

THE TOKEN

By LOUIS TRACY.

CHAPTER VII (Continued).

"Unfortunately we have to remember that the Chief Commissioner dislikes broadcasting of sensational yarns by the police," growled Winter.

"Admitted. But, while avoiding the tuppenny coloured version why not publish the penny plain one?"

"What? Beginning at Box Hill yesterday afternoon?"

"Oh! For goodness' sake, leave me out of it," bleated Peggy.

"We'll do that for everybody's sake," said Furneaux instantly. "Nevertheless, it is hopeless to expect that we can prevent the newspapers from linking the attack on Foster with what has happened here, since some chatty cop the appointment made already for noon at Police Headquarters in the tower, and one of Lord Copmanthorpe's servants are lying dangerously ill."

"I am not sure," said Winter, "that the whole countryside has been changed into an uproar by terrific explosions. Look at the Dorking road now! As you would have said when in Artois, Sergeant Linton—"The cloud of dust rising from the pave reveals the passage of a large number of vehicles travelling at high speed." I recommend, Chief, that you leave word at the gate of your intention to keep the appointment made already for noon at Police Headquarters in the tower, and one of Lord Copmanthorpe's servants are lying dangerously ill."

"But, why?" demanded Peggy, and her tone was so imperious that it surprised Linton.

"Because we ought to secure Cabinet Ministers and others in high places to take all necessary precautions for their own safety," came the prompt reply. "If the Government can be persuaded that a really dangerous conspiracy against the State in active existence the less difficulty we, the guardians of law and order, shall have in devising and carrying out defensive measures. We are handicapped heavily enough, as matters stand, by a fixed principle of the British Constitution that the police may be shot, stabbed, blown up, bludgeoned, or otherwise destroyed by enterprising criminals at all convenient times and places, but who betide the unhappy detective or constable who shoots first. There is hardly a coroner in the land who is not eager to commit him for trial on a charge of willful murder."

"Quite true," said Winter grimly. "And here comes the first newspaper car. . . . Sit well back, Miss Mainwaring. Let no one see you clearly."

"By this time they were at the end of the road. The car was a motor-cycle, and the driver, Winter himself, assured the first flight of journalists that there would be no more sensational occurrences at the Avenue House, which, according to a resident in the locality, was the accepted name of the place. With much difficulty, owing to the congested traffic, they passed slowly along the Dorking road. Near the Buford Bridge Hotel they were stopped by a police cyclist patrol, who informed them that a foreigner on a bicycle had been taken to Headquarters.

"Did he say anything—make any protest?" inquired Winter.

"Yes, sir," answered the policeman. "He raised a regular row, making out that he was going into the town to telephone for seats at a theatre."

"Did he tell you where he lives?"

"At the house over there," said the man pointed to a residence on the west side of the valley, whereas Avenue House stood on the eastern slope. "As a matter of fact, we spotted him riding down to the road, so were ready for business when he came bowling along."

"Capital! Let the reporters pass, but keep a sharp eye on others until the time is up. If anyone tries to bluff you be sure and bring him or her along."

Linton, of course, deeply interested in the words and actions of the two detectives, Hiert and Winter, who had regarded their utterances as verging on the fantastic, but now he was beginning to doubt his own sagacity. He would never have dared to alarm half a dozen parishes so thoroughly by blowing up the mine if, as a direct consequence, some accomplice of the actual criminals fell into one of both of the police traps on the high road, in would give blind obedience in future to these queer representatives of the I. D. "There's one catch," explained Winter, as the car slowed up on approaching the Police Headquarters. "Two motor-bicycles and an ordinary pedal machine were balanced against the kerb. One constable remained

with them and his right hand rested unobtrusively in a pocket. The other was shepherding a stockily built little fellow into the police station.

"Ever seen him before?" said the Chief, turning suddenly on Linton.

"No, sir—not to my knowledge," was the ready answer.

"Tell that cyclist constable not to give any attention to the man if he comes out again. Take Miss Mainwaring to Superintendent MacDermott's house, and leave her there. Then return here, watch Mr. Furneaux from a distance, and be ready to help him if required."

As neither of the detectives had said a word bearing on any new project the younger man was puzzled, but his training had taught him to carry out definite orders without question. Peggy, of course, acknowledged no such silent acceptance of the incomprehensible.

