

The Man Who Was Two

by Harold Ward, 1879-1950

Published: 1922
in »Black Mask«

*** **

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 ...	The True Story of John Connors.
Chapter 2 ...	Latham's Arrest.
Chapter 3 ...	A Model Prisoner.

*** **

Six years ago, the death of New York City Detective Capt. John Connors was reported by the papers. Today, the man he arrested claims to know the true fate of the detective hero.

Chapter 1

The True Story of John Connors.

To The Governor and Members of The Board of Pardons: Some six years ago, according to the Daily Press, Captain John Connors of the Detective Bureau of the New York City Police Department was killed in a wreck of the Oscaloosa Limited between Chicago, Illinois, and Clinton, Iowa. His body, horribly mangled and disfigured beyond recognition, was shipped home, where it was buried with all the honors due a man of his position.

In view of the fact that his was the only body not positively identified, together with the further fact that he was a personal friend of the conductor, one James Barley, who testified at the inquest that he had talked with Connors not over five minutes before the wreck, his family and friends accepted the remains without question.

I alone know the true story of John Connors.

I am making this statement in the hope that a great wrong may be righted.

Chapter 2

Latham's Arrest.

Captain John Connors had been in the West in search of a gang of forgers who had made New York their headquarters. Failing to locate his men, he was on his way home when a telegram intercepted him at Denver asking him to keep an eye open for one Simon Latham, wanted in New York for murder.

Latham, known throughout the country as a gunman and gangster, had, according to the telegram, committed a crime of unusual atrocity, killing two policemen in cold blood and making his escape unscathed. He was believed to have gone to Denver, where he was known to have friends. Connors, being well acquainted with him, was asked to stop over in the Colorado city to assist the police in their search.

Two days spent in Denver convinced him that there was nothing to be gained by a longer stay.

The second day out of the Western metropolis he was passing through the train on his way to the observation car when he suddenly located his quarry slumped down in a seat in the smoking compartment. In spite of the fact that

Latham had disguised himself to the best of his ability by growing a stubby beard and donning smoked glasses, Connors had no trouble in recognizing him.

Latham was alone in the compartment at the time. Before he had time to make a move Connors had him covered.

„Up with your hands, Latham!” he commanded.

The gunman obeyed the order.

„Who d’ye think I am, damn yeh?” he snarled.

Connors smiled. „I don’t think—I know!” he answered. „You are—”

He was interrupted by a crash. His revolver flew from his hand as he pitched forward into the arms of the man he had arrested. An instant later both men were hurried across the car and buried under a mass of debris.

Then hell broke loose. The wrecked train was enveloped in flames. Clouds of scalding steam drove the rescuers back time after time. The air was filled with the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying. Men worked like demons to save those who were buried beneath the burning wreckage.

Connors and Latham, hidden under the debris of two cars, were among the last to be found. The body of the policeman was little more than a charred mass of flesh. Under him, yet protected to a certain extent by his form, was Simon Latham. He, too, had suffered terrible injuries, yet within his shell still lingered the breath of life.

As they dragged the form of the murderer from beneath the wreckage even the hardened physicians and volunteer nurses gasped with astonishment that he still lived. His face had been parboiled by the scalding steam until the flesh hung in strips. His body, from which the clothes had been burned, was a solid mass of burns.

Swathed in cotton, saturated with oil, they rushed him to the hospital. A week passed. He remained unidentified.

After a month he took a slight turn for the better. Finally he was able to speak a few words. Physicians and nurses gathered around his bed and asked him to identify himself.

He answered them listlessly, seemingly as a child repeats a lesson.

He was Simon Latham, gunman, gangster—murderer! He was wanted in New York, he told them, for the killing of two policemen. Captain Connors had been about to arrest him when the wreck intervened.

They expected him to die. It was an impossibility, said the physicians, for a man in his condition to continue living. They believed that he realized it and was making a death-bed confession. They summoned a priest. To the Holy Father he repeated the same story.

And then he got well—as well as a man can get who has passed through hell.

