

\*\*\*\*\*  
 READ THIS STORY, YOU WILL LIKE IT.  
 \*\*\*\*\*

## BLACKMAIL.

TELLING HOW THE VICTIM OF A  
 BLACKMAILER ESCAPED HIS  
 TOLLS BY A CLEVER RUSE.

A man sat at a desk in a well-furnished study-like room, his head resting in his hands, and his whole attitude depicting dejection.

His age was only thirty-five, but his hair was already well tinged with grey.

"Two thousand pounds!" he muttered in a broken voice. "I simply cannot pay it. Surely I have atoned for that one small error. He will drain me of every penny before he has finished. Two thousand!"

And again he read the letter which lay open on the desk before him.

"Dear Roger," it ran, "I am wanting two thousand pounds. Will you be sure to let me have it by to-morrow (Wednesday) evening;" and it was signed, "William Kirk."

"Am I to keep this wretched man in idleness?" continued Roger Thornton to himself. "I don't deserve it. My punishment to too severe."

For perhaps the thousandth time, this man went over the last fifteen years of his life.

At twenty he had been a care free boy, ready to face life—or death—with a laugh.

His father had not been a wealthy man, but had managed to send him to Oxford.

When he came down, his father handed him a cheque for two hundred and fifty pounds, and told him that this was all he could manage to give him as a start.

"I am sorry, my boy," the old man had said. "I should like it to be much more, but I cannot manage it. It has been difficult at times to manage the heavy fees for your education, but now you must do your best."

"You are a dear, generous father," young Roger had replied, "and I will make good. You shall be proud of me when you remember that all I do will have come from this cheque," and he had brandished the cheque gaily in his proud father's face.

Then he had met William Kirk.

They had talked over lunch in the club, and Roger had told him that he wanted to make money, but only had a little capital.

Kirk was a keen-eyed Scotsman.

"You want to make money," he had said.

"All right, I'll help you, but you'll have to come with me to Rhodesia. I have the richest claim in an area of two thousand square miles over there, and all I want is a little more capital, and you shall have this golden opportunity of putting it up. I promise you shall make money."

And Roger, blinded by the thought of riches, promised.

In three months they were in Rhodesia.

Kirk's claim proved to be useless, and Roger soon realised that his money had been taken from him under false pretences.

But this was a difficult matter to prove, and Roger knew it.

Moreover, he knew that not one penny of the two hundred and fifty pounds had been used in prospecting the claim in Rhodesia. It had all gone to pay Kirk's debts before he could leave England.

For some months the two men lived together in a small hut which they called their home in Rhodesia, until the little scruple that Roger had gave out.

Then he appealed to Kirk.

"You must have a little money," he said, "Lend me enough to get away from here, and I promise you that I'll pay you back if I work my fingers to the bone."

"Not likely!" retorted Kirk. "Of course I've got money. Did you think I should leave myself stranded with a young fool like you with no money? But you're not going to see the colour of it. You're the sort of young scamp who would take what I would lend, and then disappear for ever!"

Roger was silent under the injustice of it all. What could he do? He was on a fair road to starvation unless something turned up.

He was too proud to appeal to his father for he knew that the old man could ill afford another penny. He had already done his best.

Then after nights and nights of sleeplessness and worry, temptation proved too strong for him.

Roger had discovered where Kirk kept his store of gold, and one night when he thought Kirk was asleep, he crept into the room, opened the box with the key from the other man's pocket, and having counted out fifty pounds in golden sovereigns, was about to creep out of the room and away, having left a note for Kirk to say

that he knew he had stolen it, but would do his best to return it quickly.

But he never got away. Kirk opened his eyes as Roger turned to go out of the room, and holding a revolver to the young man's head read the note.

Of course he called Roger a thief, and said he would write to his father.

Roger thought of the disgrace, and begged him not to do so. It would break his father's heart, he pleaded, and he had honestly meant to replace the money.

Really Kirk had no hold on the young man, but at twenty Roger did not realise this. He thought Kirk could get him imprisoned, although he had not got away with a penny that did not belong to him.

