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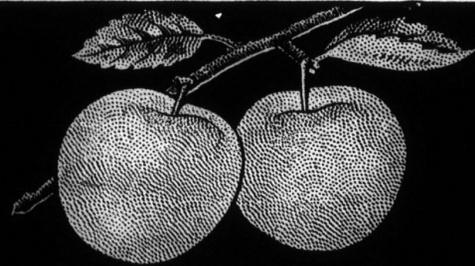
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T.G. WANLESS, SALES AGENT, VERNON, B.C.

in the building—and they instituted a quiet search.

They dug and delved into every nook and corner. They turned upside down piles of loose bagging, and peered into empty boxes and empty barrels, but there appeared no sign of the missing seven gallons. They seemed simply to have passed into thin air.

At the end of three or four days, Johnson & Walling concluded that they might as well pocket the loss philosophically and forget the matter. They could keep a sharp watch on the drivers and upon the one or two workmen, and that was about all.

Business thereafter resumed its usual course.

The heat—the glorious, extract-selling heat—continued unabated, and flavoring extracts were sent out almost as rapidly as Scovill could make them.

The mysterious theft dropped into the past. Seven gallons of Rex Vanilla was a pretty stiff loss—but they were making it up.

And then, one morning, some five minutes after his arrival, Scovill hurried down to the office again with a queer smile on his lips.

"Five gallons Rex, two gallons of pistachio and two gallons of violet!" he announced.

"What about 'em?" asked Walling, pushing away at his pen.

"Gone!" said Scovill laconically.

"What!" cried Johnson, whirling about in his chair, as Walling leaped from the stool. "More stuff stolen?"

"As sure as you live."

"It's impossible!" said Walling.

"It may be impossible, but it's a cold fact. I haven't touched the bottles. They're just as I found them. Come and see for yourselves."

There was a scramble for the laboratory.

Scovill had spoken the truth.

Ranged along the wall stood nine extract bottles, labeled, and containing the dregs only of their recent contents!

The three men stared at the line in utter bewilderment. One of the doors was nailed hard and fast—the other had been locked all night. Yet nine gallons of extract had vanished as completely as if it had never existed!

"One hundred and eighty dollars' worth, and gone as clean as a whistle!" Johnson gasped at last.

"And they didn't go through that loft door, either, supplemented Walling, "See—the nails haven't been touched!"

"And they didn't go through the other door, either, Mr. Walling, unless you unlocked it, for I've had the other key on my ring all night."

"Well, where in thunder have they gone?" Johnson demanded.

The trio found seats and pondered the problem.

Putting the doors out of the question, there were just two means of egress from the laboratory remaining.

The first—the big window—would obviously be useless to the thief, for it overlooked the street. Had anything been passed out, it must have been seen by at least a dozen people, for the intense heat kept the dwellers in the adjacent tenements in the open air all night.

The other exit was the large skylight, which could be raised and lowered upon occasion. How the thief could contrive to reach the roof, drop into the laboratory, and climb out again, without attracting the watchman's attention, was beyond conception; yet that seemed to have been his method of working.

Still further, there was hardly room for a man to wriggle in and out, carrying nothing. Burdened with nine gallons of liquid, an escape through the skylight seemed an absolutely utter impossibility.

"But I'm hanged if I can see how else it was done," said Walling, when the subject had been thrashed to the end. "He must have come over the roofs and through the skylight."

"Nonsense," said Johnson; "it's impossible."

"It seems so, I'll admit," said Walling; "but have you any better explanation to offer?"

"Me? Lord, no!" said Johnson. "The

thing's the blackest kind of mystery to me."

"How about you, Scovill?"

"Same here. I never saw or heard of anything so confoundedly queer in my life!"

"Well, I tell you, it was the skylight," Walling reiterated. "That is the only way the fellow could possibly have gone in and out. Had he gone through the building the watchman must have heard him. Listen to this scheme."

"To-night, Scovill, you leave a light in the laboratory. I'll go home in an hour or so and sleep. Then I'll return after closing time, sit down on the roof beside the skylight and watch. If the fellow comes over the roofs, I'll get him. If he wriggles through the keyhole, I'll have a glimpse of him through the skylight. See? Either way, if he comes, I'll have a look at him, and maybe more. How's that for a scheme?"

"Suppose he doesn't choose to visit us?" asked Johnson.

"Then, by Jmiminy, I'll stay on that roof every night until he does come!"

Before lunch, Walling went for his nap.

Johnson was up to his ears in work when, at six o'clock, Scovill called to him from the laboratory:

"I'm going now."

"Eh? What? All right."

"Do you want to look at the stock before I go, in case of accidents? Everything's in shape for the night."

"Oh—no," Johnson called back. "Got a memorandum of what's there?"

"Yes. The Rex Vanilla shelf is full



"Little Mary Jane's top note."

—thirty one-gallon bottles. Then there are forty gallons of—"

"All right—let it go at that," said Johnson, dashing back to the ledger through which he had been running. "The gentleman won't visit the laboratory to-night, any way, if Walling's going to watch on the roof. You may depend on that, Scovill."

The extract-maker locked the door of the laboratory and descended.

"I put a little wax over the keyhole," he murmured in the senior partner's ear. "If any one has a duplicate key, we shall find it out that way."

"Good idea," Johnson commended approvingly.

When the men had gone and the place was empty except for the watchman, Walling returned and made his way through the scuttle to the roof.

He took his station by the skylight in such a position that by turning his head he could either survey the apartment below or sweep the roofs to the end of the block.

He laid his revolver beside him and laughed savagely. If the individual who had made a fine art of spectacular extract stealing had happened to turn up that night, he wouldn't leave with a whole skin.

In the morning, Johnson and Scovill arrived almost simultaneously, and together they mounted to the laboratory.

There was not a scar on the thin