit realizing that her own frank, chummy, 'don't-let's-stand-on-ceremony' attitude has kept men from ever thinking of her except as a 'good sort.' Oh yes, I know it's the fashion to pretend that every woman could marry if she wanted to and that all lonely spinsters are independent 'bachelor girls' by choice, but that isn't life as I have found it."

## NOT ABLE TO ACCEPT OFFER

Young Lady Wittily Replies to Advertisement That Had Been Misdirected

Because a large woolen company mailed a circular advertising a line of woollens for trousers in place of woollens for ladies' skirts to a lady of Washington, the concern received an unexpected letter in its correspondence. In her reply she deplores the fact that she is not able to accept the offering in the advertisement of trousers. She says:

"Relative to the generous offer, I beg to advise that there seems, unfortunately, to be a slight misapprehension as to gender on your part. The offer itself seems most attractive, and I regret that nature—seconded by our rather stringent police regulations—has debarred me from the privilege of alleviating your anxiety to make me the recipient of your special bargain prices in trousers. Would that it were otherwise! Color would be no object, texture a mere bagatelle, could I conscientiously take advantage of your proffered augmentation of my present somewhat limited wardrobe at your most cut prices. I'd glory in one of the 'superb pair' you wish specially to make according to my plans and specifications, as it were, and really the outlay would not be so great for you, either, as I am not very long, and I like things without trimmings anyway."

"My heart yearns—nay pants—to take advantage of your princely offer, but, alas! I am not a true gentleman—not even a woman militant."—Philadelphia Record.

## All in Fear of Man.

The universal antipathy of animated nature for man can scarcely be explained as the teaching of experience. Man has played his role of universal meddler for too short a time to have impressed himself on the memory of each individual line. There must be something in his attitude of mind that communicates itself to them and induces its proper automatic reflex. The mouse that runs over the lion's foot and gnaws at his bone, goes to earth like a flash when a man comes near; the bee hangs in the air and then goes off because man stands by her favorite foxglove; even the witless snake stirs in its sun-emitted sleep and is moved by a feeling in the air to seek its den.—London Nation.