

The background of the entire graphic is a photograph of a classical building, likely a government or institutional structure, featuring large, fluted columns and ornate capitals. The lighting is somewhat dim, giving it a serious and historical feel.

***ARTHUR
CHENEY TRAIN***

***TRUE CRIME -
STORIES FROM
THE DISTRICT
ATTORNEY'S
OFFICE IN NEW
YORK CITY***

Arthur Cheney Train

True Crime - Stories from the District Attorney's Office in New York City

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The Woman in the Case

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On a sultry August afternoon in 1903, a dapper, if somewhat anaemic, young man entered the Broadway store of Rogers, Peet & Company, in New York City, and asked to be allowed to look at a suit of clothes. Having selected one to his fancy and arranged for some alterations, he produced from his wallet a check for \$280, drawn to the order of George B. Lang, and signed E. Bierstadt, and remarked to the attentive salesman:

"I haven't got quite enough cash with me to pay for these, but I have been intending to cash this check all the afternoon. Of course, you don't know me or even that my name is Lang, but if you will forward the check to the bank they will certify it, and to-morrow I will send for the suit and the balance of the money."

"Certainly, Mr. Lang," replied the salesman. "I will hold the suit and the money to await your orders."

The customer thanked him and took his departure. The check was sent to the bank, the bank certified it, then cancelled its certification and returned the check to Rogers, Peet & Company, and the store detectives, having communicated with Police Headquarters, anxiously awaited the arrival of Mr. Lang's messenger.

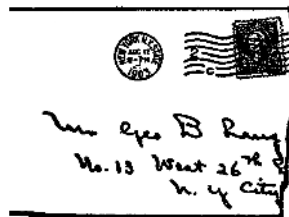


FIG. 1.—Envelope on the back of which Parker's forged order was written.

Their efforts were rewarded a couple of days later by the appearance at the store of a lad who presented a written order (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2) inscribed upon the back of an envelope bearing a cancelled stamp and addressed to Geo. B. Lang, No. 13 West Twenty-sixth Street, New York City, which read as follows:

ROGERS, PEET & Co.

Please give to bearer the clothes I purchased on Tuesday—suit—pants—S. coat, and also kindly put change in envelope in inside coat pocket. Trusting the alterations are satisfactory, and thanking you in advance for the favor and for past courtesies, I am,

Resp. yours,

GEO. B. LANG.

Rogers - Bet & Co

Please give to
bear the clothes
I purchased on Tuesday
- Suit - Pants - A Case
and also kindly put
change in envelope
in inside coat pocket

Trusting the alter-
ations are satisfactory
and thanking you
in advance for
the favor and your
part. courtesies I
am

Respect Yours
Geo B. Lang.

FIG. 2.—Parker's order on Rogers, Peet & Company, in the name of Lang.

The boy was immediately placed under arrest, and after proclaiming his own innocence and vociferating that he was only doing an errand for a "gent," who was waiting close by, was directed to return with his bundle as if nothing had occurred. This he did, and Mr. George B. Lang was soon in the clutches of the law.

Interrogated by his captors, the supposed Lang admitted that his real name was James Parker, that he lived at 110 West Thirty-eighth Street, and only requested that his wife be immediately notified of what had happened. At Headquarters the prisoner was identified as a gentleman who had been very actively engaged during the preceding months in passing bad checks throughout the city, his more recent operations having consisted in cashing a check on the Lincoln National Bank for \$160 on July 20th, one for \$290 on the same bank on July 30th, still another for \$510.50 on August 4th, and one for \$440.50 on the National Shoe and Leather Bank, "to bearer," on August 8th. This last, in some inexplicable way, had been cashed at the very bank itself.

Believing that the forger had at last been caught, the precinct detectives later on, during the evening of Parker's arrest, visited no West Thirty-eighth Street, and on inquiring for "Mrs. Parker," were introduced to a young girl of attractive appearance to whom they delivered their unwelcome message. Mrs. Parker seemed overwhelmed at the news and strongly asserted her confidence in her husband's innocence of any wrong-doing. Having performed their errand the officers departed.

