

***FRANK
L. PACKARD***

POLÍCIA JUDICIAL

***FROM NOW
ON***

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BOOK I: THE CHASE

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I—ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS

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A WILD and prolonged roar came from every quarter of the race track. It swelled in volume. It came again and again. Pandemonium itself seemed loosed.

Outside the enclosure, a squat, fat man, the perspiration rolling in streams down his face, tugged at his collar with frantic, nervous jerks, as he leaned in over the side of a high-powered car, and with his other hand gripped at the arm of the young man in the driver's seat.

“Dave, listen to 'em! My God, listen to 'em!” snarled the fat man.

Dave Henderson, with the toe of his boot, moved the little black satchel that the other had dropped on the floor of the car farther to one side; and, by way of excuse for

disengaging his arm, reached into his pocket for his cigarettes.

"I can hear 'em—even a yard away out here!" he said imperturbably. "Sounds like a great day for the bookies—not!"

The fat man secured his grip on Dave Henderson's arm again.

"I'm wiped out—every last cent—all I've made in years," he said hoarsely. "You get that, don't you? You know it! I'm cleaned out—and you don't seem to give a damn!"

"Why should I?" inquired Dave Henderson calmly. "I guess it's *their* turn, ain't it?"

Bookie Skarvan's red-rimmed little gray eyes narrowed, and he swallowed hard.

"I've played square, I have!" he whined. "And I'm wiped out!"

"Yes—square as hell!" amended Dave Henderson.

"You don't give a damn!" shrilled Bookie Skarvan. "That's like you! That's like the lot of you! Where would you have been if I hadn't taken you up—eh?"

"God knows!" said Dave Henderson dispassionately. "I'm not blaming you for trying to make a crook of me."

An apoplectic red heightened Bookie Skarvan's flushed and streaming face.

"Well, that's one thing I didn't make a bull of, at any rate!" he retorted viciously.

Dave Henderson shifted his cigarette from one corner of his mouth to the other with the tip of his tongue. There was a curious smile, half bitter, half whimsical, on his lips, as he leaned suddenly toward the other.

"I guess you're right, Bookie!" He shrugged his shoulders. "But I've only just found it out myself, so if you think there's any congrats coming to you and you're sore because you didn't get 'em before, you know why now."

The scowl on Bookie Skarvan's face deepened, then cleared abruptly, and the man forced a nervous, wheezy chuckle.

"You won't feel so blamed cool about it to-morrow morning when you come to size this up!" He was whining again, but plaintively now. "I'm wiped out, I tell you, and it's too hard a crack for Tydeman to give me any more backing after he's squared this up—so what are you going to do, eh?"

Dave Henderson glanced at the car's clock. It was already after three.

"I'm going up to 'Frisco—if I ever get started!" he said brusquely. "I've missed the train, as it is, and that means a ninety-mile run—and we're still wasting time! Get down to cases! You got Tydeman on the long distance—what did he say?"

"I couldn't help your missing the train!" Bookie Skarvan's voice had grown almost ingratiating. "There wasn't any use of you going until I knew Tydeman was at home, and unless I got hold of him before the banks closed, was there? And if I'd been able to get him at once we might have had time to arrange it by wire with a bank here—if they were carrying that much in ready cash—and you wouldn't have needed to go at all. But I didn't get him until just a few minutes ago. You know that! I couldn't help it, could I—and the run won't hurt you. You can grab the evening train back. I can stave

this gang of wolves off until then by telling 'em Tydeman's making good."

"All right!" Dave Henderson was apparently much more intent upon the starting mechanism of the car, than he was upon either his companion or his companion's words. The engine was already purring softly when he looked up at Bookie Skarvan again. "Well, what's the arrangement?"

"Tydeman will have the money in cash at his house—one hundred thousand dollars. You go there and get it, and bring it back on the train to-night."

"Anything else?"

"No; that's all." Bookie Skarvan mopped at his face with the back of his sleeve, glanced in the direction of another sudden outburst of delirious cheering, and mopped at his face again. "That'll be another long shot—everybody's playing 'em—damn 'em! For God's sake, don't miss that train back, Dave! It leaves at nine o'clock. Some of these pikers that never turned a red in their lives before 'll be laying me out if I don't flash the long green then. You get me, Dave? I'll have all I can do to stave 'em off that long. I wish I could go with you and get out of here, but they'd think I was running away, and——"

"I get you!" said Dave Henderson. "They all love Bookie Skarvan! Well, it's your car, and you've got a right there, but get off the step unless you're coming!" He threw in the clutch, and the car shot forward. "So-long, Bookie!" he flung out over his shoulder.

