

(From Chambers' Journal.)
A Cast of the Net.

THE STORY OF A DETECTIVE OFFICER.
CHAPTER I.—CONTINUED.

"I think what Mr. Byrle means is, that in case he wants to speak to you, where shall he find you?" replied the young fellow. "You see, I don't know much of the business myself; I only know he has engaged you as a detective."

"And that's more than you ought to have known," I said; "however, Mr. Byrle knows his own business best. Tell him that of course he can always hear of me under the name agreed upon, at the *Yarmouth Smack*, where I shall lodge."

"Under what name, did you say?" asks the clerk.

"I didn't say any name, and I don't mean to say any name," was my answer. "If Mr. Byrle wants any more information, he had better write."

"Oh, very well," says he, quite short and sharp, for I suppose he did not like my manner, and away he goes.

I sat and thought, or tried to think, but I could not get on so well as before; the visit of that young fellow had unaccountably upset me, and I could not settle down again. Then in came first one, then another, then two or three of our men, and so I got up and went out. I had hardly turned the corner, when I met Inspector Maffery, and it was pretty easy to see by his rosy cheeks and unsteady eye what he had been up to.

"Off for a meditative stroll I suppose, Mr. Nickham?" he says. "You are the boy for my money."

"I am glad to hear it, Inspector," I said. "But I don't think much of Mr. Byrle's clerk, nor of Mr. Byrle himself, for his judgment in sending him to me."

"Mr. Byrle's clerk!" he says; and then repeats it: "Mr. Byrle's clerk!"

"Ah!" I said, "Mr. Byrle's clerk. He came with a message from Mr. Byrle to know where he should meet me if he wanted to see me. I had already settled with him how I would call at his manager's private house with my report, whenever I had anything to say; and he ought to have been satisfied with that."

"You are making some mistake here, Sergeant Nickham," says Inspector Maffery. "Mr. Byrle had no clerk with him, and more than that, I've been with him myself till the last five minutes; till he got into the train in fact; and can swear he never spoke to anybody, but myself from the time I left you."

"Then there's a screw loose!" I said; "There's something wrong here, Inspector, and we have got to deal with some uncommonly deep files. They have scored the first notch in the game, that's clear, but perhaps we can turn the tables on them all the better for it."

"If there's a man in the force as can do it, Sergeant Nickham, you are that man," said Inspector Maffery; "I'll trust it to you; for my head just now ain't up to the polishing off of such a business. But do what you like."

"Can I have Peter Tilley for a week, Inspector?" I said.

"Half a dozen for a month, if you like," he answered; "Mr. Byrle is that much in earnest, Sergeant Nickham, and he is that rich and liberal, that he would buy up half a dozen rather than be beaten. So pick who you like, and keep them as long as you like. I will see you all right."

"Very good, Inspector," I said; "Then I will have Peter to-morrow; and don't make any report of this little adventure, not even to Mr. Byrle. I think I see the little game, and I will try and spoil it."

"If I had had any doubt as to the Inspector having had quite enough brandy-and-water with Mr. Byrle (it was sure to be brandy-and-water, for Inspector Maffery never touched anything else); he said it was ordered for his liver—I say if I had felt any doubt before, I should have none after the way he wrung my hand and said: "If there's a man in the force as can do credit to the force and bring 'em through in triumph, that man is Sergeant Nickham," and so, after another squeeze of my hand, he walked away with a step so excessively solemn and stately, that it was only a little better—a very little—than staggering across the pavement, in the way of telling what was the matter with him; but Inspector Maffery was not a bad fellow, and never carried favor with those above him, by worrying and prying on those below him, and so we like the old boy.

To be Continued.

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