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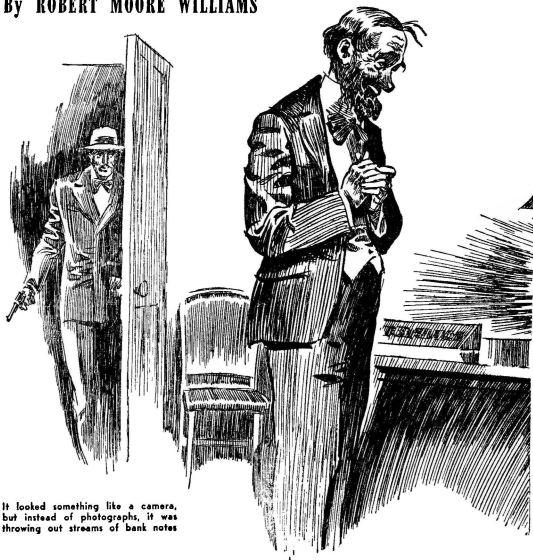
The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS can always be depended upon to write an unusual story. In this issue he presents, "The Counterfeiter," a story about a little man with a machine that could duplicate things. It started out with hundred dollar bills and ended up with—but you read the story and find out yourself. Incidentally, Bob dropped in on us a week ago for a short visit from his home town, St. Louis. We were mighty glad to see him—and especially the swell yarns he brought along with him. You'll be seeing these yarns in future issues of FA.

The COUNTERFEITER

By ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



It looked something like a camera, but instead of photographs, it was throwing out streams of bank notes

"THERE'S a man to see you, Mr. Gray," my secretary said. "I'm too busy to see anyone," I answered.

She looked at the stacks of hundred dollar bills on my desk and at Hinkle, standing across from me. Hinkle and I

were busy, too busy to see anybody about anything. "Tell him to come back tomorrow."

"But he insists," the girl protested.

"Then have the guard—" This was as far as I got. The girl, standing in the doorway of my office, was gently

He was just a little man, but he had a machine with very peculiar abilities. It could duplicate things . . .



shoved aside. A little man, bent almost double with the weight of the huge box he was carrying on one shoulder, puffed his way into the room. He was wearing a black derby hat, an old black suit, and a gray shirt with a patent leather bow tie. His face, lined and wrinkled,

sported a short, neatly trimmed black beard.

He looked as old as the hills and maybe older.

"I want to speak to someone," he said vaguely. Because I was seated in the swivel chair, he picked me as the im-

portant person in the room, and concentrated his gaze on my face.

I expected him to open up his box and try to sell me something out of it.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I'm too busy to see anyone just now. If you will come back in two or three days, I'll be glad to see you, Mr.—"

"Arken," he supplied. "Yoseph Arken." His eyes came to rest on the stacks of bills lying on my desk.

"Yah," he said, the beard nodding a little sadly. "I see you are busy. It may be dot I am de reason you are so busy—"

Sitting across the desk from me, I heard Ed Hinkle take a deep breath and then stop breathing. I don't know whether or not I stopped breathing, but I do know that from this instant on Mr. Joseph Arken had my full and undivided attention.

I AM executive vice-president of the Pine Street Bank and Trust Company, in St. Louis, Missouri. The executive part of my title means that I am actually in charge of the bank, that I pass on all important loans, that I make all decisions on policy, that I do the hiring and the firing—unless I am hiring or firing a director's nephew—in short, that I take all the responsibility, do most of the work, and get damned little of the money. It also means that when something goes wrong, I'm the guy who gets his head chopped off.

There was something wrong this morning, something plenty wrong. It had started when Hinkle, who is as expert a teller as ever rippled a stack of bills through agile fingers, had discovered he had a counterfeit hundred dollar bill among the money in his cage. He had brought the bill in to me, dumping his troubles in my lap, and we had begun to check all our bills. So far, we

had discovered exactly eighteen counterfeit hundred dollar bills in the bank's funds.

Eighteen counterfeit hundred dollar bills amounts to eighteen hundred dollars. That's not much money in terms of the national debt but let any bank discover it has been taking in counterfeit bills and watch the president, the board of directors, and every blasted employee in the place start running in circles. Queer money is something every banker hates with an undying hatred that verges on insanity.

We had eighteen hundred dollars worth of queer money on hand.

