

# **The Man Higher Up**

By Edwin Balmer and William B. MacHarg

## The Man Higher Up



Authors of "The Eleventh Hour" and "The Hammering Man"

This excellent detective scientific story is the first of a series to appear in AMAZING STORIES. These romances depict the achievement of Luther Trant, psychological detective.

While the results of psychic evidence have not as yet been accepted in our courts, there is no doubt that at a not-distant date such evidence will be given due importance in the conviction of our criminals. The authors of this tale are experts in their science and the series cannot fail to arouse your interest to the highest degree. A second story will appear in an early issue of AMAZING STORIES.

The first real blizzard of the winter had burst upon New York from the Atlantic. For seventy-two hours—as Rentland, chief clerk in the Broadway offices of the American Commodities Company, saw from the record he was making for President Welter—no ship of any of the dozen expected from foreign ports had been able to make the company’s docks in Brooklyn, or indeed, had been reported at Sandy Hook. And for the last five days, during which the Weather Bureau’s storm signals had stayed steadily set, no steamer of the six which had finished unloading at the docks the week before had dared to try for the open sea except one, the *Elizabethan Age*, which had cleared the Narrows on Monday night.

On land the storm was scarcely less disastrous to the business of the great importing company. Since Tuesday morning Rentland’s reports of the car-and train-load consignments which had left the warehouses daily had been a monotonous page of trains stalled. But until that Friday morning, Welter—the big, bull-necked, thick-lipped master of men and money—had borne all the accumulated trouble of the week with serenity, almost with contempt. Only when the chief clerk added to his report the minor item that the 3,000-ton steamer, *Elizabethan Age*, which had cleared on Monday night, had been driven into Boston, something suddenly seemed to “break” in the inner office. Rentland heard the president’s secretary

telephone to Brooklyn for Rowan, the dock superintendent; he heard Welter's heavy steps going to and fro in the private office, his hoarse voice raised angrily; and soon afterwards Rowan blustered in. Rentland could no longer overhear the voices. He went back to his own private office and called the station master at the Grand Central Station on the telephone.

"The seven o'clock train from Chicago?" the clerk asked in a guarded voice.

"It came in at 10:30, as expected? Oh, at 10:10! Thank you." He hung up the receiver and opened the door to pass a word with Rowan as he came out of the president's office.

"They've wired that the *Elizabethan Age* couldn't get beyond Boston, Rowan," he cried curiously.

"The ——— hooker!" The dock superintendent had gone strangely white; for the imperceptible fraction of an instant his eyes dimmed with fear, as he stared into the wondering face of the clerk, but he recovered himself quickly, spat offensively, and slammed the door as he went out. Rentland stood with clenching hands for a moment; then he glanced at the clock and hurried to the entrance of the outer office. The elevator was just bringing up from the street a red-haired, blue-gray-eyed young man of medium height, who, noting with a quick, intelligent glance the arrangement of the offices, advanced directly toward President Welter's door. The chief clerk stepped forward quickly.

"You are Mr. Trant?"

"Yes."

"I am Rentland. This way, please." He led the psychologist to the little room behind the files, where he had telephoned the moment before.

"Your wire to me in Chicago, which brought me here," said Trant, turning from the inscription "Chief Clerk" on the door to the dogged, decisive features and wiry form of his client, "gave me to understand that you wished to have me investigate the disappearance, or death, of two of your dock scale checkers. I suppose you were acting for President Welter—of whom I have heard—in sending for me?"

"No," said Rentland, as he waved Trant to a seat. "President Welter is certainly not troubling himself to that extent over an investigation."

"Then the company, or some other officer?" Trant questioned, with increasing curiosity.

"No; nor the company, nor any other officer in it, Mr. Trant." Rentland smiled. "Nor even am I, as chief clerk of the American Commodities Company, overtroubling myself about those checkers," he leaned nearer to Trant, confidentially, "but as a special agent for the United States Treasury Department I am extremely interested in the death of one of these men, and in the disappearance of the other. And for that I called you to help me."

"As a secret agent for the Government?" Trant repeated, with rapidly rising interest.

"Yes; a spy, if you wish so to call me, but as truly in the ranks of the enemies to my country as any Nathan Hale, who has a

statue in this city. To-day the enemies are the big, corrupting, thieving corporations like this company; and appreciating that, I am not ashamed to be a spy in their ranks, commissioned by the Government to catch and condemn President Welter, and any other officers involved with him, for systematically stealing from the Government for the past ten years, and for probable connivance in the murder of at least one of those two checkers so that the company might continue to steal.”

“To steal? How?”