An hour passed. Out in the free sweep of country, the car was running at terrific speed. And now, from the road ahead, Dave Henderson's dark eyes, cool and self-reliant,

strayed to the little black handbag at his feet as they had done many times before, while the tight lips parted slightly in a smile; and suddenly, over the rush of the wind and the roar of the speeding car, he spoke aloud.

“One hundred thousand dollars—*in cash*,” said Dave Henderson meditatively. “Well, it looks like the chance I've been waiting for—what? Only I can't go and let old Tydeman hand it over to me and trust me with it, and then beat it and give him the doublecross, can I? Once he shoves it at me, and says, 'Dave, my boy, take this back to Skarvan,' I'm stung, and there's nothing doing! That's right, ain't it? Well then, what's the answer?”

The broad, muscular shoulders set a little more rigidly over the steering wheel, and the square jaws clamped in a sort of dogged defiance in the face of his self-propounded problem. His mind, as though seeking therefrom the solution he demanded, was reviewing the facts and circumstances that had placed that little black hand-bag, with its suggestive possibilities, at his feet. It had been a bad day for the bookmakers, and a particularly bad day for Bookie Skarvan—for it was the culmination of several extremely bad days for Bookie Skarvan. Shots at odds that were staggering had won again and again. There was absolutely no question but that the man was wiped out—a good many times over. True, Tydeman was coming to the rescue, but that did not put Bookie Skarvan on his feet again; it only paid the bills, and saved Bookie Skarvan from being used as a street cleaning device in the shape of a human mop! The curious thing about it was that Tydeman was in any way connected with Bookie Skarvan! Everybody knew that

Skarvan was crooked from his boot soles up—except Martin K. Tydeman. But that was Tydeman's way! Tydeman must have been told often enough, but Tydeman wouldn't believe it. That was Tydeman's way! Once, years ago, Skarvan had tipped Tydeman off that one of his string was being “doctored.” It did not matter that Skarvan had juggled his information, and had tried first to play both ends to the middle by blackmailing and then doublecrossing the man who had done the “doctoring”—Tydeman did not know that—and Tydeman from that moment was unshaken in his belief that there was no squarer man on the circuit than Bookie Skarvan. It had resulted in Tydeman becoming a silent partner of Bookie Skarvan—and the betting fraternity had been not a little pleased, for Tydeman's millions went up on the board better than even against Bookie Skarvan's trickiness.

Dave Henderson nodded his head. It was quite true. Martin K. Tydeman was getting to be quite an old man now, but Martin K. Tydeman was still hailed as the squarest, garnest sporting gentleman California had ever known—and it would be a little rough on that king of sports. It was too bad that it wasn't Bookie Skarvan! Skarvan was crooked from the ground up—and who knew it any better than he, Dave Henderson, who had worked for Skarvan for several years now? But, as it was, Tydeman would simply have to cough up a second hundred thousand out of his millions, that was all. No, it wasn't all! It depended entirely upon whether he, Dave Henderson, could get his hands on the money without accepting it as a trust from the old millionaire.

“You're a poor fool!” Dave Henderson informed himself, with a sharp laugh. “What's the difference? You pinch it either way, don't you?”

He shook his head, as the car tore forward.

“Mabbe,” he muttered, “mabbe I am, and mabbe there ain't any difference—but there's nothing doing that way. I got a little reputation myself—left. No guy ever put a bean in my mitt that he didn't get a square deal on, and that's on the level—in spite of Skarvan! Damn Skarvan! He wouldn't have had a look-in on a two-bit bet for more seasons than one if I hadn't been running the cases for him—nobody'd have trusted him!”

Again Dave Henderson relapsed into silence. He drove in a purely mechanical way. His mind was rankling now in a sort of bitter speculation over the years that reached back as far as he could remember. They were not an altogether pleasing memory; and that was why he wanted, and not only wanted, but had made up his mind to have—one hundred thousand dollars. He did not remember either his father or his mother. They hadn't had any money, but he had an impression that they had been rather decent people—only they had died. He had been a kid when it happened—he didn't know how old—just a kid. Some one had put him in a school, an orphan school. It had been a hell of a place. And at ten he had run away. After that, beginning by making himself useful around one of the training stables, he had lived on the race courses ever since—and had risen to the heights of becoming Bookie Skarvan's clerk!

