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HONEY AND ALMOND

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what happened then? Well, Shaver turned me up and saved himself from the rope." He threw up his hands in a gesture of impotence. "Yep, that's the way it comes back on you. They gave me fifteen. I tried to make a deal with 'em by turning up my plates, but they figured fifteen would wind me up; and they knew I was the only one who knew where the plates are buried. And they ain't afraid of those plates as long as they're in the ground, and I'm in here. There you are, kid; that's how it nicked me. Now will you believe me when I say I know you can't make it pay?"

Chub played the part of remorseful youth to perfection.

"You're right," he said. "I've been a fool. Well, it is n't too late for me to go right when I get outside."

He let there be no doubt concerning his reformation, always giving Clarkson credit for opening his eyes. The warden noted it and told a reporter. The reporter wrote a Christmas feature story about it. It was a touching little thing, the tale of the old broken convict who had saved a young man after his first false step. The warden mailed a copy with a hearty, encouraging letter to Chub's father in New York City. And Chub continued to work Clarkson, and day by day absorbed bits of the two great secrets which he needed in his business.

Clarkson never told Chub the secrets — his secret process for counterfeiting and the location of the buried plates — in so many words. There were times when he seemed on the point of so doing, but on such occasions Chub swiftly changed the subject or moved himself out of hearing. It was no part of the brilliant young man's plans to permit the old counterfeiter to realize that Chub Walker could possibly be in possession of the precious secrets. Little by little, in dribbles of information painfully small, the desired knowledge came. It was a process of education that required infinite patience and plenty of time. Chub had both. Bit by bit Clarkson unconsciously revealed his counterfeiting secret and the process of its application. Bit by bit Chub pieced the information together, building up in tiny mosaics a complete knowledge of how Dell Mungry had produced the bills that had made him famous. And bit by bit, as Clarkson rambled over and over again the story of his last forced use of his plates and their final consignment to the ground, Chub pieced together tiny glimpses of the circumstances of the burial until at last, when the term of his sentence was drawing to an end, he was able to put down in black and white on a paper hidden in the sole of his shoe the second great secret — the exact location of the hidden plates.

THEN Chub's manner toward Clarkson began to change. He wanted Clarkson to forget about the plates. He ceased to be the patient, silent listener; he became the talker. Clarkson had to listen now. Chub was thinking and talking only of his impending release, of his hopes, fears and plans for the honorable scheme of life which he was to lead when he was outside. If Clarkson attempted to revert to his old experiences Chub excitedly interrupted with a sketch of his plans for the future. Never for an instance did they talk of the plates. Apparently Chub had forgotten that Clarkson once had been Dell Mungry.

"I've got my lesson all right," he repeated over and over. "I've been a fool, but I'm just smart enough to quit. The only thing that worries me is if they'll give me a chance outside."

"Sure, they'll give you a chance," said Clarkson bitterly. "You ain't tied up with any old-time pals the way I was. You'll be all right."

To his other prison friend, the warden, Chub also confided his hopes

and fears. The warden slapped him on the back and laughed.

"Don't you worry a bit, my boy," he boomed. "You're all right now. You've shown me the kind of stuff that's in you, and I'm going to see you go out of here started right. There isn't going to be any prison taint to you; you're going away clean."

"Thank you, sir," said Chub with quavering voice. The big heart of the warden swelled with warmth; it was worth something to put young fellows like this back in the right path.

A month before the day of his release Chub was called into the warden's office.

"I've been corresponding with your father, Walker," began the big man bluffly. "He's all right, and I've told him that you're all right. We're going to stick together to see you get started right when you're through here, me and your old man. You're going right back home and start out like a white man. None of this beating it out west and changing your name. You're going to make your beginning where you belong, at home with your old man. He's a brick, and I've got a job with a New York insurance company waiting for you."

Chub did not trust himself to speak this time. The warden respected him for that. He knew how the boy felt and he did not like a man to slop over.

For the last three weeks of his term Chub made Clarkson weary. Not once did he allow the old counterfeiter to talk about his profession. Day after day Clarkson was forced to listen to the boy's plans and to receive his flattering thanks for having convinced him of the impossibility of a life of wrong-doing. Day after day the warden noted the new manliness in his model young prisoner and was proud. And night after night now Chub lay in his cell gnawing his finger nails, suffering for the day of his release, for the day when he would step back into the world and be free — to begin work on his big clean-up.

