

# FIVE MINUTE STORY--CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13.

parlor, but a very brief investigation of the furniture satisfied them that nothing of value was to be found there. They passed through folding-doors into a second apartment furnished as a study. A fire still smouldered in the grate; in the air was an odor of tobacco smoke; on the table were bottles and glasses. They drank some whisky and proceeded to open, one by one, the drawers of the writing table. But nothing worth taking did they find. They examined two bronze vases on the mantelpiece, and in one was a small sum in silver, which they appropriated. They put into their bag a meerschaum pipe and a silver cigarette case.

"Not much of a cop as yet," whispered Bob.

He keeps his money in his bedroom, the old swine," Jimmy answered. "Look here, we musn't hang it out too long. I'll go upstairs. I'm softer on the pads than you."

"None o' your bogey, y' know," said Bob.

"Would I kid you now?" Jim cried indignantly. "You tour round the back a bit."

"I'll wait in the kitchen."

"All gay!"

They stole out of the study together, and parted in the hall at the foot of the stairs. Bob went into the kitchen, and Jimmy crept up to the bedrooms, thrilling with a consciousness of daring. His movements were soft, sure and agile as a cat's. Even his breathing seemed suspended. He knelt down on the first landing with his ear to a keyhole, and listened. A pleasant sound of snoring came to him, and he indulged in the cheap luxury of a noiseless chuckle. His fingers closed silently on the handle and turned it. There was no interruption of the sounds within. He pushed softly against the door. It did not open; it was locked.

"I must use the twirls," said Jimmy.

He set down the lantern on a table and pulled out a bunch of skeleton keys. In a few seconds he found one which fitted, and, very carefully, he opened the door. A dim light flickered out. Jimmy lay down flat upon his stomach and peeped into the room. A candle flickered on the washstand. He looked toward the bed and saw the face of the sleeping man. It was an old, tired face, seamed and grey, wearing even in sleep an expression of unrest.

Jimmy wormed his body into the room, inch by inch. Over against the fireplace was a portable iron safe; he could see the shining yellow paint upon it, and his heart began to thump hotly, loudly, within him. He wriggled along cautiously until he had crossed the floor. His hand clutched a corner of the safe, and then he uttered an irrepressible grunt of disgust. The safe was fastened by a chain to an iron staple in the hearth. For a moment he lay, too discouraged to stir; then he turned over gently on his back and began to search in his pockets. He found what he wanted, a pair of small, steel pliers. The sharp point of these he inserted in one of the links, and by means of the handles began to force it apart. To prevent the chain from rattling he wrapped his neckcloth about it.

He was a weakly man, and his efforts brought out a dew of sweat upon his face. But he struggled on, putting out all his strength, and at last he had made a fissure in one link large enough to slip the next link through. The chain was broken. He lay for a moment, trying to recover his breath without undue panting; then he began to rise to his feet. When he was erect he stooped and tested the weight of the safe. It was too heavy for him.

"I shall have to get Bob to help me, after all," he whispered within himself. He was angry at his failure, for he had meant to dazzle his companion with his success. With an ill grace he turned toward the door. And then he heard a sound from the bed—a sharp click—that stopped his heart. He turned quickly, startled, and met the wide eyes of the man upon the bed. Blue bright eyes were they, humid from age and weakness, but afire with courage and resolution. Jimmy uttered a groan of fear,

as he saw, outlined against the white pillow on a level with the hoary chin, the shining point of a revolver.

"Don't shoot," he gasped.

"What are you doing here?" asked the old man.

"Nuffink!" cried Jimmy. "Leastways, I won't do nuffink if you only won't shoot. Put it down, sir."

The old man smiled grimly and pushed down the bed-clothes. He protruded a muscular, brown leg.

"For God's sake, let me go," whined Jimmy. "Don't get me lagged. I'm only on this lay ag'in' my better self. I was born honest, sir, I was, straight."

"Be quiet!" said the old man.

Jimmy's voice subsided to a weak whimper. The old man sat up on the edge of the bed, still covering him with the revolver.

"What are you going to do wi' a honest cove as 'as gone wrong through evil company, sir?" whispered Jimmy.

"Hush!" cried the old man. "What is that?"

Jimmy was silent. He listened. A footfall was audible upon the stairs.

"Are there two of you?" asked the old man. "Are there? Are there?"

Jimmy nodded.

"Tell your companion, then, to keep out of the room. The moment he enters I will shoot."

"Keep out, Bob!" wailed Jimmy.

His voice rang out clear and shrill. There was an answering growl from without and the handle of the door rattled. Jimmy, screaming in his overmastering fear, swept the candle off the wash-stand and ducked. A report rang out. He felt a sudden pang of pain in his arm and his shirt became in an instant hot and wet. He darted for the door and collided violently with Bob. They staggered, clutched desperately at one another, and fell rolling downstairs into the hall, locked in an unwilling embrace. They lay, half-stunned, upon the stone flooring.

The door above them opened and the old man appeared, bearing the re-lighted candle. In his hand he carried the revolver. Deliberately he pointed it at the writhing men below and fired twice.

Jimmy saw Bob rise suddenly in the flickering light; for an instant he stood erect, then swayed forward, and fell headlong.

"Bob! Bob!" cried Jimmy.

Bob did not stir.

Jimmy looked up at the watching figure at the head of the stairs.

"Murderer!" he shrieked.

The old man raised his arm as if to fire again. Jimmy cowered back, and then ran stooping through the open doorway into the cold, starlit garden.

The rain dribbled slowly down the panes, and the casement rattled in the wind, as if a peevish child were shaking it. It was the middle of the forenoon. All night Mrs. Royt had sat waiting for the return of her husband. Now, worn out at last, she nodded in a chair upon the hearth. The baby lay whimpering upon the bed. Louder and more insistent grew the voice of its complaining. At last it uttered a prolonged, shrill yell, and Mrs. Royt awoke.

"Bob!" she whispered, and looked hastily, eagerly about the room. "Not come home yet?"

She went to the bed and crooned over her child.

There came a step upon the stairs. The door was flung open violently, and a tatterdemalion figure lurched into the room. It was Jimmy. His face was grey and drawn with agony. He was hatless, and his clothes were stained thickly with wet mud. His right arm dangled loosely at his side. In his left hand he clutched a crumpled newspaper. He fell across the bed and lay gasping.

Mrs. Royt rose up slowly and touched him on the shoulder. "Where is Bob?" she whispered.

He laughed aloud in delirium. "Mornin' paper—burglar shot dead—I see it wi' my own eyes—The last time—He said it was the last time—an' it was."