

THE EXPLANATION.

I am trembling.

When I rest my hand on my desk it trembles. I shudder when the door is suddenly opened. I know you will tell me you know all about it, that it is nothing but nervousness.

But I am only 39 and as strong as a bear, broad-shouldered and red-cheeked. I am single and independent—

Still I am trembling.

In front of me I have a copy of the local paper, and I read:

"Otto Justesen, the merchant, was robbed of two thousand crowns in cash last night. Yesterday afternoon he had written and sealed up a letter containing the above named amount in bills. It was addressed to the wholesale firm of Soelberg & Co., Copenhagen, and was to have been mailed this morning, but last night, when Mr. Justesen left his office a little before midnight to go to his club, he carelessly left his window open. As the office is on the ground floor, access was easy and early this morning the crumpled up envelope was found in the street outside. The money, of course, had disappeared. The police have no clue."

I have read this paragraph three times and read it once more. The paper is shaking in my hand. Do you understand why I am trembling?

I am the thief, you suppose. No. Why then? Don't you understand, I am Otto Justesen, the man who has been robbed. Ssh! Was not that the door?

.....
The police are sitting opposite me in the shape of Henrik Gram, one of the kindest-hearted men I know. Still I am trembling.

Gram and I are old friends. He knows all about my affairs, knows just how I am fixed. A young business man, starting without capital, has an uphill job and times are bad.

But today there is an abyss between Henrik Gram and me. His voice sounds differently, he is here in

his official capacity.

"Tell me all the details," he says, "but calmly. Why, you are shaking with nervousness, man?"

"Well, you see the thing is this," I begin. And I talk on rapidly, hardly knowing what I am saying. I tell him that I am ruined if the money is not found. Soelberg & Co. are not philanthropists, they want their money, and now, just as I had succeeded in scraping the money together, it's gone.

"Can't you raise a loan?" Gram asks.

"No," I say. "I am done for; the lemon has been squeezed to the last drop."

Now do you understand why I am trembling? No, you cannot. You think I am afraid of bankruptcy. No, it is much worse. It is a lie. There has been no theft.

There never was any money in the letter. I stole it myself. It was I who threw the empty envelope in the street outside.

The Lord knows I worked like a slave to keep above water, but it was of no use. The lack of two thousand crowns will make me bankrupt unless Soelberg & Co. take pity on me when they hear about my misfortune.

"It was gross carelessness to leave the money near the open window. All a man had to do was to stretch out his hand."

It is Gram speaking in a tone of reproach. A glass of port wine, then? He shakes his head. He wants to make me understand that he is not paying me a friendly visit.

A boy comes in from the store and hands me a telegram. I tear it open and read. Gram comes closer.

"Well?" he asks.

"Read it yourself," I say.

Gram takes the telegram, reads it and lays it aside.

"Must have money; otherwise bankruptcy. Soelberg & Co."

I am ruined.

My eyes cannot tear themselves from the telegram. So the whole

scheme is wasted. I am to be pun-

ished for my falsehood. Is it then really a crime I have committed? The police have had a little extra work, without any reason. As if it were not

reason enough that a man wanted to save himself from bankruptcy. But it is against the law and I will be punished. I am trembling again. There is not the least bit of des- perado in me.

"Now, listen, Justesen," Gram says.

"Yes! yes!" I look up. How he is staring at me. What does he mean?

Now he says slowly, emphasizing every word:

"The whole story is a fake. You took the letter yourself."

"What—?"

"You took the letter yourself."

"Gram! old friend! What are you saying?"

He bends over me, lays his hand on my shoulder and repeats: "You took the letter yourself. There never was any money in it."

I groan and fall back in my chair as limp as a rag. There is no fight in me. I am ready to confess everything.

Then the door opens.

The man who enters has black, piercing eyes and a nose like the bill of a hawk, a dark moustache and thin lips. He is well dressed.

"I beg your pardon," he says. "I come in regard to the theft."

Gram hurriedly places himself between him and me.

"I am a police official," he says.

The man steps aside so that he can see my face in spite of Gram.

"I can get back the money you lost," he says.

"You", I stammer. What did he mean? Was it a trap perhaps?

"On one condition," he says. "You must withdraw your complaint."

Gram turns to me. His

presses his sorrow at having suspected me without reason.

"Of course, you accept," he says.

I nod my head. My brain is

lyzed understanding nothing. I only stare at the man with the piercing

eyes.

"I must have it in writing," he says.

"Of course," Gram replies.

The man unbuttons his coat and from an inside pocket produces a wad of bills which he puts on my desk.

"Please count them. There are two thousand. To make a clean breast of it, I was I who stole the money from you, but I have regretted it and if you are satisfied with getting back your money—

Yes, everything is correct. There are two thousand crowns in bills. I count them over and over again. Gram has picked up a pen and is writing some kind of an agreement, which I sign. I declare to have received from Nicholas Kragberg the sum of two thousand crowns, in consideration of which I consent to drop all prosecution.

I don't stand one word of the man's needless except that I am saved from bankruptcy and dishonor.

That simply cannot be any explanation.

.....
I am a different being now. The crisis is past and my business is thriving beyond all expectation. Only one thing is lacking to make my happiness complete—the explanation.

Sometimes I press my hands against my throbbing temples. The thoughts are chasing one another badly. Why—? How? I see before me the man with piercing eyes. Was he perhaps the evil one and did I sell my immortal soul to him?

One morning I get a letter from South Africa. I do not know the handwriting and finger the envelope for a while before opening it. I read:

"Dear Sir—I am sure you have racked your brains many times for my sake, but now I will tell you the story. People call me the master thief, I am a past master of the art of stealing.

"I came to Roskilde on the night train the very night you manufactured your little yarn about the money in the letter. The whole town was

talking about you the next day and there was not a single person who doubted that you had invented the story yourself. I listened to all the gossip in the bar room of the hotel.

"Your letter, you said, had been stolen about midnight, the very hour when I had cracked a nice little crib in Copenhagen getting a snug little amount of 80,000 out of a jewelry shop. You see, a much more stylish affair.

"I caught the night train at 1:15 and reached Roskilde about 2 in the morning. I have always found it a good scheme to go to a small town and stay there for a while so as not to be arrested at the frontier.

"Do you understand now that it was good business for me to pay 2000 crowns to get a certificate from the authorities that I had been in Roskilde at midnight?

"I proudly returned to Copenhagen the same evening, was, of course, arrested at the depot. The whole job at the jeweler's had been arranged so that I was immediately suspected. My methods were too well known to the detectives.

"But I show them our agreement. The police ring up Roskilde police station on the phone. Was I right? Sure enough! And, of course, even I could not be in two places at the same time.

"And now I am sitting here thinking that I have done a good thing, supposing you don't try any more tricks. Respectfully yours,

"NICHOLAS KRAGBERG."

.....
The letter is burnt, the ashes gone. But, after all, there is an explanation of everything.—Harold Tandrup.

A. J. and Mrs. McCall, of Kansas City, were in Brownsville yesterday, having arrived Saturday night. Mr. McCall is in charge of a party of prospectors from the North.

C. H. Peterman, wife and son, of St. Paul, Minn., are Brownsville visitors.

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