“Customs frauds, thefts, smuggling—anything you wish to call it. Exactly what or how, I can’t tell; for that is part of what I sent for you to find out. For a number of years the Customs Department has suspected, upon circumstantial evidence, that the enormous profits of this company upon the thousand and one things which it is importing and distributing must come in part from goods they have got through without paying the proper duty. So at my own suggestion I entered the employ of the company a year ago to get track of the method. But after a year here I was almost ready to give up the investigation in despair, when Ed. Landers, the company’s checker on the docks in scale house No. 3, was killed—accidentally, the coroner’s jury said. To me it looked suspiciously like murder. Within two weeks Morse, who was appointed as checker in his place, suddenly disappeared. The company’s officials showed no concern as to the fate of these two men; and my suspicions that something crooked might be going on at scale house No. 3 were strengthened; and I sent for you to help me to get at the bottom of things.”

“Is it not best then to begin by giving me as fully as possible the details of the employment of Morse and Landers, and also of their disappearance?” the young psychologist suggested.

“I have told you these things here, Trant, rather than take you to some safer place,” the secret agent replied, “because I have been waiting for some one who can tell you what you need to know better than I can. Edith Rowan, the stepdaughter of the dock superintendent, knew Landers well, for he boarded at Rowan’s house. She was—or is, if he still lives—engaged to Morse. It is an unusual thing for Rowan himself to come here to see President Welter, as he did just before you came; but every morning since Morse disappeared his daughter has come to see Welter personally. She is already waiting in the outer office.” Opening the door, he indicated to Trant a light-haired, overdressed, nervous girl twisting about uneasily on the seat outside the president’s private office.

“Welter thinks it policy, for some reason, to see her a moment every morning. But she always comes out almost at once—crying.”

“This is interesting,” Trant commented, as he watched the girl go into the president’s office. After only a moment she came out, crying. Rentland had already left his room, so it seemed by chance that he and Trant met and supported her to the elevator, and over the slippery pavement to a neat electric coupé which was standing at the curb.

“It’s hers,” said Rentland, as Trant hesitated before helping the girl into it. “It’s one of the things I wanted you to see. Broadway is very slippery, Miss Rowan. You will let me see you home

again this morning? This gentleman is Mr. Trant, a private detective. I want him to come along with us.”

The girl acquiesced, and Trant crowded into the little automobile. Rentland turned the coupé skillfully out into the swept path of the street, ran swiftly down Fifth Avenue to Fourteenth Street, and stopped three streets to the east before a house in the middle of the block. The house was as narrow and cramped and as cheaply constructed as its neighbors on both sides. It had lace curtains conspicuous in every window, and with impressive statuettes, vases, and gaudy bits of bric-a-brac in the front rooms.

“He told me again that Will must still be off drunk; and Will never takes a drink,” she spoke to them for the first time, as they entered the little sitting room.

“‘He’ is Welter,” Rentland explained to Trant. “‘Will’ is Morse, the missing man. Now, Miss Rowan, I have brought Mr. Trant with me because I have asked him to help me find Morse for you, as I promised; and I want you to tell him everything you can about how Landers was killed and how Morse disappeared.”

“And remember,” Trant interposed, “that I know very little about the American Commodities Company.”

“Why, Mr. Trant,” the girl gathered herself together, “you cannot help knowing something about the company! It imports almost everything— tobacco, sugar, coffee, olives, and preserved fruits, oils, and all sorts of table delicacies, from all over the world, even from Borneo, Mr. Trant, and from



Madagascar and New Zealand. It has big warehouses at the docks with millions of dollars' worth of goods stored in them. My stepfather has been with the company for years, and has charge of all that goes on at the docks."

"Including the weighing?"

"Yes; everything on which there is a duty when it is taken off the boats has to be weighed, and to do this there are big scales, and for each one a scale house. When a scale is being used there are two men in the scale house. One of these is the Government weigher, who sets the scale to a balance and notes down the weight in a book. The other man, who is an employee of the company, writes the weight also in a book of his own; and he is called the company's checker. But though there are half a dozen scales, almost everything, when it is possible, is unloaded in front of Scale No. 3, for that is the best berth for ships."

"And Landers?"

"Landers was the company's checker on scale No. 3. Well, about five weeks ago I began to see that Mr. Landers was troubled about something. Twice a queer, quiet little man with a scar on his cheek came to see him, and each time they went up to Mr. Landers' room and talked a long while. Ed's room was over the sitting room, and after the man had gone I could hear him walking back and forth—walking and walking until it seemed as though he would never stop. I told father about this man who troubled Mr. Landers, and he asked him about it, but Mr. Landers flew into a rage and said it was nothing of importance. Then one night—it was a Wednesday—everybody

stayed late at the docks to finish unloading the steamer *Covallo*. About two o'clock father got home, but Mr. Landers had not been ready to come with him, He did not come all that night, and the next day he did not come home.

