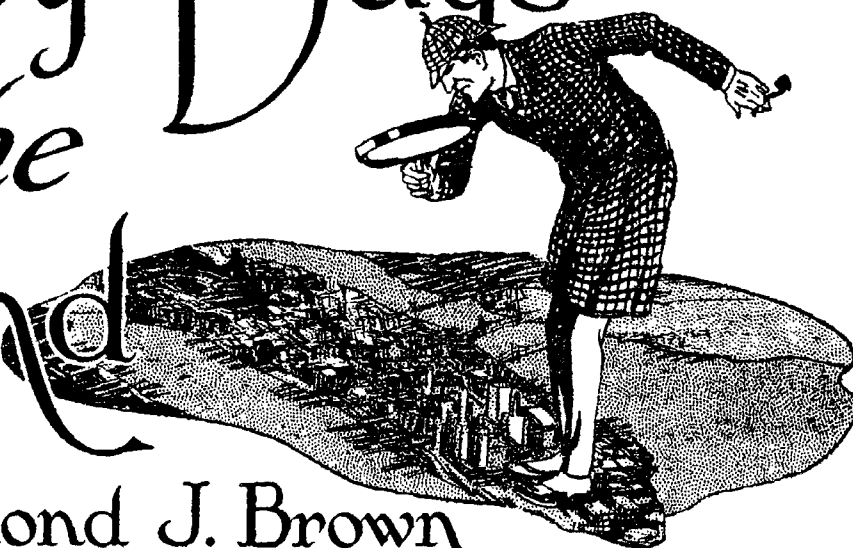


# Thirty Days on the Island

by Raymond J. Brown



**T**HE boss has executed one of his flyin' tackles. He always acts so when he sees money loomin' on the horizon. I was matchin' quarters with Ed, and, as the boss grabs my shoulder, a couple of pounds of cute little silver coins is knocked out of my hands and rolls all over the floor.

"Never mind that!" orders the boss as I start to scoop up my fallen wealth. "Just come along with me!"

He plants a hat on my head—it was Ed's; two sizes too small—gives me a heave and we gavotte together toward the door of the office.

"Hey! Wait! What's the idea? Where's the fire?" I kind of yelp as we wrassle our way to the elevator.

"Tell you later," he barks, hurlin' me into the car and hoppin' in after me with a graceful movement that brings both his number elevens down on my Trilbys.

Another guy might have got excited—maybe mad—to be hauled around like a packin' case under the gentle influence of a cotton-hook, but not me! That's just the boss's way of puttin' pep into his business.

The boss is Horace P. Giles; you know—Giles Confidential Detective Agency. Him, me, and Ed Taylor, the bird I'd just won three fifty from at matchin's, makes up the agency. We get

about a case a month, and, when one comes in, old Giles just natu'ally goes wild, like now.

When the elevator hits the ground floor, the boss won't even give me credit for bein' able to limp out of it. He lays violent hands on my collar, hauls me out of the buildin' and shoves me into a taxicab.

"Universal Club—and make a world's record gettin' there!" he bellers at the chauffeur as he hops in after me and slams the door.

"For the love of Mike!" I gasp as the taxi engineer, a goofer if ever I seen one, steers his hack wagon out of the mob of assorted vehicles that's streamin' up the street. He made the dash from the curbstone on two wheels and grinned like an ape as various drivers of trucks, trolley-cars, and delivery-wagons cursed at him for cuttin' them off.

"Take it easy, Joe," the boss advises me. "We're perfectly safe."

"Sure!" I tell him sarcastic. "Safe as a wax candle on a hot stove! And, now that that point's settled, would you mind informin' me what's the idea of the wild rush, the taxi Marathon, the—"

"Hist!" cautions the boss, puttin' his finger to his lips. He loves to pull the 'Sherlock Holmes' stuff, the boss does. With low lights and soft music he could make the investigation of a trolley accident case seem as mysterious as the great

diamond robbery. "Hist!" he says again, lookin' around him like be was afraid somebody'd planted a dictograph in the taxi. "A man is goin' to disappear!" he tells me.

"Disappear! Who?"

"At the Universal Club," he explains. "We got to keep him from doin' it."

"We got to—what?"

"We got to keep him from disappearin'."

"Keep him from disappearin'!" I exclaim. "Who are we supposed to be—Houdini and Herman the Great? How are you goin' to—"

"I don't know how we're to do it," the boss interrupts "All I know is that there's a thousand bucks in it for us—for me, I mean—if we turn the trick."

"And this feller that's goin' to stage the grand disappearin' act," I inquire. "Who is he?"

"Dunno," says the boss "All I know is that Mr. Courtney Saintsbury called me up from the Universal Club to say there was a thousand bucks—"

"When you heard about the money, you stopped askin' questions," I suggested "I did," he admits. "I just necked you out of the office—and here we are."

"Here we are—maybe!" says I as a sudden swing of the taxi around a corner nearly hurls us through a window.

