

A Ruined Lawyer's Trap.

Marks the lawyer, empty of pocket and bitter of soul, fled the town between two days. His fine laid scheme for rigging the stock market had been frustrated; he himself was liable to arrest, while the ruin which he had brought down upon his fellow conspirators in the Street put his life in danger and brought to an abrupt close the precarious livelihood which his lurking in the by-ways and hedges of an honorable profession had vouchsafed him. For all these woes he blamed not himself, the primal evil but gave the credit to Abe Cronkite, the former detective, whom he had tried to induce to betray his master, Judge Marcellus, but who had led him by the nose into the pit of his undoing.

Was Marks the man to forget this grudge as he trudged through the night and storm, each dolor aggravated by the thought of luxurious ease which so readily might have been? No, indeed: In many projects, mostly chimerical, for recompense which flashed through his mind, one detail was ever present, the most pleasurable of all. Cronkite must bite the dust; Cronkite must be ground under heel.

It is characteristic of criminals that, however exclusive they may be in prosperity, they seek out one another in adversity. Whatever the inducements they plan to urge, whether through recalling some favor granted or joint adventure had in the past, or through threatening to expose some undetected crime, experience has taught them that only from their kind can they expect help. Hence Marks made all the haste his unaccustomed legs were capable of until he reached that city within whose prison he had once undergone many months of confinement.

It was barely 6 in the morning when Marks arrived at the prison walls, discreetly keeping on the further side of the street lest some passing keeper should be tempted to express his regard with a cuff or a kick. He knew only too well that any long-timer whose discharge was due that day would be released at this early hour, while the bums, hoboes and short time men generally, who received no allowance from the state and whose collective assets were not worth the price of a drink, would linger lovingly over their boot leg and hash until fairly swept away from the premises. Throughout his grievous pilgrimage he had cudgelled his brain to recall those whom he had left behind and the times and seasons of their dures. Here the endless reiteration of convict conversation, with its minute calculations of days served and days to be served, befriended him and with every step the assurance became more certain that this was about the date, indeed the very date, when Bill Dalton, the burglar would regain his freedom. Ah, if this were so, it it were only so; then, he was willing to admit that there was good luck yet in store for him, then he was willing to forget his recent misfortunes, always excepting the duplicity of Abe Cronkite, for in Bill Dalton, he knew he had what he least deserved, a friend.

How this unilateral attachment came about was in this wise. Dalton, always a gruff, unsocial creature, had been locked on the same gallery with Marks, and only three cells away. The lawyer, with sharp, cunning eyes ever alert for the main chance, noticed that morning after morning when Bill came out he thrust some sort of a packet into an inside pocket of his brief jacket, which he must have contrived himself, since prison fashion called not for one. Now what is good enough to be kept is good enough to be taken, in convict logic. So Marks had watched his chance and priggish pocket, only to find to his disgust that it contained the picture of a little girl. Most of his fellows in like disappointment would have torn the likeness in to shreds, but Marks's legal training had taught him that the leviathan can sometimes be drawn with an exceeding fine hook. He therefore, had contrived a tasteful frame for the photograph, and restored it to its owner, receiving in exchange for the accompanying lie to the effect that he had found the burglar's undying gratitude.

The time had now come for Marks to realize on this asset; for the cell door opened wide enough to let a stocky form to lurch out, and then slammed briskly a good riddance to it. It was Dalton, and no mistake; there could be no doubt about those broad, though stooping shoulders, that drag of the legs, as if some heavy-weight impeded, that gray head, sunkenly bent and stern, fallow face.

'Hist!' signalled Marks from behind his tree in true convict style.

The burglar looked up, and his expres-

sion grew human and even attractive as he crossed over to greet him.

'I'm on the hog,' said Marks abruptly. 'Come,' replied the other, and in a moment the two were touching elbows across a little table in the rear of the corner saloon, while the lawyer explained the calamities of which he was the victim.

Bill Dalton listened in silence until the jeremiad was concluded. 'You know me,' he then began, 'and you know my graft. I never have no side partners; I never go cahoots with no one. When I figgers out a snap, I work it; if it comes out soft, well and good; I have the hull of the swag, with no one to throw me down; if it pans out rough, why, I have only my own troubles to bear and I kin stand 'em. But with you, Marks, it's different; you realize how I felt about that little girl, and you fixed a purty frame around her purty face. You're a man of eddicatun and yet you're got some heart; and jst got the dinky, too, 't'roo relyin' on an old pal and are feelin' sore. So, damme, if I don't let you in on the biggest job of my life.' And then Bill Dalton told the following story:

A few weeks before the arrest occurred whose natural consequence had but just expired Bill Dalton was staying at Bassford, in the western part of the state, to which unusual prosperity had come in the shape of oil, with a friend of his earlier professional career named Scaggs. Scaggs had a farm on the outskirts of the town which gave him a pretence of occupation, but in reality he was engaged in smuggling over the line from Canada. The two men, both solitary birds, had worked together before Dalton had advanced to his true calling and through mutual respect for squareness sometimes came together in this way to live over their adventures again. Now, in the cellar of Scaggs's house was a concealed trap door, which let into a subterranean cavity of indefinite extent, common enough in the limestone formation of that region, which had served as a safe and secret receptacle for goods; and one day, when Scaggs had crossed the river in pursuit of his vocation, Bill Dalton entered the place with a design which was the result of much recent deliberation.

