



# The Special Agent

A SERIES OF REMARKABLE DETECTIVE STORIES FOUNDED UPON THE ACTUAL EXPERIENCES OF A WELL KNOWN CRIMINOLOGIST.

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By ROBERT NAUGHTON

## The Mystery of The Silver Doctor

**Y**OU have been brought here to exercise your far-famed cleverness in answering just one question, that and no more," said the great man. He made the remark with a half sneer on his heavy face and as near a sniff as his huge bulbous nose could express. Also an evil smouldering anger showed in the eyes that had long surveyed the finances of the world from the center of the web of Wall Street and known that they held the mastery of most of them and if they could maintain their power long enough and their mighty owner keep life within his body a sufficient length of time the contest would be complete and nearly absolute.

Purdon was speaking to Lawrence Rand and myself, but his half contemptuous frown was directed at the great professional investigator. I saw a flicker of resentment in Rand's well-governed face, but he said very quietly:

"What is this question, Mr. Purdon?"

"You see this room?"

We surveyed his spacious private office with its rows of rare books and special reports, its priceless tapestries. "You note that it has but the one door and that is set in a forged steel casement and leads to outer offices, from which four or more guards are never absent. Also that door is locked, save when I am in this office, by a double Belgian trick lock. I have the two keys always with me and even if either of you or anyone else had them you would not know how to use them. You notice that there is only this one broad, steel-casemented window, opening on a court sixty feet wide. It is fifty feet down and fifty feet up and there are no windows above or below that are not grated and barred. Yet, gentlemen, yesterday afternoon I left a paper of a value to me of more than forty million dollars lying on this desk. I went out, locked my door and returned in an hour. The weight I had placed on the paper had been moved to one side and the paper was gone.

"The question I ask you is, how was that paper taken from my desk, and where is it?"

"What was that paper?" Rand asked. "I don't intend to tell you," he thundered. "You are employed to answer my questions, not I yours. If you can't, why here's your check and get out."

"When was this room swept last?"

"It was cleaned with a pneumatic suction cleaner yesterday morning."

"Who has been in it since?"

Purdon thought a minute. "General Thomas Bickle—"

"Who has an artificial leg?" Interposed Rand.

"Yes, Mrs. Reddington van Petries, Mr. Jenkins of my firm, my secretary and my wife."

"Will you send for Mr. Jenkins and your secretary, please?"

Purdon opened his dictograph and asked for them and they appeared at the door in the fraction of a minute.

"This gentleman wanted to see you," said Purdon, curtly.

"Step three paces inside the door, please, gentlemen, one of you to the right and one to the left."

They did so, their astonishment thinly concealed.

"That is all, thank you," said Rand, his eyes fastened on their feet. As the door closed behind them he rose and bent over the tracks they had left in the deep, rich silk nap of the carpet. Under his magnifying glass their every characteristic was made clear. Slowly he circled the desk, going round and round, coming nearer and nearer the walls each circuit.

Rand completed his survey and then said:

"There was no one in this office to take that paper."

Rand now carefully inspected the desk, the paper-weight, the chains and the sill of the open window. He scanned the court above and below and then standing on the ledge looked carefully over the outer face of the wall about the window.

"Also, Mr. Purdon, you can be sure that no one came down from above by a rope or other device or came up by a ladder. Now you are certain you placed the paper under the weight?"

"I am."

"Then, Mr. Purdon, I cannot answer your question unless you tell me the story of the paper and let me work toward the thief through the motive of the theft."

Purdon's brow grew very black. He reached for his check book and drew one quickly.

"That I will not do. Here is your

retainer. Good morning, gentlemen."

Over to Broadway and the subway we passed and in half an hour we were in the firm's apartment looking on the Plaza. Tom Rahway, Rand's gigantic Sioux student helper, was busy in the laboratory and I went into the office to answer clients' correspondence. Scarcely had I opened the dictograph when I heard a crash somewhere in the locality of the laboratory. We never knew when the assassin, the maniac or the avenger would visit us. In fact, for three years we had been expecting blood-thirsty calls from at least two men. Snatching my Luga magazine pistol out of a drawer, I tore through the place. It was deserted. Beside a powerful microscope lay Rand's hat, under the scope was what seemed to be a tiny bit of feather as nearly as I could tell at a hasty glance. I did not recall having seen it as any of the material evidence in any of our cases. In front of the hall door lay Tom Rahway's laboratory apron torn in pieces as if it had been snatched from his body. Two chairs and a water-cooler lay overturned. I ran on down the dark hall and stumbled over something so forcibly that I fell sprawling. A human body lay there.

