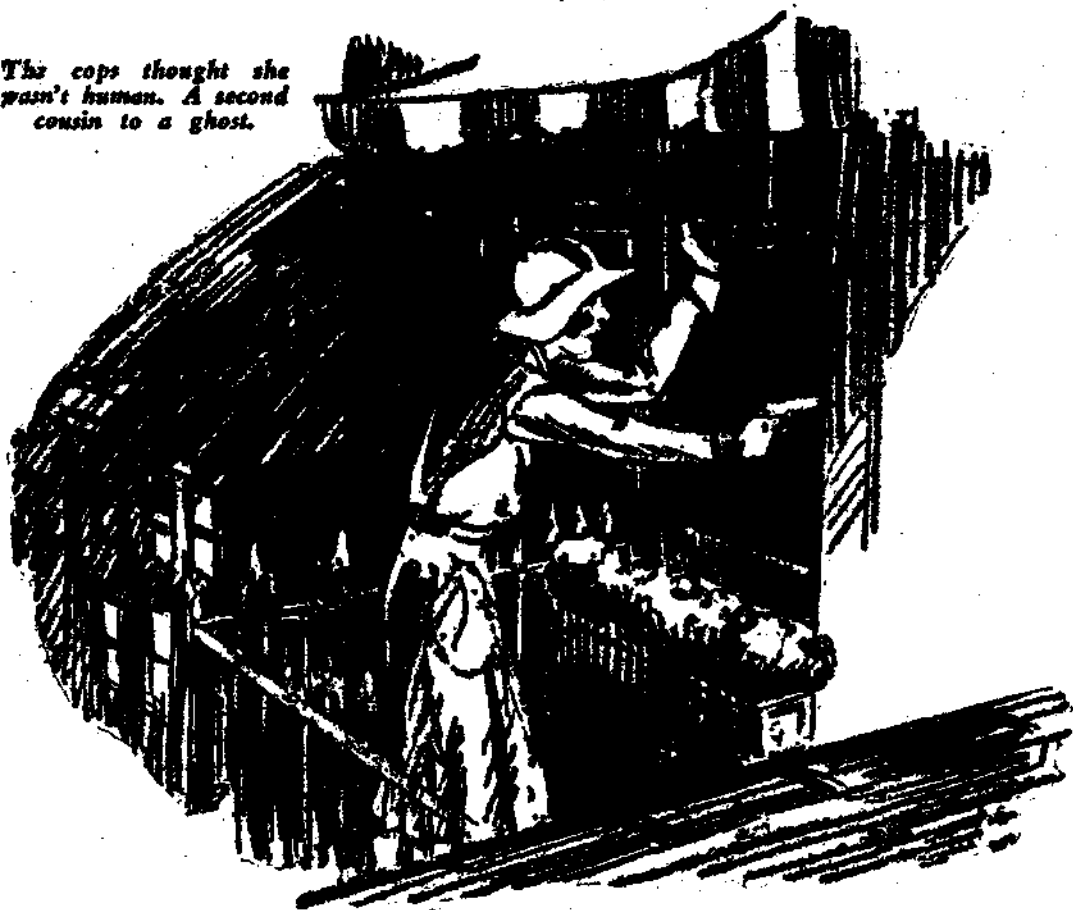


The cops thought she
wasn't human. A second
cousin to a ghost.



The Phantom Burglar

A True Story

As told by JACK HEIL

Author of "The Sphinx Woman," etc.

Here's the fact yarn of a moll who burgled and burgled until . . .

SLIPPERY ANNIE, queen of the burglars, was no mugg's moll, and you can lay the family plate on that, providing Annie hasn't visited your home lately.

She gained her name, her fame and her royal ranking in crookdom by playing a lone hand. Annie might

have been a frail when she started out, but that's a long, long time ago and not in more than thirty years have the cops connected Annie with a male accomplice.

"Slippery Annie" earned her name, if not by the sweat of her brow, then by the nimbleness of her

wits. Annie and the cops have taken turns laughing at each other since the late nineties. The cops have the laugh now because Slippery Annie is sojourning temporarily in Ohio's big resort at Marysville, but Annie isn't through laughing.

Slippery Annie's real name is lost somewhere in the musty files of the days when women were wont to stay home and wash the dishes instead of poaching on the men in the fields of crime.

The law first caught up with Annie way back in 1900, August 23, to be exact. Annie wasn't so slippery in those days, and the Buffalo cops knocked her off for lifting a few little things here and there. Larceny was the charge and the sentence was one year in the Erie County pen.