His jaws clamped hard. It was a piker life, but here was a chance to get out of it! He had been looking for the chance

—and here it was—if he could get away with it. There had been lots of chances before, chances for a few thousand dollars—but the bet hadn't been good enough. He had even a little better than three thousand dollars himself, for that matter, and it was pulling interest, too; he had loaned it to Square John Kelly, who ran the Pacific Coral Saloon down on the Barbary Coast in 'Frisco. And he had a couple of hundred dollars in his pocket now, too, for that matter. But it was all chicken feed. He had won it, and he might win as much more again some time—or he might lose it. The game wasn't any good. It didn't get anywhere. Maybe it was the interest coming in on that three thousand that showed up where the odds stood on a hundred thousand. There wasn't anything else involved. Was it a good gamble? The interest on a hundred thousand would make a blooming gentleman of independent means out of him at one crack. Sure, it was worth the risk! If he got caught, well then—*good-night!* If he got away with it, well then—*zowie!*

Yes—but how? That was the question.

If he wouldn't go to Tydeman and let Tydeman trustfully hand the money over to him, how was he to get the cash into his possession? He was quite willing to accept the risk of pursuit and capture, given a few hours' start, he was quite willing to pit his wits against the machinery of the law, that was the gambling chance he ran; and it would be very simple to let Tydeman, in Tydeman's own library, say, assist in packing the little black hand-bag full of money, and then, instead of taking the train back to Stockton—to disappear. The strong jaws clamped harder. But—. nothing doing! Not that way! He'd go the limit, and he meant to have that

hundred thousand, and he would have it, and, once decided upon getting it, he would drop in his tracks before he would give up the attempt, and he would drop in his tracks, if the attempt were successful, before he relinquished his grip on the money—but that way was *raw*. Rotten raw! To get away with a hundred thousand dollars was a sporting proposition, a gambling and a fighting chance, but to double-cross a man who placed that money in one's keeping in good faith was in Bookie Skarvan's line—not his!

Well then—how?

The miles and the minutes and the half-hours passed. Tight-lipped, the clean-shaven face set and hard, the dark eyes introspective as they held on the road ahead, Dave Henderson sat there, almost motionless, bent over the wheel. Once he stopped to replenish his supply of gasoline, and then the car roared on again, rocking in its speed. He drove perilously fast, in a sort of subconscious physical synchronism with his racing brain. One hundred thousand dollars—that was the stake. In another hour or so that hundred thousand dollars would be his—some way! There was no question about that! But how? There was something ironical in the fact that Tydeman was waiting to throw it at him, and that while he racked his mind for a method of getting the money into his possession, he must also rack his mind for a method that would prevent it being forced upon him! He laughed out sharply.

“Now wouldn't that sting you!” mumbled Dave Henderson. “Say, wouldn't that sting you!”

And then, abruptly, Dave Henderson stopped the car at the side of the road. He had it now—almost. It had come,

the germ of it, in a flash. And now he wanted to think it out without the distraction of handling the machine. There came a smile, and the smile broadened—and he laughed again. There was a picture before his mind's-eye now that afforded him a grim sense of humor. He could see the great bare dormitory in the orphan school, a room whose walls were decorated with huge scrolled mottoes—and there was the one on the end wall with its great red painted letters, and the same old crack in the plaster that zigzagged its way through the words. Sure, he could see it! “Virtue Is Its Own Reward.” He had never taken much stock in mottoes, but it looked now as though that one wasn't all to the bad! By refusing to allow himself to double-cross old Tydeman, he had now found a very much better way. He wouldn't have to take the risk of pursuit now if he had any luck, for the very simple reason that there wouldn't be any pursuit; and instead of it being a self-evident fact that he had got away with the money, he would not now appear in the affair at all.

He began to elaborate the germ very carefully in his mind. He knew old Tydeman's house well, almost every inch of it, for he had been there on errands for Skarvan many times. Tydeman had secured the money from the bank just before closing time, and had taken it to his home. Tydeman's habit was to dine about half-past six. These three facts woven together offered a most satisfactory solution to the problem. One hundred thousand dollars in bills of the denominations that Tydeman would be likely to call for in order to make it convenient for Bookie Skarvan's use, would be too bulky for Tydeman to carry around in his pocket. Therefore the money wouldn't be on Tydeman's person

when the old millionaire sat down to his high-falutin' dinner with his butler at his elbow at half-past six. The money would be in the library most likely—and the library was accessible—thanks to the hedge that flanked the driveway to the house.