Turning on the hall light, I saw that it was neither Rand nor Tom, but a tall, powerful young man laid out unconscious with a big purple bruise beginning to stand out on the side of his face and a cut in his head. In one hand he held a piece of Tom Rahway's apron and it was plain to me that the Sioux's fist had stretched him there. Now it flashed over me that I had seen that face twice before within a few hours. I felt sure of it, but I had hurried on down and nearly reached the street before I remembered. The first time had been in the crowd in Wall Street before Purdon's door as we came out; the second time was on the platform of the subway at Columbus Circle.

By this time I was on the sidewalk looking wildly about for signs of Tom and Rand, who doubtless had gone in pursuit of the second man. If Rand wanted to capture him, surely he would wish to retain possession of the man upstairs in the hall. I should not have left him. Back I hurried with all speed and to my intense chagrin he was gone. I ran down the steps and found a mite of a milliner's delivery girl there, staring stupidly down toward Madison avenue. Yes, she had nearly been knocked down by two men who brought a third out of the door and put him in a cab, then drove away very fast toward the east. One of them had a big brass thing in his hand. That was all she could tell. I returned to the apartment gravely puzzled and only when I entered the laboratory did I realize the significance of even that little. The brass thing the girl has seen was the microscope—the one that had had the bit of what seemed to be feather under the lens.

Since I could not follow and assist Rand and Tom in whatever they were doing, the only thing was to bide their return or word from them. I did not have long to wait. It was less than half an hour before Tom Rahway came in breathing heavily, but grinning. He did not stop even when he heard of the escape of the man he had flogged and I did not blame him for his amusement when he told me what had happened. As he was at work over the Bunsen burner he heard a door creak and looked just in time to see two men behind Rand, who was at the microscope. The short dark man dealt a mis-aimed blow at Rand with a black-jack. Both Rand and Tom rushed the pair and when Tom had stretched out his man in the hall he ran on after Rand, who was pursuing the heavy dark man across the Plaza. The pursued dashed into the Park and Rand, telling Tom to continue the chase on foot, sprang to a nearby taxicab stand, where we knew all the drivers, caught a cap and coat from one and jumped into his cab running it into the Park with the "Vacant" sign showing. It was an easy thing to come bowling along the drive ahead of the pursued man, who hailed the cab with joy, climbed in and gave orders for all speed uptown somewhere.

Just as Tom finished the telephone bell rang. When I answered it a heavy voice said:

"Hello! Who is this?"

"Mr. Duncan."

"To make sure you are Mr. Duncan, I will ask you what a friend of yours said this morning when someone else mentioned General Bickle's name?"

"He said he had an artificial leg," I replied, recognizing that I was talking to Purdon. "I know now who you

are and you can be sure this is Mr. Duncan. What can I do for you?"

"Some other gentlemen interested with me in that paper we were discussing have told me I was very wrong in refusing to trust your friend. Also I hear the very highest praise of him. I want you to come down at once."

"That is impossible. My friend is not here and I dare not leave."

"Then I will come up."

"You had better not."

"I am going to send you as complete an explanation in written form as you need by a single messenger whom I trust absolutely and whom I believe safe from attack."

When Purdon rang off I looked at the clock. It was nearly one. Tom had gone back to the laboratory as if nothing had happened. I sat watching the minute hand crawl around, my brain at sea and my nerves on edge. Two o'clock, and still nothing! I went to the cabinet and mixed a stiff Scotch highball. Just as I resumed my seat the bell rang and Tom Rahway ushered in Purdon's messenger.

Safe from attack? She was a tall girl of striking beauty—a distinctly English type with fine coloring, dark curling hair and unfathomable grey eyes, while her figure and carriage showed splendid physical vitality if not athletic powers.

She opened a black bag hung to her waist and as she drew out Purdon's doubly sealed letter I caught the gleam of a large and able pistol there.

