

Elgar tingled all over with something which was not fear, but a delightful sense of daring. He had got the store to protect, and he meant to do it. One way was to shout, and yell, wake his uncle and aunt, start the three little girls crying from fright, and give the would-be-thief plenty of time to decamp under shelter of the noise, but that was not the way that appealed to Elgar, who had been calling himself a coward all the day, and might well be reckoned one, if he roused the house every time that he heard a mouse scratching outside a cheese-tub.

There was a revolver kept in the store, and it was kept loaded too, for in a new settlement like that, where everything, law and order included was in a state of chaos, it behoved every tradesman to be prepared to act on the defensive should need arise.

Slipping noiselessly from his heap of shavings, Elgar groped in the dark for the revolver, and as his hand closed over it, a delightful sense of security came to him, for now he was at least on an equality with the man outside, who was still scraping vigorously, making as little noise as possible, but apparently finding more difficulty than he had expected. This was owing to a ruse of Elgar's, who finding on the previous day that the putty about the window glass would not set, had got some quick drying varnish, and mixing a liberal amount of rock-grit with it, had smeared the putty with it, the result being that already it was as hard as if it had been in place a week, while the grit might be trusted to spoil the edge of the best knife that was ever sharpened.

Creeping close to the door, Elgar crouched, and waited. He meant to shoot the man's hand, when it appeared through the opening in the window-pane.