"Now, Mr. Trant, they are very careful at the warehouses about who goes in and out, because so many valuable things are stored there. On one side the warehouses open on the docks, and at each end they are fenced off so that you cannot go along the docks and get away from them that way; and on the other side they open on the street through great driveway doors, and at every door, as long as it is open, there stands a watchman, who sees everybody that goes in and out. Only one door was open that Wednesday night, and the watchman there had not seen Mr. Landers go out. And the second night passed, and he did not come home. But the next morning, Friday morning," the girl caught her breath hysterically, "Mr. Landers' body was found in the engine room back of scale house No. 3, with the face crushed in horribly!"

"Was the engine room occupied?" said Trant, quickly. "It must have been occupied in the daytime, and probably on the night when Landers disappeared, as they were unloading the *Covallo*. But on the night after which the body was found—was it occupied that night?"

"I don't know, Mr. Trant. I think it could not have been, for after the verdict of the coroner's jury, which was that Mr. Landers had been killed by some part of the machinery, it was said that the accident must have happened either the evening before, just before the engineer shut off his engines, or the first thing

that morning, just after he had started them; for otherwise somebody in the engine room would have seen it.”

“But where had Landers been all day Thursday, Miss Rowan, from two o’clock on the second night before, when your father last saw him, until the accident in the engine room?”

“It was supposed he had been drunk. When his body was found, his clothes were covered with fibers from the coffee-sacking, and the jury supposed he had been sleeping off his liquor in the coffee warehouse during Thursday. But I had known Ed Landers for almost three years, and in all that time I never knew him to take even one drink.”

“Then it was a very unlikely supposition. You do not believe in that accident, Miss Rowan?” Trant said, brusquely.

The girl grew white as paper. “Oh, Mr. Trant, I don’t know! I did believe in it. But since Will—Mr. Morse—has disappeared in exactly the same way, under exactly the same circumstances, and everyone acts about it exactly the same way—”

“You say the circumstances of Morse’s disappearance were the same?” Trant pressed quietly when she was able to proceed.

“After Mr. Landers had been found dead,” said the girl, pulling herself together again, “Mr. Morse, who had been checker in one of the other scale houses, was made checker on scale No. 3. We were surprised at that, for it was a sort of promotion, and father did not like Will; he had been greatly displeased at our engagement. Will’s promotion made us very happy, for it seemed as though father must be changing his opinion. But after Will had been checker on scale No. 3 only a few days, the

same queer, quiet little man with the scar on his cheek who had begun coming to see Mr. Landers before he was killed began coming to see Will, too! And after he began coming, Will was troubled, terribly troubled, I could see; but he would not tell me the reason. And he expected, after that man began coming, that something would happen to him. And I know, from the way he acted and spoke about Mr. Landers, that he thought he had not been accidentally killed. One evening, when I could see he had been more troubled than ever before, he said that if anything happened to him I was to go at once to his boarding house and take charge of everything in his room, and not to let anyone into the room to search it until I had removed everything in the bureau drawers; everything no matter how useless anything seemed. Then, the very next night, five days ago, just as while Mr. Landers was checker, everybody stayed overtime at the docks to finish unloading a vessel, the *Elizabethan Age*. And in the morning Will's landlady called me on the phone to tell me that he had not come home. Five days ago, Mr. Trant! And since then no one has seen or heard from him; and the watchman did not see him come out of the warehouse that night just as he did not see Ed Landers."

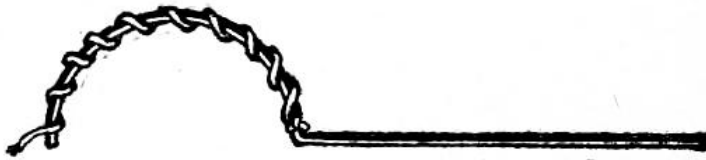
"What did you find in Morse's bureau?" asked Trant.

"I found nothing."

"Nothing?" Trant repeated. "That is impossible, Miss Rowan! Think again! Remember he warned you that what you found might seem trivial and useless."

The girl, a little defiantly, studied for an instant Trant's clear-cut features. Suddenly she arose and ran from the room, but returned quickly with a strange little implement in her hand.

It was merely a bit of wire, straight for perhaps three inches, and then bent in a half circle of five or six inches, the bent portion of the wire being wound carefully with stout twine, thus:



The mysterious string-wrapped piece of bent wire.

"Except for his clothes and some blank writing paper and envelopes that was absolutely the only thing in the bureau. It was the only thing at all in the only locked drawer."

Trant and Rentland stared disappointedly at this strange implement, which the girl handed to the psychologist.

"You have shown this to your stepfather, Miss Rowan, for a possible explanation of why a company checker should be so solicitous about such a thing as this?" asked Trant.

