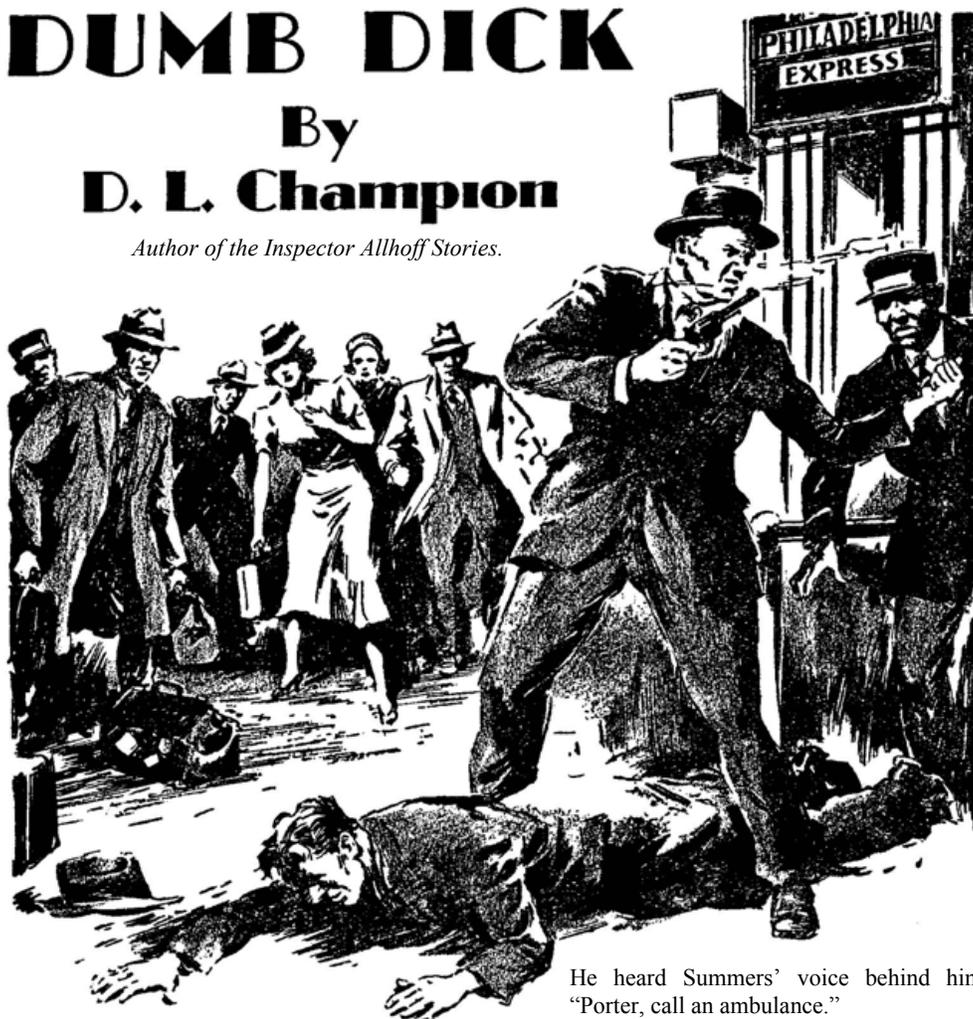


DUMB DICK

By
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He heard Summers' voice behind him.
"Porter, call an ambulance."

Cain counted on Sergeant Summers' stupidity when he planned his perfect crime and the old copper justified his reputation for dumbness right up to the hilt. Up to the hilt and then some! That was the rub. He was a hundred percent stupid—plus!—and that's what Cain hadn't figured when his scheme went blooey.

WHEN Sergeant Summers was transferred from his headquarters desk to Homicide, Eugene Cain got his greatest idea. Of course, circumstance had something to do with it, but it was Cain's brain that saw the opportunity, that juggled three apparently unrelated facts into position of undoubted advantage to himself.

Cain was possessed of a keen intelligence and an amazing store of information. Even the police department conceded that. On the other hand, Cain did not return the compliment. He knew that on a single Sunday afternoon, he could glean more information of underworld activities than the entire racket squad could collect from its stool pigeons in

a month.

Hence, the mentality of the force in general did not impress Cain a great deal. And the mentality of Sergeant Summers in particular did not impress him at all.

AT ten o'clock of a rainy Saturday night he discussed his plan with Aaronson, the big metropolitan bookmaker. With the air of a man who does not expect to be believed, he remarked: "Ben, they've transferred Summers to Homicide. This district."

Aaronson stared at him incredulously.

