

The Silent Bullet

By

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Craig Kennedy's Theories

"It has always seemed strange to me that no one has ever endowed a professorship in criminal science in any of our large universities."

Craig Kennedy laid down his evening paper and filled his pipe with my tobacco. In college we had roomed together, had shared everything, even poverty, and now that Craig was a professor of chemistry and I was on the staff of the Star, we had continued the arrangement. Prosperity found us in a rather neat bachelor apartment on the Heights, not far from the University.

"Why should there be a chair in criminal science?" I remarked argumentatively, settling back in my chair. "I've done my turn at police headquarters reporting, and I can tell you, Craig, it's no place for a college professor. Crime is just crime. And as for dealing with it, the good detective is born and bred to it. College professors for the sociology of the thing, yes; for the detection of it, give me a Byrnes."

"On the contrary," replied Kennedy, his clean-cut features betraying an earnestness which I knew indicated that he was leading up to something important, "there is a distinct place for science in the detection of crime. On the Continent they are far in advance of us in that respect. We are mere children beside a dozen crime-specialists in Paris, whom I could name."

"Yes, but where does the college professor come in?" I asked, rather doubtfully.

"You must remember, Walter," he pursued, warming up to his subject, "that it's only within the last ten years or so that we have had the really practical college professor who could do it. The silk-stockinged variety is out of date now. To-day it is the college professor who is the third arbitrator in labour disputes, who reforms our currency, who heads our tariff commissions, and conserves our farms and forests. We have professors of everything--why not professors of crime"

Still, as I shook my head dubiously, he hurried on to clinch his point. "Colleges have gone a long way from the old ideal of pure culture. They have got down to solving the hard facts of life--pretty nearly all, except one. They still treat crime in the old way, study its statistics and pore over its causes and the theories of how it can be prevented. But as for running the criminal himself down, scientifically, relentlessly--bah! we haven't made an inch of progress since the hammer and tongs method of your Byrnes."

"Doubtless you will write a thesis on this most interesting subject," I suggested, "and let it go at that."

"No, I am serious," he replied, determined for some reason or other to make a convert of me. "I mean exactly what I say. I am going to apply science to the detection of crime, the

same sort of methods by which you trace out the presence of a chemical, or run an unknown germ to earth. And before I have gone far, I am going to enlist Walter Jameson as an aide. I think I shall need you in my business."

"How do I come in?"

"Well, for one thing, you will get a scoop, a beat,--whatever you call it in that newspaper jargon of yours."

I smiled in a skeptical way, such as newspapermen are wont to affect toward a thing until it is done--after which we make a wild scramble to exploit it.

Nothing more on the subject passed between us for several days.

1. The Silent Bullet

"Detectives in fiction nearly always make a great mistake," said Kennedy one evening after our first conversation on crime and science. "They almost invariably antagonize the regular detective force. Now in real life that's impossible--it's fatal."

"Yes," I agreed, looking up from reading an account of the failure of a large Wall Street brokerage house, Kerr Parker & Co., and the peculiar suicide of Kerr Parker. "Yes, it's impossible, just as it is impossible for the regular detectives to antagonize the newspapers. Scotland Yard found that out in the Crippen case."

"My idea of the thing, Jameson," continued Kennedy, "is that the professor of criminal science ought to, work with, not against, the regular detectives. They're all right. They're indispensable, of course. Half the secret of success nowadays is organisation. The professor of criminal science should be merely what the professor in a technical school often is--a sort of consulting engineer. For instance, I believe that organisation plus science would go far to ward clearing up that Wall Street case I see you are reading."

I expressed some doubt as to whether the regular police were enlightened enough to take that view of it.

"Some of them are," he replied. "Yesterday the chief of police in a Western city sent a man East to see me about the Price murder: you know the case?"

Indeed I did. A wealthy banker of the town had been murdered on the road to the golf club, no one knew why or by whom. Every clue had proved fruitless, and the list of suspects was itself so long and so impossible as to seem most discouraging.

"He sent me a piece of a torn handkerchief with a deep blood-stain on it," pursued Kennedy. "He said it clearly didn't belong to the murdered man, that it indicated that the murderer had himself been wounded in the tussle, but as yet it had proved utterly valueless as a clue. Would I see what I could make of it?"

"After his man had told me the story I had a feeling that the murder was committed by either a Sicilian labourer on the links or a negro waiter at the club. Well, to make a short story shorter, I decided to test the blood-stain. Probably you didn't know it, but the Carnegie Institution has just published a minute, careful, and dry study of the blood of human beings and of animals.

"In fact, they have been able to reclassify the whole animal kingdom on this basis, and have made some most surprising additions to our knowledge of evolution. Now I don't propose to bore you with the details of the tests, but one of the things they showed was that the blood of a certain branch of the human race gives a reaction much like the blood of a certain group of monkeys, the chimpanzees, while the blood of another branch gives

a reaction like that of the gorilla. Of course there's lots more to it, but this is all that need concern us now.

"I tried the tests. The blood on the handkerchief conformed strictly to the latter test. Now the gorilla was, of course, out of the question--this was no Rue Morgue murder. Therefore it was the negro waiter."

