

The Free Press Short Story

THE CLUMSY THIEF

WILODYNE DICKINSON HACK

FRANK BENSON, young engineer for the McDonald Construction Company, had decided to get down to his office early before anyone else was about. As he walked down Allendale's main street, he was glad to be back home after his years at college. At last he crossed the railroad tracks and reached the skeleton of Allendale's new warehouse, which was to house the quantities of pecked grain which came down the river on barges, there to be transferred to great ocean-going vessels.

Frank looked with pride at the great steel girders, which showed his first efforts in the great game of construction engineering to which he intended to devote his life. When he passed on to his office shack at the upper end of the wharf, he was whistling, but as he fitted his key in the lock of the rough door and stepped inside, the sound died on his lips. The window opposite was wide open and in the sudden draft from the doorway, papers and blueprints on top of his desk fluttered to the floor. While a trickle of ink from an overturned bottle on the desk was being absorbed rapidly into the rough wood floor. A dull thud back of him caused Frank to turn with a start. He laughed heartily as a cat, whom he recognized as one fed by the men, rubbed against his leg.

"So you're the culprit, jumping on my desk and turning over the ink bottle. You came in through the window—? He stopped suddenly, "but how did the window get open? I was careful enough to leave these papers out, but I'm sure I closed that window last night."

Frank put down the window, deciding that he had forgotten to close it after all and then sat down at his desk to work on the drawing which had occupied his spare moments for many months. It had been his dream while still in college to invent collapsible forms for concrete construction which would revolutionize the building game. It had been his plan, when he got his position with the McDonald Construction Company, to perfect his idea in time to be of practical value in the Allendale warehouse construction. Now he was more eager than ever to complete it, as the president of the company was expected in a few days and Frank intended to try to induce him to have some forms made to test them out. His hope was that his company would become sufficiently interested to give him financial assistance, for he had worked his way through college and had no funds to put his invention on the market. As the time was getting short, he had worked late the night before and came early this morning to take advantage of a few precious moments before his men arrived.

Because there was no safe in the room, Frank had slipped his nearly completed drawing under a pile of blueprints on a shelf over his desk. Now he raised up the papers with the one hand and groped for his drawing with the other. It was not there! With a sudden panic, he grabbed the blueprints and hastily sorted them over, dumped everything out of the drawer in his desk, flung open the lever door, picked up the papers which had fluttered to the floor and looked at them over. His body was hot and cold by turns. Having thoroughly searched the room, he ran outside around the building to the window which had been open. There were footprints in the mud! Frank followed them down to the water's edge where he found the rowboat which he and his men used when they had to go under the wharf tied loosely to the piles. It was bobbing up and down on the waves.

Running back to his office, Frank grabbed the telephone to call the constable, but suddenly his face turned white and his arm fell as if paralyzed. At last, mechanically, he put the receiver back on the hook and as, with haggard eyes, he watched some of his men approaching, he realized gravely that he never expected to see Eugene Markham, his foreman, again. He had met Eugene when they were both freshmen at college. He had been well-dressed and debonaire in those days, but the time had come when he grew shabby and diffident, and many times Frank had helped him with his own hard-earned dollars. Later, Eugene had found more ways to make money than he and had prospered accordingly, but when their courses were finished, he had been unable to find work. In fact, to Frank, he had always seemed to misfit in the engineering line, but he was so willing to do anything that Frank had persuaded his own employers to take his friend on as foreman. The other boy had seemed so grateful, especially when he had introduced him to his mother and sister, Sylvia.

"It's great to be in a real home again!" Eugene had said, enthusiastically. The family had accepted the newcomer on Frank's recommendation without reservation until he seemed like one of the family. Why, just the night before he had dinner with them, and when Frank had said he was going back to the office to work on his invention, he had offered to go with him. In fact, outside of Mrs. Benson and Sylvia, he was the only person who had been told about the drawing. He had seen Frank put it under the pile of blueprints just before he left, and he knew its value. He must have taken it! Frank groaned. The dreadful loss staggered him, but still he would not call the constable. He would give Eugene a chance to con-

front! That is, if he ever showed up. A moment later, as if in answer to his thought, the door swung open and a young man, tall, well-built, Auburn-haired, stepped in.

"Gene!" cried Frank. "What's the matter, old man? See a ghost?"

"Yes, the wrath of a betrayed trust," answered Frank, unsmilingly. "My drawing's gone!" Eugene started violently and his face flushed, but he gained his self-control quickly and looked around at the litter of papers. "Looks like you'd made a pretty thorough search for it, but maybe you've overlooked it in all this confusion. I'll go over everything again."

He looked over all the papers, but the drawing was not there. "Sure you did not take it home?" he asked. "You saw me leave it under the blueprints last night," answered Frank, pointedly.

"That's right. I'm sorry this had to happen after the way you've worked!" Eugene told the other with apparent sympathy. "If your drawing is really gone, you could make another one."

"Perhaps," replied Frank. "I have the general idea in mind, of course, but I'd have to do all the calculations over again and it would take so long I'd be too late for this job."

"I'm sorry, but possibly you may find it again. Come out on the job when you get over the shock."

Whenever they met during the day, Eugene seemed to make a tremendous effort to act natural, and at five o'clock he came to the office. "Find the drawing?" he asked.