Well, we get to the Universal Club without any serious accident, although our chauffeur done his best to murder everybody he passed in the street and to run into all the wagons, cars, buildin's, telegraph poles, and other objects that lay along the line of march.

Mr. Courtney Saintsbury is a thin, middle-aged bird with a Wallie Reid suit, a flower in his buttonhole and an air of bein' the man that wrote the book. S-p-o-r-t is wrote all over him, especially about the complexion, which is light violet with a little touch of cerise at the beak. You could see that to him prohibition was only a rumor.

"Ah!" he says, grinnin' and blinkin' a pair of fox-hound eyes. "The detectives!"

"Discovered!" I admit.

"I'm Giles," says the boss, "and this is Mr. Joe Conner, my sup'rintendent."

Sup'rintendent! If I'm a sup'rintendent, a car conductor's a captain of industry! I just snicker,

and let the boss get away with it.

"You're just in time," says Saintsbury. "You'll catch him red handed. Ha, ha! Oh, what a joke! Ha, ha!"

He looked around him—sneaky, like a guy that's just about to rob a grave.

"He thinks," he says, "that he can spend thirty days on the island incognito. But he can't! Ha, ha!"

I looked at the boss, and the boss looked at me.

"Thirty days!" I exclaim. "On the island! In-in—whatever you said! What're you talkin' about? And would you mind tellin' me who 'he' is?"

Saintsbury wrinkles up his rum-burned face in a grin.

"Your pardon, gentlemen!" he says. "I permitted my enthusiasm to overcome me. Suppose I begin at the beginning?"

"It's usual," I comment.

"Well," he says, "Thorndyke—Henry J. Thorndyke, one of my fellow members of the Universal Club—in the course of a discussion a half-hour ago became boastful and announced that it was possible for him to spend thirty days on the island—"

"On the island!" I interrupt. "What did he do to get thirty days on the island?"

"Oh, you don't understand!" laughs Saintsbury. "I am not referring to the island where the municipality has placed its penal institutions—Blackwells Island. It is this island—Manhattan Island—that I mean. Thorndyke informed me that he, or any other intelligent man—imagine Thorndyke referring to himself as an intelligent man!—could vanish for thirty days, remaining on Manhattan Island for every second of the time, and that nobody to whom he did not care to disclose his identity could get any trace of his whereabouts."

"Oh!" I said, understandin'. "And we're the guys that's to prove he's wrong?"

"Exactly," nods Saintsbury. "When Thorndyke made that absurd assertion, I immediately bet him two thousand dollars that he could not do as he said. It is not the money I care for so much as the opportunity of proving that Thorndyke's a fool—to his own satisfaction. I expect you gentlemen to aid me in winning my

bet.”

“Five hundred down—” begins the boss, whose mind is on the money side always.

“Of course!” smiles Saintsbury, takin’ out a roll that would have blocked the Subway. He thumbs off five centuries, which the boss takes with a look like he was accustomed to handlin’ real money all the time.

“I’ll—I’ll leave things in the hands of my sup’rintendent,” says the boss, edgin’ to the door. He’s slick all right! He wanted to get away before I had a chance to mace him for my bit.

“Well, where is this disappearin’ guy?” I ask as the boss makes the front stoop.

Saintsbury begins to laugh.

“That’s the funniest part of it!” he says. “He’s right here!”

“Here?”

“Yes. The joke’s certainly on him! No sooner did I inform him that I’d take his bet than I called up your office. He’s been loitering about the club, expecting to walk out and disappear without hindrance, and there you’ll be, dogging his footsteps from the moment he goes! Disappear for thirty days!” Saintsbury grunts. “He won’t disappear for thirty seconds!”

“Not while Joe Conner retains his eyesight!” I promise.

“Isn’t it the greatest joke in the world?” Saintsbury wants to know. “Won’t he be the surprised man when he finds out that you have been on his trail since the start?”

“He ought to be—especially if it’s goin’ to cost him two thou—”

“That won’t trouble him,” says Saintsbury. “He has lots of money. The thing that will cut him to the quick is the realization that he’s not so shrewd as he believes.”

“Where is he now?” I ask.

Saintsbury took me by the wrist and led me to a little room a few feet down the hallway.

“Look!” he directed when we got to the doorway. “That is he—in that telephone booth!”

He pointed to a booth in the corner of the room. I could see a guy’s hat through the window.

“Pretty soft!” I grinned.

“Isn’t it?” Saintsbury laughed back, “One might say it was a shame to take the money.”

“Speakin’ about money,” said I, “I’d like a little for expenses.”

“Of course,” nodded Saintsbury, pullin’ that roll out again. “How much?”

“Oh, just a few dollars,” I said careless-like. “About a hundred.”

“Small bills?”

“Pennies if you want!”

He gave me ten tens—more dough than I’d handled in a year!

“I’d better leave you,” said Saintsbury then. “Thorndyke might become suspicious if he saw me talking to you.”

“Good idea!” I told him. “Good-by, Mr. Saint Bernard. I’ll let you know when I need more money.”

