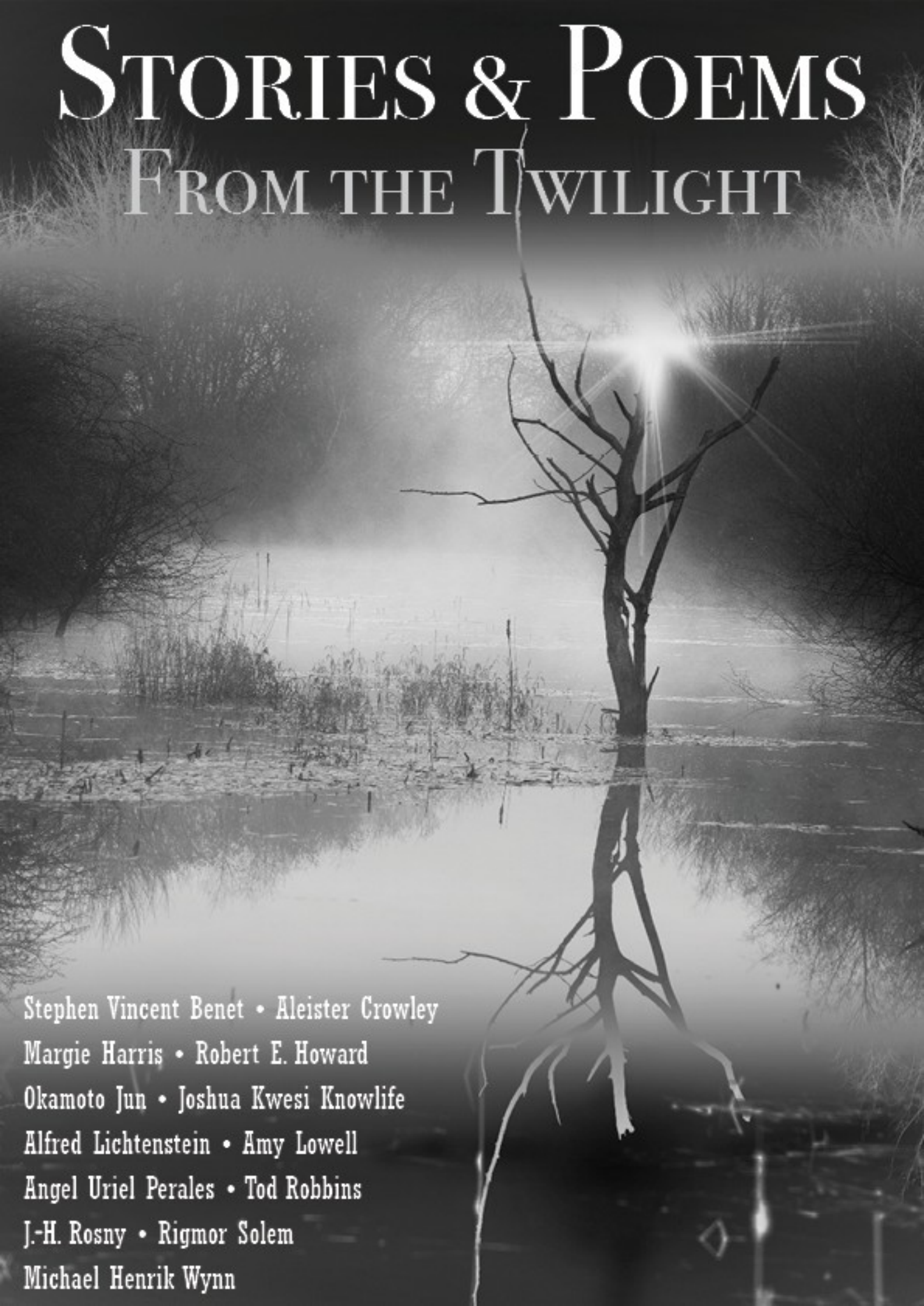


STORIES & POEMS

FROM THE TWILIGHT



Stephen Vincent Benet • Aleister Crowley

Margie Harris • Robert E. Howard

Okamoto Jun • Joshua Kwesi Knowlife

Alfred Lichtenstein • Amy Lowell

Angel Uriel Perales • Tod Robbins

J.-H. Rosny • Rigmor Solem

Michael Henrik Wynn

Historyradio.org

Stories & Poems
from the Twilight

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Introduction

The stories and poems in this ebook come from no particular place and no particular time. What binds them together is their dark theme, as well the passion with which the subject matter is presented. I like spicy food. In fact, I like sugary treats too. This glutinous preference for color and flavor has guided me in my selection of these stories and poems. Of the more famous writers in the collection, are J.-H. Rosny. I use the plural because J.-H. Rosny is the pen name for two Belgian brothers: Joseph Henri Honoré Boex (1856–1940) and Séraphin Justin François Boex (1859–1948). They are perhaps best known today for their stories set in prehistory, but they were important writers in the history of French science fiction. In fact, their influence almost equals that of Jules Verne. The stories that I include were written in the late nineteenth century, and I was so lucky to discover two anonymous translations in the *Santa Fe Daily New Mexican* and in *The Omaha Daily Bee*, both published in the latter part of the 1880s. These are not science fiction stories, though. One is a dark story about a mental patient who kills her guard and the other a sad and sentimental text about a dying girl. They are both brilliant in their own way.

The second prose writer to which I will draw your attention, is Margie Harris. She wrote tough gangster stories, violent revenge dramas. She published her stories in magazines such as *Mobs* and *Gangster Stories* in the late 1920s and early 1930s. She was one of the best paid writers in the business, a sort of female Quentin Tarantino, a no-nonsense hard-

boiled yarnspinner. In my view, she makes even Chandler look like a kitten. Her stories are taken from the collection *Margie Harris: Queen of the Gangsters*, edited by John Locke. I am grateful to Mr Locke for letting me interview him, and for allowing me to publish some of the pulp writings he has so prodigiously collected. Not much is known about the identity of Margie Harris, he informs me. We do not know when she was born or when she died. She suddenly disappears from public view in the late 1930s and is never heard of again. Scholars estimate that she was about 50 years old in 1930. Whoever she was, she must have had intimate knowledge of the American underworld because her characters navigate the bars and the speakeasies with the greatest familiarity.

There are other writers in this ebook with a claim to fame. I have included a poem and a short story by the notorious occultist Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), commonly known as “The Great Beast”. The short story was published only six years before Crowley wrote his great novel *Moonchild* (1917). Even so, in 1911 he still had some way to go before he was able to produce significant literature.

Another minor celebrity is Tod Robbins, or Clarence Aaron Robbins (1888-1949), as his real name was. He penned a couple of successful crime novels, as well the horror story “Spurs”, which is included in this book. “Spurs” was first published in 1923 in *Munsey's Magazine*. The piece became the literary foundation for the infamous 1932 Tod Browning movie *Freaks*, a love story featuring midgets and several characters with disabilities. It is also a crime story, and the plot is perhaps best left to your own discretion.

Besides my own attempt, “Deception”, there is a short story by the contemporary Norwegian novelist, Rigmor Solem, in the book. Mrs Solem

has a wonderfully rich life from which to draw inspiration. She is both well traveled and well read, and when the opportunity came my way to translate one of her more spooky tales, I did so. The result is found in this book, a ghost story set in Morocco. One of her short novels has just been published in English, in a translation by me. The book is filled with colorful anecdotes, including some from Uganda where she worked as a teacher just before Idi Amin came to power.

In my search for sinister poetry, I ended up in the First World War, an upheaval that shook the literary establishment to its very foundations. Old rules were discarded, and evocative imagery appeared. I have included poems by two Jewish men from both sides of the trenches, one German and the other British.

Alfred Lichtenstein (1889-1914), who wrote “The Drunkard”, was an early victim of the war, at the Somme. He was a German expressionist writer of some note, and known for ridiculing his friends in fictional form. In the introduction to his 1999 book *The Pity of War*, historian Niall Ferguson makes the claim that Lichtenstein might have been the first of the anti-war poets. “The Drunkard” was taken from the Gutenberg publication *The Verse of Alfred Lichtenstein* produced by Michael Pullen.

Isaac Rosenberg (1890–1918) was one of the brilliant poets of the period. But the poem included here, “In Piccadilly”, is one of his earlier works, and is taken from his second collection *Youth* (1915), published just before he enlisted in the army. He was by all accounts a sickly man with chronic health problems, but that didn't stop him from doing his bit. He was killed in the last year of the war. Historians disagree about whether

he was shot by a sniper or whether he died in combat.

In this ebook there are poems by two Pulitzer Prize winners who were active during the war, but who did not participate the fighting: Amy Lowell (1874–1925) and Stephen Vincent Benét (1898–1943).

At 70, Heath Street, in Brookline Massachusetts stands the 8,448-square-foot mansion which once was the seat of the prominent Lowell family. Amy Lowell occupied it both as a child and as an adult. She was an imagist poet and a follower of Ezra Pound, and I have included a very lovely poem by her from 1914. A media celebrity in her own day, she even appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine*. She was the sister of Percival Lowell, the astronomer who became famous for speculating that there were canals on the planet Mars. Unfortunately, Amy Lowell's poetry has always fallen into the shadow of Pound's more famous works, a man whom she herself tirelessly promoted during the First World War. She was in London during the fighting, and even attended a reading given by the legendary war-poet Rupert Brooke at the Poetry Bookshop.

Benét was a poet and short story writer from Pennsylvania. He did civilian service during the conflict. He was a member of the famous Elizabethan Club, an important literary society at Yale. Benét won his Pulitzer for an ambitious narrative poem, but I have selected one of his shorter, more sombre works from 1918. When Benét passed away in 1943, professor Henry W. Wells of Columbia University wrote: "Will he be remembered chiefly as a man of letters and a largely personal force in our political and cultural life, or considered a notable poet? Will he grow, as Amy Lowell has grown, more a figure in American biography than in American literature....?" The few texts in this collection are perhaps not sufficient to provide any answers.

The esteem of Robert E. Howard (1906–1936), the creator of Conan the Barbarian, however, has only grown after his death. Howard was too young to be drafted for war duty. He became one of the giants of what is known as pulp fiction, during the peak of its popularity in the 1920s. Most people know about his tragic suicide at the age of 30. In his brief life he produced several pieces of fiction that are considered American classics. I need only mention the Conan stories or the spine-chiller “Pigeons from Hell”. I have included his poem “Babel” (1935) because I thought it was a good fit for the mood I was trying to evoke.

The final distinguished writer in the poetry section comes from Japan. Okamoto Jun (1901-1978) was an experimental poet and anarchist, and one of the founders of the influential periodical *Aka to Kuro* [Red and Black]. I am grateful to professor Haider A. Kahn for his translation of the poem “Yoru no Kikansha”, and for allowing me to include it in this ebook.

There are other unfamiliar names worth noting in the poetry section, Angel Uriel Perales and Joshua Kwesi Knowlife. Perales is a part-time poet, and he lives and works in Los Angeles. It is perhaps superfluous to say “part-time poet” because there is hardly any such thing as full-time employment as a writer of poetry. Poetry is often written and read by enthusiasts, people who live and breathe for the art of articulate expression. Perales is one of those who writes for the enjoyment, who visits pubs to hold readings and who—without thought of fame or gratitude—uploads his poems to the internet. He has become quite an accomplished writer.

To find Joshua Kwesi Knowlife, we need to travel to Africa. As far as I

know, he has published quite a substantial number of books in his home country of Ghana, and even penned some movies or TV-productions. He owns and operates his own publishing firm, and seems to thrive in his own environment.

The final contributor to this collection of stories and poems from the twilight is mentioned only reluctantly, namely myself. I was born in 1973, and have lived most of my life in a small town in Northern Norway called Tromsø. I have a degree in British literature from my local university, and worked for a time as a high school English teacher. But, alas, my interest lay elsewhere. However, I never lost my literary inclination, and two years ago (in early 2017) I started historyradio.org, the website which is perhaps my only real achievement. The site and my fictional scriblings are, however, only a sideshow to my work as an academic translator. It is, in short, a hobby. Even if I do not share the talents of some of the more distinguished writers in this collection, I do hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed making it.

Michael Henrik Wynn

Tromsø, September 2019

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Stories

J.-H. Rosny
“The May Bug: The Story of Its Capture”

A burst of shrill laughter rang through the courtyard. A girl’s face looked from the barred window of a cell.

It was beautiful face—set in a glory of golden hair—the parted lips were like the petals of a young rose! But the laughter was the wild, terrible laughter of the mad.

“I have it?” she screamed, exultantly.

“What?” asked the keeper.

The keeper was made of gross material. He had a loose skin, full of large, dirty pores like an old sponge—a thick, brutal nose, pierced by narrow nostrils and a wide mouth—red-lipped and cruel.

His eyes were small, hard, brilliant and singularly opaque. They looked like little bits of blue china. The girl’s eyes were blue also, but with the tender blue of turquoise, yet full of clear, liquid, changing lights like the sapphire. She was pale, delicate, exquisite! A beautiful casket bereft of its precious treasure—the mind.

“What?” asked the keeper.

“The May Bug!”

The keeper grinned and winked his blue china eyes. He had heard before of this May Bug—a chimerical insect which troubled him little. He was not a bad man—taking him altogether—a trifle over-fond of turning the cold shower on the poor wretches entrusted to his tender care—not averse to

using a stout leather strap in the interest and welfare of the more refractory—and he often exercised a little judicious economy at their expense, in setting before his family the bread intended for his patients. Not a nerve lodged amidst the bone and brawn of his gigantic body! The most frantic struggles of the maniacs filled him with amusement.

The most furious ravings brought a smile to his great lips. Oh! He was very good-natured!

He approached the window. “Where is it?” he asked, curiously and idly. “It is here! here!” cried the girl, full of excitement. And she pointed to a hole in the wall of her cell.

A hole in the wall!

The excellent keeper was annoyed.

He frowned blackly. He entered the cell and struck the woman on the face.

“See that thou makest no more holes in the wall!” he said roughly.

She trembled violently. Her eyes darted strange lights but she said nothing. She did not even cry out, although the blow was a cruel one. She only watched, with jealous, angry eyes, as the keeper thrust three fingers into the hole. There was no insect there. He stood ruminating a moment, after the manner of beasts. Presently he began slowly to scratch his head. The woman made a sudden movement toward him.

“Give it to me!” she cried imperatively. “It is mine! I will have it!

You shall not put it in your head! Give it to me! Give it to me!”