Dave Henderson selected another cigarette from his package, and lighted it thoughtfully. So far, so good! And the rest wasn't so dusty either! He had the whole thing now. As soon as he reached 'Frisco he would drive down to that shabby little street where he kept the shabby room in which he lived during the off seasons on the turf, and leave the car standing in front of the house. From his room he could easily gain the shed at the rear of the place, and from the shed he could gain the lane—and all this without the slightest chance of being observed. He should be able to go to Tydeman's house and return in, say, an hour, or an hour and a half at the outside. If any one noticed the car in front it would seem only natural that he had gone to his room to wash up and perhaps change his clothes after a ninety-mile run, especially in view of the fact that the train he was supposed to take back to Stockton did not leave until nine o'clock.

He leaned back in his seat, and blew a smoke ring into the air complacently.

“Sure!” observed Dave Henderson. “I guess I've got the odds switched—to a little better than even money. I'll be back with that hundred thousand and no one the wiser, but I've got to hide it somewhere—what? And I can't make the fool play of hiding it in my room.”

Another smoke ring followed the first. Almost any place would do—so that it was easy to get at, and at the same time would not attract attention to him when he went back to it. Well—the shed, then? He nodded his head suddenly. Yes, of course—Mrs. Tooler's old pigeon-cote in the shed! It was the one place in a million! The money would be perfectly safe there, and he could get it again any time at a minute's notice. Again he nodded his head. The whole thing was as good as done now. After the money was hidden, he had only to get into the car, drive to Tydeman's house, mount the steps with the little black satchel in his hand—and request of Mr. Martin K. Tydeman, Esquire, the money that Bookie Skarvan had sent him for, and which he had motored a matter of some ninety miles to obtain!

Dave Henderson's lips parted in a sudden smile, though the outthrust, dogged jaw was in no degree relaxed. There would be one whale of a hullabaloo! But the last man who could by the wildest stretch of imagination have had anything to do with the robbery was—Dave Henderson!

After that, maybe he *would* accept a second hundred thousand from Tydeman—and take it back to Bookie Skarvan, too! That was all he had to do—play the game. In six months it would be soon enough to dig up and beat it out of the West for keeps. There wasn't any hurry. Being already a man of affairs, it would take him some time to get those affairs settled up! There was old Square John Kelly and that three thousand dollars, for instance. Kelly couldn't produce the cash at an instant's notice, it was invested in Kelly's business; but if he tipped old Kelly off that he was

thinking of chucking up the West, Kelly would have it for him at the end of a few months. There wasn't any hurry.

Dave Henderson glanced at the car's clock—and flipped the butt of his cigarette away. It was ten minutes of five. He started the car forward again—but now he drove leisurely. The plan he had decided upon no longer demanded an excess of speed. He was getting in pretty close to 'Frisco, and he did not now want to reach the city until at least a few minutes after six.

There was something superbly insouciant about the man, as, far back in his seat, his hands rested in a sort of masterful negligence upon the steering wheel. Of ethics Dave Henderson knew little, and cared much less—ethics had been missing from the curriculum of the school in which he had been brought up. He wanted a hundred thousand dollars, because with a hundred thousand dollars he was fixed for life; and, having weighed the betting odds that stood between him and his goal, and having decided to accept those odds, it became simply a question of winning, or of being wiped out. If he got wiped out, he would neither whimper nor whine—he would simply swallow his medicine. He was taking a sporting chance—he was staking his liberty, quite possibly his life, against Martin K. Tydeman's hundred thousand dollars. And Tydeman could afford to lose. He wasn't for putting Tydeman, or any one else, on the rocks; that wasn't the sort of game he had any use for—but a hundred thousand to Tydeman was street-car fare. He admitted that he would have preferred it should have been some one other than Tydeman, in the sense that he possessed an unbounded admiration for Tydeman—for

Tydeman, even though he was too old to take much of an active part in anything, was still the gamest sport on record. But it *was* Tydeman, it happened that it *was* Tydeman; and so, well—— Dave Henderson shrugged his shoulders.

“Step up, gentlemen, and place your bets!” murmured Dave Henderson softly. “And take a tip from me—bunch your wads on the dark horse!”

