

BAKER VERSUS THE FIRM

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VAN CLEVE, DENTON AND PETE

"Hello, Jim! How's business?" he
cheerfully cried.

"Fairly brisk," I answered, at the
same time thinking that no person but
Baker would ever have the nerve to
come in after what had transpired.

"I thought it must be," laughed he.
"Got a new case, too, since I left,
haven't you? I see Riley is on a
shadow job now. Quite a come down
for one of our best men, isn't it. You
know Riley has been following me
for two or three days. We've been
having a lovely time, he and I. I felt
just like a walk this morning, so I
started off good and early. Riley
came along like a nice little boy, and
we had the loveliest walk imaginable.
Of course Riley might tell you differ-
ent. I noticed him once or twice
over my shoulder and he seemed to
be perspiring quite freely. By the
way, isn't it a beast of a hot day?
Why I am almost warm myself; and
poor old Riley: he is so terribly fat!
He must be making a noise like a pot
of boiling water by now."

"Where is Riley now?" I asked,
when I could get a chance to put in
a couple of words.

"Why, he's outside waiting until I
come out. I'm going to take him off
somewhere and lose him when I go
out, for it gets on my nerves to have
a guardian all the time. I just drop-
ped in, you know, to thank you for
putting a protector over me. So very
kind of you, to be sure! Just
tell Williams that Riley and I will
have a lovely time this afternoon, and
not to blame him to-morrow morning
when he tells how he lost me. Good-
bye, Jim. See you later." And off
he went, smiling as ever, and appar-
ently not in the least put out on ac-
count of Riley.

I told Williams about Baker's re-
appearance later, and his remarks
were far too lurid to be put in print.

However, Baker's visit had the ef-
fect of making us awaken to the fact
that we would have to use more tact
in future, and the following day, a
new man, whom Baker had never
met, was put on his track. We had
strong hopes that this coup would be
successful, and the man was told to
use the strongest precaution to avoid
becoming observed. He did, or at
least he swore later that he did, but
it was not long before Baker again
paid us a visit.

Again I happened to be alone in
the office.

"Oh, say, Jim," he gasped, as he
beamed at me over the railing. "That
new man you have following me is a
regular dandy. Why, I didn't notice
him yesterday until nearly ten o'clock.
He sure is all to the good. You just
hang on to him and when I come back
in a few weeks I will make one of the
best men you have got out of him.
But tell him to try some other work
for a start and not to follow me, for
he will get himself disliked if he don't
stop it, and you know I never like to
fall out with the boys. Well, good-
bye, Jim. Better luck next time! By
the way, I was to a palmist's last
night and she told me that my old
firm was going to have an awful hard
run of luck and that it was going to
get worse and worse if I didn't go
back. I told her that I could not
think of it, and the poor old dame
nearly cried. She said these failures
were such terrible things and turned
so many good men out of employ-
ment, and almost begged me to go
back. Isn't it funny how true these
people are sometimes, Jim?"

"Get out, you old croaker!" I shout-
ed. "This firm isn't going to have
any failure yet awhile, and when we
want you we know were to get you."

"All right, Jim," he said. "You

know my old address. It will still
catch me."

We did not see anything more of
Baker for several days but we were
continually kept in remembrance of
him. Client after client called us up
either over the phone or came into
the office with an expression of dis-
approval on their faces, and almost
invariably they would have some pro-
test to make about the way in which
we were handling some operation.

"What is the matter with you, any-
way, Williams?" said one of the old-
est clients we had, "Your men don't
seem to be able to keep under cover
at all of late. I can't get a decent
piece of work out of you, nor have
I been able to do so for some time.
You will certainly have to do better
or I will be compelled, much as I
dislike to, to go back to our old friend
Baker. You know, I suppose, that he
is working for Holmes and Boyd
now."

"No. I didn't know that," Wil-
liams said craftily, "How do you
know?"

"Well," he replied, "I don't suppose
I should tell, but a friend of mine
wanted some work done in your line,
and as he had always patronized
Holmes and Boyd, he sent to them
for a man. I happened to be in the
office and in came no one else than
Baker, and the same old Baker as of
yore."

"When was this?" asked Williams.
"Only yesterday," was the reply.

When we were again alone, Wil-
liams turned to me and said "Why
didn't our man report that Baker was
with Holmes and Boyd? What kind
of a crowd have we got anyway?"

"I guess," I answered, "that our
men did not know he was employed
anywhere. They don't seem to be
able to keep track of him at all lately.
He comes out every morning and
they do well if they keep track of
him until noon. It is my candid
opinion that he knows who is fol-
lowing him every day and simply
gives them the slip whenever he
wants to."

"And that is where he is getting
his money to do all this devilment,
I suppose," replied Williams. "Hol-
mes and Boyd! Yes, I guess they
would be willing to give him employ-
ment if he turns over all the business
we lose to them. That firm would
do anything underhand for the sake
of doing us out of a client. I have
been wondering lately where Baker
was getting money enough to loaf
around and tip off our men, and now
that is explained, all right."

"Mr. Williams," I said, "Why don't
you take him back? He has the
upper hand, and although we may be
able to catch him in time, we can't
do so before we have lost half of
our clients. Why we have lost over
a dozen already and it is getting
worse all the time. His yarn about
the old palmist was certainly no
dream. It's coming far too true.
The clerks are having a fine time
now with nothing to do, but they
seem to be about all who are enjoying
themselves in this office. I know it
will be a bitter pill to swallow to
take him back, but what's the use of
bucking against a man like that. We
haven't got his equal, and he knows
nearly every one of the men. We
might be able to get new men, but
we can't run our business without
men of experience. Come on, give
in! Baker would never turn us
down if we get him back, and I don't
know but what he might be able to
bring back some of the clients we
have lost."

It was a wonder the Chief had
listened this long. Without giving



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