“Hush, fool’ he said, and he raised his hand threateningly. She cowered away from him and crouching in the corner of the cell, began to cry bitterly, wiping her eyes, now and then on a strand of the long yellow

hair that lay on her shoulders. As the keeper opened the door to go out a ray of sun light fell on his rough hair which curled thickly over his temples. The girl bounded suddenly after him like a tiger.

“Is it there!” she shrieked, shrilly.

“Ah! the pretty thing! Do not crush it!” for the man raised his hand involuntarily to the spot she indicated with her outstretched fingers; then, recollecting himself, he turned on her fiercely, and advancing deliberately, as she retreated from him, until he had driven her again to her corner, he stood a moment quelling her with the cold power of his eyes. It was an instant’s silent struggle! The force of reason prevailed. She sank shuddering—conquered—in the angle of the smooth stone wall.

“Good!” he said, gruffly. “And no more of holes in the wall, Dost thou hear? I shall look tomorrow and see if the hole grows larger in the night. Tomorrow—aye! and again the next day and the next!” He thrust his ugly face down to hers. She shivered and shrank nearer the wall. “Good!” he said again. His tone was fatherly. It was pleasant to him to see his power. Ah! they feared him—these poor, helpless, hopeless, miserable creatures.

He left the cell, turning his face toward her as he closed the door. At last, a trembling ray from the setting sun died on the matted hair above his left temple. A tremor shook the delicate body huddled in the corner. More than two hours passed, and still the girl crouched there. Her little white fingers worked nervously. Her eyes were never still. Her brow was drawn in deep, painful lines, as though the poor disordered brain beneath made some great physical effort to form thought. And so the darkness fell.

With morning came the keeper.

“Is there a hole in the wall?” He laughed maliciously. “Then we can have no bread today,” and the excellent man passed on well satisfied. Had he not inflicted punishment when punishment was due? And, moreover, his family lived on the bread which cost him nothing.

June passed and July—long summer days when the sun lay in the courtyard and there was always a warm corner in cell No. 80, where the beautiful insane girl was kept. The keeper liked to go there and lounge in the afternoons. She was afraid of him, and he found her terror diverting. It pleased him to see her standing with downcast eyes sending out those strange gleams from under the deep-fringed lids—with heaving breast from which the breath labored heavily—with trembling fingers locked so tightly together that the little nails grew white with the cruel pressure. It was a tribute to his power. A more observant person might have seen something here to suspect—might have analyzed this fear and found in it a trace of danger—might have declared this attitude to be that of a person detected—or in fear of detection in wrongdoing.

But the keeper, good man, was not one to analyze. He examined all the cells daily. It may be that his examination was sometimes clumsy. But why should he suspect this child? Or suspecting, why should he fear her? A slender, white-faced cowering thing who could only pick a hole in the wall to hunt for an imaginary May Bug! A poor, weak imbecile creature who shook at the sound of his voice! The keeper would have called your analyst a fool for his pains!

There were times when the girl did not shrink from him, but, instead,

greeted him with her charming, childish smile. Then, were he in a good humor, he would talk with her. Truly a strange duet, this, between the man without intellect and the woman without reason. An interesting study of chiaroscuro, where the ideal subtlety of the maniac stood out intensely against the brutish, unimaginative stolidity of the keeper. Often his rough voice, like the bellowing of a bull, frightened her, but she listened to him with her adorable smile, and only when he turned his eyes away did that strange expression leap into her, the greedy, jealous light burn in the eyes which, stealthily, she raised to the ragged clumps of hair which lay upon his temples. Once he surprised the glance. He laughed loudly, derisively. He had not altogether forgotten the May Bug. "Aha!" he laughed, "dost seek thy treasure? Oh! Oh! the fool! the idiot! the lunatic! Oh! I have it! Here" tapping his forehead suggestively, and blinking his blue, china eyes, "here: I keep it safely!"

The girl made a sudden, uncontrollable movement as if she would spring upon him, and the strange look deepened in her eyes—the look of passionate desire now mingled with rage and hatred of the man who kept from her what she coveted. The keeper was enchanted at the success of his pleasantry.

Still laughing, he rose, stretched his leg comfortably, and lounged over to the window. Outside the court lay flooded in the sunlight, a gray fowl minced across the flagging, pecking at the tufts of grass which forced themselves between the stones of the walk. The flowers in the square garden plot in the center of the court gave up their sweetness languidly to the caress of the warm air. The keeper gazed stolidly through the

crating. His hard little eyes rested unblinkingly on a great metal ball on which the dazzling sunlight sported bravely.

Softly she came—softly, lightly! With cheeks aflame with the strength of her desire! With gleaming sapphire eyes!

With quivering nostrils and parted lips through which the breath fluttered tremulously! Softly she came, with her lithe young body swaying, and her little, trembling hands before her! In an instant her dainty fingers had twisted themselves in the man's rough hair, jerked the great head backwards, and began a furious scratching in the grizzled mop over the left temple. The keeper flung himself around with an imprecation and sent the woman spinning against the wall.

“Insolence!” he roared, rushing upon her. “Dost thou dare, indeed” In the name of Reason—of which thou knowst naught—take this—and this!” He struck her a crushing blow with his clenched fist. She smothered a cry and crouched, still with dangerous look in her eyes—crouched as if to spring at his great brutal throat.

“Have a care!” he muttered, threateningly, rushing upon her again. Slowly her expression changed. The corners of her pretty mouth trembled. She put out one fist faintly. Then with more assurance, and moving gently forward, she looked up, shyly, into his scowling face as one who would implore forgiveness. It was the keeper. How ready she was to confess his power!

How eager to sue his pardon! He was mollified.

“There!” said he, “no more of thy stupid tricks, fool!” And he went away.

The summer waned. No. 80 seemed dull and sober. She slept little, grew

weak and thin, and, from out the pallor of her face, her great blue eyes shone unnaturally. She was silent for long hours at a time. She no longer talked of the lost May Bug. She looked like a student who seeks to solve great problems, and who loses his health and strength in long vigils. She left her bed at night and strange sounds were heard in her cell.

“She sleeps too warm, perhaps,” said the keeper: “give her a cooling shower!” And this merry fellow bade them hold her under the icy douche until she fell, chilled and exhausted, to the ground. This occurred twice. After that there were no more nocturnal disturbances. The keeper chuckled.

“I know their tricks,” said he.

The girl became very quiet and circumspect. She began to manifest interest in objects about her. She was strangely observant, and occupied herself for hours in examining the scanty appointment of her cell. Once the keeper fancied he saw her fumbling with the bars of her grated window.

He went in and examined the place.

She watched him with stealthy eyes.

When he turned she spoke to him pleasantly. She was always gay with him now. The brave man never detected a false note in the clear, crystal tones of her laughter—his ear, like his eye, made no fine distinctions. After this episode, however, she was more prudent and gave no cause for suspicion.

She was thoughtful—oh! very thoughtful at times—preoccupied but patient, good-tempered and obedient. Soon she began to talk rationally,

and answered all questions with sense and judgment.

One day, in, the late fall, the keeper summoned the doctor.

“If Monsieur the Doctor would call and see No. 80, who seems quite recovered?”

Monsieur the Doctor called. But Monsieur the Doctor was, as it happened, an old and skillful practitioner, who for many years had studied every form of insanity under the light of his own interests. Monsieur the Doctor had no intention of speedily ridding the asylum of any patient who materially increased his income.

“H’m:” said the doctor, “wait a while longer! It is best to be Prudent”

“The girl is harmless?”

“Perfectly so!”

“She can be given a little liberty?”

“Assuredly, yes! She is quite harmless!” and the worthy physician smiled and rubbed his hands softly together, and, thinking of the clear, quiet eyes which met his own so steadily, the cool hand which rested obediently in his, the girl’s normal, composed manner, repeated to himself, “Oh, certainly! Quite harmless!”

It was after this that the keeper made himself easy. The examination of cell No. 80 was no longer considered necessary. No. 80 herself grow paler and ate but little. This could scarcely be said to distress the keeper, whose family profited thereby. Winter came, and from her grated window the poor young creature watched the year grow grey.

A few withered leaves fluttered in through the casement and she treasured them—poor dead things! They were redolent of the free life

beyond cruel bars. The swallows in the courtyard complained shrilly of hunger, and beneath the eaves they huddled, pluming themselves and giving piteous little cries. She would have liked to have fed them, but the family of the keeper could use even the crumbs, and, harshly, he forbade her to waste good bread.

She was now very thin and her eyes were brilliant with fever—that consuming mental fever which burns in the eyes of all great toilers who fancy they see near them the desired end for which they have striven long and patiently.

Now came the long winter nights, when the white moonlight lay on the floor of the cell. The girl hated the moon. It was a great Eye, she thought. Calm, impartial, all-seeing, why did it watch and watch, and wait and wait, the night through to see what she would do? And it was so cold – ah! so cold! And she turned her back to the window and crept to her bed, drawing the covers up over her head to shut out the hateful Eye. And at last it went away, and there were long dark hours when its silver face was hidden, and at last she could move stealthily about her cell at night, could go on, silently and swiftly, with the great work she had been planning, without feeling continually spying upon her the cold stare of this mysterious enemy. By this time she had won the entire confidence of the keeper.

She was so patient and docile.

Ah? more patient than this good man guessed, and more cautious, too, and more furtive!

And; at last, it happened on a cold, black night when the heavens were

overcast by threatening clouds, and all earth's creatures sought shelter from the bitter touch of Winter's hand, a light figure crept between the loosened bars of a cell window and dropped noiselessly to the ground. Swift and straight it took its way across the court, never swerving, never hesitating in spite of the impenetrable darkness; for in the slow elaboration of this mighty idea, all had been calculated—recalculated—with the triple patience which comes of madness, of solitude and of imprisonment.

Veiled in the darkness, No. 80 took her silent way past the square garden-plot.

She moved with the noiselessness and the certainty of a cat. She never stopped, but as she moved rapidly she lifted her face to the free night air as if she loved it and had longed for it. Her face was like a moon beam against the shadows of the night. Its peculiar pallor seemed to radiate a faint, unearthly light. Almost as if she were conscious of this, she bent her head and quickly covered her face with her long hair.

She passed on in the shadow of the asylum walls and paused before the keeper's quarters. Here there was a small door. Well she knew it! Long and patiently had she waited to hear from some one through which door she must pass to accomplish her grand purpose.

She stood here listening for an instant, then thrust into the keyhole something she held tightly in her hand. There was a faint clicking sound – then a sharp squeak, which might have been made by a mouse, and a little rectangle of darkness opened before her.

Silence!

The clouds gathered thickly over the mournful walls of the asylum. A wild

night-wind sobbed in the gaunt arms of the leafless trees in the courtyard. A single star trembled for an instant in the black mass of moving clouds and was gone.

Suddenly a woman's sharp cry smote the night air. It seemed to come from the keeper's quarters, but one could scarcely tell whence it began, for it was instantly caught up by the startled creatures in the asylum and passed on from one to another with varying and terrible modulations of fear, of anger, of insensate joy! The night was soon hideous with their cries! The panic spread! From every cell came curses, shrieks, groans, wailings and sobbings: the sickening sound of human bodies beating against the invincible bars which held the captive; despairing cries mingled with snatches of obscene song.

The sonorous voice of some frenzied orator delivering his theories; the heartbreaking prayers of maniacs begging to be delivered from imaginary tortures, all the horrors of the bestial scene, indescribable as it is awful, enacted in these living hells where men and women live the lives of caged brutes, forsaken by Reason, and, seemingly, by God. The doors opened, and the director of the asylum made his appearance among the keepers. His face was pale.

This was unusually bad, he thought, even for the violent wards.

Awakened from a deep sleep by the horrible uproar, he had feared a general riot among the patients. Suddenly a woman appeared at the end of the passage. She was in her night robe. She held a candle in her hand, and two children clung to her skirts.

"Here! Monsieur the Director! Here!

And oh! come quickly!"

The director moved toward her. He recognized the wife of the keeper, Desambre.

Well?" he questioned briefly.

The woman began a mournful litany, broken by fitful sobbing. Alas! She could hardly tell! She had been sleeping! There had been something—she knew not what! Her husband had bounded up in the bed, had given a heavy groan, had fallen back on his pillow! Then a dark thing had sprung from the bed right by her side, glided across the room down the stairs, perhaps—who knows? She had been unable to rouse her good man!

Would not Monsieur the Director come to him?

Alas! Alas! And again—alas!

The director followed the woman to a room in the keeper's quarters.

On the bed lay the body of the man Desambre.

The face was hideous. The eyes squinted horribly. The mouth was open.

The teeth had closed upon the tongue.

"Alas! Alas!" wailed the woman.

The director examined the body.

A small blade had been driven through the left temple, obliquely into the skull.

There was no blood. The clumps of grizzled hair nearly concealed the wound. The nail was a slender thing, without a head, but it had been driven home with deadly force. A fine scratch extended to the eyebrow. It looked as if something had been picked from the wound and drawn sharply across the knotty forehead.

"The man is dead—quite dead," said the director, gravely.

He left the woman howling over the corpse. and notified the keeper.

“We will make the rounds immediately.”

The procession of lights moving up and down the corridors was a grand festival for the maniacs. They had grown quieter under the forcible measures employed by the keepers, and now they gave fierce cries of pleasure. Only a few were enraged, and a few were sullen.

Number 80 was asleep.

The director bent over her bed with the lamp in his hand.

The light awakened her. She rubbed her eyes with one little hand. Then she smiled her adorable smile. The beautiful eyes were clear and serene—her face was joyous. She pushed back her glorious hair and raised herself a little from the pillow. Then she held out the other hand. It was tightly closed, as if something of great value. Slowly she extended the fingers that the director might see what she held. The little pink palm was empty. But she saw something there. She was quite satisfied.

“I have it,” she whispered, triumphantly.

The director patted her hand kindly.

“You are dreaming!”

He gave a cursory glance at the grating as he passed. He touched the bars at the window.

“Nothing wrong here,” said this wise and experienced man. “The girl has slept well.”

Margie Harris
“While Choppers Roared”

I

Shorty Breen, get-away driver for the Bull Coleman gang, was keenly alive to the trouble hunch which had been riding him all afternoon. So it needed but the touch of heavy fingers on his shoulder to send him jerking, leaping, twisting through the crowd on Fourteenth Street.

His first spring carried him through a group of chattering women. In a few seconds more he was clattering down the steps of the subway. Behind him was the usual chorus of “Stop, thief!” but over all resounded the bull-like roar of Police Captain McGrehan.

An express train was standing in the station. Shorty dropped a nickel in the turnstile, dashed aboard as the doors closed. Damn McGrehan anyway. Two nights before he’d caught Shorty in a dark corner and given him purple hell for playing with Bull’s gang.