It was some time after when the men separated, and it was many years after before they met each other again.

By this time Roger had done well, and was on the way of becoming a very wealthy man.

He had married, and was happy in his home with his wife, and small son, and his old father in a cottage in the country.

Then Kirk came on the scene—still the good looking man of the world, but penniless and living on his wits.

And then started Thornton's trouble.

Kirk threatened to tell his wife and father of the attempted theft of years ago, if he did not hand over the money for which he asked.

Frightened lest his happy home would be broken up, Roger foolishly gave him money, and since that time the demands had become more frequent and exacting each time, until this day, when Roger sat at his desk with the top-notch demand for two thousand pounds.

"I'll not pay him!" he said again. "I've just heard how he got poor little Wilber's money from him, and promised him a share in a company which was never even started—the scoundrel—he ought to be in prison!"

And for an hour Roger Thornton sat thinking deeply.

"Got it!" he said, suddenly bringing his hand down sharply on to his desk. "I'll stop his tricks once for all."

Turning he pressed a bell, which was answered by a neatly dressed maid.

"Tell Crowell I want him, please," said Thornton.

Crowell was Roger's valet, and had been with him for years. Roger had found him starving in Rhodesia soon after he began to make money, and had given him a job there, and later brought him home as his valet.

Crowell, an ugly, but faithful looking man, came into the room, and taking the chair, his master pointed to, sat down, and the two men were deep in talk for the next half hour.

Then upon the conclusion of their chat, the valet rose to his feet, and approaching the telephone, rang up William Kirk.

"Will you call here at 12 o'clock to-night, please. Mr Thornton will not be in until then."

Having received an answer in the affirmative from the blackmailer, Crowell replaced the receiver, and with a grim smile of satisfaction upon his face, turned to his master and gave a meaning wink.

"Got him, sir!" he remarked. And Thornton nodded his head.

### II.

At five minutes past twelve that night, in the kitchen of Number Twenty-four, Park Avenue, Hampstead, a man carefully opened wide the window at the bottom, and, although it was windy and cold, left it open.

It was Crowell, and the house was Roger Thornton's.

Then the man went quietly out of the door, and locked it behind him, leaving the key in the keyhole.

Making his way silently up into the hall, he opened the door leading into the street, and let himself out, the door closing silently on its well-oiled hinges with scarcely a sound.

Once down the steps Crowell began to run.

Down Park Avenue into the wider thoroughfare at the bottom he went like the wind, until he came to a policeman at point duty.

"Constable, come quickly!" he said breathlessly. "Number Twenty-four, Park Avenue. A man is in the house burgling it!"

With nothing more than a keen glance to see whether his informant was in earnest, the constable turned and walked rapidly along the road with Crowell.

"Tell me more," he said.

"I was sitting in my kitchen," said Crowell, still a trifle breathless, "when suddenly I heard the key turn in the lock, and a voice laugh on the other side of the door."

"Got you!" said a voice. "Now I'm off to your master's room upstairs to get what I want. There's plenty of valuable stuff there."

"For a moment," continued Crowell, "I was paralysed, and then I realised that I could get out of the kitchen window, and rush for help. I thought it best to get you instead of catching the man."

"Quite right," said the policeman pompously. "Let's run a bit."

The two men broke into a trot, and if the policeman could have seen in the darkness, he would have noticed a grim of satisfaction on the ugly features of his companion.

"This is the house," gasped Crowell, as they reached Number Twenty-four. He quiet or the man might hear you and get away. He's up in the master's room, because there's a light there. I know the master was in bed more than an hour ago. I wonder whether the thief woke him."

"Hush!" said the policeman. "We'll give him a surprise. He probably thinks you are still in the kitchen. We'll show him something."

Crowell took a key from his pocket and opened the front door.

Silently the two men made their way upstairs.

"This is the master's room," whispered the valet.

From inside they could hear the sound of voices.

"Come on," said the policeman. "He may be making himself a nuisance to your master."