"Summers," repeated Cain positively.

“Homicide. This district.”

For a moment Aaronson was silent. Then he threw back his dark head and roared with laughter.

“Sam Summers,” he howled. “That’s terrific. What in the name of heaven possessed the commissioner to do that? How will he find his way around? He doesn’t even know the town. He’s lived in Jersey for years. They retired him to that desk twenty years ago because he was so damn dumb. Even doing nothing he’s pulled so many boners he’s been the laughing stock of Centre Street. It’s a wonder he wasn’t fired years ago.”

“The working of the departmental mind,” said Cain gravely, “is too complicated for a mere civilian to follow. Anyway, it’s done.”

Aaronson lighted a cigar. “Well,” he observed, “the murder business should pick up now.”

“It will,” Cain said, and there was something in his tone which caused the bookmaker to glance at him sharply.

“Another item of information I’ve picked up,” went on Cain, “is the fact that Georgie Kline leaves for Boston on the midnight train.”

“Kline,” said Aaronson. “That rat!”

“You don’t like him, do you?”

“I don’t like any welsher. He owes me ten grand from last year’s Futurity.”

“Yes,” said Cain slowly. “I heard about that. Of course you have scruples about pressing him for the money?”

There was mockery in his voice which brought a flush to the bookmaker’s face.

“I don’t want a bullet in my guts.”

“No,” said Cain. “Of course not. Well, I have another item of information for you.”

Aaronson laughed. “You’re lousy with information tonight. First Summers. Then Georgie Kline. Now what?”

Eugene Cain smiled without mirth. “I’m going to kill a man,” he said quietly.

Aaronson regarded him in silence. Murder did not shock the bookmaker. He had lived too close to the underworld for that. His shrewd mathematical mind carefully associated each thing Cain had told him. When he spoke, a suppressed excitement underlay his words.

“I see,” he said. “Summers is on Homicide. You’re picking yourself a spot for knocking off Georgie Kline. Well, if you want an alibi, I’ll give it to you. Maybe a little bonus besides.”

Cain waved a slim deprecating hand. “You

anticipate me,” he said. “I’m not going to knock off Georgie Kline. I’m going to plant the job on him.”

Aaronson licked his thick lips. His smile held more of gloating than of mirth. “Even better,” he said. “Go on.”

“Summers is a fool,” said Cain. “His stupidity is a surer thing than any race you ever framed. Now here in my pocket I have a piece of paper torn from a timetable.”

He laid a finely printed slip of papers on the table before him. He took a gold pencil from his vest pocket.

“Here are printed the departure times of three Boston trains leaving from Grand Central Station. Now I draw a circle around the figure twelve. Midnight. That’s the train Georgie Kline is going to take. That’s item number one. Here, I have a cigarette case. You will observe I handle it with care. It is Georgie Kline’s cigarette case. It has his initials on it, emblazoned in garish diamonds. It also has his fingerprints upon it.”

Aaronson stared at him with interest.

“Gene,” said the bookmaker, “it’s getting better every minute. It’s beautiful. You plant the timetable and the cigarette case. Summers finds them near the corpse. He rushes over to Grand Central Terminal and grabs Georgie just as he’s about to board the Boston train. It’s all very nice.”

“That’s what I thought,” said Cain. “In the meantime, or rather at the same time, I’ll be three quarters of a mile away on the other side of town at Pennsylvania Station, taking the midnight train to Philadelphia. You see any holes in it?”

“None,” said Aaronson enthusiastically. “Boy, I can just see that rat, Kline, when the coppers get hold of him.”

Cain’s smile was bleak. “I knew you’d appreciate it,” he said gently. “That’s why I wanted you to know about it.”

Aaronson pushed a bottle across the table. “Have a drink,” he said. “A wake for Georgie Kline. I don’t suppose you’d care to tell me who it is you’re going to knock off?”

Cain covered the bottom of his glass with cognac. He took a deep breath, emptied his glass and set it down. He leaned forward slightly in his chair and said: “You, Aaronson.”

Then Aaronson saw the automatic. He heard Cain’s voice pouring into his ears as if from a great distance.

“It’s Saturday, Aaronson. You won a cold

twenty grand at the track today. You haven't banked it yet. Undoubtedly it's in your wallet at this very minute. That's the third fact I've given you tonight. Summers is a fool. Kline is a rat. And you're a sucker. This time the percentage isn't working for you."

ARONSON died with less fear than most men. The time between his sentence and execution had given him no time for apprehension. He lay back quietly in his chair, a red hole drilled neatly through his shirt-front.