II—THE THEFT

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IT was in front of a shabby frame house in a shabby street that Dave Henderson stopped the car. It was five minutes after six. He lifted up the seat, and, leaning down, surreptitiously conveyed to his pocket a cold-chisel from the car's complement of tools. Lacking any of the accessories of a professional burglar, the chisel would make a most excellent substitute for a steel jimmy. He replaced the seat, picked up the little black hand-bag, alighted, entered the house, and from the musty hallway, after unlocking the door, stepped through into a room on the right. He closed the door behind him, and stood surveying his surroundings in a sort of half grim, half quizzical contempt.

It was possible that old Tooler upstairs, on hearing the car, and hearing him, Dave Henderson, enter the house, might come down; on the other hand, it was quite equally possible that old Tooler would not. It was, however, wise to wait a few minutes and see. That was part of the plan. He, Dave Henderson, was supposed to be here in his room while some one else made that little raid on Martin K. Tydeman's library! If, therefore, Tooler should come down, and find no one—— A shrug of his shoulders completed the obvious deduction.

His eyes traveled around the room. This was his home—that is, if he could claim a home anywhere, this was his home. It was dingy, comfortless and uninviting. There was only the one window that faced the street, and the window was inadequate, and the light seemed to be imbued with a niggardly hesitation about coming in at all—which was perhaps just as well. The furnishings weren't out of any prize collection!

He dug his hands impulsively into his side-pockets—and, one hand encountering the chisel, he smiled with a kind of cool, composed satisfaction. Between this barren and God-forsaken hole and this bit of steel there had been a connection that was both intimate and pertinent. For nine years, ever since he had run away from school, the kind of existence this place stood for had got his goat—that was the reason why he had put the chisel in his pocket.

The room had served its purpose better than any other place of like circumstances and surroundings would have served him—he had, indeed, chosen this particular room very carefully—but the place had always got his goat. He

had had to have a room somewhere—he had taken it here. There were many reasons why he had selected this one. It was cheap; and it was among the only class of people with whom he had ever had a chance to associate—the hangers-on of the race-tracks, the dance-hall crowd of the Barbary Coast, the night world of 'Frisco. He knew every one here—he knew the crooks and the lags of the underworld. These latter had time and again even tried to inveigle him into active membership in their fraternity. They wanted him. They had even paid him the compliment of telling him he would make the slickest crook in the United States. He had refused. The game didn't look good enough. It was all piker stuff. It wasn't morality that had held him back... his morality was the morality of his environment... nine years of it... what was morality anyhow?... as far as he could make out it was simply a question of whatever you do don't get caught. And he had seen some of the upper crust playing at morality, too! Sure, he knew what morality was—he had seen a lot of it in his nineteen years!

“Well, what do you know about that!” said Dave Henderson aloud, in a sort of surprised voice. “Sounds like I'm arguing with myself whether I ought to do this or not. Say, wouldn't that sting you! There's nothing to it! It's what you get for waiting—a lone hand that cops the sweepstakes, and sets you up for keeps like a nabob!”

He went to the door, opened it slightly, and listened. Upstairs he could hear Tooler moving about. That was another reason why he had, having once taken the room, remained on as the sole lodger in this house. Tooler minded his own business—and Mrs. Tooler couldn't help minding

hers. Mrs. Tooler was a paralytic. They were a couple well beyond middle age, and, having been thrifty in their early days, had purchased this house here some fifteen years ago. The neighborhood, even if still a cheap neighborhood at that time, had been a little more refined in those days. It had changed for the worse since then, but having invested their savings the subsequent changes had to be borne, that was all. It hadn't apparently affected Tooler very much. The man was naturally sour anyhow, and Mrs. Tooler's illness hadn't changed him into what might be called, by any stretch of the imagination, genial! He was a mechanic of some sort; but his work had been spasmodic—Mrs. Tooler could not always be left alone.

Dave Henderson frowned. Tooler evidently wasn't coming down; but Tooler, for all that, must, if the necessity arose, be the means of establishing an alibi, and that required something of at least a definite recognition by Tooler of his, Dave Henderson's, presence. He stepped abruptly out into the hall.

“Heh, Tooler!” he called. “Tooler!”

A door opened somewhere above.

“Hello!” snapped a gruff voice.

“It's me,” announced Dave Henderson.

“I heard you!” grunted Tooler.

“I just came in for a wash-up,” explained Dave Henderson. “Came up in Skarvan's car. I'm going back to-night by train.”