“Report to me here every day,” he ordered, movin’ down the hall.

I strolled into the phone-room, intendin’ to give Mr. Thorndyke the once over with a view to tabbin’ his face and figure for future reference. I sort of backed over to the booth and squinted through the glass door.

Then I stopped squintin’, and rubbed my eyes. I needed to. There wasn’t nobody in the booth! I was just goin’ to say there wasn’t nothin’ there, but that would be wrong. There was somethin’ there—it was a derby hat, perched up on a thin little walkin’ stick and restin’ against the telephone. From outside the room it looked just like a guy was in the booth talkin’ a mile a minute into the phone. Thorndyke had made his getaway, leavin’ his lid and his cane behind for camouflage. A little door behind the phone booths that led to the kitchen in the basement of the club had made it a cinch for him to accomplish the fadeout.

I hunted up Saintsbury—in a hurry.

“This Thorndyke,” I said. “You told me he ain’t a very bright feller?”

“Anything but that!” declared Saintsbury.

“You may be right,” I said, “but he was smart enough to give *you* the slip.”

“The slip! What—”

“He’s vanished—as he said he would.”

“But you—why did you let him? Why couldn’t you prevent—”

“He was on his way long before I ever got here.”

“Dear! Dear!” said Saintsbury. “What a distressing development!”

“It is that,” I nodded. “About two thousand dollars’ worth of distress to you.”

"You must catch him!"

"I know it. What does he look like?"

"Well," said Saintsbury, "if President Wilson was younger, and smaller, and stouter, and had a mustache—no, he doesn't look like that either! I'd say he resembled Douglas Fairbanks more, or Senator Lodge, or Samuel Gompers. Only, he's not quite so old, and yet he isn't so young—"

"Some description!" I interrupt. "What kind of eyes has he?"

"Eyes? Why—er—just eyes."

"Good! And the rest of him to match?"

"I think so."

"With that description," I told him, "I'd be able to pick him out of a million! Mister, you're the original man with the camera eye! Well, anyhow," I went on, heftin' the lid I'd found in the phone-booth, "I know he wears a seven and an eighth hat. That's somethin' to start with. You got his address?"

"Yes. It's some number on Fifth Avenue."

"With the information you've gave me," I said, movin' out, "I ought to have him before night!"

Maybe you think Saintsbury was somethin' of a boob? I don't blame you. I thought so myself after he'd let Thorndyke slip right out from under his nose. I thought so, that is, until the next mornin' when the newspapers come out. Then I changed my mind. Saintsbury knew somethin' at that. Every paper in the city carried this quarter-page ad:

**\$1,000 REWARD!**

**This reward will be paid to any person who can  
furnish information as to the whereabouts  
of**

**HENRY J. THORNDYKE**

**who disappeared from the Universal Club about  
2.30 o'clock yesterday afternoon. Mr. Thorndyke is  
known to be somewhere within the limits of  
MANHATTAN ISLAND**

**This offer holds good only until one month  
from this date.**

**Communicate with:**

**COURTNEY SAINTSBURY, Universal Club**

**Or**

**Giles Confidential Detective Agency**

Old Giles was tickled to death with the ad.

"That guy throws thousand-dollar bills around like they was pebbles!" he said. "I ought to

have held him up for five thou before I took the case."

"You're doin' fine as it is," I told him. "A couple of hundred thousand people on this island will start lookin' for Thorndyke as soon as they read those ads."

"That's so, too," agreed the boss. "Have you got any trace of him yet?"

"Sure!" I tell him sarcastic. "Saintsbury says he's on the island, and a girl at Thorndyke's house tells me he's out of town for a few days. Between them both I've found out just where he is."

Well, startin' off to look for Thorndyke, I have a few words with about eighty people who know him. The result of my investigation is to find out that Thorndyke is a feller about thirty—or maybe fifty. That he's between four foot, eight, and six foot, two. That his eyes is brown—or blue. That his hair is black, blond, red, gray, and that he's bald-headed. That he has a mustache, and he hasn't. That his complexion is dark, or light. That he's always smokin', or has yet to light his first cigar. That he's a slim feller, and also inclined to be fat. That he prances along like a dancin' master, and that he walks with a slight limp. That he's a very rich man, and that he's broke.

If you don't think you can get so many different descriptions of the same man, just ask a few of your friends to give you an idea of the height, weight, complexion, and outstandin' features of somebody you know pretty well.

Such a thing as a picture of Thorndyke didn't seem to be in existence. His particular hangouts was the Universal Club and a downtown law office where he was a kind of silent, not to say dumb, partner. The law people seemed pleased that he'd decided to take a month off. In fact, they kind of hinted to me that they wished it was longer.

Some collection of clues to start with, I'll say!

One thing, though, Saintsbury's ad sure started somethin'. There was a mob of reporters around to the Universal Club and our office before either place was opened, and the evenin' papers was full of pieces headed *Prominent Clubman Vanishes to Win \$1,000 Wager*. I didn't show up at the office all day, and, when I looked in there at night, the boss was like a guy that had been run through a concrete mixer.