"No," the girl hesitated. "Will had told me not to say anything; and I told you father did not like Will. He had made up his mind that I was to marry Ed Landers. In most ways father is kind and generous. He's kept the coupé we came here in for mother and me for two years; and you see," she gestured a little proudly about the bedecked and badly furnished rooms, "you see how

he gets everything for us. Mr. Landers was most generous, too. He took me to the theaters two or three times every week—always the best seats, too. I didn't want to go, but father made me. I preferred Will, though he wasn't so generous."

Trant's eyes returned, with more intelligent scrutiny, to the mysterious implement in his hand.

"What salary do checkers receive, Rentland?" he asked, in a low tone.

"One hundred and twenty-five dollars a month."

"And her father, the dock superintendent—how much?" Trant's expressive glance now jumping about from one gaudy, extravagant trifle in the room to another, caught a glimpse again of the electric coupé standing in the street, then returned to the tiny bit of wire in his hand.

"Three thousand a year," Rentland replied.

"Tell me, Miss Rowan," said Trant, "this implement—have you by any chance mentioned it to President Welter?"

"Why, no, Mr. Trant."

"You are sure of that? Excellent! Excellent! Now the queer, quiet little man with the scar on his cheek who came to see Morse; no one could tell you anything about him?"

"No one, Mr. Trant; but yesterday Will's landlady told me that a man has come to ask for Will every forenoon since he disappeared, and she thinks this may be the man with the scar,

though she can't be sure, for he kept the collar of his overcoat up about his face. She was to telephone me if he came again."

"If he comes this morning," Trant glanced quickly at his watch, "you and I, Rentland, might much better be waiting for him over there."

The psychologist rose, putting the bent, twine-wound bit of wire carefully into his pocket; and a minute later the two men crossed the street to the house, already known to Rentland, where Morse had boarded. The landlady not only allowed them to wait in her little parlor, but waited with them until at the end of an hour she pointed with an eager gesture to a short man in a big ulster who turned sharply up the front steps.

"That's him—see!" she exclaimed.

"That the man with the scar!" cried Rentland. "Well! I know him."

He made for the door, caught at the ulster and pulled the little man into the house by main force.

"Well, Dickey!" the secret agent challenged, as the man faced him in startled recognition. "What are you doing in this case? Trant, this is Inspector Dickey, of the Customs Office," he introduced the officer.

"I'm in the case on my own hook, if I know what case you're talking about," piped Dickey. "Morse, eh? and the American Commodities Company, eh?"

"Exactly," said Rentland, brusquely. "What were you calling to see Landers for?"

“You know about that?” The little man looked up sharply. “Well, six weeks ago Landers came to me and told me he had something to sell; a secret system for beating the customs. But before we got to terms, he began losing his nerve a little; he got it back, however, and was going to tell me when, all at once, he disappeared, and two days later he was dead! That made it hotter for me; so I went after Morse. But Morse denied he knew anything. Then Morse disappeared, too.”

“So you got nothing at all out of them?” Rentland interposed.

“Nothing I could use. Landers, one time when he was getting up his nerve, showed me a piece of bent wire—with string around it—in his room, and began telling me something when Rowan called him, and then he shut up.”

“A bent wire!” Trant cried, eagerly. “Like this?” He took from his pocket the implement given him by Edith Rowan. “Morse had this in his room, the only thing in a locked drawer.”

“The same thing!” Dickey cried, seizing it. “So Morse had it, too, after he became checker at scale No. 3, where the cheating is, if anywhere. The very thing Landers started to explain to me, and how they cheated the customs with it. I say, we must have it now, Rentland! We need only go to the docks and watch them while they weigh, and see how they use it, and arrest them and then we have them at last, eh, old man?” he cried in triumph. “We have them at last!”

“You mean,” Trant cut in upon the customs man, “that you can convict and jail perhaps the checker, or a foreman, or maybe even a dock superintendent—as usual. But the men higher



up—the big men who are really at the bottom of this business and the only ones worth getting—will you catch them?”

“We must take those we can get,” said Dickey sharply.

Trant laid his hand on the little officer’s arm.

“I am a stranger to you,” he said, “but if you have followed some of the latest criminal cases in Illinois perhaps you know that, using the methods of modern practical psychology, I have been able to get results where old ways have failed. We are front to front now with perhaps the greatest problem of modern criminal catching, to catch, in cases involving a great corporation, not only the little men low down who perform the criminal acts, but the men higher up, who conceive, or connive at the criminal scheme. Rentland, I did not come here to convict merely a dock foreman; but if we are going to reach anyone higher than that, you must not let Inspector Dickey excite suspicion by prying into matters at the docks this afternoon!”

“But what else can we do?” said Rentland, doubtfully.

“Modern practical psychology gives a dozen possible ways for proving the knowledge of the man higher up in this corporation crime,” Trant answered, “and I am considering which is the most practicable. Only tell me,” he demanded suddenly; “Mr. Welter I have heard is one of the rich men of New York who make it a fad to give largely to universities and other institutions; can you tell me with what ones he may be most closely interested?”

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