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*A five-minute story
Of Siamese twins and a keen-eyed cop*

Justice Gets a Break

By AL BROMLEY

ON the evening of February 10, 1930, as Officer Frank Moran was sauntering down Ohio Street, a shot rang out.

It sounded so close behind him that the policeman instinctively ducked his head. He drew his gun, whirled quickly and saw three men standing beneath a street lamp less than half a block away.

An instant later he saw one of them sinking slowly to the sidewalk. Moran rushed forward.

"Don't move!" he yelled. "You with that gat—drop it!"

"Ah, a policeman! Good!" said he who had fired the shot, and his gun clattered upon the concrete at his feet.

The officer stared in amazement at the two grotesque figures before him. Nature had been cruel to this pair and had welded their bodies together near their waists.

"Siamese twins!" said the cop.

"That, I believe, is the accepted expression,

although we are Filipinos." It was spoken in a calm manner. "My name is Marcio Sarmani, and this is my brother Sanchi. It was I who did the killing. Sanchi is innocent—he knew nothing of my intentions."

"Who is this guy?" asked the policeman, jerking a thumb toward the body on the sidewalk.

"I do not know. I only know that I'm glad he is dead. Always, when we leave our room in this neighborhood, we seem to meet him, and always he has stared at us and laughed loudly—a filthy laugh. He never failed to point at us and hurl ridiculous names."

Windows of rooming houses in the vicinity were rattling up. Men and women were pouring through the doorways. A curious and excited mob was forming around Moran and his prisoners.

"It's Carlson!" grunted a fat man, bending over the corpse. "Bill Carlson, the poolroom owner."

"Where does he live?" asked Moran.

“On this street, couple blocks down.”

Fifteen minutes later the Sarmini brothers were facing Lieutenant Miller in the River District Police Station.

“Huh!” snorted Miller, chewing on his cigar. “So you admit it’s plain murder, eh? You was carrying that gat for no other reason than to kill him, eh? Where did you get the gun?”

“We use it in our vaudeville act. Loaded with blanks, of course. We have been ‘at liberty’ for the last three weeks, and the gun has been in a bureau drawer in our room. Last night I pretended to examine it for rust and I changed one of the cartridges without my brother’s knowledge. Tonight, as we were preparing to go out for a walk, I slipped the weapon into my overcoat pocket, unobserved by him.”

“Uh-huh,” said the lieutenant. He beckoned to the jailer. “Lock ‘em up.”

“Wait!” shrieked Sanchi Sarmini. “You have no right to lock *me* up. I am innocent! My brother admits it. You can’t put an innocent man in jail! I want to go home!”

“What the hell!” said Miller.

Then, after considerable discussion and no small amount of profanity, he grabbed his telephone and called the home of Captain Brown, commander of the station.

The captain listened attentively. He was silent for an embarrassing length of time. Finally he decided to “pass the buck.”

“I’ll call you back in a few minutes,” he told Miller. “This is a case where Commissioner Murphy must give the decision. If we put an innocent man in the cooler, he’s apt to make things hot for us.”

So he called the commissioner and explained the situation. Whenever Murphy was confronted by a problem that bothered him, he had a habit of coughing; therefore, he now went into a coughing spell that lasted several minutes while Brown waited patiently for instructions. At last the instructions came:

“Damn! Uh—er—send them both back to their room! Send an adequate police guard to stay with them! I’m not sure I’m doing the right thing, but we got to play safe.”

MORTON STILLE was the attorney for the defense. His arguments were loud but poor.

“Justifiable homicide,” he called it, and painted ridiculous word-pictures of a sensitive,

deformed boy shooting a big hoodlum who deserved to die.

“Murder in the first degree,” was the verdict brought in by the jury.

And then it was Judge Gorman’s turn to scratch his head and register perplexity.

“Sentence will be pronounced on Friday morning at ten o’clock,” he managed to utter, and, having thus given himself two days to consider the matter, hurried to his chambers.