'You see, Marks,' Bill explained, 'when I was walkin' 't'roo the town I naterally noticed the rush of business which the flush time of ile was a bringin' to the bank on Main street. People was a flockin' in as if to a lottery, each one with a wad of the dough fit to set your stommick tremblin'. The bank was, and is, remember, a substantial affair, built long ago when folks worked more with their hands and less with their jaws; one-storyed, with a big shiny vault squatting in the rear like a cruiser on a drydock. The idee kem to me to onct that that's about my size, for, as you knows, I cotten to the rooral deestricks, where the buglar alarms ain't been interduced, and what perlice there is is bot' skurse and sleepy. But the more I loked the thing over the better I thought of their job, and the wuss of mine. The vault was, and is, remember fust-class, arter the obsolete style; the roof was peaked and slippery, and the sides mostly winders; so that even if a man cud cut his way 't'roo, what with the light they kep' burnin', he'd have no earthy show unless he had huccessed the hull community beforehand. 'Well,' says I to myself, 'it not from the top or the sides, what's the matter with the bottom?' and, then, some how, I remembered the hole under Scaggs's cellar and a narrer passage I had onct remarked leadin' off to the right and plum in the d'irectun of Main street.

'Well, the fust time Scaggs went away I filled my clothes with candies and made a ventur' at the same passage. It was tight in the beginnin', but widened considerable, with a gradual dip, and keepin' in the one directun. Here and there it spread out with the ceilin' so high as to be most out of sight, and yet with slopin' sides, for one of a mind to climb up. There was one of these sort of caves at about the distance I 't'ought was right, and so I did climb up, diggin' my heels in the half rotten rocks and now thin fetchin' a compass around a bit of white clitt that stuck out like a ghosts finger. When I got pritty close to the top I stopped and listened, and what do you s'pose of all things I heard? Nothin' more or less, s' help me, but the rumble of the big vans bringin' barrels of ile along the Main street, yes and stoppin' too with their tally at the office directly opposet the bank.

'Think of it, Marks, the easiest place to work and the safest, unbeknownst to everybody but me and you! Why I kin run a tunnel into that vault for the very

love of it; so much room for the dirt, [and the rock yieldin' pleasant to the pick! Old Scaggs is dead, and his place on the market, and you're jst the man to put on the proper front and rent it. I've got the dough under cover for all expenses never fear. In course I'll do the work, I wudn't be content to trust another, while you kin buy the pervians and keep comp'ny durin' the long evenin's. It will take time, when we've struck the kerrect spot, I s'pose there'll be full thirty foot of tunnelin' on the slant, but arter all we'll be livin' all the while, and livin' good, with the suttenty of a melon to cut at the wind np. Now, what d'ye say?'

What Marks did say at first was to make all manner of selfish conditions, and then he agreed to the plan, as if granting a favor. In a week's time the two men were settled at Scaggs's farmhouse, which Marks had found a reasonable explanation for renting, and Dalton had disappeared into the bowels of the earth. He stayed there, too, for the most part, being from long habit a persistent, tireless deliver, only coming up late in the evening for a pipe and chat with his friend, so that after a little he was only remembered by the villagers as a casual visitor. The work grew under his skill, with a thoroughness worthy of a better object; slowly but surely approaching the base of the vault, with a tunnel well arched and shored.

Meanwhile Marks acted to perfection the part of a gentleman of leisure, bent on the restoration of health through country air and food. He loitered in the store and tavern, he attended church socials, he even deposited a part of Dalton's savings in the bank and chatted affably with the cashier. To all appearances, he had not a care in the world; yet day and night, his mind was racked with purposes half formed and contradictory. The man had a fear of the law, which thus far in his career had restrained him within the limits of chicanery. He realized how precarious were the pathways of crime, where any false step might prove a fatal one. Giving to his associate Bill Dalton full credit for preeminence in his profession, he could draw but dismal forecasts from a life half spent in prison. He shuddered at the idea of violence, pursuit and hiding; the prospect of being possessed of vast wealth, which he dare not use, tormented him. And so, gradually, tortuously, he formed the judgment that the discreet course for him to adopt was to betray Dalton at the very moment of his success, and live thereafter securely and like a gentleman on the reward of his treachery.

In conjunction with these reflections, though antagonistic to them, thoughts of Abe Cronkite and the revenge that he would take on him kept recurring, half forbidden. The mind of Marks, being that of a criminal, was warped and abnormal. It could not content itself with the selfish benefits of its scheming. Hatred brought about that uncase which neither remorse nor superstitious fear could ever effect, until finally vengeance on the detective, seemingly unattainable, dwarfed in importance a proceeding so commonplace as the mere selling out of a pal.

