

ALFRED

# HITCHCOCK'S

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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NEW stories  
presented by  
the MASTER of SUSPENSE

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June 1972



Dear Reader:

If it is your habit to titter at the sound of tin cans affixed to the rear of matrimonial getaway cars, let me remind you that marriages may be 100 percent successful—especially when they are blends of bizarre mystery and macabre suspense—and as clearly indicated among the new stories that follow, divorces are seldom a problem when innumerable other methods of dissolution exist in lieu of the courts.

Your feeling as you read should not be unlike that of being swept off your feet—with a jolt—as so many popular authors treat you to gems of fancy and fantasy, from *Pattern of Behavior* by Stephen Wasylyk to the gripping novelette *The Vanishing Point* by Pauline C. Smith. From this day forward you should be happy that to the contemplated procurement of this issue you replied, "I will."

May I propose that you return next month?

*Alfred Hitchcock*

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# ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S

## mystery magazine

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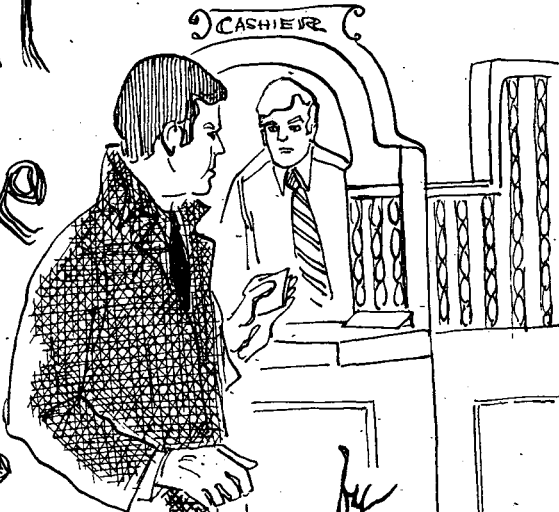
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*There are tricks in every trade, of course, but some are obvious.*



# Shell Game



by  
*William  
Jeffrey*

**G**LOVED HANDS thrust into the pockets of his heavy tweed overcoat, Steve Blanchard entered the Midwestern National Exchange Bank a few minutes before six p.m. of a snowy Friday in December. A uniformed guard stood near the main entrance doors with a ring of keys in his hand, his eyes cast up-

SHELL GAME

ward to the clock on a side wall, and Blanchard's steps echoed hollowly as he crossed the nearly-deserted lobby to the teller at window 4, the only one open at this late hour. He waited until a stout, gray-haired man had finished his transaction, and then moved up to the window.

A small bronze plaque positioned to the right indicated that the teller's name was James Cox. He was a thin, relaxed young man with dark eyes and sand-colored hair. He smiled at Blanchard, said, "Yes, sir, may I help you?"

Blanchard took the folded piece of paper from his coat pocket and slid it across the marble counter. The second hand on the wall clock made two full sweeps, half of a third, and then Blanchard turned and strode quickly away without looking back.

He had just passed through the entrance doors, was letting them swing closed behind him, when Cox shouted, "Stop that man! He just robbed me, Sam. Stop him!"

Blanchard halted on the snow-covered sidewalk outside and turned, his angular face a mask of surprise. The guard, a fat, florid man with mild blue eyes, remained motionless for a moment; then, like an activated robot, he pulled the doors open, stepped out, and grasped Blanchard by the coat with

his left hand, his right fumbling the service revolver off his hip.

"What the hell's going on?" Blanchard asked.

The guard drew him roughly inside the bank, holding the revolver pressed tightly against Blanchard's ribs. The near-funereal silence of three o'clock closing had dissolved now into excited murmurings, the scrape of chairs, and the slap of shoes on the marble flooring as the bank's employees surged away from their desks. Cox ran out from behind his teller's window, and the president of the Midwestern National Exchange Bank, Allard Hoffman, was at his heels. The teller held a piece of paper clenched in the fingers of his right hand, and his eyes were wide and excited; Hoffman looked angrily officious.

"He held me up," Cox said breathlessly as they reached Blanchard and the guard. "Every bill I had over a five."

Blanchard gave his head a small, numb shake. "I don't believe this," he said. He stared at Cox. "What's the matter with you? You know I didn't try to hold you up."

"Look in his overcoat pockets, Sam," Cox said. "That's where he put the money."

"You're crazy," Blanchard said incredulously.

"Go ahead, Sam, look in his pockets," Hoffman said.

The guard instructed Blanchard to turn around, and to keep his hands upraised. His eyes still wide with amazement, Blanchard obeyed. The guard patted his pockets, frowned, and then made a thorough, one-handed search. A moment later he stepped back, his forehead corrugated with bewilderment akin to that of Blanchard's; in his hand he held a thin pigskin wallet and seven rolls of pennies, nickels and dimes.