Annie must have had some of her eel-like qualities even then, because in spite of her one-year sentence she slid in and out of the Erie jailhouse three times that year and each time for the same offense.

But Annie was simply serving her apprenticeship in those days and beginners always make mistakes. However, she learned quickly because she had the laugh on her copper friends until July 27, 1903, when Buffalo found out that she had been graduated from the petit larceny class to the advanced class in burglary. Also, her name had changed from Annie Dombrow to Annie Grabowski.

The cops thought they had a swell case, but Annie beat that rap and gave them the Bronx cheer. She didn't say much. She never has. Whoever said women couldn't keep secrets just didn't know Annie.

So Annie went on about her business. She was determined to perfect herself in her profession and her profession was burglary with a capital B. One year passed, two, three, four and five. Annie sighed

for more worlds to conquer. Buffalo got monotonous, so Annie tried Cleveland.

Annie became Martha Grover. She was in her early twenties now, and while she was hard in one way she wasn't in the least hard to look at. Annie decided to go visiting. She picked an apartment over the saloon of Vincent Sticha on East Thirty-seventh Street. There wasn't anyone at home, but Annie visited just the same.

Police learned that \$260 was missing after the visit. They gumshoed around and picked up the girl who gave her name as Martha Grover. On her they found the 260 smackers.

"Ha-ha," laughed the police. "Grand larceny."

THE coppers told it to the grand jury and there was Annie alias Martha, all indicted and in front of the judge. Annie told it to the judge and prosecutor, and into the waste basket went the indictment. Now, that was way back in 1903, but the memory lingers that when Annie snickered past the coppers on her way out, her thumb found its way to her nose while her fingers wiggled the Kankakee salute.

Back in Buffalo the following year Annie put on her act. In fact, she had just started to put it on when she found she had a copper audience.

"Ha-ha," ha-ha'd the cops in the approved style, "attempted burglary." Into court went Annie.

"Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?" droned the clerk. "What's your name?"

This time it was Annie Gombrowski, and once more the coppers saw Annie slip out from under. They do say that the veterans of the Buffalo force can still hear Annie's cackle over this one.

Having shown the Buffalo and Cleveland coppers what a sap she could make of the law, Annie set sail for Chicago to give the Windy City cops a few lessons in how a smart moll beats the rap.

That was in October, 1910, before the Morans and the Capones had monopolized Chicago's attention and a dozen or fifteen first-class burglaries were sufficient to get a nod from the law. Annie got careless.

And there she was, an innocent-looking gal of twenty-six before a stern judge and a he-man jury of twelve. As usual the charge was burglary.

One by one the ponderous cops took the witness stand and testified while Annie Lewis wept softly for the benefit of the second juror in the back row. Poor little abused girl! The jury went out and came back.

"Not guilty," said the foreman. Annie smiled at him and laughed right out loud at the cops.

For the next two years the cops were chasing their own shadows trying to run down a daylight burglar that was nothing short of a phantom.

It was July, 1912, before the cops rounded up Annie Lesinski.

"She's the phantom burglar," quothed the cops. And then ensued one of those "You are—I ain't" police station debates. From Annie the quizzing coppers learned exactly nothing.

"What's an arrest, more or less, among friends," Annie must have thought as the coppers hied themselves before the grand jury with their evidence. They never even got Annie past the grand jury that time. It was her turn to laugh, and how.

No woman was going to make a monkey or monkeys out of Chicago's

finest, and with their Irish up the cops dashed right out and dragged Annie back into durance vile. There was the burglary charge, the judge, the cops and Annie. She turned on the weeps and did her best. But this time it wasn't enough.

"One year in the house of correction." The court was stern. It was the cops' turn to laugh.

BUT there's an old saw about he who laughs last. They didn't think of that until two days later. November 20, 1912, when they learned that Annie had succeeded in convincing the court that there had been a gross miscarriage of justice. The judge vacated the sentence and paroled "Little Orphan" Annie to somebody or other.

Annie had now been in the racket a dozen years, and since her first sentence in Buffalo, in 1900, had kidded the cops silly without any time. But the law nabbed her again two years after her parole on a burglary charge. Annie tipped over the tear bucket and somewhere in the scramble the burglary rap was forgotten and Annie pleaded to petit larceny. It meant a year in the works, and she did it.

After this stretch Annie became homesick for her old Buffalo stamping ground.

But the change of scenery didn't agree with her and on May 14, 1918, she started on a sightseeing tour of Auburn prison which was to last for three years. That time the burglary rap kept her there until August 3, 1920.

