

# The Case of Minna Lang.

AN INTERESTING EPISODE IN A NEW YORK POLICE COURT.

BY CHARLES MICHAEL WILLIAMS.

## I.

DESPITE the dirty, discolored card giving notice that the bench was "For Witnesses Only," the policeman who had arrested Minna Lang allowed her to sit there because he thought she was about to faint. She covered her face with her handkerchief, leaned back against the railing, and cried silently until the linen was wet with her tears.

It was Monday morning in the Jefferson Market police court; and the magistrate was rapidly disposing of the usual batch of cases that follow Sunday and its liberty. The place was thronged to the doors with friends of the prisoners, witnesses, speculative bondsmen, and the idle, curious spectators you always find in such scenes. Outside it was raining dully and persistently, and the grimy, dark, dismal room seemed gloomier than ever in the mean, yellow light, the foggy, malodorous atmosphere. Everything suggested discomfort and bad health, physical as well as moral.

The magistrate, a stout, tired-looking man, sniffed vigorously at a bottle of smelling-salts in the intervals between signing summonses and questioning and sentencing prisoners. The long line of the latter—men and women, drunkards, thieves, street-walkers, negro "crap" players, Chinese gamblers—extended along the rail before the bench far into the corridor to the magistrate's right hand. They were hustled into place by the burly policemen who had gathered up all this débris of the city's humanity as the street-cleaners sweep its material rubbish.

One by one, sometimes by twos and threes, the prisoners passed in dolorous procession across the bridge before the magistrate, and were fined, or held for Special Sessions, or discharged; while the lawyers who had found a pris-

oner with enough money to engage them argued the cases, and prisoners so disposed argued their own, telling wonderful lies that were no novelties here, and policemen and witnesses gave testimony that revealed scenes of crime and shame and sorrow. Two or three young newspaper men, who looked at once fatigued and alert, stood on the bridge waiting for a "story" to turn up. At any moment something humorous or pathetic might float to the surface of this stream of sordid incident.

Beside Minna there sat a young man, who looked curiously around, licking his lips in a nervous, cat-like fashion; and a young woman who gazed about with indifferent, accustomed eyes. One of the reporters stepped down from the bridge and elbowed his way through the press of court-officers, lawyers, and policemen within the rail. With a look toward Minna's bowed figure, he said to the young woman:

"A good story to-day, Miss Robley?"

The department-store detective gave the reporter a brisk nod in which there was a hint of fellowship, and answered:

"Why, no, I think not. She was caught stealing; that's all."

The reporter nodded, and returned to the bridge, where a longshoreman with hospital bandages on his spiky-haired head was volubly relating the story of the assault made upon him in a West Street saloon.

"An', s'elp me, judge, your honor, it was only five or six drinks I'd been after having all the night!"

Through the mist of tears that veiled Minna's eyes, and the stupefaction of shame and terror that was upon her, her surroundings were as the sights and sounds of an evil dream. Everything had happened so swiftly, bewilderingly, crushingly, that she seemed to have lived a year of pain since yesterday. She tried agonizingly to recall what had

gone before her arrest, as if, were she to get in touch with her former life, she would awake from the nightmare.

And every moment the policeman who had her case in hand was getting nearer and nearer to the magistrate as the line moved along.

## II.

THAT morning Minna had walked across the Brooklyn Bridge on her way to work, slowly, because she did not like the work she was going to, and sadly, because she had not seen the Blond Stranger since Saturday.

Minna had worked in stores for years, ever since her father died and she had to help her mother to care for the smaller children. She was a pretty girl, pale and slim with much exclusion from air and sunshine, but of a robust constitution, withal, bequeathed from sturdy Scandinavian ancestry. When she came home at night she cooked dinner, washed dishes, and afterward sat down with her mother to help on the sewing the widow took in. She knew other girls, shop-mates, who were not burdened with such duties, who had more time and more inclination for amusement, and spent nearly all their salaries of six or seven dollars a week for it. She did not care to join them. Her outward life was spent in the noise and glare of a city work day, but inwardly she lived a life of subtle reserves, and knew the twilights of romance.

This she owed to her novel reading. She drew her books from the public library, and they were always with her. She read in the car when she did not walk across the bridge; she read in her noon hour; she read going home at night; she read in bed until her tired eyes closed, and the vague dreams her books inspired gave her escape in blessed moments from her drab, work-a-day world.

The Blond Stranger was to her like a figure stepped from the shadowy region wherein moved the characters of her favorite stories. She knew now that his name was Gene McCarthy, and that he was a sign-painter, but she preferred to think of him as the Blond Stranger.

One evening, a few months before, when she was walking homeward across the bridge in the evening, her book had slipped from under her arm. A young man close behind her picked it up and returned it, lifting his hat from a head of curly yellow hair. She thanked him, and he smiled in such pleasant good nature that they moved on together for a few steps, talking little commonplaces:

"Thank you very much!"