With a rush the policeman opened the door and entered Roger's bedroom.

"Here we are, sir," he announced cheerfully. "Where's the thief?"

Inside the room stood two men.

One was Roger Thornton clad only in his pyjamas, holding a revolver in his hand, and the other was William Kirk, with a look of concentrated rage and hate disfiguring his handsome face.

They were standing by the dressing-table, which was strewn with jewellery.

"Here he is constable," said Roger. "He hasn't been much trouble. It didn't take me long to convince him that it was no use making a fuss," Roger concluded significantly.

"This is absolute rot!" broke in Kirk. "Mr Thornton asked me to call upon him, and when I arrive I find all this jewellery strewn about, and then he pretends that I have come to steal it."

"A jolly good tale that," jeered the policeman. "I suppose you'll say next you didn't lock this young fellow in the kitchen. I suppose he opened the door to you and showed you into this room, because the gentleman keeps all his own and probably his wife's jewellery, too, in here. A good yarn that. You shall tell it to the magistrate. Come along!"

And, as he spoke, the policeman advanced with the handcuffs in his outstretched hand.

"I'll break you for this!" muttered Kirk to Thornton.

But it was Thornton's turn to smile now.

"Don't forget young Wilber," he said in a voice which only reached Kirk's ears. "If you say anything about that little affair of years ago, I'll publish the truth of that and you'll get a longer sentence than you will for attempted theft, and the mercy I am extending to you is more than you deserve."

Kirk's face dropped at the mention of Wilber's name.

He had no idea that Thornton knew the truth of the scandalous trick he had played upon an unsuspecting youth of some nineteen summers.

"Come along! Come along!" broke in the constable. "This gentleman will want some sleep before he answers the questions I shall have to ask him in the morning."

"Good-night, constable," said Thornton, as he slipped something into the policeman's willing palm. "Sorry to trouble you at this time of night. Hope your prisoner won't give you much trouble. He's rather a powerful looking man, I should keep a tight hold of him."

With a knowing grin and a wink, the policeman disappeared with his victim; and Crowell accompanied them to the door.

Thornton waited for his man to return, which he did in a few moments.

Then, for a few seconds, Roger and his valuable servant looked at each other in silence until they broke it with a roar of laughter.

Peal after peal broke the quiet of the night.

"That's the best joke I've had for a long time," said Roger, holding his sides. "Thank goodness my wife was out of town. It would have been rather difficult to persuade her to lend herself to it otherwise."

"Oh, sir!" laughed the valet, "the black-guard's gone for ever now. What a jolly good idea it was. And it went off without a hitch. The old policeman didn't ask many questions there. It all looked too real and genuine."

"And the sentence he'll get will be too good for him," said Roger, preparing to go to bed for the first time that night.

"Good-night, sir," said his servant.

"Good-night, Crowell," returned Roger, "and I shall not forget the help you were to me to-night."

### III.

The following day Roger made his way to the flat where young Wilber lived.

A manservant showed him without hesitation into the boy's little library.

"What can I do for you, Mr Thornton?" he asked.

Roger Thornton's face softened as he noted the look of worry and the lines which were beginning to show on this young man's face.

"You are in trouble, I believe?" said the older man kindly.

The boy looked up sharply.

"Yes," he replied, after a keen glance.

"But how did you know?"

"That doesn't matter," replied Roger, "but I know that you have just placed a good deal of money in the hands of William Kirk, and he has lost it all for you. Am I not right?"

"Yes," replied the boy, and then began to talk rapidly, obviously glad of somebody to talk to about his trouble.

"And I borrowed the money from money-lenders, and I know my father will never forgive me. I am at my wits' ends. I can never repay it all. Why have you come to see me. Are you one of the moneylenders' agents?"

"No, I am not!" replied Roger. "I am here to hand you this, and, before you attempt to thank me, I want to tell you a little story."

As he spoke he held out a slip of paper, which young Wilber took mechanically.

It was a cheque for a large sum of money.

