

DETECTIVE HARRY SCOTT'S HUNCH--THRILLING STORY OF HOW IT SECURED JAMES CONLEY...

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DETECTIVE HARRY SCOTT'S HUNCH--THRILLING STORY OF HOW IT SECURED JAMES CONLEY'S CONFESSION

By Britt Craig.

Have you ever had a hunch that there wasn't anybody around the table that held a higher hand than your Jacks over tens and consequently you shoved a 'blue' to the mahogany with the result that every hostile hand went to the discard?

Have you ever had a hunch that it was going to rain and you pulled in the rugs and took the clothes off the line and let down the windows just in time to see the elements express themselves in a downpour?

Have you ever had a hunch of any kind one of those real, undeniable inner promptings that chases round and round in your bonnet and worries the life out of you and invariably forces you to do something that you really intended doing but about which you were sorely undecided?

If you're human you have. Detective Harry Scott had one about Jim Conley, the negro sweeper in the Phagan mystery. It was one of those irresistible hunches that buzzes about like a June bug. He took it for its word with the result that he found the key that is predicted to unlock the secret of Atlanta's most hideous murder.

Detectives are very normal beings. They have hunches like the weakest of us. They're superstitious, too. You can't find a single one that will walk under a ladder or fail to knock wood when he brags about himself.

A hunch is one of the most common of human afflictions. It is the very essence of a frailty that affects every normal somebody. The very fact that it is a weakness requires a nerve of steel and backbone of similar fortitude to play one to the limit like Detective Scott played his.

Good detectives, like genius, are utterly human. Genius frequently stalks about in its shirt sleeves without a shave and wearing suspenders. It has been known to chew tobacco and cuss volubly. Sometimes, it has a red nose and a thirst. It can sleep as contentedly on Decatur street as on Peachtree.

Detectives Very Human. A good detective is so absolutely human that he generally chews tobacco, doesn't care where he spits it, possesses a vocabulary of profanity that is surpassed only by his eloquence and brightens up sartorially only when he falls in love or his wife makes him.

Detective Scott, although he doesn't chew tobacco—not since he was 16, at least—or allow his profanity to interfere with his knowledge of perfectly good English, is so keenly human that he had a premonition that Jim Conley knew something about the death of Mary Phagan.

While the investigation was at its zenith, the negro lad in police headquarters, neglected and sorely in need of a bath, Scott, casting about for someone on whom to cast suspicion in order to convince himself that he wasn't prejudiced against the white prisoner, was guided by the hunch to Conley.

He had no reason to suspect the sweeper other than the fact that Jim had been caught washing his shirt in order to appear presentable at the inquest. Nothing but the hunch pointed Conleyward.

He tried to figure that the negro was guilty and there was nothing to figure on. He tried to figure he was innocent, and the hunch figured that him. It pointed to Conley like that uncanny feeling which irresistibly draws you over on the right hand side of the street on the way home of a dark night when the left side is really the nearest.

It weighed as heavily as rement-bred wrong. It tortured him of nights and made his days miserable. Conley knows something, it whispered. Pick it out of him or go back to selling fish.

Finally, the Pinkerton man set out with Detective John Black, of police headquarters, to prove that either the hunch was a liar or he wasn't a detective as good as he had always considered. Conley had maintained that he was illiterate—couldn't even write his name, and as this seemed the only vulnerable spot in his story, Scott told him he probably was a liar.

At least, it was the only thing about the negro that could plausibly be discredited. On the theory that every negro who owns a wife and home as Conley owned, possesses furniture bought on the installment plan, the two sleuths cast about for some contract to which the black man could possibly have attached his signature.

They visited third-rate furniture stores, business houses and jewelry shops. The search was fruitless. The signature of Conley was as missing as the secret of the sphinx. Scott was prepared to abandon his hunch on the dead-ends of failure, when Fate—not a chance—took them to the vicinity of a station near Five Points.

Providence—an I not the houncer—sent a gentleman in Panama and white shoes, and with the oily air of a collector, gently through the doorway. He stopped to the sidewalk and scrutinized Black. He greeted and shook a disconsolate hand.