“All right!” Tooler grunted again.

“How's the wife?”

The only answer was the closing of a door upstairs. Dave Henderson smiled pleasantly, and re-entered his own room. When it came to sociability Tooter was a star! Well, so much the better! He had no complaint to register on that score—especially to-night! He crossed to where his trunk stood against the wall at the lower end of the room, opened the trunk, lifted out the tray, and from somewhere in the lower recesses possessed himself of an automatic pistol and a generous supply of reserve ammunition. With this in his pocket, he closed the trunk again, and, sitting down on the edge of the bed, unlaced and removed his shoes.

And now Dave Henderson, silent as a cat in his movements, his shoes tucked under one arm, the black hand-bag under the other, made his way out into the hall. The car standing in front of the house was mute evidence that he was still in his room. Later on, when he returned, in the course of an hour, say, he would call up to Tooter again to say that he was going. It was a perfectly good alibi!

He crept on along the hall, reached the back door, opened it cautiously without a sound, and stepped through into the shed that connected with the house. Here, he spent several minutes in a careful examination of the old pigeon-cote. He had never been very much interested in Mrs. Tooter's abandoned pigeon-cote before—he was very much interested in it now! There was a small side window in the shed, and it gave just light enough to enable him to see. It was many years since Mrs. Tooter had kept any pigeons, or anything else, save the bare threads of her life together; but the old pigeon-cote was still here at the end of the shed, just above the door that opened on the lane. It wasn't

anything very elaborate, just a sort of ceiling platform, boarded in, and with a little door in it. Standing on the ground he could just reach up to the door, and he opened it tentatively. Yes, it would serve excellently. It was instantly accessible at any time, either from the house or from the lane, and certainly Mrs. Tooler's long-forgotten shelter for her bygone pets was not a thing to excite suspicion—especially in view of the fact that there never would be any suspicion excited on any score as far as he was concerned!

He put on his shoes again, and, opening the shed door at the rear, stepped out into the lane—and a moment later was walking quickly along a side street away from the house.

Martin K. Tydeman's house was on the Hill. Dave Henderson smiled a little grimly at the airy lightness of the empty black bag in his hand. It would be neither as light nor as empty on the way back—if he had any luck! He pulled the slouch hat he was wearing a little farther down over his eyes. A man carrying a bag wasn't anything out of the ordinary, or anything to attract particular attention—he was much more concerned in avoiding the chance of personal recognition. And, anyway, the bag was a necessity. If the money, for instance, was in customary banded sheaves of banknotes, and loose, how else could he carry it? Not in his pockets—and he couldn't very well make a parcel of them in Tydeman's library! Of course, the bank might have made up a sealed package of the whole, but even then a sealed package would have to be kept out of sight.

The slouch hat was drawn down still a little lower, and by the less frequented streets Dave Henderson made his way along. At the expiration of some twenty minutes he had

emerged, a block away, on the street upon which the millionaire's home fronted. The hurried pace was gone now, and he dropped into a leisurely and nonchalant saunter. It was a very select neighborhood. There was little or no traffic, and the majority of the houses possessed, to a greater or less extent, their own grounds. Tydeman's house, for example, was approached by a short driveway that was flanked on both sides by a high and thick hedge. Dave Henderson nodded his head complacently. He had pictured that driveway a dozen times on the run up from Stockton, and particularly he had pictured that hedge! It was a most convenient hedge! And it was exceedingly thoughtful of Martin K. Tydeman, Esquire, to have provided it! If one crouched low enough there was nothing, unless some one were especially on the watch, to prevent one reaching the library windows at the side-rear of the house, and of accomplishing this without the slightest chance of being seen.

He was close to the driveway entrance now, and his eyes swept narrowly up and down the street. For the moment there appeared to be no one in sight—and, with a quick side-step, he slipped suddenly in from the street under the shelter of the hedge.

He moved swiftly now, running, half bent over. It was a matter of but a few seconds—and now, darting across the driveway where it branched off to circle around to the front entrance, he gained the side wall of the house, and crouched, listening intently, beneath the window of the library.