A certain ineradicable jealousy has always existed between the plain-clothes men of the various precincts and the sleuths attached to the Central Office, and in this instance the precinct men, having gained the credit for the arrest, it did not occur to them as necessary to communicate

the knowledge of their acquaintance with Mrs. Parker to Detective Sergeants Peabody and Clark, originally assigned at Headquarters to investigate the case.

It seemed, however, to Peabody very unlikely that Parker had conducted his operations alone, and he therefore at once inquired at the Tombs what character of visitors came to see the prisoner. The gateman replied that as yet none had arrived. At that very instant a young girl stepped to the wicket and asked if she could be allowed to see Mr. James Parker. It took the detective but a moment to run across to the Criminal Courts Building and to telephone the warden to detain her temporarily and then to refuse her request. Five minutes later the girl emerged disconsolately from the Tombs and boarded a car going uptown. Peabody followed her to 110 West Thirty-eighth Street, not for an instant supposing that the girl herself could be the forger, but believing that possibly through her he might learn of other members of the gang and secure additional evidence against Parker himself.

Of course, no intelligent person to-day supposes that, outside of Sir Conan Doyle's interesting novels, detectives seek the baffling criminal by means of analyzing cigar butts, magnifying thumb marks or specializing in the various perfumes in favor among the fair sex, or by any of those complicated, brain fatiguing processes of ratiocination indulged in by our old friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. There are still, however, genuine detectives, and some of them are to be found upon the New York police force. The magnifying glass is not one of the ordinary tools of the professional sleuth, and if he carries a pistol at all it is because the police rules require it, while those cases may be numbered upon the fingers of two hands where his own hair and whiskers are not entirely sufficient for his purposes in the course of his professional career.

The next morning Peabody donned the most disreputable suit in his wardrobe, neglected his ordinary visit to the

barber, and called at 110 West Thirty-eighth Street, being, of course, at this time entirely unaware of the fact that the girl was Parker's wife. He found her sitting in a rocking chair in a comfortable, well-furnished room, and reading a magazine. Assuming an expression of sheepish inanity he informed her that he was an old pal of "Jim's" who had been so unfortunate as to be locked up in the same cell with him at Headquarters, and that the latter was in desperate need of morphine. That Parker was an habitual user of the drug could be easily seen from the most casual inspection, but that it would prove an open sesame to the girl's confidence was, as the detective afterward testified, "a hundred-to-one shot."

"Poor Jim!" exclaimed the girl. "Couldn't you smuggle some into the Tombs for him?"

Peabody took the hint. Of course he could. It would be a hard job—those turnkeys were so suspicious. But *he* could do it for her if anybody could. He rambled on, telling his experiences with Parker in the past, how he had been in Elmira Reformatory and elsewhere with him, and gaining each moment valuable information from the girl's exclamations, questions, and expression. He soon learned that she was Parker's wife, that they were living in comparative comfort, and that she was an exceedingly clever and well-educated woman, but she said nothing during the conversation which would indicate that she knew anything of her husband's offenses or of any persons connected with them.

After a few moments the girl slipped on her coat and hat and the two started down to the Tombs, where, by prearrangement with the officials, the detective succeeded in convincing her that he had been able to send in to her husband a small hypodermic syringe (commonly called "the needles") which she had purchased at a neighboring drug store.

The apparent success of this undertaking put Mrs. Parker in excellent humor and she invited the supposed crook to

breakfast with her at the Broadway Central Hotel. So far, it will be observed, Peabody had accomplished practically nothing. At breakfast the girl inquired of her companion what his particular "graft" was, to which he replied that he was an expert "second story man," and then proceeded to indulge his imagination in accounts of bold robberies in the brown stone districts and clever "tricks" in other cities, which left Mrs. Parker in no doubt but that her companion was an expert "gun" of long experience.

Then he took, as he expressed it, "another chance."

"Jim wanted me to tell you to put the gang 'wise,'" said he.

The girl looked at him sharply and contracted her brows.

"Gang?" she exclaimed. "What gang? Oh, perhaps he meant 'Dutch' and 'Sweeney.'"

Peabody bit his lip. He had had a close call.

"Don't know," he replied, "he didn't say who they were—just to put them 'wise.'"

