"Mine Talking Me About It?"

The LASH of CIRCUMSTANCE

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SYNOPSIS.

Abner Halliday, a wizardly millionaire, is found stripped, bound and tremendously in his room, his safe rifled and $6,000 missing. Suspicion points to Jack Lester, a friend of his nephew, Tom. Living in the same house are other relatives: curious Bruce Lester, Jack's father; Mrs. Lester, his mother; and Ruth Lester, his sister, who has been trying to raise $10,000 to put through a deal and thereby save her father from ruin. Jack is also suspected by the police and is arrested on the day Ruth has had been refused. Tom Halliday, Abner's nephew, is also suspected. He is engaged to Ruth, but has been estranged by his relatives. Tom reverts to his engagement when Mrs. Dunn, a wealthy widow whose business agent is Richard Markey, a lawyer, is introduced to Ruth by her fiancé, Mr. Dunn. Mrs. Dunn is known to be in love with Tom. Bruce Halliday is found murdered in his room. Tom is arrested. Then enter Mrs. Dunn and Markey together. He affectionately meets the woman as a friend, but Tom suspects that there is more than friendship between them. Markey tells Tom he will give him $10 a piece on the case. The latter refuses the bribe. Markey leaves in a huff.

CHAPTER IX.

LuDue was a medium-sized man, wiry of build and tough as whalebone. His eyes were a peculiar, pale, flinty amber which hung habitually under the heavy lids of a head that sat low. I had known him ever since we had attended the same school as youths. Later on he had naturally gravitated into the police force, and had the big detective agencies had been constantly in touch with him, with the unfortunate result that more good luck could not accompany, and having thus acquired a reputation had established an agency of his own. But I had seen very little of him in the last ten years, but as long as he had more or less chummy, the difference in our ages having been inconsiderable, the physical fact of my being considerably larger for my years than he, and I had admired him in those days for his marvelous ability to use his fists, and his quality of brain matter which I counted rather than quantity, so it is equally true of myself that I found Billy was not especially powerful in the matter of mental equipment, his muscles were like piano wire and the brain of a bulldog, and his principal conceit was to him a matter of supreme disregard. Therefore, he was shrewd and pleasant to meet and a good fellow withal, and one whom I ably had wended along smoothly until the inevitable separation at our life paths. As he had never called to see me before, it took no rare genius on my part to divine that this visit was not purely a social one.

Dr. Courtney passed us in the hall on the way back to his office and with a farewell salutation to him I led my old friend into my private quarters. He seated himself and I gave him a cigar. He seemed to be not quite the object of my visit, although I presumed I may as well do so. When I got wind of this affair it occurred to me that perhaps I might be of assistance to you professionally, and even if that were not the case that I would be glad to see you again on general principles. So I hurried right over. But now that we have shaken hands and looked each other over I am anxious to know the particulars of this affair—that's Halliday's business you know. Mind telling me about it?"

"Not in the least. Glad you came," I returned heartily. "Will have to give you a very little time now, perhaps, as the case as they had come to me for my observation. He then asked me a few questions, and as he put them I observed the keys, and such like, to which I gave him the same answers that I had the police. He listened quiet-ly and when concerned, and then expressed a wish to be introduced to Uncle Abner, whereupon I immediately took him to the adjoining room and left them together, and went down-stairs to devote my undivided attention to business without de-lay.

"As you perhaps know, I am a professional detective and since this affair is one strictly my specialty. I take it for granted that you would not intend the parties who did this job, and who had the nerve to commit a murder, or as much of it as possible. That being the case I would like to make an arrangement with you. I am in a more favorable position to get you results than are the police for several reasons. In the first place I am better equipped for the work than the majority of them, both by nature and experience, and the matter of common observation that the smart criminal is smarter than the average crook-quicker, and while I don't wish to sound egotistical, I don't believe that the police force has ever had a case. Furthermore, I can mix with all classes and men among any and all roundings, as well as with professional criminals, and by betraying myself to either class which is in itself a considerable advantage, for the criminal can spot the average city detective a block away from his clothes, as readily as you could should he come into your office or the consulting room. In addition to that, I am not bound by red-tape and regulations or the instructions of superiors who know more or less about the case, or not me, and no one can always look ing forward to an hour when it be time for me to cut down with my rent. Your assistance is paid a few dollars a day for certain hours of work, expects reward as a general thing, and there is no one to be financially interested in his work and then good to know the same as any other workman. I do not blame him for it, but it distracts the weakness of the system. In addition to that, I am not bound by any consider