

OUT OF MY NEWSPAPER DAYS

By Theodore Dreiser

IV: THE BANDIT

(Dreiser, on behalf of the St. Louis "Republic", and Galvin, a rival reporter on the "Globe-Democrat", interview an ex-railroad employee, who has held up a train singlehanded.)

HOWEVER, even here I was destined for another drubbing, as I shall now proceed to show, illustrating once more how man proposes but fate disposes. Following Galvin forward through the train, we soon discovered the detectives and their prisoner in one of the forward cars. To my surprise, I found the prisoner a most unpromising specimen for so unique a deed: short, broad-shouldered, heavy-limbed, with a squarish, unexpressive, even dull-looking face, blue-grey eyes, dark brown hair, big lumpy, rough hands—just the hands one would expect to find on a railroad or baggage smasher—and a tanned and seamed skin. He had on the cheap nondescript clothes of a laborer: a blue "hickory" shirt, blackish-grey trousers, brownish-maroon coat, and a red bandanna handkerchief tied about his neck in lieu of a collar. On his head was a small round brown hat, pulled down over his eyes after the manner of a cap. He had the still, indifferent expression of a captive bird, and when I came up after Galvin and sat down he scarcely looked at me or at Galvin, or if so with eyes that told nothing. I have often wondered what he was really thinking.

Between him and the car window, to foil any attempt at escape in that direction, and fastened to him by a

pair of handcuffs, was the sheriff of the county in which he had been taken, a big, bland, inexperienced creature whose sense of his own importance was plainly enhanced by his task. Facing him was one of the detectives of the road or express company, a short, canny, vulturish-looking person, and opposite them, across the aisle, sat still another "detective". There may have been others besides, but I failed to inquire. I was so incensed at the mere presence of Galvin and his cheap and coarse methods of ingratiating himself into any company, that I could scarcely speak. "What!" I thought. "When the utmost finesse would be required to get the true inwardness of all this, to send a cheap pig like this to thrust himself forward and muddle what might otherwise prove a fine story! Why, if it hadn't been for me and my luck and my money, he wouldn't be here at all. And he is posing as a reporter—the best man of the 'Globe'!"

He had the average detective-politician-gambler's habit of simulating an intense interest and enthusiasm which he did not feel. His face, for instance, would wreath itself into a cheery smile the while his eyes followed one like those of a basilisk, in an attempt to discover whether his assumed friendship was being accepted at the value he wished.

"Gee, sport", he began familiarly in my presence, patting the burglar on

the knee and fixing him with that basilisk gaze, "that was a great trick you pulled off. The papers'll be crazy to find out how you did it. My paper, the 'Globe-Democrat', wants a whole page of it. It wants your picture too. Did you really do it all alone? Gee! Well, that's what I call swell work, eh, Cap?" and now he turned his ingratiating leer on the county sheriff and the other detectives. In a moment or two more he was telling the latter what an intimate friend he was of "Billy" Desmond, the chief of detectives of St. Louis, and Mr. So-and-So, the chief of police, as well as various other detectives and policemen.

"The dull stuff!" I thought. "And this is what he considers place in this world! And he wants a whole page for the 'Globe'! He'd do well if he wrote a paragraph alone!"

Still, to my intense chagrin, I could see that he was making headway, not only with the sheriff and the detectives but with the burglar himself. The latter smiled a raw, wry smile and looked at him as if he might possibly understand such a person. Galvin's good clothes, always looking like new, his bright yellow shoes, sparkling rings and pins and gaudy tie, seemed to impress them all. So this was the sort of thing these people liked—and they took him for a real newspaper man from a great newspaper! Indeed the only time that I seemed to obtain the least grip on the situation or to impress myself on the minds of the prisoner and his captors, was when it came to those finer shades of questioning which concerned just why, for what ulterior reasons, the man had attempted this deed alone; and then I noticed that my confrère was all ears and making copious notes. He knew enough to take from others what he could not work out for himself. In regard to

