

## A Stratagem of Letters

By HOWARD FIELDING

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MY visitor had an excellent counterfeit of a frank demeanor, yet I observed that he desired strict privacy for our interview and that he was interested in the question whether the sound of our voices would penetrate the thin partition which separated my modest sanctum from the composing room of the newspaper. He drew a chair very close to mine and laid a clipping on the desk.

"Could you tell me," said he, "who wrote that article?"

It was a labored disquisition on the reading of cryptograms and had been printed in last week's Saturday supplement, with small hope on my part that it would amuse anybody in our town.

"Certainly," said I. "It was written by David Graham, foreman of my composing room."

"Could I see Mr. Graham?" he asked.

"You may send him your card," said I; "the real one, not the one you sent to me."

He eyed me with mild surprise.

"What makes you think?"—he began, but I cut in upon him.

"I don't think; I know. You are a postoffice detective, and your name is Charles Baxter. You are in this town to investigate the robbery here last week. I'm investigating it also as a part of my business, and that's how I happen to know you."

"Right," said he. "But as for the card—"

"We shall not need it now. I'll send for Mr. Graham."

My foreman was a tall, thin, long faced Scot with a hard mouth and a mild eye. The intellectual upper half of his head seemed to take a broad view and to enjoy the problems of this world, but from the bridge of his nose to the point of his chin he was the picture of narrow precision.

"I want you to help me in the matter of this postoffice robbery," said he, "and this is the special point: The job was done by two men, and we know one of them, but it's the other who has the plunder. The fellow we've got our eyes on hasn't a cent of it, and he is keeping away from it and from his pal. He's as smooth an article as I've encountered in many a day. We could arrest him any minute; but, though we have a moral certainty that he's guilty,

I couldn't bank so high on the latest evidence. And, anyhow, we should lose the pal and the award for it's a sure thing that one man wouldn't squeal. My honest man near this town since the night of the robbery. He's living in a boarding house in Stanhope, twenty miles west of us, and his patience seems to be about as long suffering as ours. His only mistake is that he writes letters, and we've trapped one of them. He started to mail it yesterday afternoon and dropped it on the



"WHO WROTE THAT ARTICLE?"

street. One of my men, who was shadowing him, nabbed it in a holy second, and here it is."

Baxter laid an envelope on the leaf of my desk between Graham and me. We saw that it was addressed to Miss Annie Davenport, a young woman much admired in our town and of unblemished reputation. I was amazed and distressed that her name should be brought into such an affair.

"It's open," said the detective to Graham. "See what you can make of it."

"I am not so clear as to that," answered Graham. "It would appear to me that I might like the young lady's permission."

Upon this Baxter made quite a flowery argument, speaking of the interests of justice and other lofty considerations, but Graham and I were not impressed.

"Who wrote this?" I asked when the detective paused for breath.

"You'll know the name," said he. "Walter Allen."

I did indeed know the name and the

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Like crystals fair of morning dew,  
Your complexion now can be,  
If you will take this good advice,  
And drink Rocky Mountain Tea.  
Frank Hart, druggist.



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