

*He didn't seem much like a dick, this mild, soft-spoken little man.  
But he knew that to ferret out larceny, not a loudmouth but . . .*

# The Eyes Have It

By Joseph F. Hook



I'D NEVER met a detective in the flesh, but now I was looking at one across the backyard fence, and could hardly believe my own eyes. He wasn't what I expected.

The tractor firm I represent had opened a sales agency at Tahomah, center of a rich farming district, and had put me in charge. The wife and I were lucky enough to find a furnished house, and that's how I came to meet Jim Clark.

He was in his late fifties, a small man with a thin halo of hair surrounding a pate almost as bald and brown as an onion. His hands and feet were small for a man, and his eyes held a gentle, quizzical expression. His bib overalls showed plenty of laundering and patching as he leaned on his shovel, his fingernails absently tapping out a rhythmic beat on the handle.

When I confessed that he was not my conception of a detective, he laughed good-naturedly and said, "No, I don't suppose I am. I ought to weigh two hundred, stand over six feet in No. 14 shoes, be about thirty years old, talk in a deep bass voice, and scowl fiercely. I know because, you see, I've read a few whodunits myself."

That was another paradoxical thing about him—his voice. He spoke slowly, distinctly, and gently. His was a voice that soothed you, a voice that gained and held your attention.

He continued questioningly, "I suppose you'll be putting in a garden this

spring! It's mighty good exercise."

"I don't know much about gardening," I admitted. "But the wife likes flowers, and we both enjoy fresh vegetables."

"Well, when you get ready to plant," he offered, "I'll show you what little I know. I get a big kick out of it, especially fighting the bugs. But the pheasants pretty near drive me crazy." He stopped drumming on the shovel handle and pointed to the neighboring brush-ridden lots. "They hang out in there, and the minute my peas and corn pop up, the rascals eat them off."

HIS wife came out and called to him, "Jim, you're wanted on the telephone. Headquarters." And to me, "Howdy, neighbor. We'll be popping over for a visit in a few days."

"Well, there it goes," Jim Clark sighed. "This is supposed to be my day off. Sometimes I'm tempted to tear that phone out by the roots. . . . All right, Matilda, I'll be there."

He stuck his shovel in the ground and excused himself. Presently he was back, looking neat as a pin. He said, "If you've nothing to do right now, you might's well ride downtown with me. We won't be gone long."

As he drove, he explained the nature of the phone call. A certain Calvin Dupree, cashier in the Crosby Department Store, had absconded with forty thousand dollars.

He was in the police station only a few minutes, and when he climbed into the car again he said, "We'll drive out to Center

Street and interview the little lady in the case. I always like calling on the ladies," he added with an infectious grin.

Center Street, he explained, had been the classy residential district in the city's early days. The house, in front of which we presently drew up, was an old brownstone which the owner had converted into apartments.

The detective opened the massive front door, and then we were standing in a spacious hall, from which the original circular staircase led to the upper apartments.

He knocked on a door to our left, and Mrs. Calvin Dupree opened it. She was a young, well-dressed, stunning blonde and, quite naturally, extremely nervous. The detective introduced himself and said that he was from police headquarters.

The woman's hand flew to her throat. "Oh!" she exclaimed. And then, "Oh, yes—from the police. Won't you come in, please?"

The owner hadn't changed the room much. The paneled wainscoting was high and dark. The original stone fireplace was intact, with its long, wide, wooden mantel. In the center was one of those old-fashioned clocks, and beside it a stuffed ring-necked pheasant. At the end of the room there was an antique wardrobe with a full-length mirror inset in the door.

The detective sat down on a chair opposite the fireplace and dropped his hat on the floor beside him. I sat next to the big bay window, and Mrs. Dupree sank into an easy chair, directly across from the wardrobe mirror, twisting her handkerchief in nervous fingers.

"This has been an awful shock," she said, dabbing at her eyes. "Calvin never once hinted that he was contemplating such a dreadful thing. There was no reason why he should have done it. And

now"—breaking down—"he's left me to—to face this—this disgrace all alone."

She bowed her head, and her shoulders shook. Crying women always did get my goat, and now I was feeling uncomfortable and wishing I hadn't come. The detective delicately refrained from looking at her. His fingernails drummed on the arms of the chair while waiting for the sobbing to subside.

"Yes, that's right," he observed at last, soothingly. "It's the innocent who pay for the guilty. Perhaps there was even another woman in the case."

The woman raised her head and dabbed at her eyes. "That's ridiculous," she said with some heat, "Calvin wasn't that type. Besides, we went everywhere together—the movies, clubs, and places like that."

**T**HE detective stopped drumming and let his glance wander around the room, to settle finally on the wardrobe for a few moments.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But we've got to try all angles, you know."

He shifted his glance to the woman, and rose from the chair. He crossed to the mantel, leaned an arm on it, and started that finger-drumming business again.