This is what I read in Purdon's own hand script:

The missing paper was a copy of a new treaty with China opening the way to a huge loan, railway concessions and American financial contract in China. I am

a trick of the other side to get us away while they executed some move. Rand would have said "Bring Tom." They not knowing his name said "Both come." Again I cursed.

Back we hurried to the Plaza and instantly that I entered the apartment I perceived that someone had been there. Furniture had been slightly moved, a shade had been raised, papers had been shifted on the desk, a black cigar butt warm lay on the hearth. They must be in possession of Rand, have taken away his keys, used them on the doors and searched the place. The one thing they could have been after was Purdon's letter. I sprang to the drawer in which I had placed it. The envelope was there, but the letter had been taken.

Never in my life have I been more thoroughly exasperated, nonplussed and mystified. I related the facts to Tom and Miss Alexander and I could see the big Sioux's fingers twitch as if they itched to close around someone's throat. Miss Alexander had risen and was pacing up and down from the window to the back of the room, evidently seeking some logical handle on which we could lay hold. Suddenly she gave a little cry and as I ran to her side she pointed out the window.

"Look! See, that hansom in the line down there. The driver has the cushion out and is trying to clean it. He is trying to get out a blood spot. Maybe he took the three men away. Of course, they got the cab hurriedly from the stand."

It was but a minute before I was at his side, a handful of money before his eyes.

"Hello, cabbie, did you drive three

There are certain tones of Lawrence Rand's voice that are very vibrant and the instant I set foot in the hall of the Thirty-first street three-story tenement I heard what I was sure was his voice. I gave one of our signals, dropping my key twice in quick succession, a very distinctive and penetrating sound, and then I listened carefully. I still heard the same voice, but it was not Rand's. It was speech in some badly broken dialect.

"I am a police surgeon," I said to a woman sitting on the stairs nursing a baby. "A man named Hooley is here and has been hurt. Where is he?"

"Right there, mister." She pointed to the ground floor apartment on the right. "Go to the back door."

The door was unlocked and I stepped inside, into one of those little dark inside rooms so common in cheap flats. In the next room at least five men were talking earnestly. I could stand where I was and hear perfectly.

"The captain is a good sport, isn't he, chief. Give him another drink, Myers. No, Hooley, you got to stay on the water wagon till the sign the Indian put on you wears off," said a drawing voice.

"That's right, Hooley," said another in a commanding tone.

"All right, chief," responded Hooley feebly. "I wish I had just one to clear me out so I could get hold of this here Ring-around-rosy game. It's a peach of a case."

"It is that!" said the cmer. "And we have played Larry Rand, the smartest man in this country, to a standstill at his own game, and got him on a wild goose chase around Battery Park this minute, thanks to the captain. Now, listen, Hooley, and get the full beauty of this story point by point.

"Beaucoup gets the envelope off Purdon's desk and I take it to keep, per orders, till the Big Fellow asks me to show it to the Wasington crowd and swear where I got it. You, Myers and Casey, keep an eye on Purdon's moves from across the court and use the microphone to hear all he's got to say. By George, that very microphone is the one we slipped away from Rand two years ago. Rand and Duncan got sent for. Rand picks up a piece of the silver doctor. It is up to us to get that piece back, so you fellows trail Rand and Duncan up town and go in, but make a rough job of it. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Rand, the Indian and Duncan all chase Myers after flooring our friend, Hooley, here and Casey and Dennett step in and cop the piece of feather, microscope, Hooley and all and made a clear run for it. Myers has a fine run for his money, Rand and the Indian nearly get him, but he falls into a taxi and gets away and the driver being a pretty fly guy, tells Myers he saw the getaway from the house and followed up to help Myers out, and if there is something in it he will put Myers next to an old drunk who can tell him a lot. Say, I guess the old fellow is so far gone now that he won't mind a little thing like that said about him—a rotten old run-soak who is on the inside with Rand and Duncan. Great stuff! Myers makes a date to meet the man and in half an hour our friend the captain here shows up. Myers asks him to show that he can make good. He offers to get Rand and Duncan called back into the case by two minutes' telephoning as a starter. They go to the phone, then Myers gets in touch with Griggs and Leslie listening at the microphone to what is going on in Purdon's office across the court and they say, yes, that Purdon has just telephoned Duncan that he wants to re-engage them and will send a messenger with instructions. Then Myers telephones me and I tell him it is worth a thousand to get that letter. The captain here says he will show how good he is by plucking it out of Rand's desk half an hour after it arrives. Myers tells me that a peach of a girl brought up the letter. That the captain got the whole crowd away by sending in a fake telegram and then he and Myers sallied in, using false keys, and got the letter. Casey telephones for me to come up here and see Hooley and I tell Myers to meet me here with the captain and I will give him his thousand for the letter. Have you seen the letter, Myers?"