the principal or general points, I found that my Irish-Jewish friend was as swift at ferreting out facts as anyone, and as eager to know how and why. And always, to my astonishment and chagrin, the prisoner as well as the detectives paid more attention to him than to me. They turned to him as to a lamp and seemed to be immensely more impressed with him than with me, although the main lines of questioning fell to me. All at once I found him whispering to one or other of the detectives while I was developing some thought, but when I turned up anything new, or asked a question he had not thought of, he was all ears again and back to resume the questioning on his own account. In truth, he irritated me frightfully, and appeared to be intensely happy in doing so. My contemptuous looks and remarks did not disturb him in the least, any more than would water a duck. By now I was so dour and enraged that I could think of but one thing that would really satisfy me, and that was to attack him physically and give him a good beating—although I seriously questioned whether I could do that,—he was so contentious, cynical, and savage.

However the story was finally extracted, and a fine tale it made. It appeared that up to a year or two preceding the holdup the robber had been first a freight brakeman or yard hand on this road, being promoted later to the position of superior switchman and assistant freight handler at some station where there was considerable work of this kind. Previous to this he had been a livery stable helper in the town in which he was eventually taken, and before that a farm hand in that neighborhood. About a year before the crime this road, along with many others, had laid off a large number of men, including

himself, and reduced the wages of all others by as much as ten per cent. Naturally a great deal of labor discontent ensued, and strikes and riots were the order of the day. A certain number of train robberies, charged and traced to dismissed and dissatisfied ex-employees, now followed. The methods of successful train robbing were so clearly set forth by the newspapers that nearly anyone so inclined could follow them. While employed as a freight handler, Lem Rollins had heard, among other things, of the many money shipments made by the express companies in their express cars, as well as the manner in which they were guarded. The Missouri Pacific, for which he worked, was a very popular route for money shipments, both west and east, bullion and bills being in transit all the while between St. Louis and the east, and Kansas City and the west. And although express messengers even at this time, owing to numerous train robberies which had been occurring lately in the west, were always well armed, still these assaults had not been without success. The death of various firemen, engineers, messengers, conductors, and even passengers who ventured to protest, as well as the fact that much money had recently been stolen and never recovered, had not only encouraged the growth of banditry everywhere but had put an unreasonable fear into most employees of the road as well as its passengers—who had no occasion for risking their lives in defense of the road. Hence few even of the especially picked guards ventured to give these marauders battle. I myself during the short time I had been in St. Louis had helped report three such robberies in its immediate vicinity, in all of which cases the bandits had escaped unharmed.

But the psychology which eventually resulted in this amazing singlehanded attempt and success lay not so much in the fact that Rollins was a discharged and poor railroad hand unable to find any other form of employment, as that, having wandered back in his idleness to his native region, he had fallen in love with a young girl there. Being hard pressed for cash and unable to make her such presents as he desired, he had begun to think seriously of some method of raising money. Presently another ex-railroad hand had appeared on the scene with the proposal to rob a train. His scheme he had rejected as not feasible, since he did not wish to tie himself up in a crime, especially with another. Later, after the man had gone and his own condition had become more pressing, he had begun to think of robbing a train on his own account.

Why alone,—that was the point we were all most anxious to find out,—and with all the odds against him? Neither Galvin nor I could induce him to make this point clear, although, once I raised it, we were both most eager to solve it. Didn't he know that he could not expect to overcome engineer and fireman, baggage man and mail man, to say nothing of the express messenger, the conductor, and the passengers?

Yes, he knew, only he had thought he could do it. Other bandits (as few as three in one case of which he had read) had held up large trains: why not one? Revolver shots fired about a train easily overawed all passengers, as well as the trainmen apparently. It was a life and death job either way, and it would be better for him if he worked it out alone instead of with others. Often, he said, other men "squealed" or they had girls who told

on them. . . . I looked at him, intensely interested and moved to admiration by the sheer animal courage of it all,—the “gall”, the grit, or what you will, imbedded somewhere in this stocky frame.