Accordin' to his testimony at least four thousand people had called to get the inside dope on Thorndyke before startin' out to collect that thousand-dollar reward. He'd been battlin' with amateur sleuths all day, most of them leavin' the office with frownin' countenances and bitter words when the boss told them he didn't know no more about Thorndyke than they did. A couple of tough guys even wanted to beat him up for holdin' out on them. There was still a line of reward-seekers in the hall when I hit the office. The boss waved his hand at them weaklike and gasped out a plea to me to get rid of them.

I went into the hall, woofed at the mob a couple of times and finally got all but one of them into the elevator.

"This Thorndyke matter—" he begins in an accent that is slightly Boston, or slightly London. You know—"hawf" and "cawn't"—kind of actor talk.

"Beat it, Percival!" I growl, fittin' him with a name to match his hull and riggin'. He was a thin, pale, ladylike bird of about forty with Fifth Avenue clothes and a kind of baby stare.

"But I have important information, y'know," he objected.

"Oh," I says, "that's different. Wait a second."

I let him stay in the hall until I'd shoosed the boss home. I wasn't runnin' any chances of lettin' old Giles pick up anything that would let him double cross me with Saintsbury. Then I took the guy into the office and gave him a chair.

He looked around him with a walls-have-ears-we'd-best-be-wary expression.

"I know where Thorndyke is," he whispers after a few seconds.

"You—you—"

"I know where he is, I say," he insists, "and, if you agree not to betray him, I'll tell you."

"Agree not to betray him! Why, I'm hired to betray him! I've got to—"

"I'm quite aware of that, old chap," he interrupts. "But—ah—for a consideration—possibly you'd see your way clear—"

It was me that looked around then with the fear of bein' overheard in my heart.

"That 'consideration' thing is what keeps me in cigarettes," I inform him. "Give us a look at the consideration and I'll tell you whether I'll listen to

you."

He drags out a leather bill-roll with gold edges. A hundred-dollar bill appears from it as if by magic.

"A hundred dollars," he says. "If I give you a hundred dollars, will you agree to—"

I make a grab for the gold-back, but he pulls it away.

"Will you agree to permit me to leave this office without molestation?"

"It's a bet!" I tell him.

He gives me the hundred.

"Very good," he says noddin'. "I'm Thorndyke."

"You—you're—what?—hah?—who?"

"I'm Thorndyke," he repeats.

"Glad to meet you!" I sneer. "I'm Bill Hohenzollern!"

"No, really, old chap!" he insists. "Observe!"

He shows me the initials on his bill-roll, a package of visitin' cards, the tailor's tag in the inside pocket of his coat, the monogram on his watch, the engravin' on his cigarette case and the letters on the inside of his hat.

"Henry J. Thorndyke" or "H. J. T." appeared in some form on all of them.

I looked at him with question marks hangin' from my eyelashes.

"What's the big idea?" I asked. "Of course," I added, holdin' up the century he'd gave me, "with this for a flag of truce you'd be safe anywhere, but—"

"I can see no good purpose to be served by haggling with you, Mr.—"

"Conner," I said.

"Mr. Conner. So I shall come to the point without further parley. Mr. Saintsbury hired you to find me?"

"He did."

"I wish to hire you *not* to find me."

"You—what?"

"He is paying you one thousand dollars—you see I've found out all about that—he is paying you one thousand dollars to search for me. I shall pay you one thousand, five hundred dollars to protect me—especially from the imbeciles and idiots who will be inspired to hunt for me by those absurd newspaper articles. Will you do it?"

"A fine guy I'd be," I started to tell him, "to take money from one feller, and then to—"

"You forget, Mr. Conner," he broke in, "that I am not a pursued criminal. My disappearance is merely a sporting affair. Mr. Saintsbury, in my opinion, acted in a highly unsportsmanlike manner yesterday in endeavoring to place me under surveillance before I had a chance to make my escape from the club. Had it not been that I chanced to overhear his telephone conversation with your office, I might have remained at the club to be apprehended by you as I stepped from its portals. Mr. Saintsbury probably considers his action a remarkably astute stroke of strategy. When I seek to engage you in my own behalf, I am merely endeavoring to match his strategy with—"

"Your argument's immense!" I butted in. "Especially that part about the fifteen hundred bucks!"

Oh, boy! Fifteen hundred from this bird plus what I could kid Saintsbury into givin' me looked like that little blue car I'd been dreamin' about!

"Listen," I said; "you know I ain't the boss here."

"No?"

"No. I'm just hired help. A guy named Giles owns the show. But you couldn't do no business with him! No, indeed! He'd knock you down, sit on you and call up Saintsbury. You make that offer of fifteen hundred to me personal, and I'll see that you get treated right."

"Thank you, sir. Done!" he says.

"Don't mention it. Just don't fall behind in payin' your installments, and everything will be O. K. You might," I suggested, "slip me a couple more of them mint tickets—just to show you're on the level."