"Don't mention it. It's a lovely evening, ain't it?"

"Yes, ain't it fine? Spring is here!"

Then Minna recollected propriety. She fell back with a little blush, and the young man moved regretfully on, alone.

And spring had indeed come for Minna Lang.

Nearly every evening, when it was fine, after that, she met him on the bridge. When she did not, the day was spoiled for her. Once or twice she thought he was about to speak to her, and her heart would flutter; but a spirit of shy reserve would restrain her from making any sign that she would welcome an advance, and McCarthy would forge on ahead. Feeling at once satisfied and regretful, Minna would watch his slight, strong form with soft eyes.

And one memorable evening, he being bolder, or she more evidently willing, he had spoken to her and walked homeward with her, and she found out that he lived just around the corner, and that she knew his sister by sight.

That night had been only a few weeks ago, just after she lost her position and passed five heart-breaking days in looking for a new one, which finally she had secured in the kitchenware department of a store on Sixth Avenue.

## III.

You have seen caged animals in a menagerie. You have seen them there padding softly up and down, up and down, discontented, sullen, unhappy. You would have thought of them if you had seen Jackson, the floor-walker in Minna's department. With hands clasped behind his back, with head bent over his narrow chest, with bright, sharp eyes peering as his head swung from side to side, he, too, padded softly

up and down, up and down. But he, unlike the animals, was very well satisfied with himself, almost happy. He took pleasure in his work, he knew he would be rewarded. Some day he would be a superintendent or a manager. But Minna Lang watched him with frightened, fascinated eyes, for she knew that he stalked her for his prey.

There were none but girls in his department, and they told curious stories about him. From the first day Minna was put in his charge she had interested him mightily. There were many ways in which he could be attentive; he practised them all. And he failed. Not for nothing did she remember her Blond Stranger and contrast him with this man, whose smile sickened her and whose look filled her with vague dread.

He tried bolder methods; and one day she raised her voice, rebuking his word or leer. Other girls heard and turned their heads, and the manager came into the room just about that time. He grew nervous; perhaps, he thought, his conduct had already been noticed upstairs. His fancy for the slim, strong, fair girl turned into acrid dislike that in some queer manner fanned the flame of his passion. He said to himself that she was dangerous; he would teach her a lesson. He would have her discharged in disgrace, so that it would be difficult for her to find employment again. Then he would go to her; he knew where she lived and would keep track of her; and he would get her another place—for a price. He had influence in other stores; it would not be hard. How should he effect the discharge?

The floor-walker lifted his head and smiled. He had thought of a way. It would be as easy as winking—and a good thing for him, too, just when he had been rebuked for not having found out the thief in his department! What luck—two birds with one stone!

#### IV.

THE store detective touched Minna's arm, and urged her to get upon her feet and move forward to the bridge. Jackson, the floor-walker, who had been sitting by her, followed closely, his eyes shifting nervously from side to side. He

inwardly cursed his employers. Why had they insisted upon this?

The magistrate read the affidavit handed him by the policeman, and said to Minna:

"Well, did you take this money?"

She lifted her wet face, and sobbed:

"No, no, no, no, sir!"

The magistrate turned his weary eyes to the policeman.

"I was sent from the station to arrest the girl," said the policeman. "She was in the office then, in a faint. This man here is the complainant, appearing for the firm. They want her held for trial."

The magistrate nodded to Jackson to speak.

"Your honor," said the floor-walker, clearing his throat to be able to talk, "I didn't want to have the girl arrested, but the firm wished to make an example of her; there's been so much petty thieving among the hands, and——"

"Never mind all that. State your case."

"Your honor, the firm's lawyer is expected here at any moment, and I'd like to wait till he gets here."

"The case is called," said the magistrate; "you are here yourself, and if the defendant wishes to proceed I don't see why we can't go on."

Minna looked up at him.

"Yes, sir, let us get it over," she said; "it's some terrible mistake, I know, and this man, sir——"

"Go on," said the magistrate to Jackson, and then, dropping his eyes to Minna: "You can say what you like afterwards."

Jackson licked his dry lips, and said:

"We have known for some time, your honor, that some of the girls were cheating us. They would, we suspected, make out slips for sales in smaller amounts than they came to, hand the correct change to the customer with goods sold, and keep the difference. In our store, which is but newly opened, the girls bundle up the goods themselves, which are not checked, and when a customer leaves the store there is no way of knowing exactly what they have brought, when the salesladies are not honest. We are going to improve the system, make it more up-to-date——"

"Go on, sir," snapped the magistrate; "you are not here to advertise your store."

