

News To Order

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quickly, will you? Slur the words a little."

Conboy stared, but read obediently, "May-chairs-am-he-lay-sure-know-she-vows-ah-sure-cuss-eh-trays-amuse-aunt—"

He stopped short and they looked fixedly at each other.

"Holy sufferin' cats, it's French!" whispered Shartle at last. "Here, gimme that. Say, talk about a scoop—!" He retired precipitately to his desk and sweated for half an hour. Then he returned and laid a sheet of paper before the editor.

Conboy tossed aside the re-write he was editing and read. Then he shook hands solemnly, his eyes glistening.

"We'll save it for the last edition, eh?"

"Not on your sacred tintage," Shartle almost wept. "I've got it all doped out how to catch Mr. K. Elkin; but if we publish that to-day it'll be 'good night.' We'll just have to take our medicine, same as the other papers. But if we wait we'll have the scoop of the year—that is, if I can catch that smart Aleck. You see, he's been into malicious mischief within the meaning of the criminal code."

"How do you make that out? He hasn't destroyed any property."

"That doesn't cut any figure; he has made the police a lot of trouble and that comes under malicious mischief."

"Now listen; he as much as boasts in here that he's the man who has been kicking up all this excitement. He's evidently a genius in a way—very eccentric, at all events. Am I right?"

"Sure thing."

"Well now, did you ever yet meet an eccentric man who didn't suffer from inflammation of the egotism?"

The editor ran over a wide and varied experience of the cranks who haunt the newspaper office and shook his head.

"In other words, every bug thinks he's the only, original it. Well, our friend K. Elkin has dug the pit for his own feet in these crazy and ingenious ciphers. We're going to catch him through the very fact of their ingenuity."

"How, for the love of Mike?"

"Why, just this way—" and Shartle spoke low and earnestly for several minutes.

"I get you," grinned Conboy at last. "But if the other papers get wise to this?"

"We'll have to chance it. I don't think they will."

"You'll talk to Mr. Hulett about this? It's not in my department."

"Of course. But let the first edition story stand until I see him. You notice that I didn't make much of those letters."

"Now I'm off on a little gum-shoe work. But first I'm going to put the inspector wise that he can call off his men with the drag-nets and grappling hooks. He's a good scout and won't squeal on us."

"All right," said the editor and plunged into a pile of manuscript.

Shartle put in a busy forenoon. He first visited the State street bridge and went over the ground carefully. At the far side of the river from the watchman's tower he found a hollow, the fresh earth of which showed that a small boulder had been rooted up within a few hours. Marks on the sod and the bruised wood of the bridge showed where it had been trundled out nearly to mid-stream and then pushed over the edge.

"That was the big splash," the reporter murmured, grinning. He went to the tower and got the address of the night watchman, then visited police headquarters, where he examined the discarded apparel. The hat, of soft felt, was of good make and bore a New York label. It had seen considerable service. The coat was almost threadbare and belonged to an ordinary business suit. The maker's name had been carefully removed.

"Anything in the pockets, Murph?"

"This is all, not a darn thing worth while," returned the detective, emptying a large envelope on the table. There were a half-empty package of cheap cigarettes, a few matches and three

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