"Certainly! Certainly!" he says, burglarizin' the roll again.

"All right," I told him. "For what you've gave me—and twelve hundred more—I promise not to hand you over to Saintsbury. Is that good enough for you?"

He said yes with his head.

"You guys must have to work for his dough about as hard as I do!" I thought, puttin' the two extra yards of jack into my kick.

"You're satisfied about the ethics of your own actions?" questioned Thorndyke as I pocketed the loot.

"Come again?" I requested.

"Your conscience doesn't reproach you. for accepting money from me as well as from—ah—Saintsbury?"

"No," I said. "As you remarked, it all comes under the head of str-str-strategy."

"Very good," he murmured, bowin'. "I shouldn't care to have you look upon the money I offer you as a bribe that would cause you to forget your duty."

"Oh, I'll do my duty all right!"

"I beg your pardon?" he asked sharp-like.

"By you—by you, of course!" I made haste to tell him, and he looked satisfied.

As far as I know Thorndyke was the first and only man in the history of detective work who ever lost himself and then agreed to chase himself without findin' himself. Sounds foolish? Not at all; it was my idea and it tickled Thorndyke to death.

"Think," I bade him. "Where's the last place in the world anybody would think of lookin' for you?"

"Why—er—why—"

"Our office," I said. "All right, then from now until the end of your thirty days on the island, you're a member of the Giles Confidential Detective Agency."

"But, you know, old chap, I don't see—"

"If you travel with me as my assistant, is anybody goin' to suspect you're Thorndyke?"

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "That's true; perfectly obvious! What a ripping idea!"

"If you can't even find yourself," I went on, "how's anybody else goin' to do it?"

"Y'know, Mr. Conner," he said, lookin' at me admirin'ly, "you're a man of singular mental attributes."

"I got to be—in this business!" I told him.

So that's what we did. I took Thorndyke down to the office with me and introduced him to the boss as John J. Jones, an old college chum of Thorndyke's. I said he knew the vanishin' man better than anybody else on earth and wanted to help me find him to test out whether he'd learned anything by readin' detective stories.

"Fine! Fine!" said the boss, who'd had visions of the whole case goin' blooie ever since Thorndyke had disappeared from the club. "Mr. Jones should be of great help to you!"

"How much you'll never know!" I remarked,

fingerin' the neat little roll of bills that was my cut from the case so far.

Thorndyke and me passed an interestin' day. We went taxi ridin', took in a movie show, had a look at the Bronnix Zoo, watched the mob of reporters and volunteer detectives who were hangin' around Thorndyke's home, passed by the Universal Club and laughed at it, had a couple of square meals and deviled around generally like a pair of idle richies.

We enjoyed partic'ly readin' the newspaper accounts of the search for Thorndyke. At least twenty people in various parts of the island swore that they'd met Thorndyke here, there or some place else. It's always like that when anybody is missin'.

Thorndyke wasn't such a bad feller to be hooked up with, either. For a prominent clubman and rich guy he was free and easy as you please. He seemed to be havin' as good a time as I was rompin' around town.

At the end of the day I called up Saintsbury to tell him how hard I'd worked for him.

"That guy Thorndyke must have hopped off a dock," I said.

"You must follow him wherever he goes," Saintsbury told me. "Remember the amount of my bet with Thorndyke is not my chief interest in this case. I'd rather lose the bet ten times over than give Thorndyke a chance to laugh at me."

"You'd pay pretty high to know where Thorndyke is right now, I'll bet."

"Mr. Conner," he said, "if you're successful in finding Thorndyke, I'll permit you to name your own reward."

"Good enough!" I said, ringin' off.

"Well," I thought as I moved from the phone, "it looks like I was goin' to get mine—no matter how this case turns out."

"Saintsbury's willin' to raise his ante," I told Thorndyke when I'd left the phone-booth.

"His ante? How so?" he asked.

"He wants to pay more money to have you delivered up to him," I said, lookin' at him kind of hard.

"But you wouldn't!" he exclaimed, scaredlike.

"I don't know whether I would or not," I said. "A guy like me don't get any too many chances of collectin' coin in carload lots. I'm just

lettin' you know in case—"

"But you agreed, y'know, for one thousand, five hundred—"

"That's so!" I exclaimed. "I did. And I'll stick by what I said. You're a good feller. I like you a lot better than I do Saintsbury. Don't worry; I won't hand you in."

"Very good. Thank you," he said politelike. "You'll stop with me, of course, during my banishment?"

"Stop with you?" I asked puzzled.

"Remain at my hotel," he explained. "As my guest," he added.

Pretty soft! Free board chucked in with all the rest!

"Yours truly!" I bowed, acceptin' his invitation with speed.

"I've removed from my customary abode," he explained, "for obvious reasons. I'm quartered in a little hotel in an obscure section of the city."