"But," I interrupted, "the negro offered a perfect alibi at the start, and--"

"No buts, Walter. Here's a telegram I received at dinner: 'Congratulations. Confronted Jackson your evidence as wired. Confessed.'"

"Well, Craig, I take off my hat to you," I exclaimed. "Next you'll be solving this Kerr Parker case for sure."

"I would take a hand in it if they'd let me," said he simply.

That night, without saying anything, I sauntered down to the imposing new police building amid the squalor of Center Street. They were very busy at headquarters, but, having once had that assignment for the Star, I had no trouble in getting in. Inspector Barney O'Connor of the Central Office carefully shifted a cigar from corner to corner of his mouth as I poured forth my suggestion to him.

"Well, Jameson," he said at length, "do you think this professor fellow is the goods?"

I didn't mince matters in my opinion of Kennedy. I told him of the Price case and showed him a copy of the telegram. That settled it.

"Can you bring him down here to-night?" he asked quickly.

I reached for the telephone, found Craig in his laboratory finally, and in less than an hour he was in the office.

"This is a most bating case, Professor Kennedy, this case of Kerr Parker," said the inspector, launching at once into his subject. "Here is a broker heavily interested in Mexican rubber. It looks like a good thing--plantations right in the same territory as those of the Rubber Trust. Now in addition to that he is branching out into coastwise steamship lines; another man associated with him is heavily engaged in a railway scheme from the United States down into Mexico. Altogether the steamships and railroads are tapping rubber, oil, copper, and I don't know what other regions. Here in New York they have been pyramiding stocks, borrowing money from two trust companies which they control. It's a lovely scheme--you've read about it, I suppose. Also you've read that it comes into competition with a certain group of capitalists whom we will call 'the System.'

"Well, this depression in the market comes along. At once rumours are spread about the weakness of the trust companies; runs start on both of them. The System,--you know

them--make a great show of supporting the market. Yet the runs continue. God knows whether they will spread or the trust companies stand up under it to-morrow after what happened to-day. It was a good thing the market was closed when it happened.

"Kerr Parker was surrounded by a group of people who were in his schemes with him. They are holding a council of war in the directors' room. Suddenly Parker rises, staggers toward the window, falls, and is dead before a doctor can get to him. Every effort is made to keep the thing quiet. It is given out that he committed suicide. The papers don't seem to accept the suicide theory, however. Neither do we. The coroner, who is working with us, has kept his mouth shut so far, and will say nothing till the inquest. For, Professor Kennedy, my first man on the spot found that--Kerr Parker--was--murdered.

"Now here comes the amazing part of the story. The doors to the offices on both sides were open at the time. There were lots of people in each office. There was the usual click of typewriters, and the buzz of the ticker, and the hum of conversation. We have any number of witnesses of the whole affair, but as far as any of them knows no shot was fired, no smoke was seen, no noise was heard, nor was any weapon found. Yet here on my desk is a thirty-two-calibre bullet. The coroner's physician probed it out of Parker's neck this afternoon and turned it over to us."

Kennedy reached for the bullet, and turned it thoughtfully in his fingers for a moment. One side of it had apparently struck a bone in the neck of the murdered man, and was flattened. The other side was still perfectly smooth. With his inevitable magnifying-glass he scrutinised the bullet on every side. I watched his face anxiously, and I could see that he was very intent and very excited.

"Extraordinary, most extraordinary," he said to himself as he turned it over and over. "Where did you say this bullet struck?"

"In the fleshy part of the neck, quite a little back of and below his ear and just above his collar. There wasn't much bleeding. I think it must have struck the base of his brain."

"It didn't strike his collar or hair?"

"No," replied the inspector.

"Inspector, I think we shall be able to put our hands on the murderer --I think we can get a conviction, sir, on the evidence that I shall get from this bullet in my laboratory."

"That's pretty much like a story-book," drawled the inspector incredulously, shaking his head.

"Perhaps," smiled Kennedy. "But there will still be plenty of work for the police to do, too. I've only got a clue to the murderer. It will take the whole organisation to follow it up, believe me. Now, Inspector, can you spare the time to go down to Parker's office and take me over the ground? No doubt we can develop something else there."

"Sure," answered O'Connor, and within five minutes we were hurrying down town in one of the department automobiles.

We found the office under guard of one of the Central Office men, while in the outside office Parker's confidential clerk and a few assistants were still at work in a subdued and awed manner. Men were working in many other Wall Street offices that night during the panic, but in none was there more reason for it than here. Later I learned that it was the quiet tenacity of this confidential clerk that saved even as much of Parker's estate as was saved for his widow--little enough it was, too. What he saved for the clients of the firm no one will ever know. Somehow or other I liked John Downey, the clerk, from the moment I was introduced to him. He seemed to me, at least, to be the typical confidential clerk who would carry a secret worth millions and keep it.

The officer in charge touched his hat to the inspector, and Downey hastened to put himself at our service. It was plain that the murder had completely mystified him, and that he was as anxious as we were to get at the bottom of it.

"Mr. Downey," began Kennedy, "I understand you were present when this sad event took place."

