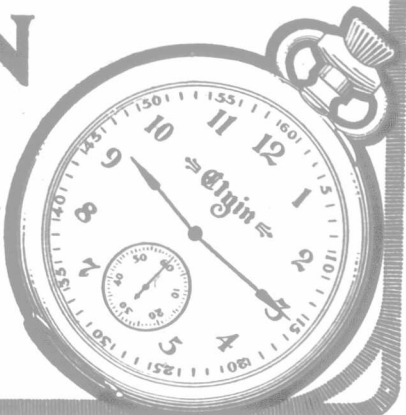


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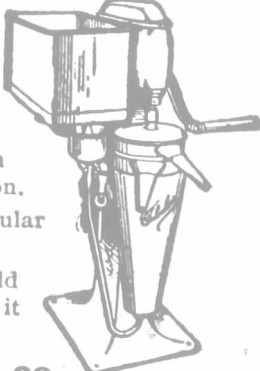
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raised his head and noticed, lying in the gloom between them and the array of sheep, a still, white heap.

James Moore was a man of deeds not words.

"It's past waitin'!" he said, and sprang forward, his heart in his mouth. The sheep stamped and shuffled as he came, and yet did not break.

"Ah, thanks be!" he cried, dropping beside the motionless body; "it's nob-but a sheep." As he spoke his hands wandered deftly over the carcass. "But what's this?" he called. "Stout\* she was as me. Look at her fleece—crisp, close, strong; feel the flesh—firm as a rock. And ne'er a bone broke, ne'er a scat on her body a pin could mak'. As healthy as a mon—and yet dead as mutton!"

Jim, still trembling from the horror of his fear, came up, and knelt by his friend. "Ah, but there's bin devilry in this!" he said; "I reck'ned they sheep had bin badly skeared, and not so long ago."

"Sheep-murder, sure enough!" the other answered. "No fox's doin'—a girt-grown two-shear as could maist knock a h'ox."

Jim's hands travelled from the body to the dead creature's throat. He screamed.

"By gob, Master! look 'ee theer!" He held his hand up in the moonlight, and it dripped red. "And warm yet! warm!"

"Tear some bracken, Jim!" ordered the other "and set a light. We mun see to this."

The postman did as bid. For a moment the fern smouldered and smoked, then the flame ran crackling along and shot up in the darkness, weirdly lighting the scene: to the right the low wood, a block of solid blackness against the sky; in front the wall of sheep, staring out of the gloom with bright eyes; and as center-piece that still, white body, with the kneeling men and lurcher sniffing tentatively round.

The victim was subjected to a critical examination. The throat, and that only, had been hideously mauled; from the raw wounds the flesh hung in horrid shreds; on the ground all about were little pitiful dabs of wool, wrenched off apparently in a struggle; and, crawling among the fern-roots, a snake-like track of red led down to the stream.

"A dog's doin', and no mistakin' thot," said Jim at length, after a minute inspection.

"Ay," declared the Master with slow emphasis, "and a sheep-dog's too, and an old un's, or I'm no shepherd."

The postman looked up.

"Why thot?" he asked, puzzled.

"Becos," the Master answered, "im as did this killed for blood—and for blood only. If had bin any other dog—greyhound, bull, tarrier, or even a young sheep-dog—d'yo' think he'd ha' stopped wi' the one? Not he; he'd ha' gone through 'em, and be runnin' 'em as like as not yet, nippin' 'em, pullin' 'em down, till he'd maybe killed the half. But 'im as did this killed for blood, I say. He got it—killed just the one, and nary touched the others, d'yo' see, Jim?"

The postman whistled, long and low.

"It's just what owd Wrottesley'd tell on," he said. "I never nob-but half-believed him then—I do now though. D'yo' mind what th' owd lad'd tell, Master?"

James Moore nodded.

"Thot's it. I've never seen the like afore myself, but I've heard ma granddad speak o't mony's the time. An owd dog'll git the cravin' for sheep's blood on him, just the same as a mon does for the drink; he creeps oot o' nights, gallops afar, hunts his sheep, downs 'er and satisfies the cravin'. And he nary kills but the one, they say, ofr he knows the vaille o' sheep same as you and me. He has his gallop, quenches the thirst, and then he's for home, maybe a score mile away, and no one the wiser i' th' mornin'. And so on, till he cooms to a bloody death, the murderin' traitor."

"If he does!" said Jim.

"And he does, they say, nigh always. For he gets bolder and bolder wi' not bein' caught, until one fine night a bullet lets light into him. And some

\*Stout—hearty.

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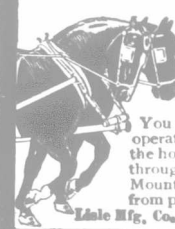
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