Little hotel in an obscure section of the city! Well, it isn't the largest hotel in the world at that, and I guess that a guy from Fifth Avenue does look on Times Square as an obscure section of town—anyhow that's where we went. A soot of rooms—four of them, and a bath. I'd disappear for a month myself if I could do it in a camp like that!

Jenkins, Thorndyke's vally, a smart-lookin', middle-aged guy, lived with us. Some job he had, too! Nothin' to do but loaf around the hotel all day and lay out clothes for Thorndyke and me to wear. Also, he seemed to have a cache of booze some place, for I'll say he was carryin' a still drunk around with him perpetual. It didn't interfere with his work, since he had no work to do, and I figgered that if Thorndyke could stand it, I could. I would like to have known, though, where the grog was hid. I looked for it the whole thirty days without gettin' so much as a smell of it—except from Jenkins.

The vally seemed all excited about Thorndyke's disappearance.

"Any adventures? Anything happen to you?" he asked Thorndyke when we reached the hotel.

"Things were decidedly quiet," answered Thorndyke. "This is Mr. Conner, Jenkins," he said noddin' toward me "The detective," he explained.

"You're right in the enemy's camp, aren't you, sir?" grinned Jenkins bowin'.

"Looks pretty friendly to me," I told him,

glancin' around the soot.

Thorndyke moved to the bathroom to wash up before goin' out to eat. Jenkins watched him go; then he tiptoed over to me and whispered in my ear:

"Mr. Conner, you're not in detective work for your health?"

"Not entirely," I told him, "although I wouldn't have much health if I quit it. Why do you ask?"

He motioned toward the bathroom door with his thumb.

"Why can't we hand him over to Saintsbury?" he asked me.

"Hand him over! What—"

"Of course! And get the reward!"

"Why, you low-lived crook!" I bark at him. "It'd be bad enough if I done that, hardly knowin' Mr. Thorndyke! But you! After eatin' his food, and takin' his money, and"—I sniffed in the air meanin'ly—"and drinkin' his booze! You'd hand him over for a few dollars? Go 'way from me!" I bawled at him. "If you don't I'll hand you one in—"

He started laughin'.

"Pardon me, sir!" he grinned. "But—good for you, sir! Mr. Thorndyke will be pleased to learn that you're incorruptible! I shall tell him, sir."

And he did. As soon as Thorndyke came out of the bathroom, Jenkins bowed to him respectful and said:

"Please, sir, I tempted Mr. Conner as we agreed I should and I find him true blue! He declines absolutely to betray you!"

"If I wanted to betray him," I say, "you don't think I'd split with nobody else, do you?"

Thorndyke grins at me grateful-like. I scowl back at him.

"You oughtn't to have done that," I tell him "It ain't right to set your servants to spyin' on me."

"Your pardon, Mr. Conner," begs Thorndyke. "There was nothing personal intended by what Jenkins did. It was just a measure of safety."

"All right," I said, "but if you don't trust me, how do you expect me to trust you? You say you'll give me fifteen hundred at the end of the month. How am I to know that you ain't goin' to

hold out on me? Suppose," I suggested, "you slip me a couple of hundred more—just as a measure of safety?"

He done it, and it give me a swell appetite for the big feed he bought me downstairs.

Well, there's no use of me describin' our day-by-day actions for the next twenty-eight days. Each day was too much like the one before it. Thorndyke and me started out about ten in the mornin', went wherever we pleased and then home to the hotel. About the last thing we thought of doin' was hidin' from anybody. That's prob'ly why nobody ever thought of suspectin' Thorndyke.

You know how a guy will look all over his desk for the pencil he's got in, his hand, or scour the house for the eye-glasses that's restin' comfortable on his nose? That's the way it was with Thorndyke and the people who were lookin' for him. He was in such plain sight that nobody found him.

Comin' along toward the end of the month Jenkins nails me one night after Thorndyke has gone to bed.

"Mr. Conner," he says kind of hesitatin', "it seems to me you're overlooking some rare chances of picking up some easy money."

"Not in this case I ain't!" I tell him.

"I insist you are," he says. "Have you, for instance, sounded Mr. Saintsbury on the question of increasing his reward for the—"

"What're you gettin' at?" I break in. "Come clean!"

"Well," he says, "it's just this: Why don't you go to Mr. Saintsbury and—well, just hold him up. Make him offer you his top figure for the capture of—"

"What's this?" I ask him sharp. "Are you still trying to find out if I'm 'incorruptible?'"

"No! No!" he exclaims "I'm serious about this. As the end of the month approaches Mr. Saintsbury will be more and more anxious to have Mr. Thorndyke delivered up to him. He would be willing, I dare say, to give as much as five thousand dollars for—oh, you don't know the kind of a man he is!" he told me when I pooh-poohed his mention of five thousand. "He'd give up five thousand *cheerfully* rather than give Mr. Thorndyke the opportunity of crowing over him after staying out of sight a month. Just you try him



out. The longer Mr. Thorndyke lies hidden, the higher Mr. Saintsbury will be willing to go. Say about ten minutes before midnight on the last day I'll venture to say he would give—"

"Aw, what's the idea?" I interrupt.

