

# A WHITE STREAK DISASTER

## Mystery Deepens As a Strange Light Appears in the Office of Millionaire Grafton.

### THE SYNOPSIS.

John Grafton, who owns almost all of Kenyonville, which he built up on a large tract of practically worthless land left him by his father, receives a visit from James Elford, old friend. During the evening they visit the club and while there Grafton tells his friend of how success came to him and how he had mortgaged about all he had to back one George Colson in building a traction line. Then he takes Elford down to see his modern office building, arriving there about 11 p. m.

While going up in the elevator a white shaft of light is seen, but investigation fails to reveal anything. Grafton and Elford finally reach the former's office and the visitor is shown the big ball safe which is supposed to hold \$7,000,000 in securities. Elford seems to be depressed and has a feeling of impending disaster. They finally leave the building and separate. Grafton looks back and sees a momentary flash of light in his office. He finally decides to return and investigate.

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### CHAPTER IV.

#### A Run and a Shock.

At nearly 1 o'clock in the morning, with nobody, presumably, to switch them on or off, the electric lights in Grafton's own office had gone out!

For a moment he was absolutely certain of the fact. Short as had been his view of the windows, he felt wholly positive that they had been brilliantly illuminated, and that, at the very instant of his turning, the illumination had vanished.

But as he stood and stared at the black wall, five blocks behind, the improbability of the affair confronted him.

Doubtless he had been mistaken—the lights had been in one of the other offices, either on the floor above or the floor below. Probably one of the few late tenants was just leaving his place of business; that must have been it. And yet the rooms directly above him were occupied by French, the architect, and French had been in New York for more than a week. And the rooms below were rented by Drake, the lawyer, who had passed the best part of a month in bed with rheumatism.

Grafton muttered in his perplexity, and stared on. Whether he cared to admit it or not, it was very unlikely that the lights had been either above or below his rooms and the precious contents.

Well—it was his own office, then, and Parker had turned on the lamps for a final look around. That was like Parker, for in his scrupulous care of all things pertaining to the big building it had probably occurred to him to glance about when his employer had left in search of possible stray matches or cigar-stumps that might have made trouble.

But there was just a little flaw in that theory, as Grafton discovered after a moment's consideration. Parker began his tour at the top and worked down, through all the offices and suites. At seventeen minutes past twelve, as Grafton recalled very vividly now, he had pressed the watchman's button in a room on the tenth floor. The short walk with Elford and their parting had consumed perhaps fifteen minutes; Grafton's wait on the corner and his own covering of another five blocks might have been good for another ten.

That made twenty-five minutes at least which must have elapsed since their watching the clock, and Parker's tour rarely consumed more than half an hour. In short, he must now be somewhere about the third floor—and he could not have turned out these lights, not two minutes back.

Having made his quick calculation, a chill ran through Grafton. The queer sight had not been his imagination; it had not been caused by Parker; and if not by Parker, then by whom? Elford's gloomy forebodings swept over him with the force of a dire prophecy. Had his office been entered, and by some one interested in obtaining possession of the Colson notes? Was there a man in the neighborhood so expert and daring that he had undertaken the job of opening Grafton's impregnable safe?

And if so, was the safe really impregnable, and if it were not, had the early morning visitor succeeded in making off with the contents?

"Some One Went Out!" The questions surged through Grafton's mind with a speed almost stupefying. He stepped out briskly for the Grafton building, and any sense of shame had vanished altogether, notes of a clock was behind, and his suspicions had turned to certainties—his office had been entered. He glanced up again at the building, half expecting to see the light once more, but something in the very blackness of the big expense seemed to hint that the damage was already done.

It was an old notion, but it impressed Grafton powerfully at the moment; he quickened his walk, and quickened it again, until, at the third block, he was running at top speed toward his office, now glancing ahead, now glancing upward again. The wall remained absolutely dark and blank. It seemed to have no intention of supplementing the bit of odd information already given its owner.

The last of the five blocks he covered at a lateral gallop; when he pulled up sharply before the big arched doorway he was panting hard, as much from



He Stepped in Quickly and Threw on the Lights. Parker, Standing With Drawn Revolver, Turned Rapidly to All Corners of the Main Office.

anxiety as from the exertion, for the nearer that he had approached his mystery, the more sinister its aspect had seemed to become.