“Damn ol’ goat,” Shorty growled. “Where’s he get ‘at stuff? You’d think he was me ol’ man, instead of him being just a guy ‘at wanted to marry Mom w’en she was a goil!”

At Thirty-fourth Street he slipped from the train and cast a furtive eye over the crowd. Hell’s fire! There he was, getting out of the last car! There was no mistaking the blue uniform with its captain’s bars and stripes in gold, nor the heavy, squared jaw above it. Shorty dashed up the stairs two at a time, made the first half block at a rapid walk. Then he slowed, but no police uniform showed behind him.

At Eighth Avenue he turned south, stopping for a final survey of his back

trail. He was safe. McGrehan had lost him. Heaving a sigh of relief, Shorty started to stroll along toward Finnegan's café and Bull's headquarters above it.

For the moment his underworld guardian angel was not on the job. He stopped at the curb to light a cigarette in the lee of a parked Checker cab. He gave the cab and driver no attention until he sensed a flurry of movement. He started to turn but it was too late.

A blue clad arm shot forth, clamped iron fingers on his shoulder, dragged him, struggling, into the cab. A split second later he heard the order.

"Down to Center Street, lad; drive right intuh the garage."

Shorty didn't need to see his captor's—McGrehan's—face. He couldn't, had he wanted to. His face was jammed into a corner of the seat, his knees were on the floor. The pressure relaxed; Shorty heaved himself erect, only to suffer the shame of being shoved back, slowly, relentlessly into his former position.

"You're a tough guy, Clyde!"—Jeez! how he hated that pansy name Mom had given him—"But I'm tougher than all of you gaycats. Now sit you down and listen to me."

The big hands heaved again, slammed him back onto the seat.

Captain McGrehan's eyes were blazing; steely fingers were digging into Shorty's shoulder muscles. Shorty tried to out stare the cop; his eyes fell first.

"What th' hell?" he growled. "This a pinch?"

"What does it feel like—a swimmin' lesson?"

"Aw, what have I done? You got nothin' on me." The old formula between cop and crook the world over.

"I have me hand on you, which'll do for the present," McGrehan

responded with heavy wit. “It looks like a tough night for you, Clydie.” Shorty winced again at the hated name. “Clyde!” for the speedball who drove the chopper car last week when Bull Coleman’s rodmen shot it out with The Yid’s organ grinders, hijacked two trucks of alky. Uh-huh. Two cops had been killed, but that was their hard luck.

“You don’t take kindly to th’ name a good mother gave you, Clyde.” There was contempt in the Captain’s sarcastic drawl. “Well, it’s a hell of a name for a gangster—and it’s a hell of a gangster you’ll be after this night.”

Shorty stirred uneasily. Jeez! Suppose some of Bully’s scouts saw him riding with McGrehan. They’d be calling him “Canary” and tomorrow taking him for a ride. Yet he hated a “chirper” worse than anyone, almost.

“Lissen, Cap,” he pleaded. “Lemme go. Jess because you’n Mom went to school together’s no reason fer youse to get me put on the spot.”

“The spot, is it now?” The reply was a bellow of derision. “You’ll be wishin’ for the spot before tonight’s over. It’s the Third we’re fixin’ up for you.”

Shorty’s blood turned cold within him. The dreaded “third.” And at the hands of this ramping, raging old Mick on whom he’d always looked, though from a distance, as a family friend!

“Yuh can’t give me no hosin’,” he said. “Whaddyuh think you got on me?”

McGrehan’s lips didn’t move; his hand did. It slid down to a point on Shorty’s arm between elbow and shoulder. The fingers tightened, dug into the nerve center under the biceps. Shorty tried to jerk loose. The movement brought a howl of pain from his lips. McGrehan was pitiless.

Slowly the grasp tightened. Horrible searing pains flashed down the arm to the finger tips, up over the shoulder.

“Enough?” The Captain growled the word. Shorty nodded in mute agony. “Listen to me, then. Don’t you start tellin’ me what I can or cannot do this night. In five days more I retire on pension. Nobody can change that. Them five days is to be given to runnin’ down some rats that killed two brave men recent—and to makin’ a man out of Mary Ann Breen’s lousy brat—or killin’ him.”

Shorty sunk down in his corner. Suddenly he felt terribly alone. McGrehan he knew was tough, iron hard. It was said he preferred a billy to a rubber hose—and followed his liking.

“Yes, Clyde,” the Captain’s tones were silky now. “It’ll be a tough night, and here we are ready for it to start.”

The cab swung across the curb, into a big room filled with riot cars, prowl cars, the fast buses of the strong arm squad; the big racers in which the Commissioners and Brass Collars buzzed to danger points. McGrehan handed the driver a bill, pointed over his shoulder with a big thumb.

“Out,” he growled.

As the automatic doors closed, he spun Shorty about, crossed his pile-driver right to the button with a snap.

Shorty went limp. McGrehan caught him, did not let him fall.

“Poor, dumb lad,” he half whispered. “Spoiled as he is, I wish he was mine.”

Two plainclothes men came from the shadows, took the drooping form, carried it to the silent cells where there is only silence.

While Shorty still was unconscious, the detectives stripped him of coat, hat, shoes, collar, trousers, hat and tie.

“Cap said to leave him his cigarettes and matches,” one of the searchers said.

“Yeh?” his mate replied. “The ol’ boy’s gettin’ soft. Wouldn’t be surprised to come down here in a day or two an’ find he’s been getting drinkin’ water.”

II

Doubling for Shorty

“McGrehan speaking, sir. I have the lad. May I come up?”

“In five minutes, Captain. I’ll ring.” The Commissioner’s voice was curt but friendly. “Any trouble?”

“For him, not for me, sir.”

McGrehan sensed the beginning of a chuckle as his superior hung up the receiver.

Commissioner Van Voort turned back to the stockily built, severe faced man opposite him, Captain Michaelson, Chief of New York’s Secret Police. “That was McGrehan,” Van Voort said. “Reporting he’s turned in the Breen boy. Dammit, Michaelson, I don’t like the thought of Springer and Haddon taking such chances.”

“Nor do I.” Michaelson’s face was granite hard. “McGrehan’s plan to save this little Breen rat is apt to spoil it all. But we’re ready—checked and rechecked on the plan.”

“Yes, we’re too deep in now to change,” Van Voort replied. He drew a map toward him. “We’ll go over it once again; then you can get your crew together. Here’s the district, with the route marked in red arrows.

“The point marked ‘J’ is where the truck will be, with tools, tear bombs, extra ammunition; whatever’s required. When Bull’s third car passes, the

boy who's been trying to start the engine will slip around the corner and signal Lieutenant Henry. The signal to close in will be a burst of blank cartridge machine gun fire. Right? All clear?"

"Perfectly, Mr. Commissioner. And in the meantime the other group will surround Bull's headquarters over Finnegan's. When the word is passed that the warehouse raiders have been mopped up, we'll hit Bull from all sides and the roof."

"Good, Captain. Goodnight and good luck."

A touch on the button brought McGrehan from downstairs.

"Good work," the Commissioner said. "Anyone see you get him?"

"Not a chance, sir. I snatched him offen the sidewalk before he could squawk. He was goin' to Bull's; thought he'd ditched me in Thirty-fourth Street. I hopped a cab, beat it the other way and copped him on Eighth Avenue."

The Commissioner stared for a moment at the stubborn old face before him.

"See here," he said. "It's a devil of a thing you've made me ask of Springer—to gamble his life for a crook like that."

"Wait 'til you've seen Springer in his clothes. They're enough alike to be twins, except their eyes is different. Springer has painted a couple of fine blue bruises on his lamps to take care of that. You'd swear he'd been in a pip of a fight."

"It's a terrible chance—" The Commissioner paused.

"No worsen any other man of the Secret Squad's takin' every day, sir. No more than the other boy we shoved in on Bull's gang. It's all risky; that's how we're cleanin' up on the tips they get."

"I hope you're right, McGrehan. Anyway, after tonight there'll be no more

cop killings by the Coleman gang.”

“Which’ll be a blessin’ in a wicked world, Mr. Commissioner.”

McGrehan saluted, about faced and departed.

Thirty minutes later the lookout at Bull Coleman’s headquarters opened the peep panel, recognized Shorty Breen and admitted him.

“Where th’ hell youse been, punk?” the lookout demanded. “Bull’s been askin’ for youse.”

“Aw hell! I had a fight wit’ a guy over a pool game,” Shorty replied out of the corner of his mouth. “I got a pair uh shiners.”

“Damn if you ain’t—an’ maybe Bull won’t slap youse down fer that.”

Shorty did not reply. Instead he shambled across the room and, dropping into a chair commanding a view of both the office and entrance doors, he seemed to doze.

III

The Stage Is Set

Sharp at 10 o’clock Bull Coleman opened the door of his private office to crook his fingers at four of the loungers. Shorty followed Ginger Olsen, Chopper Allen and Sid Haddon into the room.

“Shut the door, kid,” Bull growled. “All of youse set down and hang out an ear. Everything’s set. Sid’ll drive the lead car wit’ two roddies an’ Chopper wit’ his grinder. Shorty’s to drive the guard car. He’ll take two more rods, an’ Ginger wit’ his Tommy.

“On th’ way youse’ll pick up the third car, which’ll run between lead an’ guard. That one’ll back into th’ shippin’ alley beside the warehouse.

Shorty pulls down th’ street half way of th’ block, headin’ east. Sid heads

back west and pulls near to the corner. That way, if they's a ruckus, they won't burn each other down.

"Now lissen. That gives a guard car headed whichever the dope buggy heads when it comes outta the alley. The other one'll swing an' follow. Get me?"

All nodded, but Bull, himself a strategist, duplicated the scene of a few moments before in the Commissioner's office, when he produced a rough map of the route to show the course to be taken.

To one man in the room the scene had its element of humor. It was his second view of the maps—one down in Center Street, the other in Bull's office. For Sid Haddon was the "other fellow" mentioned by McGrehan—a member of the Secret Police, planted on Bull's gang through clever plotting.

Something warned Haddon. He looked up, caught the burning eyes of Chopper Allen studying him intently. Instantly he let his face go blank, gazing back almost stupidly at the other. This simply wouldn't do. Allen never had been friendly. Just now it is possible the man had caught the half grin on his face.

Bull's bellowing voice brought the duel of glances to an end.

"Everybody out now," he said. "But stick around. Youse know th' rules. I'll tell youse when it's time."

That was Bull's method. At the last moment he outlined his plans in detail. After that no one was allowed to leave the hangout or to telephone. Even then the exact hour was kept secret until the moment of departure.

At the door, Chopper turned back.

"See you a moment, Bull?"

“Yeh. What youse got on your chest?”

Chopper saw to it that the door was closed. He returned to the desk and leaned forward.

“It’s that guy, Haddon,” he half whispered. “Lemme knock him off, chief; he’s poison. Don’t ask me how I know. I just feel it. I’ve seen him in my dreams putting the cuffs on me. Every time he comes near me I smell the cops.”

“Aw cripes, Chopper, you’re nuts,” Bull answered. “He was sent to me by Mickey the Harp from Chicago after he got into a jam there. I had him watched plenty, and I know he’s all right. Just because you’re a damned old woman’s no reason for me to lose a guy with th’ kinda guts he’s got. He’ll go down intuh hell if I send him—’n come back wit’ a bottle of pre-war in each hand.”

Chopper shrugged, started for the door; turned back.

“Lissen, chief—” He was bitterly, insanely angry now. “When this guy sends you to the Big Squirm up in Sing Sing just remember that I told you to get rid of him.”

Bull’s heavy face crimsoned, turned purple.

“Get th’ hell outta here, you damned croaking louse,” he shouted. “When anybody sends me to the Hot Seat it’ll be some rat like youse, afraid of his own shadow. Mebbe you’re th’ one ‘at needs his horns knocked off—” Chopper shivered involuntarily.

“Forget it, chief,” he said placatingly. “It’s you I’m worryin’ about; not me. When do we start?”

“When I send you, rat,” Bull snarled. “That good enough for youse?”

Chopper slouched to the door, white-faced, humiliated.

The stage was set for the third act of the drama of Secret Police versus the Coleman dusters.

IV

The Attack

Zero hour was 1:30.

Bull strode into the main room, followed by Ginger and Chopper, each carrying his favorite sub-machine gun.

“Smitty and Shuffle!” he barked. “Get your rods and go wit’ Ginger. Dutch and Ike, you go wit’ Chopper. He’ll tell youse what to do.”

“Come on, punk; get your driving eye alive,” he snapped, halting before Shorty’s slouched form. He stopped and peered under the boy’s hat brim.

“Jeez, you would pick a night like this to get slapped up,” he snarled.

“One slip-up from you, gaycat, and I’ll knock youse off myself. Kin you see well enough to drive?”

Shorty spat nonchalantly. “Sure!” he responded. “What’s a shiner got to do wit’ steppin’ on th’ gas?”

“Hell! Get goin’,” Bull demanded. “Ginger’s grinder in your car. If he tells you to drive offen a dock—do it.”

Quietly the four slipped through the outer room, down the rear stairs to the alley garage where waited a stolen Packard touring car. Shorty wriggled under the wheel, touched the starter, listened for a moment to the motor’s purr. He cut the switch, looked about him tranquilly.

The outer door opened. Sid Haddon entered, followed by Chopper and the two rodmen. Beside the opposite wall stood a Buick. Half way there, Haddon whirled and said to Shorty:

“Slip us a pill, kid, I’m all out.”

Shorty obligingly extended a package of cigarettes to Haddon.

Before returning it, the other snapped his pocket lighter and set the fag going. Stepping close to the side of the Packard he handed the package back to Shorty with his right hand. At the same time, with a deft twist of his left, he tucked a squat automatic between the padding of the front seat and Shorty's leg.

"Thanks, kid—see you in church," he said nonchalantly, turning back to the other car.

Shorty's eyes flashed to the rear vision mirror. Had Ginger or the other two seen Haddon slip him the rod? It was Coleman's rule that drivers of get-away cars must not be armed. Thus, if they started any treachery, they'd be at the mercy of the other gunmen.

Seemingly Haddon's sleight-of-hand had gone unnoticed. Dutch Schmaltz, who had been standing at the right of the car, slipped in beside Shorty. He inspected his automatic, lighted a cigarette and wriggled to a comfortable position.

"All right—let's go," Ginger said in a moment. "Follow Chopper half a block behind, When we pick up the other car on Eleventh Avenue slide back a little further; don't want it to look like a parade."

