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## AN UNSTAGED MELODRAMA

By Esther Griffin White

Who Stole Old Blankensop's Five Hundred Dollars? A Fine Mystery Story, with a Genuine Surprise at the End.



"A little old man—a little, timid, meek old man, with a beard like an attenuated goat, a neat high hat, and a shiny frock-coat . . . came in at the door... A low 'ahem!' caused the Old Man's heels to come down and his hands to begin fumbling with some letters on his desk."

### The Bookkeeper's Story



SOMETHING'S up," mumbled Tommy, stopping at my desk.

The Old Man and the Junior Partner were closeted in the back room. That always meant that something was up or down. Stocks, maybe.

Tommy's interest, however, was only alleged. I knew it, and looked up with an expression intended to be interpreted. "Well—well—pass on." I knew I should see Tommy twirling my ruler in his hand and fixing one of his hypnotized stares on the Stenographer. This always annoyed me excessively. I regarded it as in odious taste, impertinent, outrageous and not to be tolerated. "Mayn't a cat look at a queen?" gurgled Tommy, shifting his glance to mine.

"Change the 't' in cat to 'd' and you'll have it," said I, snappishly, and wondering why I wasn't an engaging young athlete like Tommy.

Tommy got very red, and looked at me fixedly. I immediately begged his pardon. I was, of course, ashamed of having said it. Besides, Tommy is big. "You know my passion for puns," mur-

mured I, weakly, looking out of the corner of my eye to see if she had heard.

"That ain't no pun," said Tommy, haughtily, bethinking himself to his typewriter, which he rattled ferociously.

I chewed my pencil, and looked at the Stenographer. After all, I'm glad she heard. It gave me a chance to look at the ravishing curve of her throat, as she tilted up her adorable little chin disdainfully. I am a connoisseur in Beauty.

Just then the door ripped open, and the Old Man bounced out, followed by the Junior Partner. The Junior Partner never bounced; he undulated.

While we all entertained a murderous animosity toward the Old Man, who spent his time blustering and bullying his employees, we held the Junior Partner in supreme contempt. In newspaper notices of local doings of a various nature he was invariably referred to as "one of our most representative young men." This on account of a position attained through pulls and his own magnificent impudence. But though he might be Superintendent of St. Mark's Sunday-School and a member of the vestry, though he led a class weekly at the Y. M. C. A., though he might be toast-master at public banquets of business men's organizations, though he might lead all the cotillions in a manner

to make the gods green with envy, though he might be a director in the Heavy-Weight Magnates' Club and a trustee of a Deaconesses Home, we knew him for an insolent young brute, a hypocrite, a sycophant, a sneak and a coward. It was my superlative ambition to kick him out of his own front door, followed up with a pugilistic exhibition of my prowess. But then I am not big, like Tommy. So the Junior Partner continued unlicked of me.

To-day he wore his sanctified smirk, but behind it I saw something—a lurking something. Was it fear? Was it triumph? Was it cunning? Was it—But I am too much of a psychologist.

The Old Man flopped down in his chair and began reading the morning paper. There is a tradition in Hinsdale that the Old Man is in the strenuous class; that he is a Busy Man. This is to laugh, as the saying goes. The only thing at which the Old Man works hard is to sustain his reputation as a Pillar of Society. Practising most of the exalted virtues in public, and a majority of the vices in secret, he wears a perpetual expression of Afraid-I'll-Be-Found-Out.

A little old man—a little, timid, meek old man, with a beard like an attenuated goat, a neat high hat, and a shiny frock coat buttoned up tight and close, came in at the door. In a mirror over his

desk, placed there to reflect the door, the Junior Partner saw him enter. A low "ahem!" caused the Old Man's heels to come down and his hands to begin fumbling with some letters on his desk. (The Old Man and the Junior Partner do good team work. It's part of The System.)

"Why, good-morning—good-morning, Mr. Blankensop," says the Old Man, in his character of genial Pillar of Society. "I'm sorry I can't talk over that little matter with you just now. Very busy—very busy with some technical matters that need attention. We've arranged—"

"But—" began old Blankensop, in the Bull-of-Bashan voice which belied his shrinking exterior.

"—to investigate," went on the Old Man, as if no one had spoken, "and you can call in to-morrow if you are down this way."

"I won't be down this way to-morrow," roared old Blankensop. "I'm here to-day. You see me. What I want to know is where's my five hundred dollars." This with alarming directness and startling distinctness.

We all grinned over our ledgers joyfully. The Old Man began to splutter, but before he could say anything more the Junior Partner, bland, smiling, jumped into the breach.

"My dear Mr. Blankensop," says he,