"What's going to happen now?" she said, in a half whisper, as her escort led her a little higher up the street. Linton laughed.

"I've got to watch Furneaux," he said. "That should be quite exciting in itself."

"But please why shouldn't I watch Furneaux, too?"

"Because the O. C. says you're to make the acquaintance of Mrs. MacDermott, who is a dear motherly old lady, who might be better described by the French word, *débuté*, was brought in MacDermott's private office.

"The young men who represent the press nowadays are intelligent above the average," murmured Furneaux. "Who are you?" began the Chief, with an agreeable smile.

"The man who might be better described by the French word, *débuté*, was brought in MacDermott's private office."

"Why am I make a ze arrest, in ze street, so?" he said, his gruffness probably concealing agitation.

"You are not arrested. You have simply been asked to come here and explain why you were hurrying to the telephone."

"I am London dissa evenin', yes, an' I tell my Margharita, vat you say, my girl, go getta two seat at de theatre, an' one dam polisman put-a me offa my bicycle. What-a for?"

"I'm sure we are very sorry to have troubled you. But you have not yet told me your name."

"Pietro Ruffini."

"Ah. And what is your occupation?"

"I work in ze garden for Mistralo Thistleton."

"At Holly Lodge," put in MacDermott.

"Yes—sare."

"Haltin'," said Winter suavely. "St. Geneva."

"And how long have you been in Mr. Thistleton's service?"

"Well, I must apologise for a mistake. We are all liable to that, you know. I suppose you know nothing about the people who lived in Avenue House?"

"Very good. You may go. We have not kept you many minutes from the telephone."

Ruffini looked rather bewildered, but hurried out at once. MacDermott, though perplexed for the moment, merely remarked that the fool might have saved himself some trouble by using Mr. Thistleton's phone.

TO BE CONTINUED.

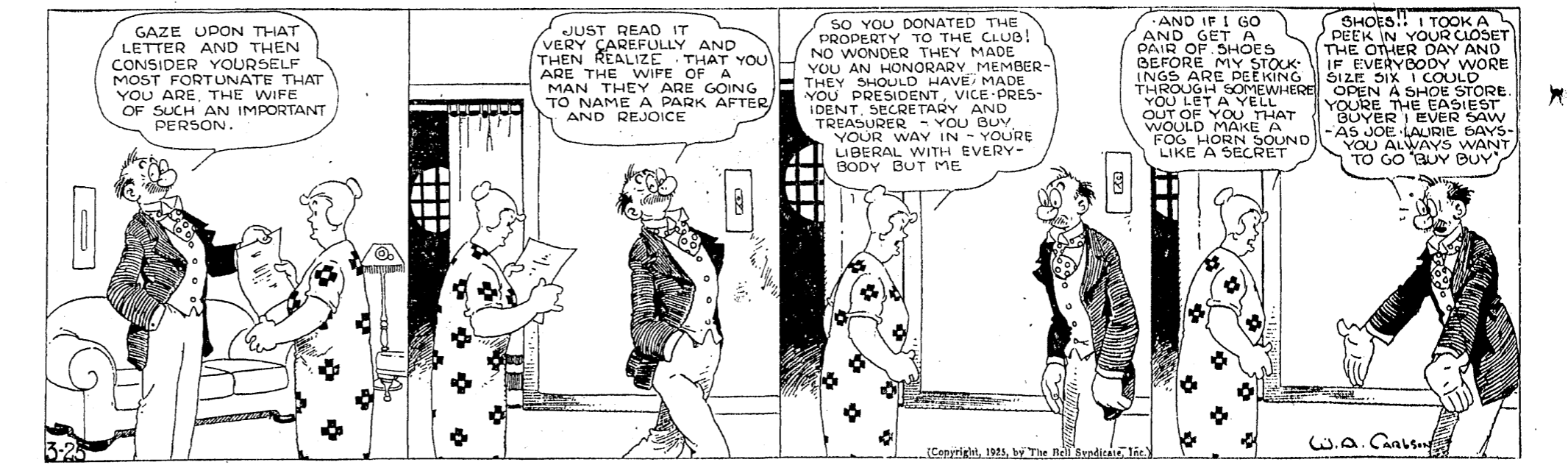
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