The garage doors swung open on oiled hinges. In another moment they closed behind the two dark cars. The side curtains were up on both, but a touch on the bottom buttons would open them for the death-spewing choppers. Otherwise there was nothing to distinguish them from the other motor-cars of the night.

Shorty kept a watchful eye on the red tail light of the Buick. He speeded up when the other driver found a hole in traffic; slowed when the lights caused a temporary jam.

On Eleventh Avenue, where traffic was light in the early morning hours, a dark shape curved out of an intersecting street, buzzed up alongside the Buick, then dropped into line. It was the raiders' car. Shorty slowed down to give it room behind the lead car.

"All set now," Ginger barked. "Remember, when we get to the warehouse, you pull east and stop about fifty feet past where Sid turns and heads west. Let the engine run and be ready for a quick lam."

"Gotcha!" Shorty grunted. "Second corner, ain't it?"

"Yeh. What th' hell's that ahead of us?"

At the curb ahead the lights had picked up an unlighted black shape. As Ginger spoke he saw the twinkle of a flashlight and lifted the grinder from the floor. Shorty gave the engine more gas, swung so that his lights also lit up the scene.

By the curb stood an ancient Model T Ford, seemingly broken down. The hood was up and an elderly man, overall clad, was looking on as a youth tinkered with the engine.

"Breakdown," Shorty called over his shoulder. " 'Sall right."

"It is—like hell," Ginger growled "It's punks and old apple knockers like that who'll remember seein' three cars come along and turn the corner."

Grumbling, he glared back through the rear window. Shorty swung his car on the trail of the other two. He cut his lights as he saw the first car turn west. The second was backing into the loading area.

Fifty feet farther on he drifted to a silent stop, jazzed his engine to blow out the last vestige of carbon, then let it purr sweetly while they waited. In the rear vision mirror he could see the outlines of the Buick at the opposite curb behind them. He grunted as he reached for a cigarette and remembered the orders were: "No smoking."

As he sat there in the darkness, he felt his nerve tauten as he visioned dark forms creeping through the warehouse, stalking the watchmen, ready to hijack the trunkful of cocaine and hyoscine Snuffles Thornton had stored there three days previously.

Wriggling about as though he tried to see farther up the street behind him, Shorty succeeded in getting the automatic under his coat and thence to the holster under his armpit.

Ten minutes passed, fifteen, twenty. Still there was no sound from the warehouse, no movement in the street.

“Looks like a pipe,” Ginger whispered. “They’ve got the watchman by now, an’ if there’s any dingdongs, they’ve beat ‘em. Pink Tiernan’s the best man in the world on alarm systems.”

Another five minutes dragged by. Suddenly three bird notes sounded shrilly. It was the “Get Ready” signal—a special whistle carried only by lieutenants in charge of a job.

It meant that the raid had succeeded, that the others were coming out. In a minute or so the trunk would be tossed into the rear of the raiding car. In thirty minutes it would all be over.

“Hold ‘er, Shorty,” Ginger warned raspily. “See which way they turn. Only one man knows. That’s Bull’s system.”

With the last word every man in the car stiffened to attention. From somewhere in the distance came the muffled tac-tac-tac of a machine gun—a sustained burst which ended as suddenly as it had begun.

“W’at th’ hell?” Ginger growled. Shorty unlatched the door and looked back up the street. When he resumed his seat he saw to it that the latch did not catch.

“Sounded like a grinder to me,” he said. “Long ways off, though.”

He let his eyes probe the darkness ahead. There were shadows, he thought, shadows in the heart of shadows out there; flitting forms, or did his eyes play him tricks?

He turned his head, spoke over his shoulder to the others.

“Prob’ly somebody else turnin’ a trick,” he said. “This’ll be a damn good part of town to get away from quick.”

Ginger grunted assent, moved uneasily.

A shot crashed somewhere near at hand. Then it seemed that the whole world went mad. Orange and blue streamers of flame sprang out of the night everywhere. Ginger howled curses, thrust his weapon out through the curtains.

“Now or never,” Shorty whispered to himself. He gathered his body into a compact ball, slid the door open another inch; fell against it and to the ground.

As he struck, instead of leaping to his feet, he rolled under the body of the car, lay there quiet. Fifty-feet distant Sid Haddon was executing a similar maneuver, warned by the crash of the first shots. Now the two cars were driverless, helpless until one or another of the rodmen took the wheel.

Heavy feet scraped the pavement in the darkness nearer and nearer at hand. From doorways service guns were belching streams of death.

Ginger, still howling curses, shifted his grinder to the left door, sprayed the shadows with red-hot bursts of fire.

Somewhere in the darkness a moan told of a stricken man’s agony. A pistol fell to the pavement, followed by the thud of a falling body.

Over the staccato barking of the rods and the deeper growl of the Tommy guns, grew a new sound. Motors were dashing up from every hand. It was

but the second minute of the attack but already scores of blue-clad cops were out of hiding, converging to add their share to the death din. Bullets were thudding now into the body of the car above Shorty. Something wet flowed along and soaked his coatsleeve as he lay hugging the pavement. A strong odor assailed his senses. Gasoline! A cop's bullet had punctured the gas tank. Shorty dragged himself a bit to one side. It wouldn't do to soak up a lot of that stuff and then get in the way of a pistol flash.

The body of the car above him swayed and groaned. Someone put his weight on the running board, dragged something from the tonneau, pattered across the sidewalk. A moment later Ginger's chopper began chattering from a recessed doorway where he had taken up his position. The value of his strategy was proved instantly. Entrenched as he was, he could hose death at the compact group of police across the street. Wounded men shouted, fell. The group melted, tried to re-form; melted again. Viciously Ginger swept the muzzle of the chopper right and left. Bullets from service guns slithered off the brick walls of the entryway, ricocheted. Ginger stopped only to change clips, then resumed his firing. "Dammit—get that guy!" The command was bellowed from somewhere near at hand.

Shorty swung crosswise under the car, lifted the muzzle of his rod; tried to peer back of the spitting flashes to get a bead on Ginger. It was no use. Another agonized shriek came from the ranks of the attackers. Shorty loosed two shots from his rod at a point beside the spitting muzzle of the chopper. His answer was a burst of slugs which spun from the pavement near his head. Ginger was not to be caught that way. Shorty raised his hand to rub his dust-filled eyes. The odor of gas was

strong again.

That was the way! He lay for a moment, trying to think clearly. Yes, he could do it—provided the cops did not kill him the first second or two after he had acted.

Rolling out from under the car he came to hands and knees. Overhead was the sound of the passage of swarms of giant bees. The smashing impact of slugs against the car's riddled sides was nearly deafening. The roll of pistol fire was thunderous.

Shorty snapped his gat back into its holster. His right hand felt for and brought out his pocket lighter. Holding it within his cap, he spun the wheel. The first spark failed—and the second. Then the wick caught. Deftly he skidded the metal box across the pavement, then dropped flat, rolling rapidly toward the opposite curb.

Almost there he collided with someone's legs. A great weight descended on him; throttling hands caught at his throat.

"Springer—headquarters!" he gasped.

The hands still held for a split second. The flame from the lighter snatched at a drop of gasoline. Instantly the opposite curb for a distance of twenty feet burst into flames which eddied and danced, making the scene light as day. Whoever was holding Shorty loosed his grasp. A tongue of fire ran along the pool, under the tank, leaped up and enveloped the container. The force of the outpouring liquid was too great as yet to permit the fire to enter.

With the lift of the blaze an exultant shout rang out.

"There he is—that doorway! Get him, men!"

Shorty stared across the way. Ginger and his chopper were outlined as on a motion picture screen. For a second he squatted there, staring dully at

the blaze. Police guns barked. Ginger instantly fell prone, sending his stream of death back full in the faces of the attackers.

It was a moment of intense drama. Outnumbered, knowing that he could not escape—that the infuriated police would stop shooting only when he was dead, Ginger lay there coolly, firing methodically into the shadowy groups across the street.

The car's body was burning now. Flames burst from underneath the hood and chassis, climbed up the sides, caught at curtains and top. One of the rodmen, badly wounded, pitched out through the flaming curtains, his clothes smoking. Police guns rattled. Dust spots billowed from his clothing in a score of places.

He twitched, died. As the curtains burned away, another huddled form could be seen in the tonneau. Death had been merciful to one gunman. Ginger was still in action, but he was firing jerkily now. A passing gust of breeze made the light lift, grow stronger. It showed a hate-twisted, bloody mask, little resembling a human face.

A dozen police pistols crashed simultaneously. No one possibly could live through that storm of lead. Expectantly the cops held their fire.

There was a moment's pause, then an unbelievable burst of shots from the doorway. "Tac-tac-tac-tac-tac!" Twenty-five, thirty times the grim chopper sang its song of menace. Silence at last.

The police guns roared again. One man, braver than the rest, charged into the doorway, firing as he ran. In a moment he was out, waving his hands excitedly. Others rushed to him.

"He's dead!" they shouted after a moment. "Croaked with his finger on the trigger."

They dragged the body into the light, marveled that one so torn and

mutilated could have the spirit to continue fighting.

“All right, men.” It was a captain calling. “That mops up this bunch. The others are inside yet. We’ve got ‘em from above and from all sides. Get in there. Don’t let one get away.”

Shorty turned dazedly, walked a few steps toward the Buick. He realized now that the firing there had stopped long before. In the darkness he collided with someone in civilian clothes.

“You, kid?” the other asked.

“Haddon!” There was joy in the tone. “You got through all right, too!”

“Yeh—just a few scratches. Better duck now. You know the orders—under cover with cops as well as civilians. They’ll mop up this mess, and anyway I want to be in on the raid on Bull.”

Together the two Secret Police melted into the darkness, caught a nighthawk cab and speeded back to the vicinity of Finnegan’s.

“I had to tell a flattie I was from headquarters after I’d touched off the gas,” Shorty said after awhile, “but he didn’t get a good look at me. Everything’s jake.”

“Nice party,” Haddon said reflectively. “Wonder what the real Shorty’d have done in your place!”

“That fuzz-tail!” Springer’s voice was hard. “He’d be dead back there with the rest of ‘em. Wonder why McGrehan wanted to save him?”

“Damfino! Hell with that. If you want something to fret about, figure what the newspapers are goin’ to say about half the department layin’ for a bunch of thugs and knockin’ ‘em off. Them and the reformers. Hooey!”

“I can see ‘em now,” Springer answered. “And I’m damn glad I’m on the Secret Police instead of the regulars.”

The taxi rounded the last corner, skidded to a stop. Uniformed police

blocked the way. "Broadway or Tenth," they chanted monotonously.

"Don't turn up Seventh or Ninth."

The trap was being sprung at Finnegan's then, according to plan. Haddon and Springer, ex-Shorty, dropped out and paid the driver. For two blocks the avenue was free of moving traffic. At the corner nearest the hangout stood several armored motorcycles, police prowl cars, and two of the big armored trucks used by the riot squad.

One of the flatties came over to them.

"What're youse guys hangin' 'round here for?" he demanded truculently.

"Sixty-six," Haddon replied, giving the code word which in the department on that particular night meant "on special duty."

The word changed nightly. Only men within the department could know it. It was whispered to each relief on leaving the station.

"Oh, yeh?" the policeman said. "Well, youse guys better crawl intuh th' ol' tin vests if youse're gonna stick aroun' here. Know what's doin'?" He leered at them craftily, with the curiosity of the harness bull as to what the plainclothes men were doing.

"No, handsome; what is it?" Haddon's reply was like a slap in the face.

"Ahrrr, nuts!" the cop replied. "Kiddin' somebody, aintcha?"

Turning, the two scurried along the darkened store fronts. A rhythmic pounding, somewhere ahead, came to their ears.

"Smashing down Bull's steel door in the middle of the stairway," Haddon said.

"That's a tough spot," Springer replied. "Be plenty hell when they finally get through."

His words were prophetic. Guns were in action now, their spitting sound curiously muffled by the building's walls. From higher up came a

crashing, rending sound. The roof detail was smashing a way through to the upper floor. Across the street someone opened a window on a fire escape. Two cops with a machine gun stepped out onto the landing, trained the weapon on the windows opposite.

The armored motorcycles made a crescent before the open doorway. Each carried a passenger in its protected tub; each passenger carried a Tommy gun. The men in the saddles crouched forward behind their shields, automatics ready for business.

The shooting, which had died down after the first few shots, crashed forth again. A policeman, his right arm dangling loosely, blood dripping in a stream from his fingers, staggered from the doorway.

"They're givin' us hell in there," he said through set lips. "Door's down but they're hosin' the stairs with a rapid fire from back of a steel shield set on the second flight. Never get 'em this way."

Springer turned on Haddon, jerked his head. Haddon nodded.

"Try it, anyway," he said.

They raced toward the front of the place but were stopped by a captain.

"Sixty-six," Springer whispered. "My friend thinks he knows a way in through Finnegan's. There's a half balcony there and a doorway that's been boarded up. We'll signal through the window."

"Good! The other way's suicide. See what you can do, boys."

In the rear of the hallway, under the old-fashioned stairway, was a descending stairway leading to the Finnegan half of the basement.

Haddon clicked on a pencil flashlight; inspected the lock. Springer flicked out a bunch of skeleton keys, turned the lock with the second.

In a moment they stood in the cellarway. A heavy partition divided the two halves of the basement from left to right. Along this stood a table

where peelers prepared the vegetables. At the left, at the wall, was a narrow stair—hardly more than a ladder.

Springer led, tried the door at the top. It was held by a bolt on the other side.

“Hold my feet so I don’t slip,” he said. Swinging as far back as he dared, he launched his wiry shoulder against the barrier. It creaked but did not give. A second thrust splintered a panel.

Three or four driving blows with his palm made a hole big enough to admit his arm. The bolt clicked back. They were in the café now. Outside the Captain stood shading his eyes, peering into the window. Springer seized a bill of fare, wrote on it; ran lightly to the front.

“hallway. through cellar and back up here,” the Captain read by beam of his hand torch. He nodded, ran to the doorway, beckoning others to follow.

Springer looked about. Haddon was at his side. “Boost,” he demanded.

“Right, kid,” the big fellow said, catching the smaller man by the cloth at his hips; boosting him straight up as one might raise a chair.

Springer’s hands caught the cross-piece; pulled him up.

“Go up the stairs,” he whispered. “Feel along the wall from the stair head toward me. I’ll work back. There’s a boarded up door somewhere.”

They met, but without result. “It’s farther back,” Haddon said. “I remember now.”

It was almost at the back corner. They ripped away the light deal casing.

“This won’t get us anywhere,” Haddon whispered. “They’re still on the floor above us.”