Not only were the bills counterfeit, but they were that much sought after but never before attained brand, perfect counterfeits. The picture, the engraving, the threads in the paper, the ink, the design, all these things were exactly right. The bills felt good, they rattled right, they looked perfect enough to have been made from the original plates. They looked so good that I would guarantee to go into any bank in the United States and have one of them accepted as genuine. I wouldn't guarantee to have two of them accepted because the second one would get me into trouble if the teller was on his toes, which indicates what was wrong with them.

They all had the same number.

Hinkle and I were busy checking numbers when Arken walked into my office. When he rather sadly said maybe he was the reason we were so busy, my bloodpressure took a big jump.

Counterfeiters happen. As long as men continue to use money, somebody will always think he can counterfeit it. The crooks can't beat this game, the Federal men get them every time, but they're always trying.

They try, but never in the history of banking has a counterfeiter walked into

a bank and announced his occupation. This was exactly what Arken had done, if I understood him correctly.

"What do you mean, Mr.—ah—Arken?" I kept my voice calm.

THE beard wagged again. "You are looking at de money. I am sorry but it may be dot some of dot money is bad!"

Hinkle expelled his breath in a long sigh.

My secretary was still standing in the doorway, a puzzled expression on her face. I shoed her out. "I'm seeing no one from now on." I turned to Arken. "Now, if you please—"

Puffing and blowing, he was turning around, easing the big box from his shoulder to a chair.

"Sooo heavy, de box is," he said, puffing. He took off his derby hat, wiped sweat from a head as bald as an egg, clamped the hat back on, and glared fiercely at me.

"Dis I keep in my basement," he said, pointing to the box. "I t'ink no one knows about it. Today I discover dat somebody has been slipping in at night and using it to make bad money."

The counterfeiter had not only come in but he had brought his equipment with him!

"I am werry sorry dot dis has happened," Arken continued. The glare changed to an apogetic smile.

"Sorry!" I exploded, then caught myself. It was all right for him to be sorry but being sorry wasn't near enough, not when you have had any connection whatsoever with the manufacture or distribution of hot money. Every counterfeiter on earth is sorry for what he has done, after he's caught. The F.B.I. could distill sorrow by the jugfull out of any crook after the bracelets are around his wrists.

At this point I realized that Arken

hadn't been caught. He had come in of his own free will. The police hadn't brought him in. He had brought himself in.

"All right," I said. "I'm willing to listen, but your story had better be good."

"Better be good?" he repeated, as if he hadn't understood.

I nodded. "It doesn't have to be good so far as I'm concerned but no matter what happens I have to report the counterfeit bills we have found. I've had enough experience with the Federal men to know that your story had better be good when you tell it to them."

Arken looked sad again, shaking his head and blinking his eyes at me. "Yah," he said. "I know. But it is innocent I am, of making bad money. I did not know my invention was being using dat way. Somebody slipped in at night. See, I vill show you—"

THAT was his story. Maybe it was the truth. Maybe somebody had been slipping in without his knowledge. And again, maybe there was a lot of these hundred dollar bills in circulation and maybe the Federal men were on Arken's tail right now, and he, knowing he was about to be caught, had dreamed up this cock and bull story to give himself an alibi.

It was his equipment, wasn't it? If he was so innocent, how did it happen that he had counterfeiting equipment in his possession? Any man found with engraved plates, paper, special ink, in his possession, has to do a lot of talking to keep himself out of the penitentiary. There is no other use for counterfeiting equipment except to make bad money.

"I vill show you," Arken repeated. "I vill show you. You vill be de judge."

His accent was bad, his English halting and slow. Whoever he was, wher-

ever he had come from, he hadn't been born in this country. The way he spoke revealed this much about him.

He lifted the lid off his box, took a coil of wire out of it, looked around for a wall plug. While he was hunting for the outlet, Hinkle and I peeked into the box.

"Well, I'm damned!" Hinkle said, looking quickly up. "If that's a set of counterfeiting tools, then I'm a monkey's uncle!"

The box contained what at first glance looked like an old-fashioned large size folding camera. It had been rebuilt so much that very little was left of the original equipment but apparently the camera was the heart of the device. It contained an intricate set of odd-shaped lenses which seemed to focus on a glass tray that was firmly fixed to the bottom of the box. The whole top of the box was taken up by the oddest shaped light I have ever seen that seemed to be a combination radio tube and ultra violet heat lamp. Three separate coils of wire ran from the lamp down to the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box.

