

THE THEFT

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was his home. It was dingy, comfortless and uninviting. There was only the one window that faced the street, and the window was inadequate, and the light seemed to be imbued with a niggardly hesitation about coming in at all—which was perhaps just as well. The furnishings weren't out of any prize collection!

He dug his hands impulsively into his side-pockets—and, one hand encountering the chisel, he smiled with a kind of cool, composed satisfaction. Between this barren and God-forsaken hole and this bit of steel there had been born a connection that was both intimate and pertinent. For nine years, ever since he had run away from school, the kind of existence this place stood for had got his goat—that was the reason why he had put the chisel in his pocket.

The room had served its purpose better than any other place of like circumstances and surroundings would have served him—he had, indeed, chosen this particular room very carefully—but the place had always got his goat. He had had to have a room somewhere—he had taken it here. There were many reasons why he had selected this one. It was cheap; and it was among the only class of people with whom he had ever had a chance to associate—the hangers-on of the race-tracks, the dance-hall crowd of the Barbary Coast, the night world of 'Frisco. He knew every one here—he knew the crooks and the lags of the underworld. These latter had time and again even tried to inveigle him into active membership in their fraternity. They wanted him. They had even paid him the compliment of telling him he would make the slickest crook in the United States. He had refused. The game didn't look good enough. It was all piker stuff. It wasn't morality that had held him back . . . his morality was the morality of his environment . . .