The New York police were notified. When he left the hospital it was with handcuffs on his wrists. Yet he made no resistance. His spirit was broken. He reiterated his confession, denying nothing, admitting everything. The State furnished him with an attorney. Acting on the lawyer’s advice he threw himself on the mercy of the court. A kind-hearted judge, taking his physical condition into consideration, sentenced him to life imprisonment rather than the chair.

Chapter 3

A Model Prisoner.

Simon Latham became a model prisoner. He went about his appointed tasks in a solemn, mechanical sort of way, a broken-down old man scarcely out of his teens—a man whose face was seamed with myriad scars, twisted and contorted out of shape by muscular contraction. His short-cropped hair was snow-white, his form bent and feeble. In his eyes was a far-away look—the look of a dog that has lost its master.

Eventually he was made a trusty. He performed his work with a servility that surprised those who had known him in former years.

Everyone remembers the prison break of some weeks ago. Five hundred men—the dregs of civilization—armed with a miscellaneous collection of weapons garnered from God knows where, threw themselves against the little group of guards in the big dining-hall. For two hours the battle waged to and fro. Eventually the officials, better armed, better disciplined, won out. Yet the victory was not gained without considerable loss.

As is always the case, many of the prisoners aligned themselves on the side of law and order. Among them was Simon Latham, the lifer.

When the trouble broke loose Latham was standing midway between the row of prisoners and the little knot of guards. As the missiles flew through the air he was caught between two fires. Something—a dish or bowl—struck him squarely on the head. He dropped to the floor unconscious.

For five minutes the battle waged across his body. Then he recovered consciousness and plunged into the fray with almost maniacal strength, aiding the guards wherever possible. When the affair was ended and the mutineers were finally herded back into their cells, he was bleeding from a dozen wounds.

Here is the peculiar feature: Immediately after the fight Latham, the model prisoner, became a prison outlaw. He refused to obey prison discipline, insisted on hobnobbing with the guards, and attempted to escape whenever occasion offered itself.

He was taken before the warden. The latter, who had taken a great interest in the case of the former gunman, especially since his services at the time of the break, tried argument.

Latham insisted to the warden that he was being unjustly held. He asserted that he was not Simon Latham, the outlaw, but Captain John Connors, the policeman!

The warden, a man not prone to forget favors, finally ordered him taken from the cell where he had been confined after his outbreak and placed in the insane ward under observation. He is there now.

Here are the facts as I deduce them. I am positive that I am right:

Captain Connors was in the act of arresting Latham when the wreck occurred. He had, as I have said, drawn his revolver and with it covered the murderer.

„Who d’ye think I am, damn yeh?“ the gangster demanded.

„I don’t think—I know!“ Connors answered. „You are—“

Before he could finish his sentence the cars were piled together. He was thrown forward and received a terrific blow on the head. Then and there all memory disappeared.

But in his subconscious mind were the thoughts that had been flashing through his brain while he was making the arrest!

His subconscious memory retained nothing but the impressions of Simon Latham. He had known Latham for years. His history was, to the policeman, an open book.

He was about to utter Latham's name when the blow came that erased all memory. So while the conscious mind of Captain John Connors was obliterated, there remained in the tiny cells in the back of his head the recollection of the man who stood before him at that last instant.

Latham was killed. His body, mutilated beyond all recognition, was buried as Captain John Connors. Connors, disfigured and mutilated, speaking only the thoughts that, as I have said, were in his mind at that last instant—thoughts that had only to do with Simon Latham—accepted the role of Simon Latham, lived it, accepted the punishment of Simon Latham!

Yet somewhere in those tiny cells of subconsciousness remained the policeman. He could not be the renegade that Latham had been, because it was not in his make-up, even though in his own mind he was Latham. Why? Because his training had all been on the side of law and order.

Then came the prison break. That flying dish, striking him on the head, removed, in some way, the pressure against his brain. Immediately the role of Simon Latham was forgotten and he started in again where he had left off six years before. He was again Captain Connors, policeman and guardian of the law. As Captain John Connors he plunged into the fight against the convicts.

I am positive, gentlemen, that I am right. I asked that you allow me to return home to my family and friends.

For, Your Excellency and Gentlemen of the Board of Pardons, I am Captain John Connors!

I trust that you will accept my word. I have no other proof.