"I don't get it," Hinkle said. "I don't begin to get it."

He was a little scared, even then.

Arken, clucking like an old hen, pushed us aside. He didn't like to have us looking inside his box.

"I vill demonstrate," he kept saying. "I vill demonstrate. You shall judge if I knew about de bad money.

FIRMLY stoppered and wired in one corner of the box was a quart bottle. It was made of some queer kind of glass. I had never seen anything like it before. Arken unwrapped the wires, carefully removed the stopper, and poured a portion of the contents of the bottle into the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box. He handled the

bottle very carefully and he took great pains to make certain he did not spill any of its contents.

A coal black, sirupy liquid came out of the bottle. It was an odd liquid. It flowed readily yet it seemed to cling together something like mercury. It was live with tiny pin-points of exploding light. I had the impression, though I knew I was wrong, that I could see atoms bursting in that black liquid, single atoms exploding one by one.

"Dis," Arken said, "is de matrix."

Carefully stoppering the bottle, he wired it back into its place in the corner of the box.

He rubbed his hands together, peered at the black liquid in the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box. "Dot matrix is de most wonderful substance on earth. Dere is nussing like it on dis or any udder planet. Dere is nussing like it anywhere else in de whole universe, may be."

He cooed like a mother bending over a cradle.

Hinkle looked at me, pointed his index finger at his forehead, and traced circles in the air. Had we caught a nut, I wondered too. Arken looked like he might have wandered out of the booby hatch and the junk inside the box looked like it had been put together by a nut. I didn't say anything. Sometimes it's hard to tell a candidate for the padded cell and a genius apart.

"That's a pretty big claim you're making," I said.

"Hah?" he glared at me.

"You said there is nothing like that black liquid any where in the universe. That's all right, but the universe is a pretty big place."

"Dot I know, dot I know. But de matrix, it is somes'ing special, it is somes'ing like nussing ever before made in all de universe, may be I t'ink. Now for somes'ing to duplicate—" He

looked around the office and his eyes came to rest on the stack of bills on my desk.

"Do you mind if maybe I use one—" he questioned.

"It's your party and your funeral," I told him.

HE PICKED up one of the bills, lovingly examined it, then slipped it into position inside the crazy camera inside the box, bending the wire prongs that served as holders until they held the bill in just the right position. Then he snapped a switch. Simultaneously a soft ticking began in the box and the combination radio tube and sun lamp bulb began to glow. The glow got brighter and brighter, became blue-white, got brighter than the flame of a welding torch, got blinding. The light passed downward through a narrow slit and was focused on the hundred dollar bill. Arken adjusted the focus. Part of the light passed through the bill and flowing downward through the intricate series of lenses, was focused on the tray of black liquid in the glass receptacle in the bottom of the box.

No visible change took place in the liquid.

So far as I could see, nothing was happening, but Arken watched the proceedings with the intent alertness of a cat at a mouse hole.

The ticking sound stopped.

When the ticking stopped, the light was automatically turned off.

Arken pulled a tiny pair of glass tongs out of his pockets, fished raptly in the coal black liquid.

"Ah!" he said.

He pulled a rectangular piece of green paper out of the matrix, flourished it before our eyes.

It looked like a hundred dollar bill.

Hinkle couldn't keep his hands off of that piece of paper. He snatched it

out of Arken's fingers, scrutinized it, twisted it in his hands. It rattled sharply, a sound that only new money can make. Hinkle looked at me. His face was the color of ashes.

"If I hadn't seen it come out of that black goo, I would swear it was a perfectly good bill," he whispered. "If anybody passed it in to me, I'd take it without asking any questions. Look at it, will you? Look at it!" He handed the bill to me.

"It's a perfect duplicate of the bill he put into the box," Hinkle said. "See, the original has a slight tear on one edge. The tear is duplicated. And the number is the same."

Snatching the original bill out of the wire prongs that held it in position, he held it up for comparison.

Hair by hair, line by line, number by number, tint by tint, the two bills were identical. The original bill had been creased where it had been folded. The new bill reproduced the crease. The original had been printed a little off center, a minting error. The new bill duplicated that error.

"Vot did I tell you?" Arken said, satisfaction in his voice. "Vot did I tell you?"

The black beard wagging vigorously up and down, he was grinning like a kid on Christmas morning.