“Old building,” Springer grunted. “I’m gambling the stairs are built all the way up on a scaffolding. You know the old system. Four-by-fours, with

two-by-four supports; like a grandstand. Get under there—shoot hell out of the choppers from underneath.”

“Sure’s hell something there, or there’d be no door,” Haddon replied.

“Cripes, listen to those flatties stumble up the stairs!” Springer said.

“Good thing everybody’s shooting.”

He flashed his torch to outline the way to the stairs. Three men accompanied the captain. One carried a chopper. The other had a sawed-off shotgun and a net of tear bombs.

The third attacked the door slit with a jimmy. The old wood gave readily. Back of it, as Springer had surmised, was a dark passage which led toward the rear of the building under the stair supports.

One of the flatties produced a long-beam flashlight, disclosing twenty feet back, the outlines of the second floor landing.

“I’m going up,” Springer said quietly. “When I find which step they’re on we can shoot ‘em loose in two seconds.”

He dropped his coat, set the pencil flash upright in his vest pocket; shinned up to the first cross support. From there he swung like a monkey, up and back to a point a score of feet above the others’ heads.

Their flashes revealed him as he balanced on a two-by-four, clinging with knees and one hand. With the other he felt of the risers and treads until vibration told him where the gunmen rested for their shooting down the stairway.

Still clinging precariously, he took out his flash and counted the stairs. It was the seventh. A moment later he dropped to the floor, dripping with sweat, his palms bleeding from a score of sliver wounds.

“The seventh stair,” he said, “but there’s no use shooting them out of there until the cops are set for a rush. Get word out to be ready.”

“That’s the dope,” the Captain replied. “I’ll send word for the boys to be ready. Here, Wilkins, get out and tell ‘em what we’re doing. When they’re ready to rush, wig wag me with a light and when you hear my whistle, you other boys blow them rats to hell outta there.”

The police machine gunner took up his place back in the darkness, found a rest; set his weapon with the rays of a flash so he could spray his death hail through the rotting wood of the stairway.

It was stifling in the narrow passage. The minutes dragged terribly. At intervals firing was resumed in the stairway. Also there was firing at some distant point; probably the roof crew fighting their way downward. Below, in the rear, were other smashing sounds as the basement was occupied.

Haddon, his nerves ragged from waiting, started toward the balcony.

Before he had taken three steps, a shrill note cut through the medley of other noises.

Springer and the harness cop threw their flashes upward. The gunner’s finger compressed on the trip and the Tommy-gun began its death chatter.

Its barking roar smashed on their ears like the turmoil of a boiler shop. Orange flames sputtered in a continuous stream from its blunt muzzle. The tread of the seventh stair seemed to lift under its smashing blows. Men bellowed in agony and a heavy object clattered downward. The stairway creaked. The tread flew apart; became a mass of splinters.

Springer touched the flattie’s shoulder; mentioned for him to sweep the remaining six steps to blot out any lurking thugs.

He obeyed. Other yells of pain or anger burst out in answer. He hosed every nook and corner where a gunman might be hiding.

“Hold it!” Springer barked the word. Heavy footed men were pounding up

the stairway from the ground floor. It wouldn't do to shoot down any of the attackers. The cops had gained the hallway now, but were being fired on from within the gang's assembly room. From farther back came the chatter of guns as well.

"Bull's holed up in the office," Haddon muttered. "He's cornered, but it'll take a hell of a lot of lead to get him out. He's shooting from behind the big safe; that's a bet."

Springer shrugged. "Let's get going," he said. They slipped back through the café and cellar, into the hallway.

The heavy fumes of cordite made it almost impossible to breathe. The stairs were heavy, slippery with broken plaster, pools of blood. At the top the cops stood massed out of range of the death hail from inside.

As they watched, Springer and Haddon saw three men raise the steel shield from behind which the defenders had held the stairway. Others fell in behind it, pushed it through the open doorway of the clubroom. The others thrust forward. Springer nudged Haddon, pointing.

Three dead men lay at the foot of the second flight of stairs. Another sprawled grotesquely over the splintered tread.

"Must have got them with the first burst," he said. "Wonder if we can drive Bull out the same way?"

"Nope. Safe's on a steel plate about seven by four feet. It stands across the corner. Anyone behind it, with the doors open might as well be shooting from a battleship."

"I've got it through the wall." Springer rushed back along the stairway, returned in a moment, cursing. "Hall only goes part way back; they've built a partition there," he said.

"Above then," it was Haddon's turn now. "There's some way for us to get

at that rat.”

They ran up the stairs, shoving the body of the dead gangster aside as they went. Springer leaped to the door at the head of the stairs, opened it, slammed it again—dragged Haddon down flat on the floor.

Lead smashed in a stream through the panels at the height of a man’s chest. More of the defenders were in there, holding back the crew attacking from the roof.

A battered broom stood in one corner. Springer tiptoed over to it, tore loose the cord of a droplight and wound it about the handle, leaving one end free.

“We’ll pen ‘em in there,” he said. “Door opens inward. When it comes time for them to smash us from the rear, they can’t get out.”

Silently he slipped to the door-casing, laid the broom across horizontally, motioned for Haddon to hold it level. He wound the wire several times about the doorknob, then about the broom, tied a granny-knot. Purposely he jiggled the handle. More slugs crashed through, then someone tried to pull the door open from the inside. It held.

“That’ll keep ‘em off our backs. Come on,” Springer barked. They ran to the rear of the hallway. The attic scuttle stood open. Back in the shadows he could make out the outlines of a face.

“Up with them—I’ve got you covered,” a voice commanded.

“Sixty-six,” Springer replied. “Drop a couple of men down here into the hallway to help smash into them from the rear. I’ve got the door barred from this side.”

“How’ll that help,” the other demanded suspiciously.

“Easy. They figure they can hold us off, while Bull stands your fellows off from back of the safe in his office. We’ve got to smash this bunch and

then get Bull through the floor from above.”

Long, blue clad legs appeared in the opening. The cop swung for a moment by his hands, fell to his knees. Another followed with drawn gun. “All right, Bob,” the first said. “Headquarters, special service men with the password.”

“Get a grinder,” Springer interrupted. “We’ll never get anywhere with hand guns.”

The second cop was still suspicious.

“Say,” he demanded. “Who in hell are you anyhow, young fellow? You look a helluva lot to me like a punk that hangs ‘round with this gang.”

“Yeh!” Springer snapped. “And if it means anything to you, I look a lot like my father too. Come on! Get busy. Introductions can wait.”

Still surly, the copper went back and called to someone above through the scuttle. In a moment a third policeman swung down, holding by one hand while he passed over a Tommy gun.

“How many in there?” Haddon asked. The policeman rubbed his nose reflectively.

“Half a dozen anyway. We got into the attic all right, but they pumped so many holes around our feet that we couldn’t break through. Four of our boys are up there, shot up. They burned the hell out of us every time we started.”

“What’s the layout?”

“Two big rooms with a door in the center of the partition. Two rooms on this floor, three in the same space on Bull’s floor.”

Springer pointed to the door with its broom-and-wire lashing.

“By now they’ve found its barricaded,” he said. “That gives us a chance to surprise ‘em. Put the guy with the grinder on the stairs, with just the

tip of the gun showing over the landing. You others plant back in the dark and knock over the ones he don't get. I'll loosen the bar and kick the door open."

The firing within was intermittent. It seemed that the gangsters were satisfied with a stalemate; glad to hold the raiders from the roof on the attic floor. Springer's hands were working now at the wire lashing. Silently he released the broom but retained his hold on the doorknob. Flattening himself against the wall he waited for another burst of firing. When it came he nodded to the others, turned the knob and sent the door sweeping back against the inner wall. Someone inside loosed a scattering spray of shots from an automatic through the opening. The copper on the stairs withheld his fire for a second, while the others, waiting for his first burst, stood silent.

Springer looked over his shoulder and unconsciously flinched aside from the doorway as the Tommy-gun went into action. He could feel the death-draught of the flying lead.

A medley of cries came from within. A bullet or two buzzed through the opening, smashed harmlessly into the plastering.

Haddon and his two supporting cops leaped forward, but Springer was first into the room. Four men were prone on the floor. A fifth, his legs shot from under him, was trying to crawl into the second room.

Springer's gun belched twice. The crawling gunny squirmed; lay still. Feet were thudding on the floor inside as the cops dropped from the low attic opening.

Springer turned and ordered the man with the Tommy-gun to keep on firing erratic bursts so Bull and his group could not know that the cops finally had occupied the floor above him.

“Give me a jimmy,” he gritted. “I want to tear up the floor in this corner.” He cast his eyes about the two rooms. Roughly they approximated the three of the gang headquarters below. Therefore the southeast corner would be directly above the spot where Bull was holding out against his attackers.

One of the cops disappeared; returned almost immediately with a jimmy big enough to wreck the City Hall. Springer snatched at it hungrily; turned to the corner baseboard. His agile shoulders twisted. The baseboard came loose. Another wrench. The inside flooring board flipped back in splinters. Another. Another. Haddon slipped to his knees beside Springer.

“Easy does it,” he warned. “You’re tipping your mitt. Can’t you hear? They’ve stopped shooting downstairs.”

Springer stared at him, wiped the sweat from his forehead.

“Who the hell cares?” he snarled. “I’m going to get Bull.”

“Be smart,” Haddon said and caught at his wrist. “Don’t be a sap. We’ve got all night—but we’ve got to put this thing over or the Commish is sunk.”

Springer nodded in understanding. He slipped the jimmy under the next board and levered it up carefully. It ripped loose at one end. Haddon slipped his fingers beneath the edge and wrenched quietly. Another board gave. Springer arose, wiped the sweat from his eyes.

“Enough?” he said, indicating the opening. Haddon shook his head.

“More,” he said. “At least three feet. Safe stands across the corner, you know.”

Springer loosened two more boards, then a third. Haddon levered them out, keeping the nails from creaking. Then the firing started up again on

the floor below, Springer motioned to the copper with the Tommy.

“Lie down,” he directed. “Listen carefully and see if you can tell from the sound just about where he’s standing.”

The cop complied, laid there a matter of moments, then arose, grinning.

“Bet I knock a hole in his skull first thing,” he boasted.

“Then get at it,” Springer snapped, passing the gun to the man’s waiting hands. “There’s a big safe across the corner that he’s using for a shield. Sponge out every inch behind it.”

The cop up-ended the weapon, stopped to kick loose a sliver of board from a cross beam. He grinned over his shoulders at the others.

“Watch this,” he said.

He brought the trigger back; drew a jagged line of holes straight from the corner back almost to his feet. The slugs tore through the plastering as a knife cuts whey. He moved the muzzle patiently from left to right and back again, probing into every possible corner. Suddenly there was a dull crash followed by a white dust cloud. A square yard of the ceiling had fallen.

Several slugs from automatics buzzed through the opening and crashed into the attic flooring but Haddon, unmindful, leaned forward to peer down. Springer shouldered him aside roughly.

The top of the safe was heaped with fallen plaster, as was the floor beside it. Two huddled forms were slumped against the wall. Springer detected sudden movement and dragged Haddon back as one of the two fallen men jerked half erect and emptied a clip from his rod at the faces above him.

Feet dashed across the floor below. Rods spoke their death word and the gangster, riddled anew, pitched forward; lay there quietly.

“Come on—it’s the finish.” Springer snatched at Haddon’s arm and raced to the stairhead. In the club-rooms below they came upon a scene none of the living participants forgot for days.

Five wounded or dead police lay in a corner where they had been dragged by their comrades out of the line of Bull’s murderous fire. The door and partition between the two rooms were splintered wrecks. The steel shield, used first by the defenders and then by the attackers, lay overturned near the doorway. Hardly an inch of its surface had escaped a scoring by flying lead and steel. Back of it lay one of the police, one side of his face shot away by a long burst of fire.

Within the inner room the walls and furnishings had been torn to fragments by the hail of bullets. Bull had left open the big doors of the safe as an added protection against police guns. The drawers and pigeonholes were wrecked, their contents smashed and torn until they were mere heaps of waste paper and rubbish.

Three dead gangsters lay in a corner back of a heavy oak table which they had up-ended to use as a shield. Another lay beside the safe, at the left.

A policeman caught at a pair of feet protruding from behind the safe and dragged out a wounded man. His head was smashed, but he still breathed—horribly, bubblingly.

Springer wriggled through the press and caught Bull’s inert form by the collar. The gang leader was badly slashed about the head, either by grazing bullets or falling plaster. Blood gushed, fountain-like, from a wound in his left shoulder. One wrist was smashed. The hand hung, grotesquely, like a wet glove.

The movement roused the gangster to consciousness. He gazed, dazedly

at first, at Springer. For a moment hope leaped into his eyes. Then he saw the police uniforms and realization came to him. Hate distorted his blood smeared features; his hand clawed at his trousers band for the spare rod he carried there.

“You damned, stinking, lousy rat!” he whispered. “Turned stoolie—gave me up to the bulls, damn you! I’m goin’ out—but I’m takin’ you with me.” Bull’s great body surged forward, his right hand clutching at Springer’s throat. Then, forgetful of his wounds, he tried to put his weight on the smashed wrist. The bones grated against the floor; sent him crashing back onto his face. The others were gathering up the injured policemen, only Haddon standing by.

Springer jerked Bull erect into a sitting posture again. The gangster’s eyes shifted to Haddon’s face.

“Another—rat!” he whispered. “Stool! Snitch! And I—I was warned. You—Shorty—lice, both of you!”

Springer leaned forward until his face was within inches of that of Bull. Hatred blazed in his eyes.

“No, not Shorty, Bull,” he snarled. “His double. Eddie Springer, son of one of the cops you and your rods knocked off two weeks ago. Take that down to hell with you—and see how it tastes for a kid to make things square for his old man.”

Bull’s eyes widened in utter unbelief. “Liar!” he mumbled. “You’re Shorty—and a stool.” He sagged back hopelessly. Springer shook him viciously. “Your mob’s gone,” he gritted. “Every one at the warehouse, everybody here. They’re all finished—like you’ll be in a minute.”

Bull sighed. Suddenly his body went limp.

The Bull Coleman gang was wiped from the roll of “men wanted for major crime.”

V

Shorty's Awakening

Daylight! Shorty Breen awoke, shivering in his underclothing in the silent cell. Slowly his mind grasped his predicament. He was A.W.O.L. with Bull. That meant he'd have to duck the town or take a one-way ride with some of his former pals.

Damn old McGrehan! Just like a thick-headed cop to get a fellow into a jam like this.

Feet resounded eerily down the corridor. Shorty strained his ears to hear. Then he leaped upright, gibbering with fear.

