Detection of Chinky

By George F. Butler and Herbert Ilsley

Dr. Furnivall Solves a Perplexing Case by the Use of His Psychometric-Deductive Powers

At 5:30 in the morning a laborer with two cents for his breakfast milk warm in his hand stopped in front of Swartz' provision store and stared blankly at the closed door and shutters. The place was always open at five at this time of year, and he was in a hurry.

The stillness was broken by the policeman. Drawing his revolver he tapped with it lightly on the glass, calling in a loud voice:

"Hi, there! You in there! I see you. Hold up your hands and come on out of that! Come out, I say!"

"Well, well, well!" "Tis poor old Swartz—he's hung himself!" the policeman whispered in awe. Then he remembered that the door of the shop, fastened on the outside, was secured by means of a bar and padlock. These must have been put in place by somebody with Swartz in the shop! Then who could that somebody be if not—the murderer? No, it was not suicide. It was murder, and if murder, who could the murderer be but Flannigan, the only person besides Swartz possessing a key to the padlock?

With the flash of this obvious sequence into his mind, the policeman hurried to the store telephone and called up his station, notifying it that Swartz was murdered, that Flannigan a clerk, had done the deed and was missing.

From the evidence not a man of the force present entertained the slightest doubt of how the crime had occurred, nor who the criminal logically must be. Flannigan, just before closing time on Saturday night when trade being over and the shop deserted, the street door was closed and the shutters put on all but the back window, had for some reason, throttled his boss with his powerful hands, slipped the rope around his neck and hoisted him up there to make it appear to be a case of suicide. Then he slipped up and fled. Flannigan was thick-witted, and it would never occur to him that he had left all the signs pointing to himself, and only to himself. As long as nobody had seen him do it he would feel safe; for he was one of those people who are continually repeating for the information of their audiences that "what you don't see you don't know."

Officers were at once dispatched in several directions for the man. The fact that he was not at his boarding house, but must have returned to his room from the shop and changed his clothes at some time between six o'clock on Saturday evening and eight on Sunday morning, was precisely the evidence that the police looked to find there, and they found it. Flannigan's lodging mistress said that on going to his room to put it in order on Sunday morning at eight, the usual time, she saw that the bed had not been slept in, and examination showed that his every-day clothes hung in the closet while his best suit was missing from its accustomed hooks. And he had not been seen in the vicinity since Saturday morning, when he left the house for his day's work. To this information the police, making a search of his room on their own account, added certain other suggestive items. A badly soiled shirt, torn up the back as if discarded in a hurry, was crowded behind the bureau; a razor, unwiped after using, and a shaving paper with dried lather on it, as if the shaver was in such haste that he could not stop to clean away the traces of his work, were on a little table near the gas jet; a travelling bag, which the lodging mistress asserted that he owned, was not to be found; there was no linen in the bureau drawers. In fact, all the evidence tended to show that the man had left suddenly for parts unknown, saying nothing to anybody of his intended absence, taking with him what few valuable effects he possessed. If the razor remained behind it was because in his excitement he had forgotten it.

Inquiry in the neighborhood soon brought to light a man who had seen Flannigan late Saturday night with a suit case and a big roll of bills staggering from one saloon to another on the way down to the south station; and it presently being learned that Flannigan had relatives in the little country town of Fairview, which was his native place, the rest was easy. He was just the type of man who, having committed a crime, would immediately make for the vicinity of his old home, having neither sense nor general information enough to steer as widely away from that particular spot as possible. Connections were made by telephone with the police of Fairview, and within two hours from that time Flannigan was undergoing examination at station five.

He was a very muscular fellow of 27 years, with a face full of good-natured imbecility. It seemed evident at once to the examining officers that the man would know no better than to commit murder, and would commit it under provocation, the last thing to enter his thick head being the fact that he, with this grade of intelligence, would not have one chance in a thousand of escaping the penalty. He asserted his innocence of the charge, but in a hatchet-headed manner, as if he was very far from realizing the seriousness of his position. He said:

"If old Swartz is dead, I'm sorry. I didn't do it. He always treated me all right, and I wouldn't do him dirt. If I knew who did I'd lick him good."