"Well, sir," said Jackson, "we tracked these thefts to Miss Lang's counter. I have been watching her for some time, and I became convinced that she was the thief. She has not been with us long, and I instructed Miss Robley, the detective, to go to Miss Lang's counter this morning, in the Monday bargain sale, when the crowds were thickest about the counter. I told her to buy a dollar and ten cents' worth of goods, tendering a five-dollar bill in payment. I was to go into the cashier's booth—we have an electric cash system, your honor—and handle the wires and carriers from that side of the room. It was in such a position that Miss Lang could not see me. Miss Robley made her purchase, and I opened a carrier in which there was the five-dollar bill, marked by Miss Robley as we had agreed, and a check made out in Miss Lang's handwriting, and signed with her number. It was for ten cents, not for one dollar and ten. I sent the change back, putting in a two-dollar bill, a one-dollar bill, which I had marked, and one dollar and ninety cents in silver, and sent it all back to Miss Lang. I went there immediately myself. Miss Robley was there. She had bought, as I had told her, one dollar and ten cents' worth of goods, and she had received the correct change from the five-dollar bill—three dollars and ninety cents."

"I at once called Miss Lang from her counter and took her to the office, accusing her of the theft of the missing dollar. She cried and said she hadn't taken it. But the proof was clear——"

"Will you attend to the matter in hand, sir?" said the magistrate. "It is not for you to decide upon this person's guilt."

"Well," said Jackson sullenly, "I only wanted to say that Miss Robley found the marked one-dollar bill in Miss Lang's pocket——"

"Where you put it yourself, you miserable liar!"

Jackson jumped a foot in the air, and his face turned to chalk. The magistrate lifted astonished eyes. Loud mur-

murs swept through the spectators in the court-room, who had been paying little attention to the proceedings. The court officers looked properly indignant, and bawled out for silence. Minna Lang, with a cry of joy and wonder, turned around from where, half senseless, she had been clinging to the railing of the bridge, and saw—the Blond Stranger!

Dressed in his white overalls, all stained with paint, McCarthy had pushed up the gate and was struggling in the arms of a court officer there. His eyes were furious, and he shook the fist of his free arm at the floor-walker. Policeman Sullivan, who had been watching Jackson, quietly moved his stalwart bulk between the floor-walker and the gate.

"Bring that man here!" the magistrate commanded, and McCarthy was led forward.

"Now, sir, what do you know about this?"

"Sit down, sit down in your seats, everybody!" cried the court officers. "Order in the court!"

The reporters, interested at last, pushed along the bridge nearer the magistrate. Stubs of pencil and scraps of paper were produced from waistcoat pockets, and one, who had neither, leaned over the bench and borrowed pen and paper from a clerk, without the asking of leave.

"That man is a liar, your honor, he's a dirty, low——"

McCarthy could scarcely speak in his rage and excitement. He was trembling with passion, and trying to move nearer to Jackson. Minna watched him with all her heart and all her soul.

"Never mind about that now," said the magistrate, leaning over his desk—a circumstance of which more than one reporter made a note. "Do you know anything about this case?"

"Yes, your honor, I do." Still panting for breath, the sign painter faced the magistrate.

"What do you know?"

"I know that this man"—an accusing finger pointed—"changed the figures on the check he talks about that Minna sent up with the goods she sold; that he rubbed out the dollar, your hon-



or, and left it ten cents. It was easy enough, for it was all in pencil——”

“Your honor,” cried Jackson in a voice that shook, “your honor, it is a lie; my lawyer ought to be here soon; it’s a lie——”

“That will do for now; your time will come,” said the magistrate, and he turned to McCarthy. “You will please answer my questions, and say nothing else. Do you understand?”

McCarthy nodded.

“How do you know what you say is true?” the magistrate asked.

“Because I saw him change the check.”

“How was that possible?”

“I am a sign-painter, your honor, and this morning I was working on a job on the blank wall of No. 201 Sixth Avenue, in an angle of the wall right by one of the windows of the place where Minna works. I knew she worked there, and this morning I was looking in the window to see if I could see her——”

“What is your interest in this girl?”

A dull flush came into McCarthy’s face, but he stood up like a man, and answered sturdily:

“We been going together for a time, and I want to marry her, if she’s willing. I guess that’s all right, ain’t it?”