"This is all he's got on him," he said.

"What?" Cox exploded. "Listen, Sam, I saw him put that money into his overcoat pockets."

"Well, it's not there now."

"Of course it's not there," Blanchard said. He turned slightly, keeping his hands up, but his face was flushed with anger. "I told you I didn't commit any robbery."

Cox opened the folded piece of paper he held. "This is the note he gave me, Mr. Hoffman. Read it for yourself."

Hoffman took the note. It had been fashioned of letters cut from a newspaper and glued to a sheet of plain white paper, and it said: *Give me all your big bills. I have a gun. If you try any heroics I'll kill you. I'm not kidding.* The bank president put voice to the message as he read it.

"He's not carrying any weapon,

either," Sam said positively.

"I believed the note about that," Cox said, "but I made up my mind to shout nonetheless. I just couldn't stand by and watch him get away with the bank's money."

"I don't know where you got that note," Blanchard said to Cox, "but I didn't give it to you. I handed you a slip of paper, that's true enough, but it was just a list of those rolls of coins and you know it."

"You claim Cox gave them to you?" Hoffman asked him.

"Certainly he did. In exchange for twenty-eight dollars, mostly in singles."

"I did not give him any coin rolls," Cox said with mounting exasperation. "I did exactly what it says in that note. I gave him every large bill I had in the cash drawer. The vault cart happened to be behind me too, since my cage was the only one open, and he told me to give him what was on that as well. He must have gotten twenty-five or thirty thousand altogether."

"You're a liar," Blanchard snapped.

"You're the one who's lying!"

"I don't have your damned money. You've searched me and I don't have it. All I've got is about twenty-four dollars in my wallet."

"Well," Hoffman said darkly, "somebody has it."

At that moment two plainclothes

detectives entered the bank, summoned by a hurried telephone call from one of the other Midwestern officials. They introduced themselves without preamble; one was named Malzberg, a lumbering and disheveled man with small, bright eyes; the other, named Flynn, was gray-mustached, the owner of a prominent veined nose.

Malzberg appeared to be the one in charge. He instructed the guard to lock the bank doors, and in a dog-eared notebook wrote Hoffman's and Cox's names, and Blanchard's, taken from the driver's license in the pigskin wallet. He took the holdup note from Cox, balancing it gingerly on the palm of his hand, then put it into an envelope which appeared from, and disappeared again into, an inside pocket of his rumpled suit.

He looked very surprised when Hoffman told him that Blanchard had been searched, and that the money had not been found on him. He said, "All right, let's hear what happened."

Cox related his version of the affair. Malzberg, writing laboriously in his notebook, didn't interrupt. When the teller had finished, Malzberg turned to Blanchard. "Now, what's your story?"

Blanchard told him about the rolls of coins. "I wanted them for a poker game some friends of mine

and I set up for tonight." He made a wry mouth. "I'm supposed to be the banker."

"He also claims to have given Mr. Cox a list of what he wanted in the way of coins," Hoffman said.

"The only note he gave me was that holdup note," Cox said with thinly controlled anger. "He must have gotten those coins elsewhere, had them in his pocket when he came in here."

Blanchard's anger was just as thinly contained. He said to Malzberg, "Listen, why don't you check his cage? That list of mine has got to be around here somewhere." He glared at Cox. "Maybe you'll even find your damned missing money. I've heard stories of embezzling tellers trying to frame an innocent—"

"Are you suggesting that I stole the bank's money?" Cox shouted.

Hoffman looked astonished. "Mr. Cox has been a trusted, valued employee of Midwestern National for almost four years."

"Well, I've been a trusted, valued employee of Curtis Tool and Die for a hell of a lot longer," Blanchard snapped. "What does any of that prove?"

"All right, all right." Malzberg tapped his teeth with his pen, speculatively. After a moment he said, "Flynn, question the other employees; maybe one of them saw or



heard something. Mr. Hoffman, I'd appreciate it if you'd detail someone to find out exactly how much money is missing, and whether or not this list Blanchard claims to have given can be found. You might as well have Mr. Cox's cage and possessions gone through, too."

Cox was disbelieving. "You mean you're taking this thief's word over mine?"

"I'm not taking anybody's word, Mr. Cox," Malzberg said calmly. "I'm just trying to find out what happened here today." He paused. "Would you mind emptying all your pockets for me?"

Purplish splotches appeared on Cox's cheeks, but his voice was icily controlled when he said, "No, I do not mind. I have nothing to hide."

It appeared that he hadn't, as far as his person went. He did not have either the list of coins or any appreciable amount of money.

Malzberg sighed. "Okay," he said, "let's go over it again . . ."

