

Cheops in Caledon

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Charles Dorian, Sudbury, Ont.

Splinkins built a jail and broke it. Diminutive men have been known to perform greater wonders, it is true, but Splinkins might have only broken his contract and lived in the jail happily ever after. This leads up to the story of how he did get there.

Splinkins had a past. A heap of money came to him that nobody knew much about. It might have descended in the regular line of a legal heritage. But it didn't. There was more than one killing up in the old Porcupine (not the Porcupine you hear about in these days) and Splinkins lived a luckless career for a long time up there and naturally drifted off the scene.

Exit Splinkins as camp cook in the Golden Summit camp where he left the body of Henry Holder in the most peaceful and inaccessible spot. The disappearance of Henry Holder must necessarily loosen the tongues of all good gossips and raise the fury of outraged mining men all over the North, because Henry Holder was the kind of man most sympathetically missed. Splinkins was missed, too, but no one knew why one or the other had not left traces of his being. Both had apparently left those regions quite preparedly without advertising their itinerary. A cap was found, said to have been Holder's, on the bank of the Porcupine near Golden Summit next spring, its lining clammy with ooze and what the experts who examine such things officially said had a meed of human corpuscles.

Splinkins just fled and then began to cover up his identity as camp cook by unlearning that profession. Forty thousand was enough to enable him to do it. Cooks with forty thousand and a surfeit of their trade do not haunt their accustomed places. Splinkins thought he might handle cement without making loaves out of it. Just because a man has accomplished a successful murder, gaining thereby a little fortune, is no sane reason why he should spend it all attempting to evade those bent upon murdering such as he in society's name. So Splinkins invested thirty-five of the forty thousand in the bowels of that body of earth known as the back yard of a desirable residence in the booming town of Caledon. Here he established himself as a builders' contractor and began the study of architecture.

Real estate men sold lots like hot cakes in Caledon, and Splinkins secured contracts for covering them with habitable buildings on which he stamped certain marks which earned for Caledon the high-sounding name of the "Classic City." It was all to be got out of the books on architecture, of course. His success advertised him; other cities sought him that he might impress his mark upon the fabric of their constitutions. But Splinkins was loyal. Caledon for the Caledonians and Splinkins art for its buildings was the heroic motto. The citizens acclaimed him a real genius and wherever his name was heard stories of self-made men were suppressed. Men of genius always have money to launch them upon their great achievements, you would hear, and there was none who asked, "Where did the money come from?"

Why did he not change his name? Why indeed? He was known up North as "Billy Peelings," and never resented the puns perpetrated upon that name either. Oh, yes, as Splinkins he was quite safe.

He designed the public buildings for Caledon one by one and whenever he would make a thousand dollars he would excavate the back yard. To bury it? Not he! He just made his deposit in the regular bank double!

Caledon always had a jail but it was notorious for the number of prisoners that escaped. Also it was an eyesore in "Classic Caledon." They must allow Splinkins to build one which would be simple and beautiful and burglar proof and unique. Caledon jail must be different.

Splinkins soared to Egypt in his dreams one night and brought back the design for the new jail. It would be of cement construction. It would be square at the base and taper upwards to a pinnacle. It would be Cheops brought up-to-date!

The council madly applauded and nearly jostled Splinkins in their hurry to have him set to work.

The convicts were removed to Oldfield

jail and the work of demolishing begun. The old excavation for the foundation could be used and as soon as the debris was cleared away the forms were made for the cement filling.

This structure was to be the crowning achievement of Splinkins' life. Other jobs were given to assistants—this one he supervised himself. His staff of workmen was small. It was purposely so. The event of his Porcupine days weighed heavily upon his heart and brain. A murderer living in the glory of respectable society and honored while lesser criminals would work out dismal sentences within the walls he was constructing. I am not saying that this was taken very seriously by Splinkins. He may or may not have been getting sentimental; he may have wanted to find a way in which to make reparation for that awful crime; or it may have worked out in his crooked brain that he was doing well and giving the people who trusted him the merry tra la! He could live luxuriously while waiting for his retribution and live that way he would.

Up went the walls of the new edifice—a four storey pyramid. It had four windows in each wall on the ground floor; three on the second; two on the third and one on the fourth. It looked at first like a lop-sided factory, but when the embellishments were made it looked just like a jail made out of Cheops.

The iron work was a feature second only to the masonry. The main door was like the door to an immense vault. The centre of the building was fitted with the usual grill in which an elevator ran. Oh, yes, Caledon jail had an elevator for prisoners, warders, visitors: the elevator operator had especial powers and was properly armed, too.

Caledon jail had all the modern trappings. A power station on one corner of the grounds supplied the light and this jail was well lighted. On the roof or apex was a searchlight which flooded the four walls with a blazing white light. The lookout's post was immediately beneath it in a kind of cupola. He could either stand or sit and scan the four walls—the floor of this watch-tower revolving slowly. The lookout was not exposed to the weather unless he chose to touch a button and allow the windows to drop.

At the formal dedication the whole town turned out and virtually camped on the lawn. There was no fence around Cheops—it stood in the centre of a two-acre lawn which had a fringe of young maples. Here swarms of people lounged and listened to the piping oration of Splinkins from the watch-tower. They cheered and cheered and the mayor stepped forward and bade them all be good and they'd never see the interior of Cheops. That was no inducement to be good so they just made a massed assault upon the building and for two hours they kept Splinkins and the mayor cooped in the watch-tower while they marauded freely and cheerily.

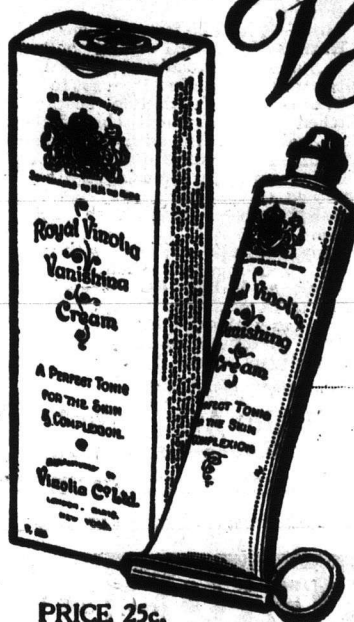
A lawn party was given with Splinkins the distinguished guest. It was a babbling success until two very rude young men pushed themselves forward to the very elbow of the honored guest and gruffly whispered to him that he was "wanted." Splinkins was unceremoniously charged with the murder of Henry Holder.

Murmurs, mummings, vociferations, yells of dissent at this untoward proceeding swept through the crowd and Splinkins in bracelets was more hero than ever.

Of course he had to go to jail—his own jail. He begged no bounty of his captors, not even a choice of rooms. He was taken away from the crowd in a carriage and brought back two hours later and placed in one of the main cells on the ground floor. His door was locked on him; the warders were all on duty; the elevator ran merrily up and down all night; the lookout was at his post and wide awake—all the forces used by law to keep a prisoner imprisoned were utilized. And yet Splinkins escaped.

The Oldfield prisoners had not been returned and Splinkins had no neighbors—he was the only prisoner. A search was officially instituted next morning. His door was found locked: it had not been unlocked—every man on duty took oath to say so. Splinkins had vanished as a cloud vanishes except that no one appeared to have seen the performance.

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