And how came he to fix on this particular train? I asked. Well, it was this way: Every Thursday and Friday a limited running west at midnight carried larger shipments of money than on other days. This was due to exchanges between eastern and western banks; but he did not know that. Having decided on one of these trains he proceeded by degrees to secure first a small handbag, from which he had scraped all evidence of the maker's name; then later, from other distant places, so as to avoid all chance of detection, six or seven fused sticks of giant powder such as farmers use to blow up stumps; and still later, two revolvers holding six cartridges each, some cartridges, and cord and cloth out of which he proposed to make bundles of the money if necessary. Placing all this in his bag, he visited a small town nearest the spot which, because of its loneliness, he had fixed on as the ideal place for his crime, and reconnoitering it and its possibilities, he finally arranged all of his plans to a nicety.

Here, as he now told us, just at the outskirts of this hamlet, stood a large water tank at which this express as well as nearly all other trains stopped for water. Beyond it, about five miles, was a wood with a marsh somewhere in its depths, an ideal place to bury his booty quickly. The express was due at this tank at about one in the morning. The nearest town beyond the wood was all of five miles away, a mere hamlet like this one. His plan was to conceal himself near this tank and, when the train stopped, and just

before it started again, to slip in between the engine tender and the front baggage car, which was “blind” at both ends. Another arrangement, carefully executed beforehand, was to take his handbag, minus its revolvers and sticks of giant powder, which he proposed to carry, and place it along the track just opposite that point in the wood where he wished the train to stop. From his hiding place between the engine and the baggage car he would keep watch, after the train resumed its journey, until the headlight of the engine revealed this bag lying beside the track. Then he would rise up and compel the engineer to stop the train. So far, so good.

As it turned out, two slight errors, one of forgetfulness and one of eyesight, caused him finally to lose the fruit of his plan. On the night in question, between eight and nine, he arrived on the scene of action and did as he had planned. The bag was put in place, the train boarded. However, on reaching the spot where he felt sure the bag should be, he could not see it. Realizing that he was where he wished to work he rose up, covered the two men in the cab, drove them before him to the rear of the engine, and forced them to uncouple it. Then he conducted them to the express car door, where he presented them with a stick of giant powder and ordered them to blow it open. This they did, the messenger within having first refused so to do. Next they were driven into the car and made to blow open the safe and throw out the packages of bills and coin. During this time, realizing the danger of either trainmen or passengers climbing down from the cars in the rear and coming forward, he had fired a few shots toward the passenger coaches, calling to purely imaginary burglars to keep watch there.

Furthermore, to throw the fear of death into the minds of both engineer and fireman, he pretended to be calling to imaginary confrères on the other side of the train to "keep watch over there". "Don't kill anybody unless you have to, boys," he declared he had said, or "That'll be all right, Frank. Stay over there. Watch that side. I'll take care of these two." And then he would fire a few more shots.

Once the express car door and safe had been blown open and the money handed out, he had compelled the engineer and fireman to come down, recouple the engine, and pull away. Only after the train had safely disappeared did he venture to gather up the various packages, rolling them up in his coat, since he had lost the bag. With this over his shoulder he had staggered off into the night to conceal his hoard in the swamp before making off for safety.

The error which finally caused his discovery was the loss of the bag, which, after concealing the money, he attempted unsuccessfully to find. In this bag he had, some time before, placed a small handkerchief containing the initials of his love in one corner. Why he might wish to carry the latter about with him was understandable enough, but why he should have put it in the bag and then apparently have forgotten it, was not clear, even to himself.