"Yes, sir, sitting right here at the directors' table," he replied, taking a chair, "like this."

"Now can you recollect just how Mr. Parker acted when he was shot? Could you--er--could you take his place and show us just how it happened?"

"Yes, sir," said Downey. "He was sitting here at the head of the table. Mr. Bruce, who is the 'CO.' of the firm, had been sitting here at his right; I was at the left. The inspector has a list of all the others present. That door to the right was open, and Mrs. Parker and some other ladies were in the room--"

"Mrs. Parker?" broke in Kennedy.

"Yes: Like a good many brokerage firms we have a ladies' room. Many ladies are among our clients. We make a point of catering to them. At that time I recollect the door was open--all the doors were open. It was not a secret meeting. Mr. Bruce had just gone into the ladies' department; I think to ask some of them to stand by the firm --he was an artist at smoothing over the fears of customers, particularly women. Just before he went in I had seen the ladies go in a group toward the far end of the room--to look down at the line of depositors on the street, which reached around the corner from one of the trust companies, I thought. I was making a note of an order to send into the outside office there on the left, and had just pushed this button here under the table to call a boy to carry it. Mr. Parker had just received a letter by special delivery, and seemed considerably puzzled over it. No, I don't know what it was about. Of a sudden I saw him start in his chair, rise up unsteadily, clap his hand on the back of his head, stagger across the floor -- like this--and fall here."

"Then what happened?"

"Why, I rushed to pick him up. Everything was confusion. I recall someone behind me saying, 'Here, boy, take all these papers off the table and carry them into my office before they get lost in the excitement.' I think it was Bruce's voice. The next moment I heard someone say, 'Stand back, Mrs. Parker has fainted.' But I didn't pay much attention, for I was calling to someone not to get a doctor over the telephone, but to go down to the fifth floor where one has an office. I made Mr. Parker as comfortable as I could. There wasn't much I could do. He seemed to want to say something to me, but he couldn't talk. He was paralysed, at least his throat was. But I did manage to make out finally what sounded to me like, 'Tell her I don't believe the scandal, I don't believe it.' But before he could say whom to tell he had again become unconscious, and by the time the doctor arrived he was dead. I guess you know everything else as well as I do."

"You didn't hear the shot fired from any particular direction?" asked Kennedy.

"No, sir."

"Well, where do you think it came from?"

"That's what puzzles me, sir. The only thing I can figure out is that it was fired from the outside office--perhaps by some customer who had lost money and sought revenge. But no one out there heard it either, any more than they did in the directors' room or the ladies' department."

"About that message," asked Kennedy, ignoring what to me seemed to be the most important feature of the case, the mystery of the silent bullet. "Didn't you see it after all was over?"

"No, sir; in fact I had forgotten about it till this moment when you asked me to reconstruct the circumstances exactly. No, sir, I don't know a thing about it. I can't say it impressed itself on my mind at the time, either."

"What did Mrs. Parker do when she came to?"

"Oh, she cried as I have never seen a woman cry before. He was dead by that time, of course."

"Bruce and I saw her down in the elevator to her car. In fact, the doctor, who had arrived; said that the sooner she was taken home the better she would be. She was quite hysterical."

"Did she say anything that you remember" Downey hesitated.

"Out with it Downey," said the inspector. "What did she say as she was going down in the elevator?"

"Nothing"

"Tell us. I'll arrest you if you don't."

"Nothing about the murder, on my honour," protested Downey.

Kennedy leaned over suddenly and shot a remark at him, "Then it was about the note."

Downey was surprised, but not quickly enough. Still he seemed to be considering something, and in a moment he said:

"I don't know what it was about, but I feel it is my duty, after all, to tell you. I heard her say, 'I wonder if he knew.'"

"Nothing else"

"Nothing else."

"What happened after you came back?"

"We entered the ladies' department. No one was there. A woman's automobile-coat was thrown over a chair in a heap. Mr. Bruce picked it up. 'It's Mrs. Parker's,' he said. He wrapped it up hastily, and rang for a messenger."

"Where did he send it?"

"To Mrs. Parker, I suppose. I didn't hear the address."

We next went over the whole suite of offices, conducted by Mr. Downey. I noted how carefully Kennedy looked into the directors' room through the open door from the ladies' department. He stood at such an angle that had he been the assassin he could scarcely have been seen except by those sitting immediately next Mr. Parker at the directors' table. The street windows were directly in front of him, and back of him was the chair on which the motorcoat had been found.

In Parker's own office we spent some time, as well as in Bruce's. Kennedy made a search for the note, but finding nothing in either office, turned out the contents of Bruce's scrap-basket. There didn't seem to be anything in it to interest him, however, even after he had pieced several torn bits of scraps together with much difficulty, and he was about to turn the papers back again, when he noticed something sticking to the side of the basket. It looked like a mass of wet paper, and that was precisely what it was.

"That's queer," said Kennedy, picking it loose. Then he wrapped it up carefully and put it in his pocket. "Inspector, can you lend me one of your men for a couple of days?" he asked, as we were preparing to leave. "I shall want to send him out of town to-night, and shall probably need his services when he gets back."

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