His senses told him that he was sitting erect on the hard board in the cell, yet there he stood outside the locked door, dressed in his everyday suit, peering in through the bars at himself!

For the first time in years, Shorty made the sign of the cross. The figure outside stood leering at him, wordlessly. Shorty tried to mouth a question—ended with a shrill scream. The words would not form in his mouth. His throat was a frozen waste. With the sound the other Shorty moved soundlessly aside, disappeared.

Long minutes passed. Never ending minutes. Once Shorty thought he heard whispering in the distance.

The boy fought to still the trembling which shook his every nerve and muscle. He lay back, eyeing the steel grating above him. It was a trick, a dream; something they were doing to crack his nerve. Well, damn them, he'd fool them.

Then, while he promised himself they wouldn't frighten him again, there was a loud click. He snapped erect, gazing in wide-eyed horror; burst into a shrill torrent of screams.

The other Shorty—his counterpart—was back, unlocking the door—coming in after him. He covered his eyes with his arms, cowered back against the cold steel wall of the cell. The other was inside now; probably come to take him down into hell.

A heavy hand clutched his shoulder, dragged him up, and out, and into the corridor.

It was more than even gangster flesh and blood could stand.

Convulsively, squirming like an eel, Shorty broke the hold, ran down the corridor at a shambling pace, rounded the cell block—smashed full into the burly form of Captain McGrehan.

Clyde Breen, ex-speedball and gangster, burst into tears.

He forced himself to look into the eyes of the double who now stood at his side. His face was bloody, his hands gory and torn.

“Get goin’; the Commissioner’s waitin’.” Captain McGrehan was speaking for the first time.

“Here he is, Mr. Commissioner,” said McGrehan, thrusting the half clad Shorty opposite the official.

For a long moment the Commissioner stared appraisingly into Shorty’s eyes. Finally he spoke.

“Of all the Coleman gang, Breen, you only are alive today.”

Shorty stared at him, unbelievably. The toneless voice continued:

“We trapped them in the warehouse raid, surrounded Bull and the others over Finnegan’s in the hangout; killed every one of them. Captain McGrehan saved you—for your mother’s sake.”

“Why? How?” The words were whispered. Shorty’s world had come tumbling about his ears.

“Why did we clean them out?” The Commissioner’s tone was savage.

“Well, you know why. You drove the chopper car on the raid on The Yid’s trucks. That night two policemen were killed. One of them was the father of Springer here—this boy who wore your clothes, pretended to be you tonight—and drove one of the cars to the warehouse.”

Shorty turned and stared wonderingly at Springer. Within his mind he said one word. It was “Guts!” The Commissioner’s dead voice continued tonelessly.

“Better men than you’ll ever be, died tonight, Breen. They’ll lie and mold in their graves while you go on living, breathing, maybe loving.

“Captain McGrehan convinced me we should save you for two reasons. The first is to keep your mother’s heart from breaking. The other is that you’re going to sit down now and tell a stenographer about everything you know that the Coleman gang did in a criminal way, including the death of the two policemen. You hear me?”

“I hope he says ‘no,’ Mr. Commissioner. I want a chance to slap him down until he’s only two feet high.”

Captain McGrehan, fists clenched, was advancing from the doorway.

“Get square, kid; start all over again—we’ll all help.” It was Springer who drove the clinching nail.

“I’ll do it,” he said.

Shorty saw the Commissioner but once more.

That was the day when Mom and Captain McGrehan went before the good Father O’Grady and rectified the mistakes of their younger years. The Commissioner was best man. Shorty gave the bride away.

At the end of the ceremony, the Commissioner said goodbye to Shorty last of all.

“Keep your head up, boy,” he said earnestly. “You’ll make it all right.”

“An’ damn well you know it,” his new father growled. “He’s ji’nin’ th’ Navy tomorruh.”

“Uh—uh—why, sure!” Shorty replied.

Michael Henrik Wynn
“Deception”

Imagine traveling through space at lightening speed, exploring the deep recesses of the universe to unveil her deepest secrets. “Are we really alone?” is one of the most fundamental questions that future generations must explore. The questions really makes my heart beat. Somehow the notion of that grand future, of all those limitless possibilities, makes me relax, bringing balance to a boring life. I am a social worker, you see, for a private company. I make rounds helping old people, geezers, hags and cripples. Perhaps they need something. Then I will provide it for them. I will even wipe their bottoms if they need it. Naturally, I often hate my job and like most people I sit on my couch and dream of becoming a millionaire or I get completely wasted and pretend to be one. Sometimes I feel as if I would care for anything or anyone provided the pay was satisfactory. Science Fiction writing is therefore a great passion of mine. When I write about the future, a world of possibilities and probabilities opens up to me and I can mold it into a format I can accept. I will become the next Arthur C. Clark. In the meantime, I will, for a modest fee, remove your excrement and make your bed.

In January a few years back, I was given a new patient to take care of, a certain Mrs. Jackson whose husband had died suddenly in a horrible accident a few years earlier, leaving her all alone with failing memory.

She lived in a nice house at the west end of town, with a patch of grass outside and a white fence to match. It would have been a paradise for someone healthy. What it was for Mrs. Jackson, I cannot say. She sat in a wheelchair as I entered, but I don't think she was physically dependent upon it. When she saw me she was immediately disgusted.

"Who are you?" she said. "I am Michael, your new social worker? Don't you remember?"

"No. Will you be taking care of me?"

"Yes."

"Well you damn well better. Crazy old cow like me, sitting here all alone!"

I soon found out that Mrs. Jackson had many needs that needed to be fulfilled. She had a schedule to keep and if it was not kept to the letter, she would become hysterical and utter words I have never heard from people her age. Other times—I think this was in one of her better periods—she would get flashes of clarity and her eyes would gleam of doom and tragedy. "I am so lonely," she would say. One day she was looking for her glasses in the living room. "Michael! Michael Michael" she shouted as she paced across the room. I ran down the stairs from the upstairs bedroom where I was making the bed, thinking that she had suffered some form of injury. When I arrived she said "I cannot find my glasses. I know they are here. Perhaps they have taken them from me?"

"Who?" I replied.

"Don't get funny with me! You know very well who I am talking about. Anyway it's 3 o'clock and you haven't finished the bedroom yet. That means that you will be late for cleaning the kitchen at 4 like we normally do. I always have the kitchen cleaned at 4. Why can't I find my glasses,"

she said as she sunk down in her chair. I could see now that she was crying. I was about to go to her side, but something held me back. Then she made it easy for me as she said "Go away!".

"I know what I want," the old woman said. "I want to be human. You all want me dead. That is what you really want. Actually, if you are going to continue with that sort of attitude, I don't see how we can work together. I honestly don't. Where are my glasses? I want my glasses, damn it"

The old woman had turned mean on me. Her face was stone cold, even her wrinkles seemed inanimate. I studied her expressions, but I could not find a hint of compromise. "Do you want me to leave, Mrs. Jackson?"

"Yes"

I sighed and gathered my things. As I was leaving, I heard her shout after me: "And don't bother coming back". The next day I returned to have the matter settled. I expected that she simply didn't like me and that she would prefer to have someone else in her house, perhaps a woman. Surprisingly she seemed cheerful in her chair by the window. She greeted me and smiled. I sat down, began politely by saying that I understood her situation, that it was her choice and that I was willing to have the company find a replacement within the month. She looked at me and laughed "My dear, what are you rambling about?"

"Don't you remember that you shouted at me and called me a liar?"

"No"

"You said I had a bad attitude."

"My dear young man, I have never seen you before in my life. I bear

grudges to no-one, especially not a complete stranger such as yourself. Now be a dear sweetheart and give my pills, will you.”

At first, I thought she was playing with me, but her act seemed so natural and her expression so innocent that I rejected the idea.

“Mrs. Jackson, do you remember my name?”

“John?”

“No, it’s Michael.”

“Such a nice name too,” she said and touched my hand. I now began to wonder what she really remembered from our past encounter. What did it matter what I did, if she would never remember it. Normally I bring some cake every Friday to my patients, but in view of recent events it seemed a waste of time. She always asked me if we had cake on Friday, and having assumed that she simply needed to have the obvious confirmed; I thought she remembered. From that day on I brought no more cake on Fridays. Certainly there was no reason to bring the actual cake. When she asked me if we had cake, I told her we had and she was just as happy as if she actually had. Pretty soon other changes occurred. I no longer needed to follow her stringent rules. She would always ask me if I had done the kitchen at 4 o'clock like she wanted it done, and I replied yes, and that was that. I had no qualms about what I was doing because it meant nothing to her now. I started wondering whether there was even any need for kindness. I thought I could insult her one day and come back the next as if nothing happened. But, such deliberate cruelty was beyond even me. Things were bad enough. There was no need to rub it in. The situation with Mrs. Jackson soon started to depress me. Somehow

I blamed her for her effect on me, and I am afraid I at times was not as polite to her as she deserved. Seeing her sit there, asking me every time who I was and what I was doing there, got to me in a way that I didn't understand. It was as if I saw in her my own situation magnified.

I began searching for something to do, something that could take my mind off the job. I found it in a newspaper ad. A local writer was organizing a course in creative writing. But it was too expensive for me, a 1000 dollars. The opportunity that presented itself to me at the end of May that year now fills me with shame, although there are parts of me that think I deserved something as compensation for the way she made me feel. Mrs. Jackson's failing memory had brought more of her practical affairs to my attention. When there was something that needed to be fixed, local taxes or gas bills, I stepped in to pay them for her. Naturally she had given me all her papers and permission to withdraw any amount from the bank. Legally she was in need of a guardian, and in the absence of any relatives, the system left those tasks temporarily to me. I now realized that Mrs. Jackson was a very rich woman. In fact, I was told that she owned as much as a million, and that there was no-one to inherit the money. In fact, the money would probably be donated to charity when she died, or even worse, it would be confiscated by the government. A 1000 dollars to her was nothing. It was a drop in the ocean. I would get my writing class, and then I would be a better nurse for her. She might actually want that. Surely, in the end this was something that I did for her too, seeing that she was helpless and needed constant assistance from strangers. It was a tip. Yes, that's what it was. The next day I withdrew the 1000 dollars from her account and enrolled in the writing

class.

I was very excited at first. I never thought that I would have any kind of talent for writing. I never compared myself to great writers, but I thought that I might actually be able to write for the mass market rather than for the sophisticated critic, who it was impossible to please anyway. The classes took place every Friday at some shabby downtown haunt. Unfortunately the classes took place at the same time as my Friday appointments with Mrs. Jackson, but I discovered that if I arrived 2 hours later and stayed a few minutes longer, she would never even notice that I was gone. There were about 10 of us and our teacher was just as eccentric as I hoped he would be. Everybody knows that anyone who tries to teach writing to others must be certifiably insane. He was a tall skinny character with bushy hair and a wild staring gaze. Apparently he had published some novels himself, although I had never heard of any of them. There were several people who considered themselves artists in the true sense of the word. They quoted Russian novelists and spoke of literary theory with great insight. Naturally, none of them had ever published anything and in my opinion they were all idiots. When I announced my intention to write about aliens for the mass market, they said I was insincere.

“Don’t you know,” I said, “that the future is a very exciting subject? New developments in biotechnology will revolutionize our treatment of disease and new information technology will bring all the knowledge of the world into our living rooms. In the future, I believe, all humans will learn faster because they can take drugs to improve their memory. We will all become geniuses.”

“Interesting,” the teacher said, and stared at me with his crazy eyes.

“Very interesting. What do the rest of you think, will there be a brave new world of tomorrow? Hm Hm Tell me.” His eyes searched the room for an opinion.

“Well, I think he is on to something,” a girl replied. “I can sort of see the sense of it”. She looked at me with deep brown eyes and smiled. I felt my heart skip a beat. I don’t get many smiles from women. Next time the class gathered, the teacher was late and I engaged her conversation. She was very pretty, too pretty for me actually. She had a quiet, subdued manner about her, she never looked straight at me. It occurred to me that she was painfully shy, even delicate.

“What do you do?” I said, “I mean when you are not writing”

“I’m a psychologist,” she said.

“Really,” I replied, “I am a social worker.”

We soon discovered that we had much in common. A few minutes later we talked about personal matters, things that we both seemed concerned about. She had some oddities though, but I easily forgave them considering how beautiful she was. For instance, she would always ask me if I thought she was fat, even though she was extremely skinny. When I told her that I thought she could well gain a few pounds, she gave me a very irritated look, as if I was lying to her. However, most of the time we talked about other things, such as the best Sci-Fi movies and who founded modern science fiction, Mary Shelley or H.G. Wells. Very soon I realized that I was in love with her.

This blessing was a tragedy in disguise. I could hardly work anymore

without having all sorts of plans for our future in my head. Her face seemed to haunt me constantly, even when I worked with Mrs. Jackson. Once Mrs. Jackson eyed me suspiciously and said “Michael, are you in love?”

“Of course not,” I said. “Don’t be silly.”

After that I decided that I should not talk to her the rest of the week. After all, I could start talking to her in a week when I had calmed down and she wouldn’t remember a thing. That weekend Lisa and I went up to a cottage she had in the country. It was one of those perfect moments that are forever imprinted in your memory. We drove into her valley and we felt happy. The cottage lay on the bank of a slow-moving river that glittered where the landscape opened up into a wide-open space. I think I told myself that this was too good to be true, fearing that I could wake up at any moment. The following week we met regularly, and it goes without saying that I partly neglected my duties with Mrs. Jackson. However, she did not suffer any distress in the sense that her physical needs were ignored. She had food, her house was clean and she never complained. Lisa and I had now become intimate and I cherished the memory of her naked body, elegant and dexterous as it was. I could sit by myself and think about it for hours on end. Sometimes I would catch myself in red-handed apathy and on those occasions I would humor myself with the idea that the senile Mrs. Jackson and I after all were not much different, comfortably seated in our chairs, staring into oblivion. My writing classes were now drawing to a close. I think we had about a week left. To be honest I had not produced much. Lisa had found an expression for her obsession with dieting and produced the first draft of a book for overweight women. I had only produced the first draft of a story about

time travel. Our teacher, however, now declared the course a complete success. Some day, he predicted, several people in our class would win the Nobel prize and then we would be grateful for the advice he had given. I think he was just making excuses for our obvious lack of talent, but I went along with it because I wanted to close on a good note.

Lisa and I had made plans for a travel to Europe. It was kind of a honeymoon for us. We wanted to travel in France and make love like they do in all the clichés. However, the journey was quite expensive. I had not told her any details about my financial situation. I barely got by on my present salary. The truth was that not only did I not make enough money to live in the dream world we wanted, my house was heavily mortgaged. I therefore asked for extra hours at work. I would stay with Mrs. Jackson the whole week and help her in any way I could. It would be much easier if she had one person to relate to instead of all the people that she had coming and going all week. Perhaps then she would remember my name. I assured my employer that that would be very unlikely.