CHUB went straight home to his father in New York when his term was over. His parting with Clarkson was touching.

Clarkson shook hands with him. There was nothing but hopelessness in the faded eyes.

"I'm glad to see you making it, kid," he said resignedly, "but I ain't fooling myself about my own case. They got it in for me. I'm an old timer and they ain't going to take a chance. But, goodbye, kid, and good luck. I—I'm glad I met you." He watched Chub's young figure swinging into the warden's office. "Yes," he murmured emphatically, "I'm very glad I met you."

The warden walked with Chub to the gates of the prison.

"Walker, you've kept yourself straighter than any young fellow we ever had in this place," he said as they shook hands. "That means you're naturally straight. You've been the best help I've ever had in the office, and that means you're naturally smart. Now with that combination you can't help winning out in the business game, if you want to. I know you want to, so there's nothing ahead of you but a good, useful life. Forget that you ever were here. Hold up your head no matter where you are. And when you get to be president of that insurance company and I come around looking for a job as night watchman in my old age," he concluded laughing jovially, "don't forget we're old pals. Good by, Walker; good luck."

"Thanks," mumbled Chub huskily, "thanks—for the steer I got down here."

Then he ran for the train that was to bear him New Yorkward, and as he sank onto the red plush seat he turned to the window and deliberately winked at the gray prison walls.

At home Chub reassured his father by the manly fashion in which he acknowledged the error of his former ways and evinced a determination to start afresh and make his career conform to honorable standards.

"Once is enough for me, dad," said the prodigal frankly. "I've learned my lesson for good."

He presented himself at the insurance office without delay. There in an hour's conference in the president's office he gave that official a renewal of faith in human nature, particularly in the nature of the frank, repentant, but manly, Chub Walker. After that he took up the delicate task of rehabilitating himself in the world's eyes through hard, intelligent work and exemplary conduct. So well did he succeed in this that at the end of a year he had won a place for himself at the head of a small department, a promotion which came as the reward of sheer effort and ability. He was a model office machine, his life being bounded on one side by his lodgings and on the other by his roll-top desk. In one year he lived down his prison term so effectively that even those who envied his sudden success forgot to bring up the fact against him.

THEN Chub got his regular two week's vacation. It being in season he followed the crowds to the fishing resorts in Maine, mailed picture post cards to everybody he could think of, had himself photographed in three different canoes, and came back sun-browned and hearty and eager for work. But, also, he came back with Dell Mungry's precious plates in his possession. He had disappeared from Maine scenes for two days and nights in the middle of his vacation. It had taken that long to run out to the little town in Ohio and dig up the plates from the spot where Clarkson had buried them.

Chub placed the plates in a safety deposit vault before going back to work. He became once more the flawless office machine. Some time early in the second year of his freedom he moved the plates to the little windowless room at the rear of the bachelor apartments which he now occupied and began to make experiments with the terrible secret which had made Dell Mungry a menace to the country's finances. He was as patient, as cautious as he had been while worming the secrets from Clarkson during the weary months in prison. An hour each evening was all that he gave to his experiments, and this time he explained away by admitting that he was writing a book on his experiences in prison. Every step that he took he checked and rechecked to make sure that it left no track by which he might be followed. The game was so big that he could afford to go slow, and he was too clever to risk the possibility of the smallest error.

Finally, one harsh winter night of that second year, Chub, in his little secret cubby-hole, bending in anguish over the results of months of labor, suddenly threw out his hands and gave vent to a pained cry of triumph. The secret had worked. He had it! The big clean-up was his.

During the rest of the winter and spring he conducted a campaign of experiments with the bills which he manufactured in his back room, passing a ten, a twenty, a fifty and a hundred in different parts of town. As the spring drew on he grew bolder. He presented a fifty dollar bill for examination at the cashier's window in the insurance office where he was employed.

"That bill looks kind of queer to me, Bill," he said. "Look it over, will you. Maybe it's only because I'm not used to handling such big money."

The cashier examined the note expertly.

"Good enough for me," he replied instantly. "Sure, it's one of the new fifties."

Likewise Chub tried one of the