From the detectives we now learned that the next day at noon the bag had been found by other detectives and citizens just where he had placed it, and that the handkerchief had given them their first clue. The wood was searched, without success however, save that footprints were discovered in various places and measured. Experts meditating on the crime decided that, owing to the hard

times and the laying off and discharging of employees, some of these might have had a hand in it; and so in due time the whereabouts and movements of everyone who had worked for the road were gone into. The result was the discovery that this particular ex-helper had returned to his native town and had there been going with a certain girl, whom he was now about to marry. Next, it was found that her initials corresponded to those on the handkerchief. Presto, Mr. Rollins was arrested, a search of his room made, and nearly all of the money recovered. Then, being "caught with the goods", he confessed, and here on this day he was being hurried to St. Louis to be jailed and sentenced, while we harpies of the press and the law were gathered about him to make capital of his error.

The only thing that consoled me, however, as I rode St. Louis-ward and tried to piece together the details of this crime, was that, though I had failed to make it impossible for Galvin to get the story at all, still, when it came to the narration of it, I would unquestionably write a better account. For he would have to tell his story to someone else, while I should be able to write my own, putting in such touches as I chose. Only one detail remained to be arranged for, and that was the matter of a picture. Why neither Wandell nor I, nor the editor of the "Globe", had thought to include an artist on this expedition, was more a fault of the time than anything else. In those days illustrations for news stories were by no means so numerous as they are today, and the peripatetic photographer had not yet been invented. As we neared St. Louis Galvin began to see the import of this very clearly, and presently he began to comment on it, saying he "guessed" we'd have to send to the Four Courts after-

ward and have a photograph made. Suddenly his eyes filled with shrewd cunning, and he turned to me and said:

"How would it be, old man, if we took him up to the 'Globe' office and let the boys make a picture of him—your friends, Wood and McCord? Then both of us could get one right away. I'd say take him to the 'Republic', only the 'Globe' is so much nearer, and we have that new flashlight machine, you know" (which was true, the "Republic" being very poorly equipped in this respect). He added a friendly aside to the effect that of course this depended on whether the prisoner and the officers in charge were willing.

"Not on your life," I replied suspiciously and resentfully; "not to the 'Globe', anyhow. If you want to bring him down to the 'Republic', all right; we'll have them make pictures and you can have one."

"But why not the 'Globe'?" he went on. "Wood and McCord are your friends more'n they are mine. Think of the difference in the distance. We want to save time, don't we? Here it is nearly six-thirty, and by the time we get down there and have a picture taken and I get back to the office it'll be half-past seven or eight. It's all right for you, I suppose, because you can write faster, but look at me. I'd just as lief go down there as not, but what's the difference? Besides, the 'Globe's' got a much better plant, and you know it. Either Wood or McCord 'll make a fine picture, and when we explain to 'em how it is you'll be sure to get one, the same as us—just the same picture. Ain't that all right?"

"No it's not", I replied truculently, "and I won't do it, that's all. It's all right about Dick and Peter—I know what they'll do for me if the paper will let them, but I know the paper won't

let them, and besides, you're not going to be able to claim in the morning that this man was brought to the 'Globe' first. I know you. Don't begin to try to put anything over on me, because I won't stand for it, see? And if these people do it anyhow I'll make a kick at headquarters, that's all."

For a moment he appeared to be quieted by this and to decide to abandon his project, but later he took it up again, seemingly in the most conciliatory spirit in the world. At the same time, and from now on, he kept boring me with his eyes, a thing which I had never known him to do before. He was always too hang-dog in looking at me; but now of a sudden there was something bold and friendly as well as tolerant and cynical in his gaze.

"Aw, come on," he argued. He was amazingly aggressive. "What's the use being small about it? The 'Globe's' nearer. Think what a fine picture it'll make. If you don't we'll have to go clear to the office and send an artist down to the jail. You can't take any good pictures down there tonight."