"Merely this," he says, lookin' at me hard. "At about a quarter to twelve on the night of the last day, you give Mr. Thorndyke up; then you and I will divide the reward."

"Divide the reward!" I gasp. "Where do you get off to get a cut?"

"You seem to forget," he told me, "that there's nothing to prevent me going to Mr. Saintsbury at any moment, and—"

"That's so, too," I admit.

"Yes," he says. "The only reason, why I prefer to have you conduct the negotiations is that I believe you can induce Mr. Saintsbury to pay a higher price."

"Are you on the level?" I demand of him.

"Absolutely, sir!"

"You ain't goin' right back and tell Thorndyke about the talk we've just had?"

"Certainly not. I'm looking out for number one."

"Yourself?"

"Myself. It's rarely that I have an opportunity of profiting to the extent I hope to—"

"If you're playin' me for a sucker," I threaten him, "I'll hand you the darnedest trimmin' you ever—"

"You may trust me," he assures me. "Mere vulgar gain is my only motive."

"You're on!" I tell him suddenly. "Shake! And now," I say after we'd mitted each other, "why can't we play the other end of this game?"

"The other end?"

"Yes. Thorndyke. Why can't I hold him up for more jack?"

"That seems like double-dealing," he protests.

"You've got a queer way of lookin' at things," I inform him. "You're willin' to take what virtu'llly amounts to blood money from one guy, and you—"

"But Mr. Thorndyke is my employer!"

"What's that got to do with it? Ain't you willin' to hand him in? Listen, bo, you can do anything you like about it, but I'm goin' to stick Thorndyke up for all he'll pay—on my own hook,

you're not in on this. Then after I've hacked his wad for all it'll stand I'll just turn him over to Saintsbury. The operation," I explain, "is known as gettin' it comin' and goin'."

"You're a rogue!" he barks at me.

"You're no saint yourself," I snap back.

"Anyhow, Thorndyke made it very plain to me the first night I met him that this whole thing is just a sportin' proposition. My idea of real sport is to gather as many silver certificates as possible. Besides, everybody I've met in the case so far has been tryin' to double-cross everybody else. Saintsbury hired me before he'd gave Thorndyke a chance to make his getaway; Thorndyke offered me dough to throw down Saintsbury, and now you want me to hand Thorndyke the rinky dink. I'd be a swell boob if I didn't start in doin' a little double-crossin' myself!"

"That's very true," he admits. "If I were you I'd talk it over with Mr. Thorndyke."

And I did talk it over with him, although not until I'd got Saintsbury's ideas on the subject. I called on Saintsbury at the Universal Club and with weeps in my voice told him that the case was hopeless. As I expected he got cold feet immediately.

"But, Mr. Conner!" he exclaimed. "You *must* find him! You have no idea how much it means to me. If Thorndyke isn't found I shall never hear the last of it. Why, already the members of the club are chaffing me unmercifully about my failure to have him apprehended. You must do everything possible to find him. Spend money and—"

"There are things money won't buy," I interrupt.

"Money really is no object in this case," he informs me. "If you can bribe anybody, or—"

"How high would you be willin' to go?" I ask him.

"I don't know. I think if a man walked in here now and told me he knew where Thorndyke was I'd give him—oh, I don't know, but—"

"Is it worth five thousand to you?"

"It is," he says so quick I was ashamed I hadn't mentioned more.

"To me?" I asked him.

"To anybody!"

Thorndyke looked at me reproachful-like when I made the suggestion that the fifteen hundred he'd promised me maybe was too little

after all for keepin' him out of Saintsbury's hands.

"But, Mr. Conner!" he exclaimed. "You promised!"

"I've been thinkin' things over," I told him. "I ain't been feelin' none too good of late, and I think I know what's been the matter with me."

"What's that?"

"My conscience," I said. "Since it never bothered me before, it took me some time to find out what it was that was achin', but I know now. Yes, my conscience hurts me for lettin' you buy me away from the first guy I took money from."

"How did you discover that the source of your trouble was your conscience?"

"Saintsbury offered me five thousand to give you up. Right away I knew that hidin' you for fifteen hundred was a crime!"

"Oh," he says thoughtful-like.

"If you wanted to buy me again," I suggested, "you'll find I'm still in the market."

"I'll give you two thousand dollars to—"

"Ha, ha!" I laugh. "Two thousand!"

"Mr. Conner," he says in a voice that made me think of icebergs and blizzards, "I've entertained you and—"

"I guess that's worth somethin' at that!" I tell him. "But what I'm interested in is money I can spend. Get down to business! What's your top figger?"

"Two thousand," he says, "and not one cent more. If you're not satisfied to take it, tell me so and I'll endeavor to find the means of hiding myself without your aid for the remaining time. Rather than give you one cent more I'd surrender myself to Saintsbury and—"

"Gee, don't do that!" I almost yelled. "I'll go you for two thou. On the level!" I told him. "For two thou I promise not to give you up to Saintsbury."