Then Roger Thornton told the younger man the tale of how he, too, had got into Kirk's clutches many years before, and how he had been heavily blackmailed.

"I was a fool to ever pay him anything," said Thornton, "because I knew all the time he was a rogue, but I didn't see my way to prove it, but the police have him now."

"Yesterday he sent me a blackmailing note for two thousand pounds which at first I thought I should have to pay, and then suddenly an idea came into my head."

"I took my servant into my confidence, and together we arranged a plan to put an end to Kirk's persecutions for ever."

"My servant was to telephone to Kirk to say that I would see him at twelve o'clock last night, at my house, and, of course, Kirk took that to mean that I would hand over the money then, and, of course, promised to come."

"When he arrived at the house, Crowell, my servant, was to admit him and show him into my bedroom, where I should be waiting for him in my pyjamas."

"Well, the idea was that before he came I should scatter my own and my wife's jewellery over the dressing-table, and then get the police in and tell them that I had awakened to find Kirk in the act of robbing me. The fact that I was dressed in my pyjamas made the thing look more real, and downstairs my servant would put the finishing touches to everything."

"He was to first open wide his kitchen window and then lock the kitchen door on the outside and pretend that the burglar had got in and locked him there, but that, fortunately, he had been able to get out of the window and give the alarm to the police."

"What really happened was that Crowell merely opened the kitchen window and walked out of the kitchen door locking it behind him, and then out into the street by the front door."

"However, it was all sufficient. Kirk walked into the trap, and the police have him now. I think the deception practised upon the police is excusable, because I could publish facts which would give them cause to charge him for something far worse than attempted burglary."

"But why should you give me this money, sir?" broke in young Wilber. "I have no claim on you, sir! It is too much to expect!"

"It is a little salve to my conscience for the mistake I made many years ago, my boy," replied Roger, "and, but for the fact that I have acted a lie to the police, I should probably have had to pay more than this to that scoundrel William Kirk. In addition to that, I should not like a son of mine to get into his clutches, and I am only too pleased to be able to help you."

Before you attempt to invest money again, come and see me."

And with these words Roger Thornton disappeared to return to his now-happily-settled home.

The End.

## TAILORED SUITS

TO

ORDER

AT

MODERATE

CHARGES.

SUPERIOR—

MATERIALS

STYLE

MAKE

FIT

FINISH.

NOTE:—Our SUITS-TO-ORDER built in our own Workrooms and are factory productions.

## Price & Bulletin

LIMITED.

TAY STREET, INVERCARGILL AND BLUFF.

## FOUNTAIN PENS.

THE kind that are always at your service; that never balk, splutter, or cultivate bad language. The tried and proved stalwarts of the pen world. You get them here

The Dedonne, Self-filler, 10/-

The Capitol, Lever Self-filler, 12/6

The Conklin, Crescent Self-filler, 20/-

The Cameron, Waverley, secure, 20/-

filler, 22/6; gold-mounted, 30/- and 35/-

The Onoto, Self Filler, 20/-

The Waterman, Lever Self Filler, 25/-

The self-filling principle saves both ink and ink fingers and the quality of above pens is beyond dispute. Post to anywhere.

## HYNDMAN'S,

INVERCARGILL,

AGENTS.

—MUTTON BIRDS!—

—MUTTON BIRDS!—

LARGE SUPPLIES NEW SEASON'S BIRDS TO HAND.

COOKED AND UNCOOKED

Wholesale and Retail at—

LINDSAY & CO.,

TAY AND ESK STREET

SHOPS.

## NEW HATS

NOW SHOWING. Black, Brown, Mouse shades in

GENTS' VELOUR HATS.

Superior FUR HATS in assorted liable shades.

TWEED HATS.

TWEED and CRAVENETTE CAPS

LATEST COLLARS, WIDE-END TIE BOWS, and ENGLISH MADE

BRACES.

## SPECIAL LINE

OF WIDE-END TIES all being cleared now at 2/6 each. Worth more than double.

McNeil & Clark

CLOTHIERS AND MERCERS

94 Dee St