IF I had been working in a bank in New York, or Chicago, or San Francisco, and this had happened, I wouldn't maybe have been so much surprised. Strange things happen in those cities. But St. Louis is a town where nothing miraculous ever happens. Oh, I know the Browns won a pennant a couple of years ago, and that was a miracle if ever miracles happen, but St. Louis is not a town where you can expect to have a little baldheaded, black bearded runt come walking into your office and

plunk down a box that contains the only perfect counterfeiting machine ever invented. Maybe in New York—

But this *was* St. Louis and this little guy *had* come puffing into my office and he *did* have a machine that worked miracles. It wasn't a machine, of course, but I call it a machine because I don't know what else to call it.

"I'm not trying to pry," I spoke. "But would you mind telling me how in the devil that blasted machine works?"

The black beard wagged again, this time from side to side. "Dot is some-s'ing I am not willing to reweal, joost now."

"I'm not trying to steal it!" I snapped.

"I know *you* are not but udder people might be thieves may be."

"Well, what are you going to do with it?" I challenged.

The black eyes glowed at the question. "Vot I am going to do, *vot* am I going to do? Ah! Dere as so many t'ings I am going to do. All my life I have worked on dis, so I could do some of de t'ings I have in my heart." He rapped his chest as he spoke, a gesture that in anybody else would have been melodramatic. In Arken it merely emphasized the way he felt.

In his next words I got a picture of what he had in his mind, of the feelings in the heart he pounded so fervently and fiercely.

"My friend, dere are poor people in dis world. Dere are kids who do not have shoes, who do not have enough to eat. Right here in dis big city we have dem. Ah! How well I know we have dem! My friend," he glared at me as if somehow I was keeping the kids from having enough to eat, "when I am finish wit dis invention I have in dis box, der will be no kids nor anybody else who do not have enough to eat in de whole world may be!"

HIS words, the hot way he used them, opened my eyes a yard wide. When he demonstrated his machine, I had thought he was just another counterfeiter trying to pull a fast one. Maybe he was a counterfeiter but he was something else too, he was one of the great souls who spend their lives trying to better the lot of suffering humanity. I hadn't the faintest idea how his machine would help the kids who didn't have enough to eat but I was willing to believe that he knew how and I was willing to credit the honesty—

"*Just don't get excited,*" a voice said in my ear. "Just don't get excited and you won't get hurt."

I'll never know how I managed to keep from jumping except that there was something in the voice that told me to keep very still. I didn't move.

"I'm talking to all three of you," the voice continued. "Don't raise your hands, don't do anything that will attract attention. Yes, this is a gun I have in my hand and I know how to use it."

Something round and hard was being pushed against my backbone. It froze me to the spot. Arken glanced over my shoulder toward the door and his eyes opened wide. Hinkle didn't move a muscle.

"Now you can turn around," the voice said. The pressure relaxed on my backbone. I turned very slowly.

Three men had come silently through the door, had closed it silently behind them. Two of them stood just inside the door. The third one was standing right behind me. He slipped the gun into his pocket as I turned.

He was short and broadshouldered. He was wearing a light gray topcoat of excellent styling and expensive cloth. His hat was gray, his face was swarthy, and his eyes were black-brown. A diamond as big as an agate taw glittered

on his right hand. Looking at him, you would have thought he was a prosperous business executive and sportsman.

"You can call me Joe," he said. "Joe is not my name but it will do for today."

He looked at Arken, at the box, at Hinkle, at the money piled on my desk, and clicked his tongue. "Too bad we have to let that go. It would be just like finding the dough." He shook his head. "We're after bigger game than hundred dollar bills today."

He looked at Arken and Arken's box. "The boys were a little slow in tipping me off about how big this is. I only got in on it this morning, and when I did get in, I found you had taken a walk. We trailed you here."

THE office was silent. On the street outside a square-wheeled street car went bumping past. A horn blew. Joe wasted no time.

"If you will pick up your box and walk out the front door, I will appreciate it. One of my boys will go along with you, of course. I might mention that all of my boys are very good shots. They have to be, to work for me. *What are you doing, Pappy?*"

The last sentence was addressed to Arken, who had bent over his box and was fumbling around in the bottom of it. He looked up. "I will go wit you," he said. "But first, de matrix, I must put it back into its bottle."

He pointed to the black liquid in the receptacle on the bottom of the box.

