

Meikle says, "Come inside." On another occasion the words were, "Come inside and say all you have to say before the people there." Lambert tells the inmates of the house all about the plot. He tells them that he (Lambert) was to get £50 for planting some skins on Meikle's land, and that Troup and Cameron are behind him, and that the police are to come and find the skins there. Meikle is to be convicted, and then he (Lambert) was to get the £50. Now, not only (Meikle says) did he tell the people inside the house—namely, Mrs. Meikle, the servant girl, Harvey, Arthur Meikle, James Meikle, and I do not know how many others—but he told this to people outside. Harvey says he was constantly talking about it. He seems to have done everything but publish the plot in the local papers. It is not yet proved that he did that, but he came as near to it as his facilities enabled him. Then the plot thickens—I am still following closely Meikle's evidence—a joker is added to the pack. Lambert tells Meikle of this joker's advent. An assistant is to be sent because Lambert is too slow. Lambert tells Meikle exactly where the skins are to be put. They are to be put in the smithy, not anywhere else, and he is to tell him the very night that he is to put them in the smithy so that Meikle may be there. The joker and Lambert then are to come like Nicodemus privily and by night. The joker is to be in white clothes and Lambert is to be in dark clothes. One of them, Meikle was not sure which, he says it was not settled which, was to advance to the smithy with the skins, Meikle was to be in waiting with the gun, he was to fire at the man who advanced, but he was not to hurt him, because I feel sure Mr. Meikle would no more think of hurting a man than he would of stealing a sheep. He was to fire blank cartridge. What particular purpose the firing of a blank cartridge was to serve I am not sure, but perhaps it was to add dramatic effect to the story. Having fired his blank cartridge, Meikle tells us, he was to rush forward and secure the man with the skins, or the man in black or the man in white, as the case might be, and hand him over to the man in blue—that is, the policeman. It is not shown whether the policeman is to be there on the spot; but Meikle proposes to tie up the culprit—it might be Lambert or it might be Mr. Joker—he was to tie him and hand him over to the police. And then, Meikle says, he was going to get the joker, or Lambert, as the case might be, as long a term of imprisonment as he could get him. Now, this is Meikle's story, repeated by all the phonographs he has put into the box; and I do appeal to my learned friend, Is it not very like the programme Bully Bottom the Weaver outlined of the play of "Pyramus and Thisbe" before the Duke? In this conspiracy Lambert the Lunatic was to play the chief part, for if all this evidence means anything it means that Lambert was to lose his £50 and get a long period in His Majesty's gaol instead. Surely this whole story is so inherently absurd as to be almost unworthy of serious examination; and yet this story, which he would ask your Honours to believe, accounts for the presence of the skins in that barn; and with the exception of letting him know that he was going to put them there, the rest of the story was carried out by this lunatic Lambert. But that is not all. The story is not finished yet, and the real heart of it is to follow: Lambert had repeatedly told Meikle the place where he was going to plant the skins. They were to be planted in the smithy. He was to tell him the night, and if your Honours believe Meikle, Lambert it seems had not the decency to keep his promise. Mr. Meikle's wife said in the Court below, and no doubt will say again, that on the night he came with the mystery-bag, the night before the police came, Lambert said to Mr. Meikle, "Depend upon it, old man, it is not to be to-night." Well, now, I come to the first real grievance Meikle has. Mr. Meikle has a real grievance. Lambert promised him sincerely and honestly that he would tell him the night it was to be done. Instead of telling him, he came without the joker, and he came with a bag and without notice. This, I admit, was a grave breach of faith, and therein it seems Lambert was not honest with this innocent man. But, your Honours, I think I am entitled to say this in Lambert's favour: He did not tell him the night, but he was at least faithful in one part of the promise. He was faithful in that part of the promise in which he said he would put the skins in the smithy; and you can see throughout Lambert's conduct a fine manly disposition to carry out that promise at all hazards. He might very easily have put the skins in the unlocked stable. The police could with quite equal effect have found them there. He might have put them in a dozen other places about the farm with indeed far greater effect, because if they had been found in some hole or corner about the place suspicion would have been increased. He might have done all that without the slightest difficulty, but having promised Meikle that he would put them in the smithy, into the smithy they must go. So he brings the bag and leaves it in so conspicuous a position that Meikle can see it 26 ft. off at night, and tell from its size and appearance in the dark that it was just such a bag as would hold two sheep-skins. This is his evidence:—

"I saw a bag standing up like a flour-bushel bag at the corner of the pines. It was a bulky-looking sack, standing up. It would hold two sheepskins, as I saw it, comfortably."

Well, your Honours, after leaving the bag in this conspicuous way outside the smithy, Lambert, quite unnecessarily, but true to his promise, sets himself to leave them in the smithy. The smithy is locked; but being a lunatic, he has one of those fine flashes of genius not uncommon to madness. He knows there is a grindstone in the building, and, although it was 10 o'clock at night, he pretends that he wants to get into the smithy in order to sharpen his knife. He got Arthur Meikle to let him in, and by that means was able to deposit the sheepskins in the smithy. The elder Meikle swears that he asked Lambert, "What time at night is this to get a knife sharpened?" But Lambert is a resolute man, and must keep his promise. Arthur has come out with his key, the grindstone is set turning, but the mysterious bag is left outside in order to reveal its guiltiness to the watchful eye of Meikle and his son. No doubt Lambert might have smuggled it in before the old man came out at all. He might have smuggled it in when he went to get his knife sharpened. But that was not Lambert's plan. His plan was to leave it outside in order that Meikle could look at it and tell the jury in Invercargill that it would just comfortably hold two mysterious sheepskins. Well, the father goes and sees something else. He watches Mr. Lambert. He does not like, it would seem, his being there at 10 o'clock at night. He observes his countenance. He observes the furtive look with which Lambert casts his eyes up to the ceiling, where I suppose these sheepskins were. It was an ugly look; and Meikle says he did not