"What did you go away from your room for without telling anybody of it?"

"Shucks! I didn't have no time. It was most 11 Saturday night when I knowed it, first myself. The boss, he says: 'Flanny,' he says, 'how'd you like a vacation?' he says. 'Everybody but you and me taking a vacation,' he says; 'it's the fashion nowadays,' he says. 'You go to-night, Flanny,' he says, 'and I'll go when you get back. You can stay a week,' he says, 'and here's two weeks' wages.' That will do you,' he says. Then he counted out $25 dollars from the big roll he had in the safe—"

"So he had a big roll in the safe, did he?" the captain interrupted.

"Sure!" He had just put it in there—$24." He says: 'Flanny, this is the biggest day we ever had, and I'm a going,' he says, 'to give you a vacation,' 'because,' he says. 'Flanny, you're all right, and we can afford to be in the fashion,' he says."

"Well, what did you do then?"

"I says if I'm going I'd go then, so's to get the 11:45 train and be home Sunday all day. So he says go ahead, and I goes—"

"You went to your room before taking the train?"

"For sure! I had to git my glad rags. And I started to shave, but didn't. I didn't have time."

"You had time to drop into a number of places on the way down to the station, didn't you?"

Flannigan grinned slyly.

"I wouldn't if I'd shaved," he answered.

That ended the examination as far as it need be given here. Swartz was found hanged in his store, to which only he and Flannigan had a key. Swartz' key was in his pocket. Flannigan's key was in his pocket, and the store was locked from the outside. Flannigan had run away, and when caught had told a cock-and-bull story of a vacation, a luxury never heard of before in connection with any employee of "Fatty" Swartz, or even with Swartz himself, who had been for 13 years in that store every day of his life except Sundays and all day. The notion that he should suddenly propose such a thing to Flannigan at 11 o'clock at night, make him a present of a week's pay and pack him off at once was preposterous—just the kind of a foolish story that a man of Flannigan's caliber would be likely to tell. Only one thing seemed strange to the police. What had Flannigan done with the $24?

The next day after Flannigan had been committed for trial without bail a little old woman with beady black eyes, a wrinkled, yellow skin, a highly nervous manner and a very shrill voice called on Dr. Furnivall, and announcing that she was Flannigan's mother said that her son was of course innocent, and as she had no money to pay a high-up lawyer and detective to prove it, she had come to him as the only thing left for her to do. Mr. Furnivall was given access to Flannigan's cell. He commanded:

"Flannigan, carry your mind back to 11 o'clock Saturday night, and tell me what happened to you then?"

"Why," he answered without hesitation, "the boss was giving me 25 plunks to go on a vacation with."

"Did you leave the store then?"

"I left as soon as I put the shutters up to the front windows. The old man said he'd fix the back one."

"Was he in the store when you left?"

"Yes, sir."

"When you went out at the door where did you go?"

"To Tim Foley's place first, and then to Randall's, and then to my room."

"Did you talk with anybody in those places?"

"Only the barkeeps. They was hardly anybody around then. It was closing time for those shops. They are victuallers."

"Did you see anybody at your lodging house?"

"No. The lights was out and I went in quiet. Everybody was abed."

"When you came out where did you go?"

"I took a car for the south station."

"Did you talk with anybody on the car?"

"I can't think. I don't think so."

"You don't think? Can't you say positively? What you had taken at Foley's and Randall's hadn't begun to affect you, had it?"

"Well, I histed it in quick, and a lot of it, and my head was going some, all right."

Up to this moment Flannigan had been talking in a normal manner. The doctor's gaze had put his face through the preparatory stages of change only. But now, from a startled, then earnest passing to a peaceful and contented expression, his eyes leaped to that of absorbed thought, and he continued in a monotonous voice:

"I think somebody was there; somebody I didn't know very well. I think I spoke to him. But I don't remember if he said anything to me. It was an open car, and I guess he was way over on one end of the seat and I was on the other."

"Was he on your right or your left side?"