"Only saw enough to say that it is on Purdon's stationery and is signed by Purdon himself."

"My, my, bet the Big Fellow will be tickled to get it. I don't know what is in this one I got, but I'll bet the second one has got cold proof that'll nip a few yards of tuck out of old R. P. Purdon. Now just put your hands lightly on the old man's arms so that he can't make a sudden move, boys. I don't want him to jolt me one, feeble as he is. There is no use forking over a thousand iron men for a piece of paper that cost him nothing. I will just lift it gently."

The crists had come. For some minutes I had seen that it was due soon, but I had not expected it so quickly. The forty million dollars' worth of information was still safe, the paper from Purdon's desk and Purdon's letter of instructions to us that furnished the fatal proof had not yet reached

the "Big Fellow," whoever that was. In the man called "Chief" I had recognized John G. McGarrity, an ex-police captain, the head of a large, powerful and unscrupulous private detective agency in the financial district.

Drawing my Luger and holding my pocket knife in my left hand as if it were the barrel of another pistol, I stepped in, covering the crowd.

"Hold on, McGarrity. Don't one of you move!" I said.

"Duncan!"

At least three of them pronounced my name in one astounded breath. The old man over whom McGarrity was bending looked up drunkenly. It was the old Scotch seaman with dirty whiskers and the ear trumpet. He began to whine and blubber, and putting up his arms drew the enraged McGarrity down half on him as if to shield himself from a possible bullet. It was a fatal mistake for me to center my attention on them even for that second and forget that the men with whom I was dealing were quick to think and quick to act. One dived for my legs. Hooley hurled a pillow full in my face. Someone I had not seen caught me from behind and in a minute I was down and being trussed up with straps ripped from a trunk in the corner. I caught a glimpse of the old Scotchman lurching out of the door that opened into the hall.

"Well, we've got the other bird fast and tight," said McGarrity, as he straightened up and brushed his hands.

"Not yet, sir," said a sweet girlish voice and every one in the room turned to see standing in the hall door with a pair of our guns leveled on the crowd—Miss Alexander and behind her Tom Rahway.

"Cut Mr. Duncan loose before I blow for the police," she said. McGarrity did not even swear as he stooped and did her bidding.

"Now, McGarrity," I said, "I will trouble you for the sealed envelope in your pocket. Sing Sing for you if you don't, you know."

He reached into his breast pocket for it and a look of blank amazement came over his heavy Irish face.

"It's gone! I had it there a moment ago."

"Tom, catch the old Scotchman, who just went out!" I shouted. It was now as clear as day to me—the old man represented a fair interest working against R. P. Purdon and, playing a lone hand, nevertheless he had beaten us all. He had picked McGarrity's pocket a moment before and fled in the melee.

Outside sounded Tom's whistle summoning me. I hesitated a second before going. We had the compelling evidence against McGarrity and his men, if we needed it. The Scotchman was now our prey. Telling Miss Alexander to drop her muzzles, I said good evening to the mortified group and hurried out with the girl.

Calmly sitting in a taxicab in front of the door was the old Scotchman smoking a fine cigar with evident relish.

He held out toward me Purdon's letter and a sealed envelope with a small jagged hole through it.

"Hello, Duncan," said Rand's voice from the bush of dirty whiskers. "I am tired of the responsibility of forty million dollars' worth of information. You keep it. Jump in, Miss Alexander, Tom, all of you; let us go home and get in touch with Mr. Purdon and tell him the good news."