A second time the detective had made a lucky hit, for Mrs. Parker suddenly laid aside all pretense and asked:

"Do you want to make a lot of money?"

Peabody allowed that he did.

"Do you know what they have got Jim for?" asked the girl.

"'Phoney' paper, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Parker, "but Jim didn't write those checks. I wrote them myself. If you want to go in with me, we can earn enough money to get Jim out and you can do a good turn for yourself besides."

The detective's blood leaped in his veins but he held himself under control as well as he could and answered indifferently.

"I guess not. I never met a woman that was very good at that sort of game."

"Oh, you don't know *me*," she persisted. "Why, I can copy anything in a few moments—really I can."

"Too dangerous," remarked Peabody. "I might get settled for ten years."

"No, you wouldn't," she continued. "It's the easiest thing in the world. All you have to do is to pick the mail out of some box on a corner. I can show you how with a copper wire and a little piece of wax—and you are sure to find among the letters somebody's check in payment of a bill. There at once you have the bank, and the signature. Then all you have to do is to write a letter to the bank asking for a new check book, saying yours is used up, and sign the name that appears on the check. If you can fool the cashier into giving your messenger a check book you can gamble pretty safely on his paying a check signed with the same name. In that way, you see, you can get all the blank checks you need and test the cashier's watchfulness at the same time. It's too easy. The only thing you have to look out for is not to overdraw the account. Still, you find so many checks in the mail that you can usually choose somebody's account that will stand the strain. Do you know, I have made *hundreds* of checks and the banks have certified every single one!"

Peabody laughed good naturedly. Things were looking up a bit.

"What do you think I am, anyhow?" he asked. "I must look like a 'come-on.'"

"I'm giving it to you straight," she said simply. "After you have made out a good fat check, then you go to a store, buy something, tell them to forward the check to the bank for certification, and that you'll send for the goods and the change the next day. The bank always certifies the check, and you get the money."

"Not always," said Peabody with a grin.

"No, not always," acquiesced Mrs. Parker. "But Jim and I have been averaging over a hundred dollars a day for months."

"Good graft, all right," assented the detective. "But how does the one who lays down the check identify himself? For

instance, suppose I go into Tiffany's and pick out a diamond, and say I'm Mr. John Smith, of 100 West One Hundredth Street, and the floorwalker says, 'Sorry, Mr. Smith, but we don't know you,' what then?"

"Just flash a few letters on him," said the girl. "Letters and envelopes."

"Where do you get 'em?" asked Peabody.

"Just write them, silly, and send them to yourself through the mail."

"That's all right," retorted the "second story man." "But how can I mail myself a letter to 100 West One Hundredth Street *when I don't live there?*"

Mrs. Parker smiled in a superior manner.

"I'm glad I can put you wise to a new game, I invented it myself. You want letters of identification? In different names and addresses on different days? Very good. Buy a bundle of stamped envelopes and write your own name and address on them *in pencil*. When they arrive rub off the pencil address. Then if you want to be John Smith of 100 West One Hundredth Street, or anybody else, just address the cancelled envelope *in ink*."

"Mabel," said Peabody with admiration, "you've got the 'gray matter' all right. You can have *me*, if you can deliver the rest of the goods."

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C. G. BUDD, D.D.E.
163 OCEAN AVE

3 AM

PERSONAL & BUSINESS
AND REGISTERED MAIL
NEW YORK

Post 5 Idem

77 City July 30 1903

Charles A. Keene

Dear Sir:

admitted
with no

Kindly let the
treasurer of this note have
ring I purchased on Monday
last and also the \$100. in
change from check of \$250.00

Being impossible for
me to call on account of
business. You will greatly
oblige me by sending a
receipt for with ring.

Sincerely Yours C. G. Budd

FIG.3.—A letter-head frill of Mabel Parker's.

"There's still another little frill," she continued, pleased at his compliment, "if you want to do the thing in style. Maybe you will find a letter or bill head in the mail at the same time that you get your sample check. If you do, you can have it copied and write your request for the check book and your order for the goods on paper printed exactly like it. That gives a sort of final touch, you know. I remember we did that with a dentist named Budd, at 137 West Twenty-second Street." (Fig. 3.)

"You've got all the rest whipped to a standstill," cried Peabody.