Some time later, Hoffman and Flynn rejoined the group. A check of receipts and records had revealed that a total of \$35,100 was missing. No list of coins had been found in or about Cox's cage, and a careful audit of the rest of the bank's funds had failed to show an unexplained overage in another teller's cash supply. None of the employees Flynn had questioned

had been able to shed any light on the matter; no one had been near Cox's cage at the time Blanchard had been there, and no one had had any idea that things were amiss until Cox shouted to the guard to stop Blanchard.

Malzberg looked pointedly at Blanchard. "Well, Mr. Cox doesn't seem to have the money, and it doesn't seem to be here in the bank. This alleged note of yours isn't here, either. How can you explain that?"

"I can't," Blanchard said. "I can only tell you what happened. I didn't steal that money!"

Malzberg turned to the guard, Sam. "How far outside did he get before you collared him?"

"No more than a couple of steps."

"Did he have time to pass the money to an accomplice?"

"I doubt it. But I wasn't paying any attention to him until Mr. Cox yelled."

"I don't know much about big money," Blanchard said coldly, "but thirty-five thousand must be a lot of bills. I couldn't have passed that much to somebody in the couple of seconds I was outside the bank."

"He's got a point," Sam admitted.

"Why don't you search the guard?" Blanchard asked in a voice



heavy with vitriol. "Maybe I passed the money to him."

"I was expecting this," Sam said. He stepped over to Flynn, raising his arms. "Shake me down and we'll get the idea I had anything to do with this out of everybody's mind."

Flynn searched him expertly and, not surprisingly, the guard was clean.

"What are we going to do?" Hoffman asked. "That money has to be somewhere, and this man Blanchard obviously knows where."

"Maybe," Malzberg said carefully. "Anyway, it looks like we'll have to take him downtown and see what we can do there about shaking his story."

"Go ahead, then," Blanchard snapped, "but I want a lawyer present while I'm questioned. And if charges are pressed against me, I'll sue you and the bank for false arrest."

They took him down to police headquarters and placed him in a small room, leaving him alone until a public defender could be summoned. Then he was subjected to an unending stream of questions, and through long hours he told the exact same story he had in the bank, vehemently proclaiming his innocence.

Shortly after eleven he was taken to Malzberg's office. The detective looked tired and grim as he ex-

plained that the three men with whom Blanchard was to have played poker that night had confirmed the game and the fact that he was to have been banker; that an investigation had borne out that Blanchard did not have a criminal record, had in fact never been arrested; that he was well-liked and respected by his neighbors and his co-workers at Curtis Tool and Die; that the holdup note had had only Cox's and Hoffman's fingerprints on it; that a search of Blanchard's apartment had revealed no evidence that he had manufactured the note; and, finally, that another search of the bank had been undertaken—Cox and the guard and the other employees again questioned extensively—without anything new having been learned or the whereabouts of the missing money discovered.

Malzberg rotated his pen between his fingers, leaning back in his chair. He watched Blanchard for a moment, and then he said, "All right, you're free to go."

"You mean you finally believe I'm telling the truth?"

"No," Malzberg said, "I don't. I'm inclined to believe Cox, if you want the truth. We checked him out, too, as a matter of routine, and his background is even more spotless than yours. But it's his word against yours—two respectable citi-

zens—and without the money we've simply got nothing to hold you on." He swung his body forward suddenly, his eyes cold and brightly hard. "But I'll tell you one thing, Blanchard: we'll be watching you—watching you very carefully."

"Watch all you like," Blanchard said exhaustedly. "I'm innocent."

On a night three weeks later, Blanchard knocked on the door of unit 9, the Beaverwood Motel, in a city sixteen miles distant. As soon as he had identified himself, the door opened and he was admitted. He took off his coat and grinned at the sandy-haired man who had let him in. "Hello, Cox," he said.

"Blanchard," the bank teller acknowledged. He moistened his lips. "You made sure you weren't followed here, didn't you?"

"Of course."

"But the police *are* still watching you?"

"Yes, but not nearly as closely as they were in the beginning." Blanchard cuffed him lightly on the shoulder. "Stop worrying, will you? The whole thing worked beau-

tifully—better than we ever hoped."

"Yes, it did, didn't it?"

"Sure," Blanchard said. "Malzberg still thinks I passed the money to an accomplice somehow, but he can't prove it. Like he told me, it's your word against mine—and they're taking yours, just as we expected. They don't have any idea that it was actually *you* who passed the money, much less how it was done."

The room's third occupant—the stout, gray-haired man who had been at Cox's window when Blanchard entered the bank that evening—looked up from where he was pouring drinks at a sideboard. "Or that the money was already out of the bank, safely tucked into the inside pockets of my coat, when the two of you went into your little act."

Blanchard took one of the drinks from the gray-haired man and raised the glass high. "Well, here's to crime," he said. "*Perfect* crime, that is."

They laughed and drank, and then they sat down to split the \$35,100 into three equal shares . . .