One day Mrs. Jackson came to me and asked me to get her some medicines from the pharmacy. They were very expensive, but she would give me the money like she usually did. I was surprised to find that she had large sums of cash stored in a box in her closet. She handed me a roll of notes, and as I held them in my hand, I could not help thinking what would happen if I took some of it. After all, I had done it before and gotten away with it. Was I stealing from her? She was wealthy and had no one to inherit her money. If I didn't take it, the money would simply go

to waste. I decided to steal yet another time. On the way from the pharmacy the remaining notes found their way into my pocket. That evening I called Lisa and told her I had bought the tickets. She laughed and said we would have the time of our lives. I repeated that phrase over again as I fell asleep that night “the time of our lives”.

As morning broke the next day I felt alive for the very first time. It was as if everything was clearer now. I noticed the slow movements of the morning mists and watched the dewdrops on the windowpane. I made my sandwich and prepared for my final day at the writing class. It was, ironically, Friday and we were having a cake baked by our mad teacher. I took the bus through the city as usual, but found that traffic was especially annoying this morning. Cars, streetlights and sirens seemed to conspire against us in a futile attempt to nag me. But nothing could touch me now. I got off the bus and made my way through the crowded park to the building and classroom. As I entered the classroom I found everyone in a strange, almost quiet mood. “Hi guys,” I said defiantly, “guess what”.

“Michael, you’d better sit down. Something has happened. Have you not heard about the accident? They are dead.”

“What do you mean, ‘They are dead?’ Who is dead? When did they die?”

“This morning, in a car crash. Lisa and her sister.”

“You are lying? They are not dead”

“Yes, they are, ask anyone. I looked at their faces and they all nodded

“But I have made plans. We are going to Europe. I have bought tickets.

The worst thing about it is that I can’t get a refund now. They don’t give

refunds on cheap tickets. It's funny really because I seldom travel. And I know they like traveling. Most people like traveling. It's not like I am an astronaut or anything. Imagine going on a spaceship to the moon or something. I just like to see new things you see."

They all gave me a strange look, my hands suddenly started shaking. I was unable to control them, so I stuffed them in my pockets. I began laughing at my own clumsiness. Those damned hands, I thought. "Well I have something to do," I said, got up nodded reassuringly to them and left. I shall not bother you with the details of my sorrow. It is, after all, not much different from that which most people experience at some point in their lives. It took me about a month to compose myself. I then took up my job for Mrs. Jackson, who still sat in her chair by the window.

"Who are you?" she said as I entered. "I am your social worker. Michael is my name," I said. "Don't you remember?"

"No"

Aleister Crowley
“The Vixen”

Patricia Fleming threw the reins to a groom, and ran up the steps into the great house, her thin lips white with rage. Lord Eyre followed her heavily. “I’ll be down in half an hour,” she laughed merrily, “tell Dawson to bring you a drink!” Then she went straight through the house, her girlish eyes the incarnation of a curse.

For the third time she had failed to bring Geoffrey Eyre to her feet. She looked into her hat; there in the lining was the talisman that she had tested—and it had tricked her. What do I need? she thought. Must it be blood?

She was a maiden of the pure English strain; brave, gay, honest, shrewd—and there was not one that guessed the inmost fire that burnt her. For she was but a child when the Visitor came.

The first of the Visits was in a dream. She woke choking; the air—clear, sweet, and wholesome as it blew through the open window from the Chilterns—was fouled with a musty stench. And she woke her governess with a tale of a tiger.

The second Visit was again at night. She had been hunting, was alone at the death, had beaten off the hounds. That night she heard a fox bark in her room. She spent a sleepless night of terror; in the morning’ she found the red hairs of a fox upon her pillow.

The third Visit was nor in sleep nor waking. But she tightened her lips, and would have veiled the hateful gleam in her eyes. It was that day, though, that she struck a servant with her riding-whip.

She was so sane that she knew exactly wherein her madness lay; and she set all her strength not to conquer but to conceal it.

Two years later, and Patricia Fleming, the orphan heiress of Carthwell Abbey, was the county toast, Diana of the Chilterns. Yet Geoffrey Eyre evaded her. His dog's fidelity and honesty kept him true to the little north-country girl that three months earlier had seduced his simplicity. He did not even love her; but she had made him think so for an hour; and his pledged word held him.

Patricia's open favour only made him hate her because of its very seduction. It was really his own weakness that he hated.

Patricia ran, tense and angry, through the house. The servants noticed it. The mistress has been crossed, they thought, she will go to the chapel and get ease. Praising her. True, to the chapel she went; locked the door, dived behind the altar, struck a secret panel, came suddenly into a priest's hiding-hole, a room large enough to hold a score of men if need be. At the end of the room was a great scarlet cross, and on it, her face to the wood, her wrists and ankles swollen over the whip lashes that bound her, hung a naked girl, big-boned, voluptuous. Red hair streamed over her back.

"What, Margaret! so blue?" laughed Patricia.

"I am cold," said the girl upon the cross, in an indifferent voice.

"Nonsense, dear!" answered Patricia, rapidly divesting herself of her

riding-habit. "There is no hint of frost; we had a splendid run, and a grand kill. You shall be warm yet, for all that."

This time the girl writhed and moaned a little. Patricia took from an old wardrobe a close-fitting suit of fox fur, and slipped it on her slim white body.

"Did I make you wait, dear?" she said, with a curious leer. "I am the keener for the sport, be sure!"

She took the faithless talisman from her hat. It was a little square of vellum, written upon in black. She took a hairpin from her head, pierced the talisman, and drove the pin into the girl's thigh.

"They must have blood," said she. "Now see how I will turn the blue to red! Come! don't wince: you haven't had it for a month."

Then her ivory arm slid like a serpent from the furs, and with the cutting whip she struck young Margaret between the shoulders. A shriek rang out: its only echo was Patricia's laugh, childlike, icy, devilish.

She struck again and again. Great weals of purple stood on the girl's back; froth tinged with blood came from her mouth, for she had bitten her lips and tongue in agony.

Patricia grew warm and rosy—exquisitely beautiful. Her bare breasts heaved; her lips parted; her whole body and soul seemed lapped in ecstasy.

"I wish you were Geoffrey, girlie!" she panted.

Then the skin burst. Raw flesh oozed blood that dribbled down Margaret's back.

Still the fair maid struck and struck in the silence, until the tiny rivulets met and waxed great and touched the talisman. She threw the bloody

whalebone into a corner, and went upon her knees. She kissed her friend; she kissed the talisman; and again kissed the girl, the warm blood staining her pure lips.

She took the talisman, and hid it in her bosom. Last of all she loosened the cords, and Margaret sank in a heap to the floor. Patricia threw furs over her and rolled her up in them; brought wine, and poured it down her throat. She smiled, kindly, like a sister.

“Sleep now awhile, sweetheart!” she whispered, and kissed her forehead. It was a very demure and self-possessed little maiden that made dinner lively for poor Geoffrey, who was thinking over his mistake.

Patricia’s old aunt, who kept house for her, smiled at the flirtation. It was not by accident that she left them alone sitting over the great fire. “Poor Margaret has her rheumatism again,” she explained innocently; “I must go and see how she is.” Loyal Margaret!

So it happened that Geoffrey lost his head. “The ivy is strong enough” (she had whispered, ere their first kiss had hardly died). “Before the moon is up, be sure!” and glided off just as the aunt returned.

Eyre excused himself; half a mile from the house he left his horse to his man to lead home, and ten minutes later was groping for Patricia in the dark.

White as a lily in body and soul, she took him in her arms.

Awaking as from death, he suddenly cried out, “Oh God! What is it? Oh my God! my God! Patricia! Your body! Your body!”

“Yours!” she cooed.

“Why, you’re all hairy!” he cried. “And the scent! the scent!”

From without came sharp and resonant the yap of a hound as the moon

rose.

Patricia put her hands to her body. He was telling the truth. “The Visitor!” she screamed once with fright, and was silent. He switched the light on, and she screamed again. There was a savage lust upon his face.

“This afternoon,” he cried, “you called me a dog. I looked like a dog and thought like a dog; and, by God! I am a dog. I’ll act like a dog then!”

Obedient to some strange instinct, she dived from the bed for the window. But he was on her; his teeth met in her throat.

In the morning they found the dead bodies of both hound and fox—but how did that explain the wonderful elopement of Lord Eyre and Miss Fleming? For neither of them was ever seen again.

I think Margaret understands; in the convent which she rules today there hangs beside a blood-stained cutting-whip the silver model of a fox, with the inscription:

‘Patricia Margaritæ vulpis vulpem dedit.’ (Patricia gave a fox to Margaret)

Rigmor Solem
“The Woman from Fez”

I saw her as I passed Garden Royal, the catholic cemetery on the outskirts of Fez. She was drenched to the bone and wore a white dress. I stopped. She climbed into the seat next to me. Her long hair flowed like black stripes down her back. She was young. Her features were soft. A beautiful woman like so many in Morocco. Blue veins were clearly visible on the slender hands that rested on her thighs.

I asked if she was going to Feja. She nodded. I noticed that she was cold and handed her the leather jacket from the seat next to her. I made an effort in shaky French. She didn't seem particularly interested and said nothing. My mind drifted, back to the party I had left at MacPherson's, the Scottish architect. There I had met a young Norwegian writer on a beach holiday in Fez. She was fed up with lying on the beach, she told me, and was looking for new writing material.

“I am glad to be of service,” I said, while we toasted glasses of fresh orange juice.

She asked me if I was concerned with the supernatural. I said no, much to her disappointment. She said she was collecting material for a series of occult stories from various countries. So far she had produced seven good short stories.

“I am not leaving Morocco without the script for the eighth,” she said.

Before we separated she gave me the address of her hotel. She was sorry that I had to leave so soon. I told her I had two thick piles of English

essays on my desk in my study. They had been there for several days. My students were impatient. I enjoyed my job as a teacher at Moiale High School, an institution for English speaking children. The school was situated a couple of kilometers outside Fez, not far from Feja.

I contemplated the light I had seen in the cemetery. It had not been bright or obtrusive in any way, but it had made me wonder. I tried to figure out what it might be, when the young woman signalled that she wanted to get off.

I stopped. Thanks, she muttered and quickly opened the car door. I saw her running up a path towards a house that was barely visible through the heavy rain. I wondered what had made a young pretty woman hitch-hike all alone. It was an uncommon sight in Muslim countries. I was just driving up toward the avenue to the main building, when I suddenly remembered the leather jacket. It was an expensive piece of clothing, but what was worse, was the fact that my passport and my driver's license were in the inside pocket. So was my wallet, but as I never was in the habit of carrying large amounts of cash on my person, this was less of a concern.

Was the young woman a trap? The first months in Morocco I had several times been scammed by petty criminals, but not anymore. I had learned my lesson quickly. Even so, as I turned the car around to find the place where I had dropped her off, I had a nagging feeling of being played somehow. It might have been somewhere halfway between Fez and Feja. The rain kept pouring, and I was annoyed when I finally located the house. A few minutes later I was drenched too. I hammered on the front door in desperation, but there was no reply for quite a while.

A middle-aged Moroccan man opened the door slightly. Normally I hate to intrude, but because the rain was so intense and because I was concerned for my important papers, I forced my way in. He did not resist and admitted me in to his scarcely furnished room. A naked lightbulb dangled over our heads, casting a strong glow over his dark, sharp face. Without digressing, I told him about the young woman who had entered the house only a few minutes earlier with my leather jacket tucked about her shoulders and my papers in the inside pocket. In stuttering French I described what the woman looked like and how she was dressed.

The man first looked at me in disbelief. I was annoyed, yes even angry, over this apparent indifference. He had better not put up some kind of act! I had been too long in Morocco to be taken in by any such trick. He shook his head, flung his arms aside and said:

“I don’t understand.”

I repeated my narrative, but the man muttered the same: “I don’t understand.”

In the end I gave up. As I walked back to my car, I told myself this slick piece of work would not get away this easily. I had his name and address. The police would have no problems tracking him down. The money was probably lost, but perhaps the jacket and my papers could be recovered. I was raging on my way to the police station. This was the thanks I got for being a friendly soul!

My piles of English essays would have to wait while I poured a glass of whisky and water, and swallowed it all in one go, and added a chaser. What a rotten thing to do! Before I fell asleep, I thought about the light I had seen in the cemetery on my return trip from Fez. There it was again.

Or was I mistaken?

Three days passed. I heard nothing from the police. My piles of English essays had been corrected and new ones had taken their place. I had plenty of time to work, because without my passport and my driver's license I was reluctant to leave the school premises. Still, I did not get much work done. An unfamiliar unease possessed me. In the evenings I walked beneath the tall palm trees in the garden looking at the black and blue sky and its profusion of stars. I was so out of character. Several times I pondered the strange light in the Garden Royal. There was something peculiar about it, was there not?

The fourth night the rain returned with a vengeance. I stayed indoors, and even declined a game of bridge with the headmaster and some colleagues. My unease would not settle. After my second whisky I calmed down. I drifted passed the large, French windows holding drink number three, when I noticed a dim light in the garden. It moved in the direction of the avenue.

Midnight was soon upon us. I grabbed the phone and dialed the number to the Fez police station. A drowsy voice replied. The man promised to check whether my jacket and papers had turned up at the station. He would call me back. My glass was nearly empty as the phone rang. The jacket and my papers were recovered. One of the sextons at the catholic cemetery had handed it in the same evening. He had found it flung across the tombstone of a Moroccan woman. In astonishment, I heard myself enquire about her name.

"It is weird," the man said, "but it is actually the tomb of the daughter of the accused. She has been dead for five years."

The following day I retrieved my jacket. Then I walked down to the Hotel Soraya to look for the Norwegian writer. When she opened the door, she looked pleased and surprised to see me.

“A cup of mint tea?” she asked.

I took a comfortable seat in the sofa.

“Yes please,” I said, I have a story to tell.

Margie Harris
“Cougar Kitty”

Seattle, Queen City of the Northwest, gleaming like a great, white jewel on rising ground overlooking Elliott Bay, is a city beautiful. There roses bloom the year around. There men and women live and love and die, far from the tenements and slums of the great Eastern cities. But in Seattle lies hidden one canker spot. It is the district below Yesler Way, which is the sole blot on the city's fair escutcheon. There is to be found the last remaining trace of those other days when lumberjacks from the woods and miners from Alaska came whooping forth with gold-filled hands, demanding of Life those things of which they had been deprived.