"Okay," Joe said. "But make it snappy."

Arken took his time. He took a small glass funnel out of his pocket, very carefully detached the tray from the bottom of the box, took the stopper out of the bottle and poured the contents of the tray back into it. The glass stopper of the bottle he screwed into place

and wired down. Then, without saying a word, he stooped over and picked up the box, hoisted it to his shoulder, puffed through the door, through the lobby of the bank, and out the front. One of the thugs followed closely but unobtrusively behind him.

It was all done so smoothly and so efficiently I didn't realize it was happening until it was finished. Then I said, "Hey!"

"Yes?" Joe said, carbolic acid in his voice.

Silly as it sounds, I had intended to tell him he couldn't do that. I wasn't thinking fast and I hadn't yet fully realized that while this was my office, I wasn't giving the orders in it just now.

I realized it damned soon. The carbolic acid tone in Joe's voice, the look in his eyes, showed me where I was wrong. I shut up. Joe looked at his watch. "They've got away safely. Now if you gentlemen will put on your hats and coats—"

He grinned at the blank look on our faces.

"Of course, you're going along," he said. "I sent Pappy along first because we might make too much commotion if we all went together. However, I wouldn't think of leaving you here to give an alarm before we've made a clean getaway. So if you will just put on your hats and coats and go with us—I might repeat that Mac here and I are both good shots." He nodded at the flat-faced thug with the cauliflower ear who stood just inside the door.

We put our hats and coats on. There was no arguing with this fellow. He had a way about him.

"And if you will just mention to your secretary as we go out that you're going out to lunch and won't be back until after two—"

I nodded.

A few minutes later Hinkle and I

were sitting in the back seat of a Ford coach. Mac was driving. Joe, turned halfway around in the front seat, was smiling and chatting about the chances of the Browns ever winning another pennant.

At ten o'clock I had been sitting at my desk, a fairly happy executive vice-president of a bank. At ten minutes after ten, Hinkle had come in with the first news about the bad hundred dollar bills. At ten thirty Arken had come puffing in. At eleven o'clock Joe had come.

A hell of a lot had happened to me in one hour!

THEY took us across the Mississippi River to East St. Louis, and when we finally stopped, we were in the back end of a ramshackle garage. At no time did they attempt to blindfold us or to conceal where they were taking us. I would have been a damned sight happier if they had.

There were two cars in the garage. Arken and the thug who had followed him out of the bank were waiting for us. Arken's box was there too.

Joe didn't waste any time. He pointed to the box. "Get it going," he said.

Arken opened the lid, found a plug for his extension cord, carefully poured the black matrix from its bottle into the glass receptacle designed to hold it.

"You have a bill, may be, for me to duplicate?" he hesitatingly asked, when the machine was ready.

"No," Joe said. "No bill this time. You can use this instead of a bill."

He pulled off the ring he was wearing, casually pried the diamond out of its mounting, and handed the stone to Arken.

"I paid five grand for that," he said. "You can work with it."

Arken looked at the ring. His face paled. "No, no!" he protested. "On

paper, it vill work. Not vork on some-s'ng like that."

"Don't try to argue with me," Joe said. "I know more about you than you know I do. Put this diamond into your machine and turn on the juice."

"No!" Arken objected. "I vill not do it."

"Look, Pappy," Joe said.

"No matter what you say, I vill not do it."

Joe shrugged. "Okay, Mac," he said.

Mac grinned, stepped forward. His fist swung in a vicious arc. The blow knocked the little inventor clear across the garage. Mac followed him like a cat following a mouse, yanked him to his feet, slapped his head from side to side, walked him back to us.

"What do you say now, Pappy?" Joe asked.

Arken, trembling and dazed, mutely nodded his head.

"That's better," Joe said. "Much better. Get going."

Taking the diamond with trembling fingers, Arken adjusted the wire prongs of the holder so they grasped the stone, minutely adjusted the focus, then turned on the current. The jetting light flared downward, poured through the diamond, and was absorbed into the black matrix. The little timing device ticked softly, then was silent. Using the glass tongs, Arken fished a diamond out of the matrix. It had been formed under the surface, formed out of sight, but it was there.

JOE snatched it from his hands, held it to the light. As he gazed at it, the glittering lights in his eyes were no less intense than the lights in the jewel. Rapacity, greed, avarice, lust for money and for power, all these things were naked in his eyes. A second later he was calm again. He handed the stone

to Mac.