He was morally certain now that something had gone wrong, and his agitated fingers fumbled long and fruitlessly before the door would open. In the dim light of the lower corridor he drew a long breath and listened. Steps were coming down the stairs. He ran forward, rather expecting to confront the person responsible for his agitation.

It was, however, Parker. The watchman opened his eyes a trifle at the sight of his employer.

"Back again, sir?" "Parker, when were you on the ninth floor—I mean the last trip?" "Why—Mr. Grafton?" "The watchman glanced at his clock—it was 12:22 when I passed your door."

"Passed it? Didn't you go in?" "Not this trip, sir; or, rather, only to reach in and press the button, you know."

Grafton frowned. "Twelve-twenty-two, eh? You're certain of that, Parker?" "Of course, I am, sir. There's the punch on the dial of the clock."

"And what have you been doing since then?" "Coming down through the building, sir."

A trifle of acidity found its way into the watchman's voice. He was really a man of extreme care, and there seemed to be an indefinite sort of insinuation in Grafton's questions.

"Why, Mr. Grafton?" he asked. Grafton looked squarely at him. "See here, Parker. It is now just about ten minutes to 1 o'clock. At quarter of 1—just about five minutes ago—you were not in my private office, were you?"

"Your private office, Mr. Grafton?" gasped Parker. "Oh, I'm not accusing you of anything—don't think that. All I want is positive information. Were you?" "Certainly not, sir. At quarter to 1 I pushed the indicator in room 201."

"Ah! The second floor, then, just as I had figured."

"Well, while you were on the second or third floor, say any time in the last five or six minutes, did you hear any signs of anyone in the building?"

"Only when you went out, two or three minutes ago, Mr. Grafton?" "When I went out?" "Why, yes, sir. It can't be more than that since you went down in

the elevator and out by this very door, can it?" "You're sure some one went out, are you?" "Certainly I'm sure."

Grafton moistened his lips. "Then it may interest you to know, Parker, that I left here just about half an hour ago—when you were on the tenth floor, in fact."

"But—Mr. Grafton?" "And whoever it was that left here when you last heard the door close—yes, it must have been that man."

"Man, sir? What man?" Parker's interest was becoming most keen, and his perplexity was very evident.

Grafton perceived the latter, and realized that in the mental whirl that had taken possession of him he was becoming rather incoherent.

"I don't know that we can blame you," he said. "Logically, I suppose that we should have at least two men in here at night. But however that may be, within the past half-hour my office has been entered by some one who had no business in there."

"Your private office, sir?" "My private office—and the visitor turned on the lights in full. Had I not seen them down the street, no one would have known of it until morning."

"But let us go up, sir, and—"

"Hold on. He's gone clear now, whoever he was. I want to know one of two things first. I suppose that there is no need of my asking whether you heard anything in the way of an explosion—anything that would seem to hint at safe-cracking?"

"If I had, I'd have been investigating it before now, sir," said Parker, rather tartly.

"Of course. So I assumed, but— Well, have you heard anything in any way out of the ordinary?" "Why, no, sir. Except that I supposed you left the building only a few

minutes ago, instead of as you say. Some one did."

"None of the other tenants are in the building, are they?"

"No, sir. Not one."

Grafton removed his hat and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. No theory seemed possible, save that of unlawful entry of his sanctum.

"Well, we'll go up and investigate," he said shortly.

He walked to the elevator, and Parker, having switched on the current, followed quickly.

"Your safe, sir," he hazarded; "has it been cracked?"

"That's what I don't know," replied Grafton, grimly. "But if it has, you

"No, sir, not a sign of trouble anywhere."

"You're sure?"

"Why, perfectly, Mr. Grafton. See? The door is as fast as it could be. There isn't a mark anywhere in the neighborhood of the combination—or elsewhere for that matter."

"It's true, thank goodness."

"But all the same, sir—the watchman straightened up—there has been a visitor in here very recently. Smell that?"

Grafton's afflicted nose sniffed in vain.

"You're not talking of Turkish tobacco, too?" he asked.

"It is that, and nothing else—that

"Yes, it appears so."

He frowned again as he stared at the safe.

"Parker, that was either an ordinary thief, here to pick up what he could, or it was a fellow with definite designs on that safe. I'm blest if I knew which to think just now."

