

"Yes, m'dear, it would have been better for us," Simon replied soothingly, as he wrapped his dilapidated ruin about his body and departed.

Outside Jackson and Mayers wholesale hardware establishment, where he filed invoices six days a week, Stubbs paused in astonishment. There was a light in the inner office.

"Funny for the boss to leave his club to come here and work nights", he reflected as he entered. Walking silently, a habit learned at home Simon went upstairs, crossed the outer office, and gazed horrorstruck into the inner sanctum.

Harvey, the night watchman, was standing against the wall, with his hands held above his head. Opposite him stood a short, tough, shabby stranger, whose face was hidden by a visor, and whose hands toyed with a small automatic. A second stranger, similar to the first in appearance was twirling the combination-knob of the vault.

Stubbs drew back into the shadow of the outer office and hesitated. He knew that there was always a lot of ready currency on hand at the end of the month, probably five or six thousand dollars. Should he charge in and try to turn the tide of battle, or attempt to secure outside help?

He thought of the telephone, but knew he was powerless to use it. Probably the men would secure their booty and escape before he could get to the street, find assistance, and return.

On the other hand, the thieves were flourishing revolvers, while Simon was unarmed, short and fifty-two. Twice he tiptoed up to the door to charge, and twice he retreated. He stood just outside the lighted area of the doorway, his heart beating wildly and his breath coming in short gasps.

In the awful silence it seemed impossible that the burglars would not hear his wild heart-beats. The moments dragged by like eons, and every minute seemed an eternity. Occasional thoughts of his wife and home came to him, but it seemed years and years since he had set out for the office.

Suddenly a familiar sound reached his ears—he heard the vault open slowly.

"Is the roll there?" asked a coarse voice.