I stood a full ten seconds staring speechless at his makeup. By this time I should have been accustomed to Rand's marvelous acting and transformations of personality, but I will confess that I was stunned into stupidity by this one as I climbed in silently. As we bowled away a feeling of anger and resentment came over me and then one of curiosity. I rapidly reviewed the events of the day and saw how he had fooled McGarrity and his men, how he had fooled us and how he had achieved his end.

"I have got it all, Larry, except who the 'Big Fellow' is and how they ever got the treaty out of the office."

"Why, that is simple, Dunk. You heard McGarrity say that a man named Beaucoup did it. Well, if you remember the Sportsman's Show last winter, one of the stars was Jean Beaucoup, a famous half-breed Mic-Mac-French Canadian guide. He is employed on the game preserves of Normand Bellamy, the American end of the Rothschilds. McGarrity has done lots of Bellamy's dirty work. Ergo Bellamy is the 'Big Fellow.' Now, we would have had to follow out the case through the physical evidence, two scratches on the desk and a bit of feather I found caught in a corner of the flagpole of the paper weight, but the attack on us in the apartment put us in direct touch with the thieves and saved us a lot of trouble. When I got that bit of feather under the lens I found it was Indian dyed, a piece of a trout fly called the silver doctor. Jean Beaucoup, from the windows across the court, cast a fly some seventy-five feet, hooked the desired paper on the second attempt and yanked it out into the court, then reeled it up. He could have done it at more than a hundred feet. See the hole made by the hook!"



"NOT YET, SIR," SAID A SWEET, GIRLISH VOICE.

the only one outside of the president and secretary of state who would have known of it before it was sent to the senate for ratification. Whoever had it stolen needed its contents and the proof that I had it, to be able to defeat it. Its defeat means a loss of forty million at the least. Any one of my foreign competitors would be interested in stealing it and then combining the others against me. The Rothschilds, the Russian Syndicate, the Bank of England—and one of these might be interested. If you can use the messenger as an operative I should be glad.

Yours truly,  
R. P. PURDON.

"Were you delayed, Miss —?" I asked.

"Miss Alexander. No, I left Mr. Purdon's office at 1:40 and came here directly."

I was about to prepare Miss Alexander for the wait till Rand should arrive when the bell rang and a messenger boy appeared with a telegram:

"Both come to Battery Park. Bring no papers or means of identification if captured."

"Both come." He could know nothing of Miss Alexander. He meant Tom. I called to the Sioux and in five minutes we three were in the street and on our way to the taxicab stand where Rand had executed his lightning change three hours before. To take a cab we had to shoulder out of the way an old man who looked like a sea-farer, a ship's chief engineer in a blue pilot cloth suit.

When we reached the Battery, Tom took one side of the Park and Miss Alexander and I the other looking for Rand, but after an hour of searching and waiting it was plain that he was not there. I read his telegram again and it flashed on me that it had been

men away from around the corner about noon, one of them without a hat and bleeding?"

"What I draw down for givin' it to ye straight, sport?" said he with cunning look in his watery eyes.

"A ten spot and if it's very good, I'll make it more."

"Dey passed me a V to keep me mouth sewed up, but your money looks good to me. Come across with it. Why, I was after comin' back to the stand from bein' on a shopping trip with an old made over on Forty-first when dey hails me and shoves in dis bleeding guy and yells for me to drive for the river. Dey was all up in the air, but before I gits to Thoid avenue dey was gittin' their noodles workin' and foist it's me to drive to a doctor and den it's me to drive to 610 East Thirty-first, and dere we goes. Next I goes after a sheeny doctor two blocks away and fetches him back. I asis for me bit and di one guy takes me into a gin mill to git a twenty changed and while we was in dere dis mutt calls up ten thousand Cortland and asts for the chief. He tells him some fairy tale about de mixup dey'd been in. I piped it off dey was tame bulls and dey'd been licked tryin' to git divorce evidence. De man he was talkin' to says to stay wit' Hooley and he'll come up and see him later. Now dis Hooley is de guy what was leakin' the red stuff all over me cab. I got wise to dat when we was runnin' him into de house. A little girl lets out a boller. 'Oh, look, Chonnie, at Mister Hooley; he's hoited hisself.' Well, den I gits me coin and I pulls me freight. Dat's all."

"Not yet, you can drive me straight at 610 East Thirty-first."