"Well, just come over to the room and I'll show you something worth while," exclaimed the girl, getting up and paying their bill.

"Now," said she, when they were safely at no West Thirty-eighth Street, and she had closed the door of the room and drawn Peabody to a desk in the bay window. "Here's my regular handwriting."

She pulled towards her a pad which lay open upon the desk and wrote in a fair, round hand:

"Mrs. James D. Singley." (Fig. 4.)

"This," she continued, changing her slant and dashing off a queer feminine scrawl, "is the signature we fooled the Lincoln National Bank with—Miss Kauser's, you know. And this," she added a moment later, adopting a stiff, shaky, hump-backed orthography, "is the signature that got poor Jim into all this trouble," and she inscribed twice upon the paper the name "E. Bierstadt." "Poor Jim!" she added to herself.

"By George, Mabel," remarked the detective, "you're a wonder! See if you can copy *my* name." And Peabody wrote the assumed name of William Hickey, first with a stub and then with a fine point, both of which signatures she copied

like a flash, in each case, however, being guilty of the lapse of spelling the word *William* "Willian."

The pad now contained more than enough evidence to convict twenty women, and Peabody, with the remark, "You don't want to leave this kind of thing lying around, Mabel," pretended to tear the page up, but substituted a blank sheet in its place and smuggled the precious bit of paper into his pocket.

"Yes, I'll go into business with you,—sure I will!" said Peabody.

"And we'll get enough money to set Jim free!" exclaimed the girl.

They were now fast friends, and it was agreed that "Hickey" should go and make himself presentable, after which they would dine at some restaurant and then sample a convenient mail box. Meantime Peabody telephoned to Headquarters, and when the two set out for dinner at six o'clock the supposed "Hickey" was stopped on Broadway by Detective Sergeant Clark.

"What are you doing here in New York?" demanded Clark. "Didn't I give you six hours to fly the coop? And who's this woman?"

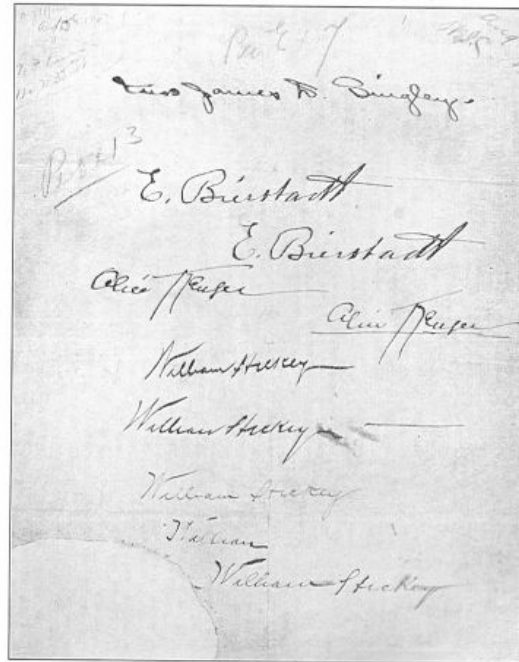


Fig. 4—The upper signature is an example of Mabel Parker's regular penmanship; the next two are forgeries from memory; and the last is a dashing imitation of her companion's handwriting.

"I was going, Clark, honest I was," whined "Hickey," "and this lady's all right—she hasn't done a thing."

"Well, I guess I'll have to lock you up at Headquarters for the night," said Clark roughly. "The girl can go."

"Oh, Mr. Clark, do come and have dinner with us first!" exclaimed Mrs. Parker. "Mr. Hickey has been very good to me, and he hasn't had anything to eat for ever so long."

"Don't care if I do," said Clark. "I guess I can put up with the company if the board is good."

The three entered the Raleigh Hotel and ordered a substantial meal. With the arrival of dessert, however, the girl became uneasy, and apparently fearing arrest herself, slipped a roll of bills under the table to "Hickey" and whispered to him to keep it for her. The detective, thinking that the farce had gone far enough, threw the money on the table and asked Clark to count it, at the same time telling

Mrs. Parker that she was in custody. The girl turned white, uttered a little scream, and then, regaining her self-possession, remarked as nonchalantly as you please:

"Well, clever as you think you are, you have destroyed the only evidence against me—my handwriting."