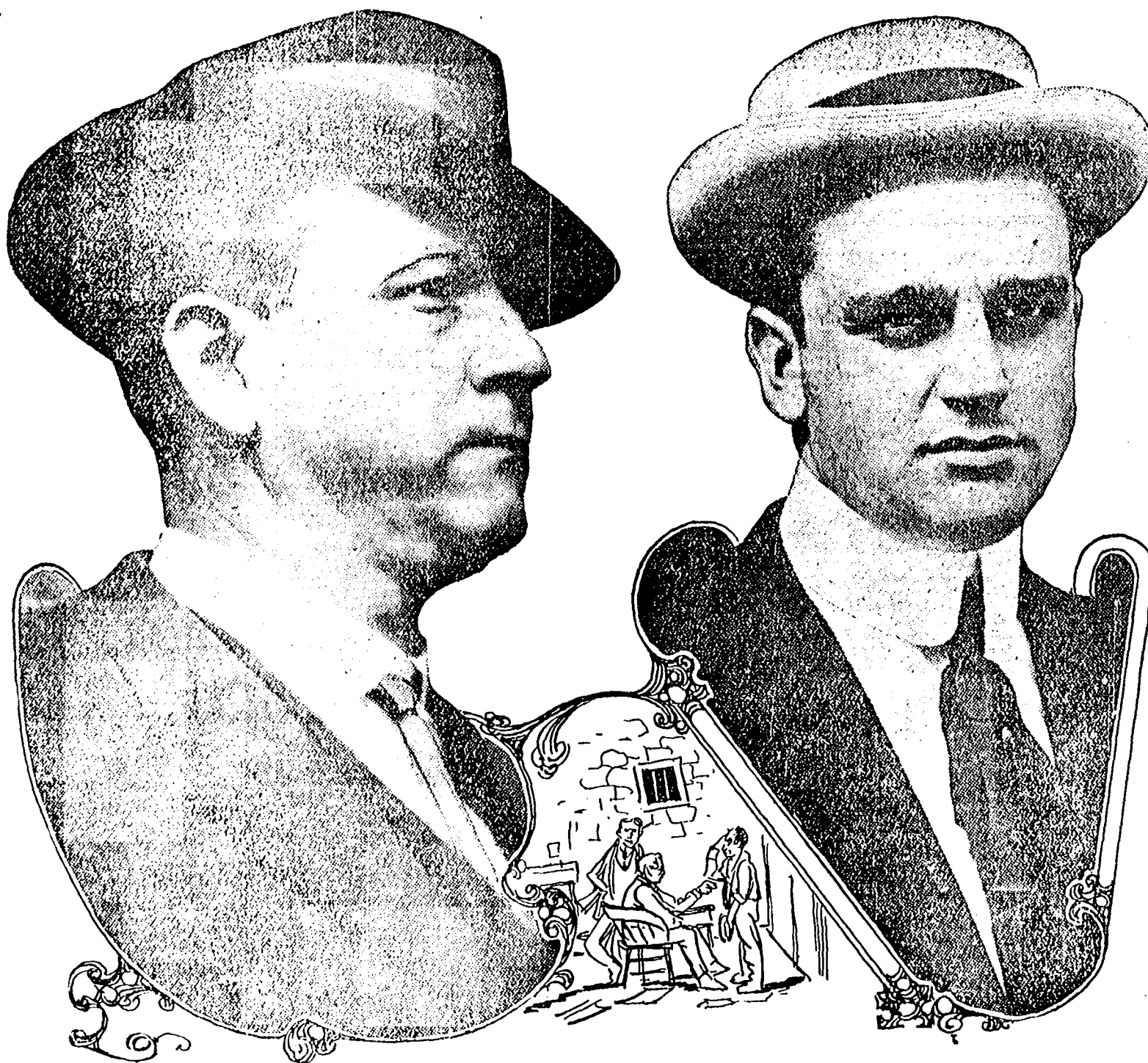
"You've got a nigger down at police station I'd certainly like to see," he announced.

"What nigger?" said Black, promoting conversation.

"That Conley nigger!"

Something bright and dazzling flashed through Scott's hunch-ridden brain as he noticed the batch of bills carefully folded in the person's coat pocket.

The hunch told him to collar the oily individual and search his batch of bills. He did, at the oily one's consent. A single glance revealed a contract issued to Jim Conley. A second glance revealed the negro's name, scrawled in a characteristic hand all over the signature's line.



Notes by Francis E. Price, Staff Correspondent.

Detective Harry Scott (in Panama hat), of the Pinkertons, who played the hunch that Jim Conley, the negro, knew something of the girl's murder. The accompanying figure is Detective John Black, of police headquarters, whose work in co-operation with the Pinkerton man did much to solve the crime. Great dependence will be put in their testimony at the coming trial of Leo Frank, charged with the murder of Mary Phagan.

The contract was signed by Conley more than twelve months ago for a watch he had bought from a jewelry firm. It is now in possession of the solicitor general, and likely will be produced as evidence in the coming trial of Leo Frank.

The Third Degree. What followed its discovery was the most successful third degree ever operated at police headquarters. Scott and Black showed the signature to the solicitor general, detective chief and Chief Beavers.

Then, they showed it to Conley. It was on a Sunday afternoon. Police station was dull and drowsy and a sleepy atmosphere pervaded the building. Even the inevitable newspaper reporter was absent. Scott and Black took the prisoner into the little 6x8 "sweat box" and sat him where the light could play full on his face.

Scott locked the door and threw the key over the transom. Black pulled off his coat, let down his suspenders and put cigarettes conveniently near. Conley blinked at the light and wondered what was coming off.

Scott pulled a mysterious something from his pocket and laid it on the table. It was a folded bit of paper, and he smiled significantly as it left his hand. Conley grimaced and shifted a leg.

"Well, Jim, we've got the dead-wood on you. Better cough up and tell us something."