It was when these mental perturbations were at their height—for Bill Dalton had announced with a grin that a few days would end his labors, and therefore it was time for decision—that Marks, much to his surprise, saw Judge Josiah Marcellus pass sedately down the main street and enter the bank. He immediately hurried to the store, confident that no unusual event would be the subject of discussion. So, indeed, it proved, the information being gratuitously furnished that the Judge was a native of the town, retaining both affection and interest for it, the former of which he showed by frequently returning, and the latter by promoting with his wealth its various institutions. It was he who had endowed the library; it was he who had organized the oil company; it was he who was the principal shareholder in the bank.

Marks fairly gaped as he considered the full meaning of this intelligence. It placed his enemy within his grasp. However Cronkite might mistrust his statements, the fact that his patron's interests were in danger would overmaster him. The former detective's gratitude and loyalty to the judge were the main motives of his life. To express them even feebly he would doubtless cast all considerations of personal risk to the winds. Hence it was clear that it convinced that the bank robbery was already an accomplished fact, and that Marks was the only one who could point the way to the recovery of the booty, he would eagerly consent to any conditions to act in conjunction with him.

So Marks deliberated, weaving snares like a spider, until he had brought into conformity his own personal betterment and his own desire for revenge. Then he called Bill Dalton into consultation, saying that as their attempt was about to be put into operation, with every prospect of success, it was wise to consider how they were

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to dispose of the securities which, as he understood, were of vast value.

'I've allus been in the habit of burnin' the scrip and keepin' the long greens,' replied Dalton.

Marks protested so vehemently against such an elemental practice that it was finally agreed that he should go to New York and secure the offices of a trusty agent, and that on his return the bank should be burglarized.

Now this was the scheme that the lawyer contrived one Friday night as he journeyed to New York. He would explain to Abe Cronkite his purpose of capturing Dalton, whom the detective very well knew and recovering the booty, urging his co-operation for the reason that the burglar would meet him without suspicion, and thus they would be able to take and master him unawares. He would also show the futility of warning the police, since the burglar would take place on Saturday afternoon as soon as the bank was closed, Dalton being willing to wait for them to come from New York and advise about the securities, for the reason that the intervening Sunday would give ample time for escape. He would stubbornly refuse to give any information to to any one except Cronkite, and only to him on his promise of secrecy, well knowing that the detective was so thoroughly acquainted with the mental processes of criminals as to understand his aversion to acting with the authorities if for no other reason than want of confidence in them.

In the event that Cronkite returned with him, Marks planned to send the detective and Dalton down into the tunnel, the postponement of the job being explained by some obstacle, and then to alarm the local authorities. It seemed to him that either one of two results would follow. Dalton would attack and kill Cronkite for treachery, or the two would be caught in the very act and convicted on his evidence. In either case he would be left secure to enjoy the reward.

When Abe Cronkite, that Saturday afternoon heard this proposition detailed with all the lawyer's persasiveness he sat for awhile in inense and rapid thought. He realized that if he hoped to save the Judge from loss he must for the time at least put himself into Mark's hands. It would be futile to turn the man over to the police; the result would be sullen denial and stubborn silence. It would be idle to give warning of a burglary already consummated, since the information he has thus far received was far too general for him to indicate where Dalton and his booty were concealed; while if, as he had reason to think, the attempt had not yet been made he still has pride enough in his professional skill to wish to be the one to frustrate it. He was in no respect deceived by Marks's friendly representations, perceiving that his own ruin was in some way sought. But the very reason that told him that the burglary was still unaccomplished

urged him to consent to the scheme; and this reason was something which he had once heard the Judge say about the construction of the bank. Therefore, impelled by anxiety for his patron's interest, the hope of professional renown and a purpose so to bring it about that the evil which Marks was plotting against him should react a hundredfold, after some quibbling as to his share of the reward he agreed to act hand and glove with his deadly enemy.

It was early on Sunday morning when Marks and Abe Cronkite reached the farmhouse and found Dalton preparing breakfast. The burglar looked up with a gratified grin.

'Hullo, Abe,' said he, 'I don't know of another cove besides you I'd have let into this 'ere job, comp'ny ain't my graft, you know. But Marks, he was on his uppers, and you are nothin' if you ain't square, and I'm glad, that I am to see you two frens agin.' Abe Cronkite told some qualms of conscience, as he thought how their ideas of squareness differed.

'I had 'ought to have the stuff all here for you,' Dalton went on, unconsciously saving Marks from the necessity of explanation, 'but I struck a boulder jst above too much for me to handle. You come along, Abe, and give us a lift and we'll be up to the cement in a jiffy.'

Making some excuse for not following immediately, Marks remained in the front room, while the two men descended into the cellar. He heard the raising of the trap-door, and then their retreating steps; and in the ensuing silence stood fixed in the contemplation of his own acuteness. At last he had his enemy in a trap; at last the way lay clear before him to safety and

(CONTINUED ON THIRD PAGE.)

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