"Let's review the case, Mrs. Dupree," he suggested. "As I understand it, your husband came home yesterday evening and ate dinner. He told you it was the period ending and, as usual, he'd have to return to the store, and that he wouldn't be home till late; that you were not to wait up for him."

"That's right," the woman said, nodding. "Whenever Calvin had to work overtime at the period endings, I'd take in a movie. But last night there wasn't anything showing in town that appealed to me, so I went to bed early and fell asleep."



“Then the phone awakened you, and the store manager asked where your husband was. He told you that your husband hadn’t returned to the store.”

Mrs. Dupree dabbed at her eyes. “Yes,” she said. “Then the police came looking for him, and told me why. I nearly went insane. I cried all the rest of the night.”

“I can quite understand that,” the detective observed sympathetically. “And now, have you any idea where he might have gone, or where he hid the money?”

She stared with surprised and frightened eyes at the detective and beyond him before crying out hysterically, “How should I know, when he didn’t even tell me what he was contemplating?”

It isn’t a pleasant sight to see a woman in hysterics, especially a pretty one. I’d about decided to get out, when the detective turned his back on the woman with a shrug.

He indicated the stuffed pheasant with a jerk of the thumb and said to me, “That’s one of the pests I was telling you about. They’ll root up your young stuff in the garden about as fast as you plant it. But

this one’s rooting days are over. I wish all the rest of ‘em were stuffed and mounted.”

I realized that he was just talking to pass the time and steady my nerves while Mrs. Dupree’s hysterics lasted. But when he picked up the mounted bird from its place on the mantel, the hysteria came to an abrupt end.

Mrs. Dupree raised herself half out of the chair, gripping the arms until the knuckles of her hands turned white. Then, suddenly, she relaxed, and her fingers loosed their grip, slipping off the arms.

I cried out, “Look! She’s fainted!”

The little detective turned slowly and regarded the woman intently. Then he crossed over, picked the handkerchief off her lap, and rolled it around in his fingers. He tossed it over to me with a grin.

The handkerchief was as dry as a board.

He said, “She’s not bad, for an amateur actress, but her eyes gave her away.”

“Her eyes?” I repeated, puzzled. “I don’t get it.”

“Lips lie, but eyes don’t,” he explained gently. “Hers weren’t like those of a woman who’d been crying all night. I always study a person’s eyes when I’m questioning him or her, Try it sometime.”

“But you weren’t looking at her eyes half the time,” I argued.

“That’s what you think,” he grinned. “I was, though”—indicating the wardrobe with a nod— “in that mirror. If you were watching her, you’d have noticed—”

“I wasn’t, and I didn’t,” I cut in. “She was putting on too good an act for me. I was looking out the window, mostly.”

“You’d have noticed,” he resumed quietly, “that her eyes would roam around the room, pause for a moment on this stuffed pheasant, then settle on me. When I picked it up, she fainted. She’s been under quite a strain, and her nerves finally snapped.”

**A**LIGHT was beginning to dawn on me. I glanced from the little detective's face to the stuffed bird he was holding. I said, "I get it. She couldn't keep her eyes off that stuffed bird because the stolen money's in it!"

His smile was gently chiding. "You couldn't stuff forty grand in a goose, neighbor."

"Well, then, where is the money?" I inquired.

He said, "That's just what I was asking myself. And when I start thinking, I start finger-drumming. Only, this time, I wasn't doing it all instinctively. I sounded out that mantel board. You see, I've got one of them in my home, and it's solid wood. This one's different. Listen."

The fingernails started a rhythmic tattoo on the mantel edge, and it sounded solid enough. Then the nails moved over toward the point on which the stuffed pheasant had stood, and there the sound given forth was hollow, booming. The detective shoved the old clock aside, and drew the same hollow note there.

"I don't see any crack," I said, looking hard.

He said, "Neither do I. But I see putty stains where a crack might have been. We'll soon see."

He took out his pocket knife, opened the big blade, and kept jabbing at the putty

stain until the point suddenly sank in deeper. He drew it along then, like you'd cut linoleum, in the form of an oblong.

I watched him in amazement, saw him rise upward with the heavy blade. Then he lifted an oblong lid and laid it aside, revealing the missing money beneath in neat, flat packages.

Just then, the blonde sighed and stirred and opened her eyes. She took one look at the little detective, saw the handful of packaged bills he was holding up for my inspection, then fainted dead away again.

He said, smiling gently, "Yes, it's hard on the nerves—acting the role of innocence with a guilty conscience, and this was probably the first time."

When I recovered my breath I suggested, "Hadn't we better call a doctor?"

"No," the little man said, "no need. But I'll call the hurry-up bus. I think the little lady will be ready to talk now and quit acting. And when hubby reads about this in the morning papers, he'll probably give himself up and try to shield the little lady; they usually do."

He moved over to the phone and dialed the police station. While waiting for the connection, he twisted around and grinned at me.

"Always watch their eyes, son," he said.