"Go find out if this thing is any good," he ordered. "You know where to go. And don't let any grass grow under your feet."

Mac took the stone, climbed into the car we had come in, backed out of the garage, the other thug opening and closing the doors for him. Joe smiled suavely at us. "We'll have to wait a while. Might as well sit down and make yourself comfortable."

He climbed behind the wheel of the remaining car, lit a cigarette. Hinkle and I squatted down with our backs against the wall. Arken, looking like a bug that has been partly stepped on and has only enough strength left to wiggle, glanced at Hinkle and me.

"Sorry," he said, spreading his hands in an apologetic gesture. "Sorry I haf caused you so much trouble. It would have been better if I had stayed away."

"Can you make anything you want to make in that machine?" I questioned. "Almost anys'ing," he answered. "Some s'ings I cannot duplicate, but most s'ings, all I need is the original."

"Supposing the object you are trying to duplicate is black and light doesn't pass through it?" I asked. "How can you duplicate something like that?"

"De light you see, it does not matter. It is joost light. It is de light you cannot see dat does de vork. And de invisible light vill pass through almost anys'ing."

The little man certainly seemed to know his optics. He squatted down beside us, sadly contemplated the toes of his shoes. From behind the wheel of the car, Joe watched us in silence. His remaining assistant had taken up a position at the doors of the garage.

"It all depends on whether or not that diamond turns out to be good," I said.

"And if it is good?" Hinkle whispered.

"Then you and I had better start saying our prayers," I answered.

If the diamond was good, if a jeweler would accept it as genuine—and unquestionably Mac had taken it to a jeweler or to a fence specializing in stolen gems—then the machine Arken had in his box was worth as many millions of dollars as he cared to ask for it.

I SAT on my haunches and thought bitter thoughts that I didn't like. The machine made diamonds. That made it valuable all right but actually diamonds are nothing more than pretty rocks. The really valuable things on earth, like beefsteak, supposing it could reproduce them? Could it duplicate a piece of coal, a strip of woolen cloth?

Diamonds are valuable but steak and coal and woolen cloth are vital.

If Arken's machine could duplicate these things, then there would be steak for all of us, coal to heat our homes, woolen clothes to keep us warm.

The history of the human race has been the record of the fight of mankind to secure an adequate supply of food and shelter. There never has been enough of these commodities to go around. There have always been millions of people who didn't have enough to eat or enough clothes to keep them warm. Bitter wars have been fought through all history to gain a supply of these essential commodities.

Only now, with Arken's machine, with Arken's pitcher that never went dry, everybody would have enough—

I thought these thoughts until I couldn't stand thinking them any longer, then I got up and spoke to Joe.

"This is too big for you to take by force," I told him. "This is too important, for all of us, for the good of all mankind, for any one person to try to

grab it off for himself."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

I told him what I meant. I told him about the beefsteak and the warm clothes and the good shoes. I told him about the slums, where they didn't have enough of those things. I know about the slums. I was born in them. And while I was talking, Arken got up and came over and listened.

"What do you say, Pappy?" Joe questioned. "Can your machine make a beefsteak, can it make a pair of shoes?"

He drew himself up to his full height. The fire that Mac had knocked out of him came back to his eyes.

"Of course it vill make dose t'ings," he answered. "Vy do you t'ink I have vorked all my life on it if it would not make does t'ings? A diamond, it is pretty, but it is really no good. A beefsteak, it is always good. Dis is vot I haf in my mind, when I go to vork on my invention. I am brought up in de old country, and we never haf enough to eat, not near enough, and I am hungry all de time, and my bruzzers are hungry, and everybody, he is hungry. So I say to myself, I will make some-s'ing so nobody will ever be hungry any more."

HE WASN'T a dingy little man in a black suit when he spoke like that. He was a prophet foreseeing the future of the human race, a prophet who had worked all his life to make that future come true.

"Don't try to grab it for yourself, Joe," Arken ended. "It's too big for you, too big for any man. If you steal it, it vill choke you, it vill strangle you. It's some-s'ing for all of us, not some-s'ing for joost one man."

"It belongs to all of us, Joe," I argued. "It belongs to every man, woman, and child on earth."

"Thanks," Joe said. "You have helped me. I might have missed a bet if you hadn't pointed out all the possibilities to me."

"You mean you—" Arken began.

