

CHESS PROBLEMS



A Detective Who Has His Hobbies Meets A Crook Who Has Them, Too!

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NOISE was prevalent, always, at the Laskeronian Chess Club. Noise was king. A game generally played in quietude was played here amid the babbling of tongues and the clatter of chessmen.

The clubroom was remarkably furnished. Twenty-four mahogany chess tables lined the walls. Seldom was a table without a duo of players and at least a trio of onlookers. In glass cases, several silver chess sets and every sort of expensive, attractive chess paraphernalia was displayed.

At a table in a far corner of the

room sat a red-haired, red-mustached, middle-aged man who in business hours was a detective, and in all other hours was a chess devotee. He bent over the board, on which were arranged two white rooks, a white king, and a black king and queen. The problem was to checkmate with the queen in four moves.

Anthony Quick bent every faculty upon solving it, oblivious of the noise of his fellow club members. Quick was as greatly interested in chess problems as in playing the game itself.

At another table, a laugh arose; a

poor player had made another stupid mistake. It issued from a dozen or more mouths, and was loud enough to be heard through the window by a passer-by.

But Quick kept on gazing at the board and pieces before him; he did not look up for an instant.

It is needless to recount the various disturbances that disturbed Quick not at all. As time passed—and time always passes quickly at a chess club—the contenders left in pairs.

AT twelve a man stepped to Quick's side.

"Time to leave, Tony."

"Sorry, but I've got to finish this. I'll lock the place up when I go."

"S'long."

The only man left now was Quick, still striving to attain his end, and muttering softly to himself over the vicissitudes of the problem.

"If I move here—no! It wouldn't be good. This might do. No, the rook is on the way. What a problem! Let's see, if—no, that wouldn't work."

At one, he decided to quit trying. As he rose, he was greatly surprised to see a man in the act of stealing something from a case.

In a moment he had his revolver leveled at the intruder.

"Come here," he ordered.

The burglar, a thin, sickly fellow, much in need of a shave, slowly ambled to a safe distance.

"What were you doing?" asked Quick.

"You know as well as I."

The captor displayed his badge.

"Never knew the detectives fooled with chess till one in the morning," said the burglar with an assumed air of indifference.

Catching sight of the problem, he bent over it, drew his hands near the table, moved a piece, then an-

other—in a moment, he had solved it.

"Huh!" gasped Quick, more astonished than when he had first caught sight of the man. He added admiringly, warmly: "Say, I worked at that since ten!"

"Nothin' at all, nothin' at all," assured the burglar. "Sam Wilton—that's me—can solve any little old problem in the chess dictionary."

"Wow!" exclaimed the captor. "You're a clever crook. Now that I know who you are, I'll introduce myself—Tony Quick."

Wilton recoiled. Quick was a detective who had been mentioned to him by gangster friends many times.

"Mr. Quick," asked Wilton, "before you pull me in, will you be so kind as to play me a game?"

"Well—"

Quick hesitated. He should immediately lead out the thief—but, oh, wouldn't it be sport to play with someone who could solve problems that quickly!

WILTON seated himself. The pieces were placed in position.

"But say," questioned Quick, the doubt showing in his expression, "I can't keep you covered with a gun and play at the same time, can I?"

"Oh, bother! I haven't got a weapon, and if I had I wouldn't use it."

A search having been instituted by the detective, the game started. From the very beginning, Wilton played well. Quick, also, was capable of keeping his side of the game going pleasingly. Twice he had won championships of the Laskeronian Chess Club.

During the game Quick suddenly recognized Wilton's features.

"Say," he burst out, "I think you were up for a year in '27."

"Sure thing. I guess I'll soon be up again."

"It's too bad I have to pull you in . . . but it's my job. You understand?"

"Yes, yes. Of course."

"Well, continue the game."

"Let's go."

The battle lasted nearly an hour. Wilton was the victor.

"Oh, gee!" moaned Quick. "Think of being beaten by a crook! I'll say that you can play!"

"Learnt how in prison."

"Got something out of your jail stretch, eh?"

"In games I'm nothin' at all. It's the problems I like."

"Me too. Well, I guess we'd better be—"

"Hold on! Let's stay a while. I just thought of a peachy problem. Sit down. Look!"

Wilton spread six or seven pieces in different positions on the board.

"White mates in three moves. See if you can do it."

Quick bent over the problem.

"It is hard. But a player like you ought to be able to—"

The compliment to his ability led Quick to try to solve the problem.

"It's two now," said the burglar. "See how long it takes you."

QUICK concentrated on the problem.

"Let's see," he muttered, "if I

move here, the black bishop is in the way. Here, the pawn is. Don't think I can move this castle anywhere. Oh, here—no! What's the use? I'll get it sometime though, I guess."

But, try as he might, Quick could not solve the problem. The former one, compared to it, was mere child's play.

He grew more and more immersed in his problem. Patiently he sat, not moving a muscle, regarding the pieces on the board, his mind active.

Suddenly he looked up and said loudly: "I'll be blowed if I can—"

HE paused in the middle of his sentence. No one was in the room! The hour hand of the clock pointed to four. "Well, of all—"

A great fear entered Quick's head. He rushed to the nearest glass case. It was open. The silver chess set, the little gold statuettes of famous exponents of the game—all, all were gone.

Pallid, Quick rushed to another case. Conditions were the same.

On a table he found a neatly written note:

"S'long. As a detective, you make a good chess player. Needn't go on with the problem; it has never been solved and never will be. Also, my name is not Sam Wilton."