"Honest, white folks, I swear 'fore God and 'ligh heaven I don't know a thing. His plea was pathetic in its apparent sincerity."

"But you know better. The quicker you tell, the better off you'll be. Kick in, Jim—kick in. It's the best for you."

"I can't kick," protested the negro. "I ain't got nothin' to kick for."

Scott stepped to the table and pointed at the folded slip.

"You see that! It's enough to hang you. You don't know what it is, and you couldn't guess in a year. It's dead-wood, nigger. It's dead-wood. You'd better kick through or we'll pull it on you."

The negro studied the slip intently. He was sorely puzzled. Great drops of sweat rolled down his face and his fingers twitched nervously. His very air betrayed guilt.

"Listen," said Scott. "Can you write?"

"Naw, sir, I can't. I never could."

"Will you swear it?"

The sleuths produced pen and paper. Conley was put at the table to write his name.

"Now, write the alphabet."

He wrote the A, B, C's in huge, scrawling figures.

"Write this: 'That long, tall, black negro did this by himself.'"

Conley winced slightly as he evidently recalled the words of the waste note found beside the body.

He wrote, slowly and deliberately with apparently no effort to disguise his script:

"That long, tall, black negro did his boy himself."

The detectives, peering eagerly over the negro's shoulder, noted with satisfaction the misspelling of

words "by" and "self." They ordered him to rewrite the words.

"Boy" and "self," he wrote.

The original murder missive had been written "boy" and "self." Satisfied that Conley was their author, the detectives flatly accused him of writing the Phagan notes.

"I didn't do it," he answered. "Fore God I didn't."

Showed He Was Guilty. "The very fact that you erred in these words show you're guilty. The handwriting compares with the originals. You accuse yourself of killing the girl. I believe you did it. Everybody else will believe it. You'll be hung just as sure as you're foot high and black."

"But I ain't guilty. I don't know a thing about them notes or about that killing—honest, white folks. Can't you believe a word I say?"

"Naw, Jim, we wouldn't believe you on the gallows. You tell so many lies."

Black broke in.

"Listen, Jim, you don't want to go to the scaffold. It's hell to be slung at the end of a rope to God knows where. You're going, though, just as sure's hell's hot, and still heatin'."

"There ain't but one way out of it—there ain't a jury in the world—uncork and tell all you know."

Black carried the news to Scott. Scott went directly to Conley's cell and drew a masterful picture of a

hanging at daybreak. He declared that efforts already were being made to indict him for the actual murder, and told that officials of the pencil factory had openly accused the negro of the crime.

Scott's visit and attitude left the negro in a state of fear. Black reached his cell shortly after the Pinkerton man had departed. He played upon the suspect's emotion. He pretended sympathy and offered to see the black carried safely through the 'plot' against him.

Finally, when Black and Scott and headquarters had become convinced that the negro was ripe for confessing, he was carried into Chief Lanford's office. He faced a group of detectives—shirts off, sleeves rolled and a prevailing widespread willingness to waive in.

The sleuths cajoled and coaxed. They warned and threatened. They did everything that detective ingenuity could suggest. Conley seemed adamant. He stuck to his story and never wavered. He was worked into a heat, a boiling, bubbling heat and left therein to think things over.

His questioners stepped into the hallway outside and compared notes. A newsboy arrived with an afternoon newspaper. Glaring headlines announced that pencil factory authorities had publicly charged Conley with murdering Mary Phagan and of trying to shift the crime to their superintendent.

Scott again had an idea. It was born in a dazzling brilliance that was overwhelming.

"Here, boy," he called to the newsie. "Take one of those papers to that nigger in the room."

The boy did as directed. Conley was given the paper containing the accusation. What happened to his emotions isn't on police record. No one knows but Conley. The result, though, is a gilded page in police history.

When Scott and his fellow-examiners returned to the room, the negro was staring blankly at the headline, perspiration streaming and fingers trembling. He glanced at the headquarters men with an air of weak resignation.

"Listen, Mr. Black," he said to the detective. "I'd like to talk to you privately, please, sir."

Black was left with the suspect, cased in the chief's office. Thirty minutes later he emerged, a smile flooding his face, success in his soul and his mind filled with Conley's startling confession of complicity in disposing of Mary Phagan's body in assistance to his superintendent.

It was the second conflicting story he had told. The first was of having only written the murder notes. It has been replaced by his latter and more incriminating tale, to which he has made a definite and sworn statement.

The prosecution maintains that this last admission solves the Phagan case. It pins the crime conclusively to one of two sources—Frank or the negro.

One or the other will be proved at the coming trial—the trial for which an entire state awaits with unprecedented eagerness—a trial that will be based largely on the amazing result of a hunch, a pure, simple hunch, one of the many frailties that affect us all.

But a frailty few of us can resist. A frailty which Harry Scott, in a flight of fancy, analyzes thusly:

"The God of Good Luck's Gift—A whisper of the conscience, 'To work a wonder with.'"