# FIVE CROOKED CHAIRS

By FAREMAN WELLS

**SYNOPSIS**

Adam Meriston, a farmer's son, articled to a solicitor, makes a brave but unsuccessful attempt to thwart three thieves in a bag-snatching raid The bag was torn from the hands of a girl who afterwards explains to Adam that it contains the day's takings of her father's shop.

He attempts to track the thieves and reaches an old warehouse. Adams enters the building while the girl watches the door Suddenly he hears footsteps.

The man turns out to be Adam's employer—Corville Perkin.

Adam, in his private hours experiments with short-wave wireless.

Walking homeward, Adam is nearly run down by a large swift car.

He calls on Priscilla Norval.

Her father recounts the history of five antique chairs he possesses.

THE CROOK'S WIFE.

That week the influenza epidemic so much dreaded by Mr. Brewster, struck the office of Perkin, Paramour and Perkin, though, much to that gentleman's surprise, Adam was not one of its victims. As the trouble coincided with a rush of work, it became necessary for the survivors to work late. At five o'clock the clerks were given half an hour off for tea, but, in exchange for the privilege of the two free nights a week he required for his technical classes, Adam worked right through the tea interval. One evening while he was so engaged, Mr. Perkin's door opened to a sound of expostulation and weeping. A neat shabby little woman was being ushered out by Mr. Perkin himself, and the task seemed to be causing him considerable difficulty.

"It's no use, my good woman, no use whatever. You must make it clear to your precious husband that unless he does exactly what he is told I shall wash my hands of his case altogether. Then instead of an easy stretch of perhaps twelve months, he'll probably go down for three years."

The woman wailed afresh. "I would not mind so much if he was really guilty this time," she blubbered. "But he's been running straight, you know he has, Mr. Perkin, and he ought to get off this time."

"Now that's enough. I've told him what he has to say, and he's got to say it, and if you like to take your case elsewhere, you've only to say so."

"But Hagar's so sure," she persisted desperately, "that if you'll only get the barrister to ask him..."

"Meriston, show Mrs. Hagar out, please," Mr. Perkin cut in and closed the wood with the slam of finality.

The woman stood noisily weeping in the outer office as Adam approached her. "Come along, Mrs. Hagar," he said as kindly as he could. "It doesn't do any good to go against the advice of your legal adviser, you know."

"But he's so set on being asked just that one question, sir," she whimpered. "I seen him only yesterday and he made me promise I'd get it asked for him. Seems to me as he ought to know what it is'd do him a bit of good with the jury."

Adam endeavored to assure her that Mr. Perkin knew best, and laying a hand on her greenish, black sleeve began to steer her towards the stairway. "You can't go against Mr. Perkin's advice in these matters, you know. Look at the number of people he has got off," he cajoled her.

The woman suddenly ceased her weeping and looked up at him shrewdly from her red-rimmed eyes. Her face had gone cunning. "But suppose Mr. Perkin don't want to get him off this time?" she whispered.

"Nonsense. If I were you I'd go straight home and I'd have a cup of tea when I got there. If anyone can get your husband off Mr. Perkin is that man. You ought to feel certain about that."

She reached out a shiny red hand and grasped his sleeve. "'Ere, step outside with me a moment," she said. "You're a kind-spoken gentleman and I'd like a word with you."

THE MYSTERY OF MR. MONTADA

Merely to humor her Adam stepped into the corridor and pulled the door to behind him. "Now lovey," she wheedled, "Couldn't you manage to get one of them notes through to the barrister in court for me?"

"It would be as much as my job was worth, and I'm not likely to be in court either."

"Isn't it worth risking a bit to save a bloke what's had years on years of clink and been going straight now for atwelve-month? If he goes down this time it'll be the end of him, and just as we was getting a nice little 'ome together along of 'im running straight."

"For your own sake, I wouldn't do anything that was against Mr. Perkin's advice. What is it he wants to be asked anyhow?" Curiosity was mastering Adam's not over spontaneous sense of loyalty to his employer.

"What Hagar says they did ought to ask him is when did he last see Mr. Montada."

She paused cunningly and watched for the effect of this extraordinary question on Adam's face.

"He says if they'll only ask him that it will all come out and the judge will see it's a frame-up. Now couldn't you just get a little note about that through to the barrister? If it don't do no good it'll make Hagar's mind easier."

In spite of the perplexity in his mind, Adam bethought him to ask why the man could not mention Mr. Montada himself.

She had her answer ready for that. "You ought to know, sir, as a poor bloke like Hagar can't say what he likes in the dock. They shut you up cruel if you says a word outside the book, them judges and barristers. What's more, Hagar ain't what you'd call a clever bloke with his tongue, like you legal gentlemen that talks so easy. What he feels is that if he was given a start it'd all come out natural like and they couldn't stop him same as they would if he was to try to bring it out himself. There, you see how it is. Do poor old Hagar a bit of good, won't you? Promise me."

He refused to promise and at last got rid of her, still pleading and beginning to whimper again. Nevertheless he was far nearer to making her the promise she had desired than his manner had indicated. He seemed to smell roguery of some complicated sort, and if any action of his could upset roguery he doubted if his official loyalties ought to be allowed to stand in the way. However, he reflected that leading barristers are not easily got at by junior clerks out of solicitor's offices, and in any case it was extremely unlikely that anyone from the office would accompany Mr. Perkin to the Assizes.

It was a slight chance that influenced him ultimately, merely a glimpse caught of Mr. Montada's chauffeur when leaving the office late one evening shortly afterwards, and then an unexpected opportunity. Mr. Montada's gleaming saloon was standing at the kerb that evening and Mr. Montada's chauffeur was leaning over the open bonnet. Interested to see if the near front axle-cap had been renewed, Adam moved to pass as near as possible to the part on which the man's attention was engaged.

As he sauntered past, the bending chauffeur straightened as sharply as he could, not entirely straight, for that was impossible. He was a hunchback. He seemed to have been rendered suspicious, and he shot a glance of sharp enquiry at the hatless stranger. There was a perplexed frown on his face in the light of the street lamps, and there was an equally perplexed one on Adam's face as he moved away. The man at once turned and bent muttering over the engine once more. And Adam walked on telling himself that he had seen that very person crouched at the corner of Grail St. on a certain miserably wet night only a week or two before.

(To be Continued.)

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## English Villagers Run Own Movie Theater

Denholme, Eng.—Finding it too expensive to visit the movies at nearest towns, a number of the villagers here have installed their own cinema and work it themselves.

In this way films are shown once nightly on three nights a week, when prices range from 3d. to 9d. On two days in the week old-age pensioners are admitted free.

Elected annually, a committee is responsible for the working of the coinema, which is almost entirely staffed by voluntary helpers. The posters announcing the films are painted by a school-master, and voluntary attendants look after the box office and show patrons to their seats.

## Two Laughs

WELCOME.

Answers

Collector—"Shall I call tomorrow?"

Young Lawyer—"Twice, if convenient. I have an idea that folks think you are a client."

LEFT AT THE POST

Associated Magazine.

Two colored boys were having an argument about ghosts. One of them claimed to have seen a ghost as he passed the cemetery the night before.

"What was dishere ghos' doin' when you las' seen him?" asked the doubtful one.

"Jes fallin' behin', mistah; fallin' behin' rapid."


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Professor Dow said that after 20 years' experience he found women far outranked the men in achievment along the lines of algebra, logarithms and calculus.

The Einsteins of tomorrow, he said, are the girls. "They have a flair for figures, somehow, and some day a girl, not a man, will revolutionize the mathematical world."


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