Avarice glittered in the crook's eyes. "Joe never lets go, Pappy. When he's got his hand on something good, Joe never lets go. If that diamond is good, you can bet that Joe will hang on to your box, Pappy, he'll hang on until hell freezes over."

He frowned. "Mac is taking a hell of a long time getting that stone appraised. He should have been back before this."

I turned and walked away. Arken followed me. His black beard wagged sadly from side to side as he mumbled to himself. Outside a car honked. The thug peeked out, then opened the doors. A car rolled into the garage. Mac was at the wheel.

Joe jumped out of the car he was in, ran to Mac.

"What did he say, Mac?"

His face was aflame with eagerness.

"The fence said he would give four grand for it," Mac answered without getting out of the car.

"Then it's really good?"

"As good as gold. Here it is," Mas answered, reaching into his pocket. The hand that came out of his pocket and up over the edge of the car door held a bulldog revolver. He pointed the muzzle of the gun down and pulled the trigger.

Flame and smoke jutted from the pistol. The heavy explosion was flat inside the walls of the garage. The slug hit Joe in the stomach.

Joe's face showed that he realized, during the split second in which the gun was exploding, what had happened. What Jack London called the law of the club and the fang, the law by which he lived, had overtaken him.

Arken's prophecy had come true. Joe was a smart crook, a very smart crook, but he had declared himself in one a game where the stakes were too big for him, too big for any man. The stakes had choked him. Because the stakes were so tremendously large, they had lured Mac into gambling for them. There was only one way Mac could do that: eliminate Joe.

Joe staggered backward, fell against the wall.

Mac, his heavy face alive with satisfied sadism, gloatingly watched him fall. Then he stepped out of the car.

"Come on, boys!" he yelled. "I got the big fellow!"

THE door of the garage was kicked open. Mac had taken so long to get the diamond appraised because he was getting together a strongarm squad of his own. The squad was outside.

Joe's man, who had remained loyal, shot the first man who came through the door. A split second later somebody outside the garage let go with a tommy-gun. Slugs moving a thousand miles an hour whammed, whistled, tore their way through the garage.

"Arken! Hinkle! Get under the car!" I heard someone shout. Only later did I realize that I was doing the shouting.

Hinkle was already on his feet, diving for the protection of the nearest car. I went right behind him, hitting the concrete floor and rolling. As I dove toward the automobile, I caught a glimpse of Joe, pulling himself to a sitting position against the wall. With his left hand holding his stomach, he used his right hand to pull a gun out of his pocket. He emptied the pistol into Mac.

The law of the club and the fang is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways. The sadism on Mac's face turned to

horrified pain. He shot at Joe, and shot again, and was falling as he shot. Joe's body jumped as the heavy bullets hit him.

The tommy-gun let go again. By this time I was under the car. I looked around for Arken. I didn't see him.

"The damned fool!" I heard Hinkle groan.

Arken hadn't followed us. The box containing his machine was sitting on a workbench against the wall. Oblivious of the bullets whamming through the garage, he was frantically digging around inside the box.

"Arken! Get under here!" I yelled.

The guns were momentarily quiet. He heard my yell, turned a white face in my direction. The black beard wagged furiously.

"I can't!" he screamed, pointing to the box.

A bullet had gone into the box. Out of the hole the bullet had left, a black liquid was oozing. The matrix.

"What the hell difference does that make? Let it spill—"

That was as far as I got. Little eyes of blinding fire had begun to appear around the edge of the hole the bullet had left. A drop of the matrix ran down the edge of the box. A tongue of fire followed it. The matrix oozed out on to the wooden workbench. Smoke puffed up, followed by fire. Almost instantly fire and smoke had appeared on the under side of the two inch boards that made the bench.

The matrix had eaten through two inches of wood. It was still eating. A drop fell to the floor. The concrete sizzled like a piece of red-hot iron that has been suddenly plunged into cold water.

Arken had always handled that matrix with extreme care. He had kept it in a bottle made of some unusual kind of inert glass. The receptacle into

which he poured it had been made of the same material. He had used glass tongs to remove the hundred dollar bill and the diamond from the receptacle.

Whatever that matrix was, it was hot stuff. Arken knew it was hot stuff, and had handled it accordingly. Now a slug had smashed the bottle that held it and it was coming into contact with ordinary materials, the wooden box, the wooden boards on the workbench, the concrete of the floor.