“Yes, that is all right,” said the magistrate gravely. “Go on. You looked in this window——”

“Yes, your honor, I looked in this window, and I could just see a little bit of Minna ’way down the room through the crowd; but the most of what I could see was this man here, working away in a cage with the cash that was coming into the place. I knew him, for Minna had let out something about how he’d been bothering her, and I’d got a sight of him before on purpose to—to—your honor, I said I’d smash his face for him the first chance I got. I won’t lie about it. I was looking at him, and I saw him change that check, for he was as near to me as you are, your honor, and the light was good where I stood on the swinging platform outside. It had just been lowered down. I was wondering what he was up to, and said to myself that he was knocking down, grafting on his boss, and that I had him where I wanted him if he ever bothered Minna

again, when he jumped up and disappeared. A moment later I saw him speaking to Minna. Minna began to cry, and the crowd got around and hid her. I wasn’t on to the game then, and all I could do was to wonder what the matter was. I decided to make a little trip into the store and find out; and I called out to the men on the roof to pull up the platform, which was at the second story. They didn’t hear me for some time, and while I waited I saw the policeman here, and—that *dog*—and Minna and another woman get on board a street car down below. Then it struck me that Minna had been arrested, and was off to Jefferson Market, and I bawled out to the men on the roof again, and after a while I was hoisted up; and then, your honor, I hurried here. But it wasn’t until I heard *him*”——again McCarthy’s fist pointed to Jackson——“that I understood his dodge!”

Here, for the first time since he had entered the court-room, McCarthy met Minna’s look, and the love, the joy, the utter, complete adoration, that it lavished upon him made him falter. His last words were like a dry sob.

“Just think of the—the dirty trick, your honor!” he said, and broke down completely.

Slowly the magistrate turned to Jackson.

“Well, sir?” he asked slowly, with blazing eyes of wrath.

“If you—you would wait for the firm’s lawyer, your honor——” Jackson began.

“The complaint is dismissed,” said the magistrate. He turned to Minna. “Prefer your charge of conspiracy against this man, my dear young lady—ah, yes, you must! Officer, hold him!”

The pompous court officers let themselves go, and did not check the applause that rang through that dingy room, which joy so seldom enters. Policeman Sullivan gripped Jackson with his huge hands.

“Yes, Minna, you must,” said McCarthy, with authority.

Minna humbly obeyed. Jackson is now in Sing Sing. And only a little while ago Minna welcomed the coming of another Blond Stranger, who she declares is the very image of the first.

# Can Men Visit the Moon?

BY ERNEST GREEN DODGE, A.M.

A QUESTION WHICH, SENSATIONAL AS IT MAY SEEM, YET DOES NOT GO BEYOND THE LIMITS OF SCIENTIFIC POSSIBILITY—HOW WE MIGHT CONCEIVABLY REACH THE MOON, AND HOW WE MIGHT MAKE THE EARTH'S SATELLITE OF GREAT VALUE TO MANKIND.

IN any age but the present this question, if seriously asked, would have been answered by a chorus of jeers. So far beyond the pale of possibilities has the visiting of other worlds always appeared that writers of fiction have felt free to treat the idea sportively, describing thrilling journeys through space in impossible vehicles, while their readers have no more been misled than by a tale of Aladdin's lamp.

Nevertheless, the thought of exploring distant planets, pausing *en route* to view the further side of the moon, so tantalizingly turned from us, is one that fires the human imagination most profoundly. It is a dream to awake the enthusiasm of children and the keen interest of sober maturity. Moreover it is not, like perpetual motion or squaring the circle, a logical impossibility. The worst that can be said is that it now looks as difficult to us as the crossing of the great Atlantic must once have appeared to the naked savage upon its shore, with no craft but a fallen tree and no paddle but his empty hands. The impossibility of the savage became the triumph of Columbus, and the day-dream of the nineteenth century may become the achievement even of the twentieth.

One of the most inspiring facts of history is the acceleration in the rate of human progress. For many millions of years the earth was given up to the brute creation. For perhaps a hundred thousand, less or more, it was the home of the savage. For about seven thousand years man has been climbing the steep of recorded civilization; but the nineteenth century, just closed, has seen more progress in science and mechanical

invention than all the millenniums before it.

Having thus observed that skepticism rather than faith is the illogical attitude with regard to the future, let us see what is really involved in the problem of navigating empty space. The limits of this article will require that some statements be made *ex cathedra*, without explaining fully the data on which they are based.

The first thing to remember is that space is indeed empty, in a sense which no man-made vacuum can approach. A Crookes tube may be so perfectly exhausted as to contain less than a millionth part of the original air, yet a space the size of the earth, if empty in that limited sense only, would contain a thousand million tons of matter. But in reality a portion of outer space the size of the earth contains absolutely nothing, so far as we know, but a few flying grains of meteoric stone, weighing perhaps ten or fifteen pounds in all.

In the invasion of this empty realm man would encounter five difficulties, the first four of which are easily disposed of.

## THE DIFFICULTIES OF SKY-TRAVEL.

The first is the absence of anything to breathe. But in an air-tight chamber he could readily carry a bit of the earth's atmosphere, while a cargo allowance for each passenger of ten pounds per day would be sufficient to cover not only food and drink, but oxygen—liquid, of course—to revivify the air, and quicklime to cleanse it of impurities.

Next is the terrible cold, for it is probable that a thermometer alone in