Out again, Slippery Annie slipped and slid around western New York for three years or so, always a couple of jumps ahead of the law. But like a ball player after passing thirty, maybe she went into a slump, for February 19, 1924, found her

once more knocking at doors of Auburn with three years to go.

Now, somewhere along the line Slippery Annie had acquired a daughter, as well as one of the most aristocratic of female crime records. But New York didn't appreciate her talents. Six years in the stir settled that in Annie's mind.

So when 1928 rolled around Slippery Annie and her daughter, Dorothy, were living out Broadway way in Cleveland. Annie had started her career at sixteen, so why not break in the daughter to carry on the family traditions.

Up to this time Annie had played a lone hand and with more than the average success. Not many criminal records of twenty-eight years show only eight on the inside. And if she'd continued her lone wolf role she'd probably still be making her daily calls.

At any rate, shortly after Annie arrived in Cleveland, burglars began working overtime. Through May and June and into July the epidemic continued. Now, craftsmen in any line have their own methods of doing their work, and as the burglary reports continued to filter in the detectives became convinced that at least fifteen or twenty had been pulled by the same outfit.

Most of them were daylight jobs in private homes. Sometimes the loot was negligible; occasionally worth while. Police were soon convinced that a clever mind was planning the jobs because for weeks there wasn't a slip.

No windows were forced and almost without exception next door neighbors neither saw nor heard the burglars. Nevertheless detectives cased five jobs in May that had the earmarks of the same person or persons. June added half a dozen more.

"This burglar ain't human," De-

tective Zalewski remarked to Sergeant Ziegler. "Must be a second cousin to a ghost."

Frankly police were puzzled. A dozen or more daylight burglaries, mostly around noon. Not once did the home owner come in to interrupt the looting. In each case a clean getaway.

Slippery Annie was having a particularly long and raucous laugh at the expense of the Cleveland cops.

IT WAS JULY 16, 1928, that Mrs. Sarah Aranswald came home to find that she had had a visitor or visitors who had left with something over \$400 in jewelry and old coins.

And then two firemen, lounging at their station house, noticed a woman at the front door of the Biggs home at 7302 Superior Avenue. They watched her walk right in. A few minutes later they saw her leave by the side door. Mrs. Biggs had no more than gotten inside the house than the firemen found out that the house had been burgled to the tune of sixty dollars in cash and a like amount in jewelry.

Police at last had a good description, but it wouldn't have done much good to go back to Slippery Annie's mug and record of 1908 even had they thought to do so.

The next day they got a break. Racing out on a burglary call Ziegler and Zalewski surprised a couple of prowlers redhanded. They nabbed a seventeen-year-old girl, but the other moll made a clean getaway.

Slippery Annie would still be laughing at the cops if the girl had been half as smart as her tutor. But she wasn't. She shot off her mouth, and in nothing flat Ziegler and Zalewski beat it to the Broadway address and nabbed Annie, who immediately switched back to the Grabowski mopicker.

The dicks started to put the works on her. They didn't get far. Slippery Annie just wasn't talking. They searched the house. There was Mrs. Aranswald's jewelry and the old coins. And then to make matters worse they found a bill from a downtown department store that bore Mrs. Aranswald's name.

They showed Annie the bill, the coins, the jewelry.

"The jig's up," Zalewski told the burglaress, "might as well come clean."

"Oh, yeah," drawled Annie.

They dragged her down to Central. In came the firemen and picked her as Mrs. Biggs' visitor. The other victims of the "phantom's" jobs were herded in the station to

identify other articles found in Annie's home.

The girl 'fessed up, but Annie—she just simply wasn't talking.

Annie took her chance with a jury. Housebreaking and larceny was the charge. "Guilty," said the jury.

"Ohio State Reformatory," said Judge Shell. Police laughed.

And that's the end of the story of Slippery Annie, but just as soon as Annie is paroled—if she ever is—there may be another epidemic of daylight burglaries because it seems Annie just can't resist the temptation to go visiting persons who are not liable to come home while she's calling.

NEXT MONTH

SATAN'S SISTER

The Story of a Modern Lucrezia Borgia

Beautiful as a Cobra
Cruel as Faustina
Powerful as Victoria
Evil as Salome
Deadly as Arsenic

"This racket is no place for a dame," they told her. "All right," swore LILY MALANA, "I'll show you all that if you're tough, a dame can be twice as tough. If you're dangerous, I'm deadly. If you bump a man for smiling, I'll crucify him for breathing! That's me. I'm Satan's Sister."