ARKEN was frantically trying to stop it from running out of the box. He stuffed rags into the hole. The matrix ate the rags. There was a piece of broken glass lying on the bench. The glass had come out of the windshield of a wrecked car. Arken grabbed the glass, held it over the hole.

It was not the right kind of glass. The matrix ate through it too.

Before he could try anything else, the whole box exploded, puffing outward and upward with a soft thud. The light that blazed up was brighter than the sun. All the little pin-points of brilliant light that had been visible in the black liquid exploded at the same time. The blazing brilliance was a flaming spray that covered Arken.

I was blind, blind. I couldn't see. But I could hear someone screaming. Arken screaming.

Blind as I was, I tried to crawl out from under the car. Somebody pulled me in the other direction. That somebody was Hinkle and he saved my life. Caught in the blazing brilliance of the matrix, I couldn't have helped Arken. He was beyond help.

The sword of the law of the club and the fang is a vicious weapon, striking the innocent as well as the guilty. Arken was a flaming torch. The workbench, the walls of the garage, the concrete floor were burning with hotter

flames than ever came from a welding torch.

Hinkle pulled me out the other side of the car. The automobile had saved our lives, by protecting us from the spray of exploding matrix, but the car was burning over us as we crawled out from under it, crawled out through the open door of the garage.

The man who had remained loyal to Joe, the unseen maniac with the Tommy-gun, both were already gone. Smoke from the garage was puffing a thousand feet into the air. Far away the sirens of racing fire engines were sounding. The sirens got closer and closer.

THIS was one blaze the firemen didn't put out right away. It seemed to be fed by some central core of atomic heat that resisted extinguishing. The whole garage was completely burned to the ground before the fire was out.

They didn't find charred bodies in the wreckage, they didn't even find bones. They found the ashes of bones, ashes of Joe, ashes of Mac. They didn't find any ashes of a little black bearded, bald-headed man. Around the workbench where the box had stood they found a hole in the ground, a hole about forty feet deep and twenty foot in diameter.

Somewhere down at the bottom of that hole the matrix had finally used up the last of its energy.

Hinkle and I told our story. We told it as being kidnapped by a gang of counterfeiters whom we had detected. We didn't mention Arken or his machine. We have jobs we want to keep. If we had tried to tell the police about Arken, they would have thought we were as crazy as loons and the directors of the bank would have thought we were not proper employees for such an institution. If Hinkle cried a little, if I wiped tears out of my eyes, as we told

our stories the police merely thought we were so glad to get away alive that we were crying. They didn't know we were thinking about Arken, about that little bald-headed man. The cops didn't much like the looks of that hole in the ground but Hinkle and I stuck to our stories. We were good citizens of the big town across the river and I could pull political wires. We got our pictures in the paper. In a few days the story was forgotten.

What was Arken's machine, how did it work? I don't know. My guess is that invisible radiations from the strange bulb in the top of the box passed through the articles he was duplicating and recreated them within the matrix. The secret of the matrix I don't know and never will know.

WORKING secretly, Hinkle and I traced Arken. He had been born in Germany and had come to this country at the age of sixteen. He was a professional photographer and he had a tiny shop on the north side. We saw samples of the photographs he had taken. They were works of art.

We also examined the basement of the little two-flat where he had lived. It was crammed and jammed with different kinds of cameras, lenses, developing equipment. Photography had been his profession and his hobby. Day

and night he had worked at it. But nowhere in that basement was there a supply of the black liquid he had called the matrix.

We talked to the kids who lived around the neighborhood. Childless himself, Arken had seemingly adopted every kid for his own. The kids mourned when he didn't come back. He had given them balls, he had given them shoes, he had given them thick steak sandwiches, all things that kids in this neighborhood don't often see. Hinkle and I have a theory about the origin of these balls and the other good things that Arken had given away so freely. It is a theory we never discuss except when we are alone.

If we are sorry for the kids, we are also sorry for Arken, for the little black bearded, bald-headed man who had tried to make certain that all kids everywhere would always have all the good things they want and need.

Everytime someone shoves a hundred dollar bill into his cage, Hinkle always looks up eagerly. Against all reason and against all knowledge, he hopes that some day one of the bills will be counterfeit and he will look up and see a little black bearded man grinning at him through the bars of his cage. If it is a day that will never come, Hinkle lives for it just the same.

THE END