That night, all judges of the criminal court sat in conference. There was a helpless look on Hon. George Gorman’s face as he explained his predicament to his fellow members of the judiciary.

“In this state,” he said, “that verdict calls for one of two sentences: life imprisonment or death in the electric chair. But the innocence of one of the twins has been established and *he* was not being tried! I can’t send him to the penitentiary! Neither can I send him to the chair! And surely I cannot set both of them free, for think what that would mean! It would mean that Marcio Sarmini could commit as many murders as he pleased and always go free as long as his brother could not be proved to be an accomplice! What can I do?”

“I don’t know,” said Judge Wilson.

“Reminds me of another Siamese twin case,” muttered Judge Smith. “On last October 10, Lucio and Simplicio Godino were brought before Judge William M. Northrup of Los Angeles. Lucio had been arrested for violating traffic ordinances. Judge Northrup decided to dismiss the charges against him because he couldn’t see his way clear to make the innocent half of the combination suffer with the guilty half.* That’s the only other case I ever heard of where such twins were involved.”

“Can these men be forced to submit to an operation which would separate them?” inquired Judge Stinton.

“If I recall correctly,” objected German, “operations of that nature have never yet proved successful. In every instance both twins died. I assume that these boys know that. Surely all Siamese twins have considered—”

“I’m afraid you cannot *make* Sanchi Sarmini submit to it,” grunted Wilson, “because, as you say, you’d be endangering his life. But if he’d be *willing* to undergo such an operation in order that—”

* The author is citing an actual case.

"In order that I might electrocute his brother?" finished Gorman. "It would be a waste of time to take the matter up with him! He'd laugh at us!"

"Well, is Justice to be cheated?" demanded Smith. "Is this man going to escape punishment through a legal loophole? Must we set a murderer at large just because—"

"We are here to find the answer to those questions. And it must be done this evening!"

JOHNSTONE, Bailey, and Medvich were the three men assigned to guard the Sarmini brothers in their room on Ohio Street.

Johnstone and Medvich were seated at a tiny table, playing pinochle. Bailey, smoking a cigar, was standing near them, but watching Marcio and Sanchi. The twins were sitting on the edge of their bed, conversing in Spanish.

"I did not expect a verdict of 'guilty,'" sneered Marcio. "However, I don't see how they can do anything to me—unless they discover that we—"

"They will discover nothing," grunted his brother. "The police are fools, and the court is baffled. Let's go to bed."

The twins slept in their underwear. This consisted of two suits joined together by a short, hollow strip of cloth eight inches in width. Hitherto, as a matter of courtesy, their guards had never watched their preparations to retire, but tonight Bailey was an interested observer as they undressed. Suddenly he approached them.

"What a queer suit o' underwear!" he exclaimed.

"Attend to your own business!" yelled Marcio, angrily. "You needn't poke fun at us."

"Fun nothing—I'm damn good an' mad!" You two punks are all through fooling *me*. I've just had my first close look at that suit. A genuine pair o' Siamese twins couldn't get into it! Yuh poor saps, that middle strip has no buttons or fastenings of any sort—it doesn't open—"

He leaped forward and burst the brothers apart with the weight of his body. The Sarminis shrieked in dismay. A few pieces of soiled cotton wadding dropped to the floor....

The 'phone in Judge Gorman's chambers rang.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, reaching for it. "Hello? Yes, this is Judge Gorman.... What! ... Well, for— ... I see ... Yes ... All right. Good-by!"

He replaced the receiver on its hook and grinned at his companions.

"Gentlemen, it has been discovered that Marcio and Sanchi Sarmini are not joined together by nature—and have never been! For seven years they have fooled the patrons of America's vaudeville houses, the managers and the theatrical agents, and they've been drawing about two hundred dollars per week while doing so. Naturally, I shall now have no difficulty in pronouncing sentence. I thank you for coming to my assistance, but there is no need for this conference to continue."

"Justice gets a break!" murmured Judge Smith, reaching for his hat.