

"Well, Laurence? What is the proposition?"

"Proposition? What do you mean?"

"An ass," replied Maginnis, pumping seltzer into a tall glass, "could see that you have something on your mind."

Varney pulled a match from the little metal box-holder, and looked at him with reluctant admiration. "Sherlock Holmes Maginnis! I *have* something on my mind. A friend dropped it there half an hour ago, and now I've come to drop it on yours." He glanced at the room's two doors and saw that both were shut. "Time is short. The outfit upstairs may drift in any minute. Listen. Do you recall telling me the other day, with tears in your eyes, that you were slowly dying for something new and interesting to do?"

Peter nodded.

"I think of your pleasure," said Varney, "always. By looking about me and keeping my eyes and ears open at all hours, I have found you just the thing."

"New and interesting?"

"There are men in this town who would run themselves to death trying to get in it on the ground floor."

Maginnis shook his head.

"I have done everything in this world," he said almost sadly, "except, I may say, the felonies."

"But this," said Varney, "is a felony."

Struck by his tone, Peter glanced up. "Mean it?"

"Sure thing."

"As I remarked before, what is the proposition?"