Cain carefully crumpled the fragment of timetable and dropped it in the wastebasket. The cigarette case he placed on the floor beneath the table. Squeamishly he kept his eyes away from the body as he poured himself another drink.

A professional soldier and a dope fiend can, perhaps, kill a man without a resultant nervous reaction. Eugene Cain was neither of these. He was aware of an empty sensation at the pit of his stomach, of a lifted pulse. But this he had anticipated. His cold will had never been more deliberately set to control his emotions.

He had himself well in hand as he strode boldly through the train gates at Pennsylvania Station.

It was then he saw Summers. A square pillar of ill-fitting serge plainclothes walked up to him.

"For God's sake," said Summers. "So it was you!"

It was unfortunate for Cain that his nervous system did not resemble that of Aaronson. Whereas the bookmaker had been completely stunned in the face of danger, Cain was not. Had he been, he would have stood his ground, bewildered and completely paralyzed.

But he did not. All he realized in that moment was that the utterly impossible had happened. He was like a mathematician who, against all the evidence of science, has come suddenly face to face with a ghost.

His fine mind no longer held complete control of his emotions. Instinct took the reins and shouted orders to his trembling body. He turned like a top and ran.

He felt the bullet hammer into his back before he heard the explosion. The pain, as he fell, was not great. He felt suddenly, oddly enervated. He heard Summers' voice behind him.

"Porter, call an ambulance. I'll take him to the station-master's office till it gets here."

Cain's back was numb down to his hips when Summers lifted him. Vaguely he knew he was being carried. Then he found himself propped up in a chair. He seemed to be sitting in a pool of blood. Yet even now the pain was not very bad. There was an odd lassitude in his wrists. He felt as if his strength were flowing from him as an ebb tide recedes from a beach.

He focused his eyes on the big blue figure sitting on the chair opposite. For a moment the sergeant's red face danced crazily before his eyes. Then it steadied slightly, became stationary.

He did not feel like talking at this moment. Yet there was a question he must ask. He summoned all his strength. When he spoke his body vibrated as if he were shouting. Yet he knew that his voice was not raised above a whisper.

"Summers," he said huskily. "How the hell did you do it? How did you figure it was me? How did you know I'd be taking this train?"

"Take it easy, son," said Summers. "Take it easy till the doc gets here."

Cain shook his head. The doctor was not important. The numbness that crawled down his thighs was not important. But the desperate question in his mind must be answered.

"How did you do it, Summers? Where did I slip? God, how could a dumb mug like you find a hole in it?"

SUMMERS shook his massive head. "It was easy, son," he said. "You wasn't so smart. I don't know why they say you're a smart guy, Cain. You left clues a rookie could figure."

Cain blinked slowly. "Go on," he said. "What?"

"Well," said Summers. "First there was that cigarette case. You left it behind you. You was wide-open on that, son."

"Wide-open? How?"

"Them initials," said Summers. "Once I found that case and saw your initials I knew I had you cold."

"My initials? What the hell are you talking about?"

"G.K.," said Summers. "Gene Kane. I knew you used to hang out with Aaronson. I thought of you right away."

Cain closed his eyes. "You fool," he said. "Oh, you damn dumb dick. You don't spell my name with a K. It's a C. And my first name's Eugene. Gene with a G is only a nickname. You've been

wrong all your life, you idiot and now—”

“Easy there,” said Summers. “Easy. The doc’ll be here in a little while. Don’t go yelling like that. You’ll make it bleed more.”

“Damn the blood,” said Cain and his voice was a dispirited breeze. “How the hell did you find me here? What made you come to this station?”

“Why,” said Summers, “you made a mistake there, too. I found a hunk of timetable. The midnight train for Boston was marked. I figured you was going to lam out of town. I figured I’d get you at the station.”

Something turned slowly over at the pit of Cain’s stomach. A sea of utter futility overwhelmed him.

“Summers,” he said bitterly, “you’re wrong again. You’re a damned ignorant fool. The Boston

trains leave from Grand Central. Not from Penn Station. The only mistake I made was figuring you less dumb than you actually are.”

“I never could keep them stations straight,” said Summers apologetically.

He saw the sudden pallor of Cain’s face, saw the convulsive movement of his body.

“Easy, son,” he said again. “Don’t talk no more. You’re wounded awful bad.”

Cain smiled. The bitterness had gone from him now. At this point there was nothing at all that mattered.

“Summers,” he said, “you’re a dumb dick and you’re wrong again. I’m not wounded. I’m dead.”

He was indeed—a full three minutes before the ambulance arrived.