"Cut it," I replied. "I won't do it, that's all." But even as he talked a strange feeling of uncertainty or confusion began to creep over me. For the first time since knowing him, in spite of all my opposition of this afternoon and before, I found myself not quite hating him but feeling as though he weren't such an utterly bad sort after all. What was so wrong about this "Globe" idea anyhow, I began suddenly to ask myself in the most insane and yet dreamy way imaginable; why wouldn't it be all right to do that? Yet inwardly or downwardly, or somewhere within me, something was telling me that it was all wrong and that I was making a big mistake even to think about it. I felt half asleep or surrounded by clouds of something

which made everything he said seem all right. Still, I wasn't asleep, and now I didn't believe a word he said, but—

"To the 'Globe', sure," I found myself saying to myself in spite of myself, in a dumb, half numb or sensuously warm way. "That wouldn't be so bad. It's nearer. What's wrong with that? Dick or Peter will make a good picture, and then I can take it along." Only at the same time I was also thinking, "I shouldn't really do that. He'll claim the credit for having brought this man to the 'Globe' office. I'll be making a big mistake. The 'Republic' or nothing. Let him come down to the 'Republic'."

In the meantime we were entering St. Louis and the station. By then, somehow, he had not only convinced the sheriff and the other officers, but the prisoner. They liked him and were willing to do what he said. I could even see the rural love of show and parade gleaming in the eyes of the sheriff and the two detectives. Plainly, the office of the "Globe" was truly the great place in their estimation for such an exhibition. At the same time, as a result of looking at me and the prisoner and the officers, Galvin had knitted a fine mental net from which I seemed unable to escape. Even as I rose with these others to leave the train I cried: "No, I won't come in on this! It's all right if you want to bring him down to the 'Republic', or you can take him to the Four Courts, but I'm not going to let you get away with this. You hear now, don't you?" But then it was too late.

Once outside, Galvin laid hold of my arm in an amazingly genial fashion and hung on it. It spite of me, he seemed to be master of the situation and to realize it. Once more he began to plead, and getting in front of me

he seemed to do his best to keep my optical attention. From that point on and from that day to this, I have never been able to explain to myself what it was that did happen. All at once, and much more clearly than before, I seemed to see that his plan in regard to the "Globe" was the best. It would save time, and besides, he kept repeating in an almost singsong way that we would go first to the "Globe" and then to the "Republic". "You come up with me to the 'Globe', and then I'll go down with you to the 'Republic'," he kept saying. "We'll just let Wood or McCord take one picture, and then we'll all go down to your place—see?"

Although I didn't see I went. For the time being, actually nothing seemed important. If he had stayed by me I think he could have prevented my writing any story at all. As it was he was so eager to achieve this splendid triumph of introducing the celebrated bandit into the editorial rooms of the "Globe" first and there having him photographed and introduced to my old chief, that he hailed a carriage. The six of us, crowding into it, were hustled off in a trice to the door of the "Globe". Upon seeing him and the detectives and the bandit hurrying across the sidewalk, I suddenly awoke to the asininity of it all.

"Wait!" I called. "Say, hold on! Cut this! I won't do it! I don't agree to this!" But it was too late. In a moment the prisoner and the rest of them were up the two or three low steps of the main entrance and into the hall, and I was left outside to meditate on the insanity of the thing that I had done.

"Great God!" I suddenly exclaimed to myself. "What have I let that fellow do to me? I've been hypnotized, that's what it is! I've allowed him to take a prisoner whom I had in my

own hands at one time into the office of our great rival to be photographed! He's put it all over me on this job—and I had him beaten! I had him where I could have shoved him off the train—and now I let him do this to me, and tomorrow there'll be a long editorial in the 'Globe' telling how this fellow was brought there first and photographed, with his picture to prove it! Oh Lord, what shall I do? How am I to get out of this?" I swore and groaned for blocks as I walked toward the "Republic", wondering what I should do.