"I don't know. Seems to me he was sort of behind me. I'm pretty sure I didn't see him. I sort of felt him, I guess, and I asked him—"

He hesitated, a strange, intent, introspective look in his blue eyes.

"Asked him?" suggested Dr. Furnivall, softly.

"Asked—him—what—time—it—was" He proceeded thus hesitatingly, groping in his mind for the clew to the impression faintly traced there. Then suddenly he went on in full confidence: "No, I asked him if we had time before the 11:45 train to drop in somewhere for a little taste."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me where I was going, and I told him to Fairview on my vacation, and I mustn't miss the train."

"What did he say then?"

"He said there was plenty of time. So we got off and walked through Arch street to Heulzer's, but he couldn't go in. He said he'd wait outside."

"But you went in?"

"Yes."

"Was he waiting when you came out?"

"No. I guess I staved too long. I missed the train and had to go home on a freight."

"You say you didn't know the man very well, but can't you remember anything about him, any peculiarity about him?"

"Well, he had a funny smell."

"A funny smell. What was it like?"

"It was kinder sweet. He said he'd been eating something for his breath. He gave me some, too. He said I ought to have some by me, it was so good for a whisky breath."

"Have you any of it with you?"

"Yes, in my vest pocket."

The doctor searched the pocket and presently found a kernel of a well-known proprietary article for the breath. He chewed it a moment and then leaning toward the man so that the scent must strongly reach his nostrils, said:

"Do you remember that smell?"

"Since I do."

"What is associated with it in your mind? What does it remind you of?"

"Heulzer's hotel."

"Did you ever smell it before you were in that place?"

"Why, yes; that is what Chinky gave me just before I went in."

"Chinky? Who is Chinky?"

"I dunno. He's a fellow I met somewhere. I dunno his last name."

"What is he called 'Chinky'?"

"They say it's because when he runs to turn the switch the lines and poles shake in his range."

"Then he must be a conductor on the street cars."

"Oh, yes; that's what he is! I remember now."

Dr. Furnivall consulted the office. The captain had just connected with the information that, although the key did not fit the lock on Swartz' safe—

"Of course," said Dr. Furnivall. "Now look up a man, a conductor on the street cars, who is known as 'Chinky.' He is your man. Bring him to me and I'll prove it."

But "Chinky," who was found to be a conductor by the name of Alan Westover, frightened so that he could not stand on his feet when charged with the crime, admitted his guilt at once, and there was no necessity for hypnotizing him. He said that Saturday night after his work he had met Flannigan on a car. He told him he was going on a vacation that Swartz was in the store with a big roll, which he was intending to take home with him, as the safe was no good, and that he (Flannigan) had brought away the store key instead of leaving it with the boss, as he ought to have done, seeing that he was to be away so long and might lose it. Flannigan was stupid, and "Chinky" easily got the key from him, pretending to help him from the car to go to Heulzer's substituting one of his own in its place. Running to the store he watched until he saw Swartz removing his butcher's frock, and while it was over his head, entangling his arms, he rushed in and choked him with a short length of rope. He meant only to robber him unconscious and get the money, his hastily conceived plan being to throw suspicion on Flannigan, who would seem to have run away after doing the job, and that was why he had stolen the key. But when he saw that he had overdone the matter—that Swartz was dead—the pulley and rope dangling down from the loft gave him the idea of complicating the affair by making it look like suicide. So he hoisted the body up and left it hanging, shut the door, put up the bar, locked the padlock, and went home. He had suffered the most horrible tortures of mind ever since, had been on the point of giving himself up a dozen times, feeling that death would be a relief to him, and now that he was taken he was glad of it. They would put him out of all his misery before long. His only excuse for the crime was that he was a cocaine fiend, and supposed he was crazy and didn't know any better.

Flannigan, released at once, went home for his vacation, this time without stopping on the way; and he never entered a saloon afterward. Westover was electrocuted, after a long trial instituted by a benevolent society in the attempt to prove him insane.

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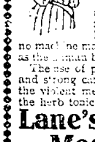

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