"Not much," remarked Peabody, producing the sheet of paper.

The girl saw that the game was up and made a mock bow to the two detectives.

"I take off my hat to the New York police," said she.

At this time, apparently, no thought of denying her guilt had entered her mind, and at the station house she talked freely to the sergeant, the matron and the various newspaper men who were present, even drawing pictures of herself upon loose sheets of paper and signing her name, apparently rather enjoying the notoriety which her arrest had occasioned. A thorough search of her apartment was now made with the result that several sheets of paper were found there bearing what were evidently practice signatures of the name of Alice Kauser. (Fig. 5.) Evidence was also obtained showing that, on the day following her husband's arrest, she had destroyed large quantities of blank check books and blank checks.

Upon the trial of Mrs. Parker the hand-writing experts testified that the Bierstadt and Kauser signatures were so perfect that it would be difficult to state that they were not originals. The Parker woman was what is sometimes known as a "free hand" forger; she never traced anything, and as her forgeries were written by a muscular imitation of the pen movement of the writer of the genuine signature they were almost impossible of detection. When Albert T. Patrick forged the signature of old Mr. Rice to the spurious will of 1900 and to the checks for \$25,000, \$65,000 and \$135,000 upon Swenson's bank and the Fifth Avenue Trust Co., the forgeries were easily detected from the fact that as Patrick had *traced*

them they were *all almost exactly alike and practically could be superimposed one upon another, line for line, dot for dot.*¹

[Handwritten notes, mostly illegible due to extreme slant and bleed-through from the reverse side.]

FIG. 5.—Practice signatures of the name of Alice Kauser.

Mabel Parker's early history is shrouded in a certain amount of obscurity, but there is reason to believe that she was the offspring of respectable laboring people who turned her over, while she was still an infant, to a Mr. and Mrs. Prentice, instructors in physical culture in the public schools, first of St. Louis and later of St. Paul, Minnesota. As a child, and afterwards as a young girl, she exhibited great precocity and a considerable amount of real ability in drawing and in English composition, but her very cleverness and versatility were the means of her becoming much more sophisticated than most young women of her age, with the result that while still in her teens she gave her adopted parents ground for considerable uneasiness. Accordingly they decided to place her for the next few years in a convent near New York. By this time she had attained a high degree of proficiency in writing short stories and miscellaneous articles, which she illustrated herself, for the papers and inferior magazines. Convent life proved very dull for this young lady, and accordingly one dark evening, she made her exit from the cloister by means of a conveniently located window.

Waiting for her in the grounds below was James Parker, twenty-seven years old, already of a large criminal experience, although never yet convicted of crime. The two made their way to New York, were married, and the girl entered upon her career. Her husband, whose real name was James D. Singley, was a professional Tenderloin crook, ready to turn his hand to any sort of cheap crime to satisfy his appetites and support life; the money easily secured was easily spent, and Singley, at the time of his marriage, was addicted to most of the vices common to the habitués of the under world. His worst enemy was the morphine habit and from her husband Mrs. Singley speedily learned the use of the drug. At this time Mabel Prentice-Parker-Singley was about five feet two inches in height, weighing not more than

105 or 110 pounds, slender to girlishness and showing no maturity save in her face, which, with its high color, brilliant blue eyes, and her yellow hair, often led those who glanced at her casually to think her good looking. Further inspection, however, revealed a fox-like expression, an irregularity in the position of the eyes, a hardness in the lines of the mouth and a flatness of the nose which belied the first impression. This was particularly true when, after being deprived of morphine in the Tombs, her ordinary high color gave way at her second trial to a waxy paleness of complexion. But the story of her career in the Tenderloin would prove neither profitable nor attractive.