Distinct as was my failure, it was so easy, even when practically admitting the whole truth, to make it seem as though the police had deliberately worked against the "Republic". I did not even have to do that but merely recited my protests, without admitting or insisting upon hypnotism, which Wandell would not have believed anyhow. On the instant he burst into a great rage against the police department, seeing apparently no fault in anything I had done, and vowing vengeance. They were always doing this; they did it to the "Republic" when he was on the "Globe". Wait—he would get even with them yet! Rushing a photographer to the jail, he had various pictures made, all of which appeared with my story, but to no purpose. The "Globe" had us beaten. Although I had slaved over the text, given it the finest turns I could, still there on the front page of the "Globe" was a large picture of the bandit, seated in the sanctum sanctorum of the great "G.-D.", a portion of the figure, al-

though not the head, of its great chief standing in the background, and over it all, in extra large type, the caption:

"LONE TRAIN ROBBER VISITS OFFICE OF GLOBE TO PAY HIS RESPECTS"

and underneath in italics a full account of how he had willingly and gladly come there.

Was I beaten?

Well, rather!

And did I feel it?

I suffered tortures, not only for days but for weeks and months, absolute tortures. Whenever I thought of Galvin I wanted to kill him. To think, I said to myself, that I had thought of the two trains and then run across the meadow and paid the agent for stopping the train, which permitted Galvin to see the burglar at all,—and then to be "done" in this way! And, what was worse, he was so gaily and cynically conscious of having "done" me. Upon meeting me on the street one day, his lip curled with the old undying hatred and contempt.

"These swell reporters!" he sneered. "These high-priced ink-slingers! Say, who got the best of the train robber story, eh?"

And I replied —

But never mind what I replied. It wasn't fit to print anyhow, and no publisher would print it.

And as for Galvin, he wouldn't fight me, or anything of that sort. He wasn't that kind. But he could smile leeringly, and that under the circumstances was as good a drubbing as one would care to receive.

THE LITERARY SPOTLIGHT

VI: F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

With a Caricature by William Gropper

IT has been said by a celebrated person that to meet Scott Fitzgerald is to think of a stupid old woman with whom someone has left a diamond; she is extremely proud of the diamond and shows it to everyone who comes by, and everybody is surprised that such an ignorant old woman should possess so valuable a thing; for in nothing does she appear so stupid as in the remarks she makes about the diamond.

The person who invented this simile did not know Scott Fitzgerald very well and can have seen him only, I think, in particularly uninteresting moods. The reader must not suppose that there is any literal truth in the image. Scott Fitzgerald, as anybody will recognize almost immediately upon meeting him, is not a stupid old woman but a good-looking young man of not undistinguished appearance and ingenuous charm, who far from being stupid is both amusing and clever. But there is, none the less, a symbolic truth in the description quoted above: it is true that Fitzgerald has been left with a jewel which he doesn't know quite what to do with. For he has been given imagination without intellectual control of it; he has been given a desire for beauty without an æsthetic ideal; and he has been given a gift for expression without many ideas to express.

Consider, for example, the novel

with which he founded his reputation, "This Side of Paradise". It has almost every fault and deficiency that a novel can possibly have. It is not only highly imitative but it is imitated from a bad model. Fitzgerald, when he wrote it, was drunk with Compton Mackenzie, and the book sounds like an American attempt to rewrite "Sinister Street". Now Mackenzie, despite his extraordinary gift for picturesque and comic invention and the capacity for pretty writing which he says that he learned from Keats, lacks both the intellectual force and the emotional imagination to give body and outline to the material which he secretes in such enormous abundance. With the seeds he took from Keats's garden (one of the best kept gardens in the world) he exfloreated so profusely that he blotted out the path of his own. Michael Fane, the hero of "Sinister Street", was swamped in the forest of description; he was smothered in columbine. From the time he went up to Oxford, his personality disappeared and when last seen (at Belgrade) he was no longer anybody in particular. As a consequence, Amory Blaine, the hero of "This Side of Paradise", had a very poor chance of coherence: he had more emotional life, it is true, than the phantom Michael Fane, who, like most of Mackenzie's creations, had practically none at all; but he was quite as much an uncertain quantity