"You're sincere?" he asked me, lookin' at me disgusted.

"Hope to die!" I vowed.

"You—you're a grafter!" he bawled at me.

"Sure!" I grinned. "But I'm a good one! Ain't that worth nothin'?"

Jenkins tried to jip me for a slice of the two thou Thorndyke offered me when I told him about it, but I told him flat there was nothin' stirrin'.

"But I'm entitled to it," he objected. "It was my idea—"

"Your idea—nothin'! You'll get yours from what Saintsbury gives me, and—"

"But, do you know, my friend," he interrupts, "I don't see how you're goin' to collect anything from Thorndyke."

"You don't? Why not?"

"Do you suppose," he says, "that he's going to give you money for protecting him from discovery after you've given him up to Saintsbury?"

"He'll have to pay in advance," I told him.

"But if he refuses?"

"He'll have to pay anyhow."

About nine o'clock on the mornin' of the thirtieth day I braced Thorndyke.

"Let's have my two thousand," I said, comin' to the point without any palaver.

"But the thirty days aren't up until midnight," he objected.

"You've given me five hundred on account," I said, "and you owe me fifteen hundred. That's plain, isn't it? Come across, now, or—"

"Or—what?" he snaps.

"Or," I said, pickin' up the telephone that was on the desk in his room, "or I'll call up Saintsbury and have him come right here and find you."

"Oh, you mustn't do that!" he exclaims. Pretendin' not to notice, I lifted the receiver off the hook.

"Don't! Don't!" he yells.

I put the receiver back, slipped across the parlor and turned the key in Jenkins's room.

"I'll keep him locked up," I said. "I guess I can safely promise to hold you here until Saintsbury comes."

Then I took the receiver off the hook again.

"Hello!" I called. "Get me Murray Hill six—"

"Don't! Don't!" cried Thorndyke. "I'll give in!"

"Never mind, operator," I tell the girl downstairs as I see Thorndyke fishin' for his bill-roll.

The pile of yellow-backs he handed me was as grand a scenic display as I ever witnessed!

"All right," I said, puttin' the wad where it was safe. "Now I'm goin' to leave you for a time. I'm goin' to put this coin in the bank," I explained. "Now, listen," I added, shakin' my

finger at him, "you needn't have any fear about me doin' you dirt. I promised you I wouldn't hand you over to Saintsbury—and I won't! But, lest you get any ideas of wanderin' away from here—"

I went to the door of the parlor, threw it open and called him over.

"Look!" I said pointin' to Ed Taylor, my partner at the agency, and three of the toughest-lookin' birds in the world. "Friends o' mine," I explained. "They'll just hang around to see that nobody goes out of here until I say so. How about it, boys?" I ask them.

They growl out somethin' that sounds like the lion house when dinner's late. Thorndyke turns pale.

"But I say, Conner!" he tells me. "This is outrageous! It's—"

"Tell it to them!" I yelp, slammin' the door behind me and beatin' it for the elevator.

I grab a taxi outside the hotel and beat it for Saintsbury's house. He's waitin' for me, and we're back in the hotel inside of ten minutes. I plant Saintsbury just outside the door of the soot, and tell Ed and his gang to blow. Then I march in.

Thorndyke and Jenkins are sittin' there like they wondered what was goin' to happen next.

"Ah, you let him out, eh?" I grinned at Thorndyke, pointin' to Jenkins. "Good! Well, as long as I'm back, Jenkins, I guess you can tell my boys that they're not needed any more."

Jenkins waltzes over to the door, opens it and, except for the grip he had on the knob, I

think he'd have gone down. The eyes pop from his head. He begins to shake like a shimmy dancer.

"Sus-sus-saintsbury" he yelps weaklike.

"Hello, Thorndyke!" grins Saintsbury. "I imagine I win the bet!"

Of course, Jenkins was Thorndyke! And the other guy, the one that had been walkin' around with me as Thorndyke for twenty-nine days, he was Jenkins, the vally. Who else could he be? Prominent New York clubmen don't say "cawn't" and "quite so" and "thank you, sir"—especially the last—in their ordinary conversations with roughneck sleuths. Also, they don't wear clothes that a blind man could see was made for the guy they introduce to you as their vally, and they don't call their vally "Mr. Thorndyke" when they think nobody is listenin'. Oh, no! And a guy that disappears from a phone-booth leavin' behind him a seven and an eighth hat don't come 'round the next day wearin' a brand new lid that's two sizes smaller!

Thorndyke—the real Thorndyke, I mean—tried to make me think I acted crooked in takin' his dough and then handin' him up to Saintsbury. But it was Jenkins, wasn't it, that I promised not to hand up? And I think I kept my promise. Besides Jenkins and him tried to play me for a sucker. Maybe that can be done—maybe!

Anyhow, if you don't think it was a pretty good case, drop around to the house some Sunday and I'll give you a ride in the little blue car.