"No."

"Still think it has been stolen?"

"Yes. It's not here and I looked over the house at noon. Don't want to worry mother and Sylvia about it, but I know it's not there; besides, I found the window in the office open this morning."

"Well, if you're sure it's a theft, why don't you get the constable busy?" suggested Eugene.

Frank began to think rapidly. Should he tell the other he suspected him and demand an explanation? He started to speak but the words died on his lips for a picture of Eugene, shabby and diffident as he had appeared at college, suddenly flashed across his mind. It was Frank's confidence in him which had pulled him up and now if he thought his friend suspected him, he might backslide again. No, Frank decided to let the matter rest. "I'll wait awhile yet before I start anything," he answered.

"Whoever took the drawing may return it. Anyway, I'll give them a chance."

"Maybe you're right to let the thing slide a day or so."

Frank turned sharply to the young fellow. "Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"Mr. Gene. He'll sell. He says he needs money. He'll sell for twenty-five dollars."

"When did he sell them to you?"

"This afternoon. I give him my board money. You like me have no good set?"

Frank unconsciously dismissed Mendosa and started to look for the foreman. As Eugene was not on the job, Frank hurried toward his boarding house, but as he passed his own home, his sister ran out to meet him.

"There's no use going on up to Gene," she told him. "He telephoned a little while ago and said he'd been called out of town. He was going to take me to a musicale to-night, you know."

Frank grasped her by both arms. "What do you mean 'Gene's been called out of town?' What right has he to leave town? What reason did he give?"

"He said something rather indefinite about his father. I asked if he had had bad news and he said, 'No, just a business proposition.' I didn't question him because I supposed you'd know about it," explained Sylvia. "Don't look as if the world had come to an end. Surely you can get along without him for a few days."

"A few days!" Frank laughed harshly. He led his sister up to the porch where his mother was sitting. Sylvia and his mother would have to know the truth.


When he had told them what had happened, his mother was dewy-eyed. "I'm proud of you, Son," she said. "What a friend you've been," exclaimed Sylvia; "but the invention! Oh, Frank, I'm so sorry."

Mr. Hays arrived early the next morning to go over every detail of the Allendale warehouse work as well as lay out plans for the company's next job. Frank was dreadfully handicapped as he had to handle the men in Eugene's place as well as spend many hours in conference with the president.

(Concluded on Page Six)

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The Minister of Finance of the Dominion of Canada offers to holders of the undernoted Dominion issues the privilege of exchanging their bonds into longer dated issues, in the following terms and under the following conditions:

⌋ This offer affords to holders of bonds eligible for conversion, the same interest payment and tax-free privilege, for the life of and as contained in the present bonds, and the opportunity of extending the term of the investment at 4 1/2% per annum. ⌋

**WAR LOAN 5% BONDS MATURING 1st OCTOBER, 1931**—Holders of these bonds have the privilege of exchanging into bonds maturing 1st November, 1956, bearing interest from 1st April, 1931. The first coupon will be for six months' tax-free interest at the rate of 5% per annum payable 1st October, 1931; the second coupon will be for seven months' interest at the rate of 4 1/2% per annum payable 1st May, 1932; thereafter to maturity interest will be payable half-yearly at 4 1/2% per annum.

**RENEWAL LOAN 5 1/2% BONDS MATURING 1st NOVEMBER, 1932**—Holders of these bonds have the privilege of exchanging into bonds maturing 1st November, 1957, bearing 4 1/2% interest payable half-yearly from 1st May, 1931. There will also be attached to these bonds three adjustment-coupons payable respectively on 1st November, 1931, and 1st May and November, 1932, for additional interest at the rate of 1% per annum.

**VICTORY LOAN 5 1/2% BONDS MATURING 1st NOVEMBER, 1933**—Holders of these bonds have the privilege of exchanging into bonds maturing 1st November, 1958, bearing 4 1/2% interest payable half-yearly from 1st May, 1931. The first five interest coupons, being those to and including 1st November, 1933, will be tax-free. There will also be attached to these bonds five tax-free adjustment-coupons payable respectively on 1st November, 1931, and 1st May and November, 1932 and 1933, for additional interest at the rate of 1% per annum.

**VICTORY LOAN 5 1/2% BONDS MATURING 1st NOVEMBER, 1934**—Holders of these bonds have the privilege of exchanging into bonds maturing 1st November, 1959, bearing 4 1/2% interest payable half-yearly from 1st May, 1931. There will also be attached to these bonds seven adjustment-coupons payable respectively on 1st November, 1931, and 1st May and November, 1932, 1933 and 1934, for additional interest at the rate of 1% per annum.

Conversion applications in the terms of the foregoing are invited to a total of \$250,000,000. The Minister of Finance reserves, however, the right to increase or decrease this amount at his discretion.

Subscriptions will be received and receipts issued by any branch in Canada of any Chartered Bank and by recognized Canadian Bond Dealers and Stock Brokers, from whom may be obtained application forms and copies of the official prospectus containing complete details of the loan. Applications will not be valid on forms other than those printed by the King's Printer.

The subscription lists to the foregoing will open on 11th May, 1931, and will close on or before 23rd May, 1931, at the discretion of the Minister of Finance.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE,  
 Ottawa, 11th May, 1931.