A minute passed, another—there was no sound. He raised himself guardedly then to an upright position, pressing close against the wall, but keeping well back at one side of the window. The window sill was shoulder high, and now, edging forward inch by inch, he obtained a diagonal glance through the pane. The room, as far as he could see, for the portières within were but partially drawn, was unoccupied. It was what he had counted upon. Tydeman, if the millionaire were following his usual custom, was at dinner, and the dining room was on the other side of the house. No one of the household, either family or servants, would ordinarily have any occasion to be in the library at this hour. Ordinarily! A glint came into the dark eyes, and the eyes narrowed as in a dogged, uncompromising challenge—and then the shoulders lifted in a debonair shrug. Well, that was the chance he took! He was gambling anyhow!

His fingers crept to the window-sash, and tested it quietly. It would not move. Whether it was locked above or not, he did not know—the slight pressure that he was able to exert from the outside was at least not sufficient to lift it—but the improvised steel jimmy would quickly remedy that defect. He worked hurriedly now. The Western summer evenings were long and it was still light, and every minute he stood there was courting discovery. The edge of the chisel slipped in between the sill and the window-sash, and with the leverage the window was raised an inch or two. His question was answered.

It had not been locked at the top.

And now his fingers came into play again—under the window-sash. There was not a sound. The window went up easily and silently; and with a lithe, agile spring Dave Henderson swung himself up over the sill, dropped with a soft *pad* to the floor, and stood motionless, shrouded in one of the portières.

The room was empty. The door leading from the library, he could see as he peered out, was closed. From the other side of the door, muffled, there came a laugh, the murmur of voices, indeterminate little sounds. The set, straight lips relaxed a little. The way was quite clear. The chances in his favor were mounting steadily. The family was undoubtedly at dinner.

He made no sound as he stepped quickly now across the room. The rich, heavy pile of the velvet rug beneath his feet deadened his footfalls. And now he reached the massive flat-topped desk that stood almost in the center of the room. It was the most likely place, the natural place, for Tydeman to leave the money. If it was not here—again there came that debonair shrug—well then, he would look further—upstairs in Tydeman's bedroom, if necessary—or anywhere else, if necessary. One thing only was certain, and that was that, having started on the job, he would get the money, or they would get him—if he couldn't fight his way out. It was quite natural! Of course, he would do that! What else would he do? He had always done that! He had been brought up to it, hadn't he? Win or lose—he had always played win or lose. Cold feet and bet hedging was piker stuff—and that was in Bookie Skarvan's line, too, not his!

Keen, alert, his ears were sentinels against the slightest external sound. He was gnawing now in a sort of grim impatience at his lower lip, as he pulled open, drawer after drawer. Strange how his mind worked! The slickest crook in the U. S. A., they had said he would make. Well, perhaps he would, but, even so, it neither allured nor interested him. This was his first job—and his last. There was enough in this to see him through for the rest of his life. It wouldn't have been worth the risk otherwise, and he wouldn't have tackled it. Once East, and he could pretend to amass money little by little until no one would be surprised that he was worth a hundred thousand dollars. That was the trouble with the bunch he knew! Some of them had brains, but they worked their brains overtime—on small stuff—and they had to come again—to keep the living expenses going—and sooner or later they came once too often—and then it was the jug for theirs!

He bent down suddenly to a lower drawer that was locked—the only one that he had found locked—and pried it open with the cold chisel.

“Sure!” said Dave Henderson imperturbably under his breath. “I guess this looks like it—what? And all done up in a nice little package, too! Even more thoughtful of 'em than I had hoped!”

He took out a parcel from the drawer. It was securely tied with stout cord, and heavily sealed with great blobs of red wax that bore a bank's impression. There could indeed be but little doubt concerning the contents; but Dave Henderson, nevertheless, made a slight opening in one end of the wrapping paper—and disclosed to view crisp piles of

brand-new yellowbacks. He nodded pleasantly to himself, as he consigned the package to the little black hand-bag.

It was what he had come for—and got—one hundred thousand dollars.

He closed the drawer, and knelt for an instant to examine it. Closed, it did not show enough of the chisel's work to attract attention; open, it at once became very apparent that the drawer had been forced. He smiled in satisfaction. That was exactly what he wanted! When, a little later, he drove up in Skarvan's car to the front door and requested the money, it was only then that it was likely to be missed for the first time; and certainly under such circumstances the last man on earth against whom any suspicion could arise would be himself. He had told himself that before. Well, why not repeat it? It was true, wasn't it?

He retreated to the window, lowered himself to the ground, and regained the street. The thing was done. He was in possession of one hundred thousand dollars. There had not been the slightest difficulty or obstacle. He hummed an air under his breath, as he went along. It had been very simple—more so even than he had expected. It had been almost tame!