"Was there something very important in the vault?"

"The most important thing on earth to me," murmured Grafton. "In a business sense, at any rate. It was a little bundle of papers, Parker. They have been in the First National vaults for a year now, and I got them out only today. Thinking that they would be secure enough up here, I decided

**\$7,000,000  
In Securities  
Stolen  
From Desk  
Left Open  
By Financier**

"And you just dropped the papers on the desk, sir?"

"Not only that, but I left the desk wide open! By George! The fellow that sent me the telegram did me a bad turn, I fear."

"It looks so, sir, but—" Parker having nothing at stake, was recovering his senses rapidly. "Most likely your papers are all there yet, sir, safe and sound."

Grafton pulled himself together with a strong effort, and a faint, drawn smile appeared on his lips.

"It—the notion rather staggered me for a minute, Parker," he said. "But of course they are. They must be. They would be of hardly any use to any one save myself—at least, very few people would dare attempt to use them. To me they mean about everything on earth! However, we'll soon have them now if they're at hand."

Very uncertainly, he walked across to the desk and stared at it. With such an effort as he would have believed hardly possible, he was trying to brace himself for the search through the desk litter—a search which might end in finding himself in the worst predicament of his life.

His hands shook violently as he raised one document and then another. He would know that little Colson bundle in an instant, by the red tape about it and the peculiarly heavy white paper; and he knew, too, another thing; that it should have been there before him, on top of the heap!

The papers had not been disturbed by him since leaving at 6. While Elford sat there, across the office, he had touched nothing on the desk.

He hunted on and on, and as the outlook became worse, Grafton grew more calm. He worked his way down to the polished surface of the desk—and the Colson papers did not appear!

"Find them, sir?"

"Not yet, Parker."

"In one of the small drawers, maybe?"

"I haven't opened one of them today—I'm positive of that," said Grafton slowly.

But he pulled them out, one after the other, until all lay before him. Not a thing had been disturbed; old bills, old records, old notes, returned checks, all were there and perfectly classified as ever. The Colson notes were not.

"It's very peculiar!" muttered Grafton.

"It is indeed, sir," said Parker sympathetically. "You have looked in the pigeon-holes?"

"I've looked everywhere in the entire desk."

"Can I help you?"

Grafton turned, half stupidly. Perhaps excitement had sent his eyes askew; perhaps he had somehow overlooked the bundle among the other papers.

"Parker," he said, "you just go through that pile of stuff and see if you're able to locate a little package of documents, about so long and so wide, made of very heavy bond paper and tied with a bit of red silk tape."

The watchman obeyed silently; his employer followed his every move with a sort of terrified fascination, calm though he had become. One by one, the odds and ends were assorted. Parker piled them deftly at the side and hunted and hunted and hunted for a sign of red tape.

At the end of five minutes he stood up and faced Grafton.

"There is nothing of the sort here, sir, so far as I can see."

"No," said the other in a low, choked voice. "I was right, Parker—they've been taken!"

"But who would take them, sir?"

"I can't say that, but gone they certainly are, and unless they come back within—"

He broke off abruptly. Hands in his pockets, he turned and walked up and down the office.

The whole thing was too incredible, despite all the evidence before him, despite the fact that his precious papers were entirely gone, he could not admit the situation. Why, if it were really so what wouldn't it mean?

"I must have been wrong, Parker," he said harshly. "Never in my life have I done such a fool thing. I must have locked them up and forgotten it in my hurry—that's all."

"And you think they're in the safe still, sir?"

"I know it!"

"The Lord only knows, I hope so!" breathed Parker.

Grafton took a new grip on himself and went to his spherical safe. Try as he would, his hands trembled violently; hope as he would, there was a sickening feeling of the uselessness of the proceeding. But he twisted the knob backward and forward, and within a minute or two the door was released.

"There! This little drawer is where they belong," he said, as his keys jingled against the steel interior.

"Here's where we shall find them, Parker. I'm pretty sure."

The Shock of Realization.

The small box was laid upon his desk, and Grafton sat down before it and tried to believe that all was still well.

The last lock was opened and the cover thrown back. Grafton, for a space of many seconds, stared into the box.

"Nothing under the sun in there but those old papers relating to the Mainwaring estate!" he muttered.

(To Be Continued Next Sunday.)

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