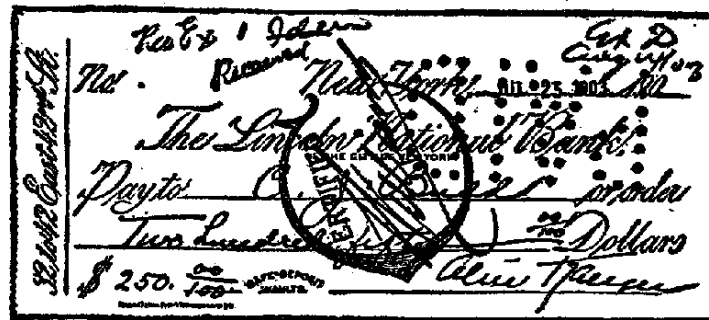


FIG. 6.—The check on which the indictment for forgery was brought.

The subsequent history of the Parker case is a startling example of the credulity of the ordinary jury. The evidence secured was absolutely conclusive, but unfortunately juries are generally unwilling to take the uncorroborated word of a policeman against that of a defendant—particularly if the defendant be a young and pretty woman. Here at the very outset was a complete confession on the part of Mrs. Parker, supplemented by illustrations from her own pen of what she could do. Comparison showed that the signatures she had written without a model upon the Peabody sheet were identical with those upon the forged checks (Fig. 6) and with Mr. Bierstadt's and Miss Kauser's handwriting. When Mrs. Parker's case, therefore, came on for pleading, her counsel,

probably because they could think of nothing else to do, entered a plea of *insanity*. It was also intimated that the young woman would probably plead guilty, and the case was therefore placed upon the calendar and moved for trial without much preparation on the part of the prosecution. Instead of this young person confessing her guilt, however, she amused herself by ogling the jury and drawing pictures of the Court, the District Attorney and the various witnesses.

Probably no more extraordinary scene was ever beheld in a court of law than that exhibited by Part II of the General Sessions upon Mabel Parker's first trial for forgery. Attired in a sky blue dress and picture hat, with new white gloves, she sat jauntily by the side of her counsel throughout the proceedings toying with her pen and pencil and in the very presence of the jury copying handwriting which was given her for that purpose by various members of the yellow press who crowded close behind the rail. From time to time she would dash off an aphorism or a paragraph in regard to the trial which she handed to a reporter. If satisfactory this was elaborated and sometimes even illustrated by her for the evening edition of his paper.

The Assistant District Attorney complained that this was clearly a contempt of court, particularly as the defendant had drawn a picture not only of himself, but of the presiding justice and a witness, which had appeared in one of the evening papers. The Court, however, did not see that anything could be done about it and the girl openly continued her literary and artistic recreation. The Court itself was not a little amused at the actions of the defendant, and when Detective Peabody was called to the stand the general hilarity had reached such a pitch that he was unable to give his testimony without smiling. The natural result, therefore, at the first trial, was that the detective succeeded in giving the unqualified impression that he was drawing the long bow in a most preposterous fashion.

At the conclusion of the People's case the evidence that Mrs. Parker had forged the checks amounted simply to this: That an officer who was greatly interested in her conviction had sworn to a most astonishing series of facts from which the jury must infer that this exceedingly astute young person had not only been entirely and completely deceived by a detective, but also that at almost their first meeting she had confessed to him in detail the history of her crimes. Practically the only other evidence tending to corroborate his story were a few admissions of a similar character made by her to newspaper men, matrons and officers at the police station. Unless the jury were to believe that Mrs. Parker had actually written the signatures on "the Peabody sheet" there was no evidence that she was the actual forger; hence upon Peabody's word alone depended the verdict of the jury. The trouble with the case was that it was *too* strong, *too* good, to be entirely credible, and had there been no defense it is exceedingly probable that the trial would have resulted in an acquittal, since the prosecution had elected to go to the jury upon the question of whether or not the defendant had actually signed the checks herself.

Mrs. Parker, however, had withdrawn her plea of insanity and determined to put in a defense, which proved in its turn to be even more extraordinary than the case against her. This, in brief, was to the effect that she had known Peabody to be a police officer all along, but that it had occurred to her that if she could deceive him into believing that it was she *herself* who had committed the forgeries her husband might get off, and that later she might in turn establish her own innocence. She had therefore hastily scratched her name on the top of a sheet already containing her husband's handwriting and had told Peabody that the signatures had been written by herself. That the sheet had been written in the officer's presence she declared to be a pure invention on his part to secure her conviction. She told her extremely illogical story with a certain winsome naïveté which carried