“Below Yesler” is evil, and of all the evil things within its purlieus, none is more depraved, more terrible in the minds of the decent and law-abiding than the underworld cabaret and speakeasy operated for nearly two decades by “Scar” Argyle. There gathered waterfront thugs, gangsters, racketeers, gunmen.

Most fearsome of all, to the uninitiated, was its proprietor. His face was thoroughly repulsive. A great red seam led from the stiff hair above his left temple and down across the bridge of his nose. It ended at the right jawbone after creasing the cheek deeply. In healing it had drawn the flesh so that the mouth seemed cast in a permanent sneer. The right eye was so affected that half of the lower eyelid turned down, gleaming redly. That was Scar's reminder that he once had double-crossed “Nigger

George,” a piano player. True, Scar had seen to it that there was an early funeral in George’s personal social circle, but the razor slash had put a permanent end to whatever was delightful, either in countenance or disposition, of Argyle. Now he was a leering, gross mountain of fat. For hours he would sit, seemingly without movement, his piggish black eyes searching, always searching for new methods of vile profit.

On a bright afternoon in March, Scar sat cursing his luck, his failing patronage and most of all the police of his precinct. Their increasing demands for graft and favors bade fair to turn his once prosperous business into a losing venture.

Only that day he had received a shipment of liquor and had paid his “delivery charge” to the policeman on the beat without demur. Later he had sent to the precinct captain the usual weekly payment for protection. Now, within the last four hours, four sergeants had slipped in to see him. One had compelled him to buy four tickets for a police ball. The next had asked for two quarts of prime liquor “for the lieutenant.” Number Three asked for a couple of drinks and then borrowed five dollars.

The fourth brought the crowning blow. With him came a stranger—a supposed friend. Scar had been bullied into cashing a twenty dollar check for this man. He tore it up after they left. Too many such had bounced back from his bank. Truly the lot of an underworld cabaret owner was trouble filled.

The side door bell rang as Scar cogitated on his woes, and the doorman turned to say:

“Lady to see youse, Scar. Good looker!”

“Hell, let her in!” Scar almost spat the words. “Probably a hen cop with another touch; they’re all that have overlooked me this week.”

His eyes brightened, however, as a modishly gowned, athletic appearing girl stepped through the door and looked unconcernedly about her. Few such had been there since the days of the gold rush. When her eyes encountered his, Scar beckoned. She walked to the table and took a place opposite him.

“Pat Jennings told me to see you,” she said confidentially. “My name is Kate Dever. I’m on the lam from New York—witness in a gang killing, which means a year in the sticks for me. Jennings says you need a hostess to pep up your game; I need a job. Also I know my stuff, Big Boy, and the jack I can make for you will be nobody’s business. I’ll have to do it in my own way, though; no buttinskys.”

As Argyle stared suspiciously at her, the girl dropped her coat from her shoulders and removed a close-fitting hat. Scar’s eyes lighted as a throat and shoulders a Diana might have envied, were revealed. He grunted in renewed admiration as the dim lights outlined a beautiful, resolute face and a frame of dark-red hair, well kept and bobbed in the latest mode.

“Hell, kid,” Scar burst forth breathlessly. “Sure! You’re fixed fer life.”

The tone, the gleam in his eyes, made his meaning all too clear. Kate Dever did not seek to evade his burning glance.

“Yes?” she queried coldly. “You wouldn’t kid a little girl, would you, Scar? You think you want me? Then come and take me.”

The man lurched to his feet with a speed surprising in one of his bulk and clawed at her in an awkward attempt to draw her into his arms. One hand fixed itself on her shoulder. Before he could do more, she sprang

up, thrusting with both hands against his chest.

Scar stumbled backward a step and the girl slipped out from behind the table. In her hand, seemingly juggled out of thin air, was a gleaming Spanish dagger, needle-pointed and with a blade almost paper thin. Scar eyed the knife; noted that it was held in the thrusting position—and that the point was aimed directly at his stomach. His arms dropped to his side in token of surrender.

“What th’ hell do you think—?” he began thickly.

Kate, smiling now, resumed her seat.

“Oh, sit down, stupid,” she said quietly. “Sit down and buy me a drink. You had to learn it some time—and right at first is the best time.

Remember this hereafter. I’m no man’s woman. Any man who puts his hands on me gets hurt. I know how to take care of myself morning, noon and night—also vacations. Now how about the job?”

Scar had signaled for a waiter, who brought whiskey. Scar gulped down a huge portion. Kate poured a few drops in a glass with ginger ale and tossed it off.

“My first and last drink in your place,” she said. “If I work here I’m served tea for whiskey, distilled water for gin and sparkling cider instead of what you call champagne. And Lord help the waiter who brings me anything else!”

Here was a new type to Scar. A beautiful woman who dared to come to his own joint and flout him when the odds were all his way, would be an asset. He visioned the returning trade when the word went out through the underworld that the Argyle Club had a new hostess who could not be

“made.”

“You’ve got the job,” he said decisively. “Seventy-five a week and a piece of the profits over the first thousand. That’s about what I’m doin’ now.”

“Big-hearted Scar!” Kate mocked him. “Hundred a week, five per cent of the gross—and I start tonight.”

About to protest, Scar thought better of it and extended his hand for the underworld shake of acceptance. Instead, Kate turned sidewise, circled his arm with her left, caught the knuckles of his fist with her right and bent the member downward. Scar grinned. It was the gangster method of making the sucker loosen up from whatever he held.

“Know your grapes, don’t you?” he chuckled. “Well, I’ve loosened for a yard and five per cent a week, so be here at eight. Wanna little advance?”

Kate opened her purse and smiled. A wad of yellow-backed bills had been thrust in there loosely.

“No, thanks,” she replied sweetly. “A nice old gentleman on the train attended to that for you. Somehow he got off at the next station; the conductor put him off. He tried to get into my berth.”

“Onto all the games, hey?” Scar queried. “Now, what’s your deal?”

“What are you using?” she countered, looking about at the small stage and the orchestra stand.

“Pretty fair nigger string band, six dancin’ girls who double as drink grafters and cigarette girls, an’ a good boy hooper. You sing, kid?”

“Nor dance,” Kate replied. “I work from the floor; out where the money jingles and the saps need encouraging. Leave it to me, Big Fellow, and don’t mind later on if I make some changes.”

Scar nodded perplexedly.

“It’s O.K. by me, girlie,” he replied, “but leave Little Laura on th’ job if you can. She’s a good little guy—kinda fond of me. And by the way, kid, what’s your moniker? Got one?”

Kate looked him squarely in the eye and said:

“They call me ‘Cougar Kitty’—better let that spread around a little.”

“She mountain lion, huh?” Scar mused. “Damn if they ain’t right.”

Midnight in Scar’s cabaret was merely breakfast time in Gangland.

Kate, resplendent in a gold sequin gown which cast forth points of light in every direction as she moved, sat chatting with Scar at a table near the orchestra. With them, snuggled close against the proprietor’s bulk, was the cigarette girl, Little Laura. She was a big-eyed, wistful child woman of the clinging type, but except when she looked at Scar, there was a hard little glitter in her eyes.

Scar had said she was “kinda fond” of him. Strangely enough, Kate reflected, there seemed reason for the statement. Between the big-eyed girl and the gross flesh-mountain of villainy there existed some bond. When he spoke to the girl, Scar’s tone was gentle and as nearly affable as it could be. Laura was serious in her talk with him and actually seemed to enjoy his elephantine pawings.

The grapevine telegraph of the underworld had carried the news of Scar’s new attraction. Already the tables had filled with a swaggering crew of gangsters, sleek haired, gorgeously dressed young gunmen, and here and there older men—cold of eye, and each seemingly determined to sit so as to face the door.

Many brought their molls and, because a thug's standing is measured by the appearance of his woman, they made a brave showing of costly garments and gleaming jewels. Only those older men, the square jawed poachers in the Land of Rackets, were alone. They hunted among the ranks of the hostesses and entertainers.

Presently Kate caught Scar's eye and nodded. He had his orders and when he lumbered to his feet and stopped the music, everyone became quiet.

Scar was about to make a speech! Usually he contented himself with howling, profane comments from his chair by the orchestra.

"Listen, guys and molls," he rumbled. "Seattle ain't so big as Noo York, but she's just as lively, and when it comes to givin' you the best in ent'tainment, Scar Argyle's the boy to do it. From now on, the Argyle Club's the live spot here. And I now takes pleasure in int'ducin' to you Miss Kate Dever—knowed mostly as 'Cougar Kitty,' our new hostess."

Kate, self-possessed as her namesake in the home nest, walked to a place beside him and smiled brightly. Prolonged hand-clapping and a few cheers greeted her.

"I am glad to be here," she said, "and I want one and all of you for my best pals. Scar Argyle has given me the right to do what I please for your entertainment. The word hereafter is 'Go as far as you like, as fast as you like, so long as you keep fairly quiet—and so long as you don't get fresh with the new hostess.' "

New applause burst forth and Kate nodded to the orchestra. Instantly a mad, jazzing dance number flared forth. Some derisive laughs had greeted Kate's reference to herself and some of the bolder of the young

cannons left their tables to gather around her.

Scar was watching, fascinated. Kate dismissed the pleas of dance partners one by one, until Speedball Kane, a leader among the gunmen and handsome in a wild, boyish fashion, clasped her about the waist. He fell into a dance step and tugged. The smile never left her face.

Suddenly her hands came up apparently to hold him off, but instead they caught both of his shoulders firmly. At the same moment she stepped forward with the speed of a striking reptile. She thrust her toe back of his left heel, then pushed him backward with all her surprising strength.

Though he was a rough-and-tumble fighter trained on the docks, Speedball had not expected the reverse back-heel from a handsomely gowned night hostess. The backward thrust was too powerful, the fulcrum supplied by her foot too far below his center of balance to be resisted.

The gangster crashed to the floor on his shoulders. A split-second later his head collided with the maple with a resounding thump. A roar of laughter followed. It stilled a few seconds later when the young tough failed to rise. Two of his friends moved toward him.

“Leave him there,” Kate commanded coldly. “I want him to come to there so he’ll realize that he’s to keep his hands off me in future. I’m no better than he is—but I’m as good—and when I want a man’s hands on me, I’ll ask him to put them there.”

Speedball stirred, blinked, dragged himself to his knees. Then his glance swept upward and encountered the gleeful eyes of Cougar Kitty. He shook his head and looked about. On every hand he saw the awe-stricken

eyes of his friends. Instantly a dull red suffused his face. He gathered his muscles for a leap at the mocking girl before him.

“Damn you—” he began. Then the words choked in his throat and his eyes went wide with surprise.

Kate’s right hand was extended toward him. A dull ring of blued steel peeped out between her second and third fingers; the whole hand was tightening on something within her palm. Too well Speed knew what that meant.

For Cougar Kitty was holding in her plump, beringed hand one of the dwarfed, vicious little plunger guns of Gangland. It was a mere ring of metal extending out of a firing chamber, back of which was a trip plunger which released the pin against a solitary bullet of heavy caliber.

Speed could be forgiven for pausing. The one-inch barrel was trained directly on his forehead. A child could not miss at that distance. The crook teetered on his feet uncertainly. Then a girl’s voice cut the silence: “Slap the broad down, Speed,” it said. “Don’t spoil a good notion.”

Kate smiled bleakly and waved Speed back to his place. Then came a muffled roar and gray smoke curled from between her fingers.

She had fired the weapon into the floor as the best means of squaring Speedball against later accusations of cowardice. Everyone leaped up; all had some question to ask.

Kate held the still smoking weapon above her head.

“Sorry, boys and girls,” she said. “I hate to pull off rough stuff on our first evening together—but I had him covered—plenty. I had to let you know I meant it when I said: ‘Don’t get fresh with the new hostess.’ All right? Well, let’s play again.”

She motioned to the goggling bandsmen to continue playing. Then, under cover of the opening notes, she walked straight to where Speedball was struggling into his light overcoat. He felt alone, disgraced in the eyes of the other gangsters and their molls. The red of shame colored his face, but about his mouth was the deadly white line which marks the killing rage in man.

Everyone was watching openly. Kate moved as one who has decided on a definite course. Speed jerked his coat into place and clapped his hat down over his eyes. She was at his side now, hand extended.

“Sit down, Speed,” she said in a tone intended for his ears alone. “If you go out now, you’ll leave these others laughing. Be nice and I’ll make it all jake for us both. Now shake hands like a sport and tell me it’s all right—even if you did start it.”

Speed took her hand, shook it heartily and grinned. Too well he knew it was his only course. Unless there was more to add to the story, Gangland would be yelping taunts at him for months to come. Maybe, he reflected, he could turn the tables on this wise broad from New York if he was crafty.

“I’m game; speak your piece,” he half whispered. “But don’t figure to start nothin’ more.”

“Be your age,” she replied. “Now, listen, Speed, I’m starting a new racket here and I need at least one friend on whom I can depend. You made me tangle with you before your friends, but I didn’t ask you to. Now, we can be the best of friends, and at the same time I’ll show you how to get yourself some good out of it.”

“I’ve heard about you. They call you ‘Speedball’ because you drive the stickups and hijackers away so far and so fast, they have to wait ten minutes before they start to make an alibi. What?”

Such tribute to his unerring efficiency at the wheel of a getaway car caused the young gangster to flush happily. Maybe here was a woman worth hanging about after.

“No,” Kate went on as though reading his thoughts, “you don’t mean any more to me than any other man, but if you wish, I’ll let you be my Number One Pal. We’ll play around together and sometimes you can take me home—as far as the door.

“What I want of you is to keep them off my back if things get rough—nothing more. If the others see us palling around together we’ll be accused of having fallen for one another. Now, say it. Want to play, or will you put on the funny hat and coat and go out and get yourself laughed at? First and last chance, boy.”

“Sure, Kitty, I’ll play,” he answered, “just to square myself.”

“Speedball and I are all made up ‘n’ everything,” Kate announced to the watching crowd. “And now I want you all to walk past here in line and shake hands with us both. Then we’ll all be the best kind of pals. Scar will buy a drink for the house, and I’ll show you the latest New York racket.”

She was exerting herself now, putting into her simple little speech and almost childish plan of personal contact with each, all of the hard won personality she possessed. She let her eyes flicker toward Scar. He sat there, a contented mountain of evil, literally drooling over the manner in which she was earning the attention of his patrons.

The idea struck the gangsters and their molls favorably. There was an instant rush to get into line. Speed fell into place beside Kate as the orchestra struck up a slow drag march. The head of the line moved forward. Kate had a bright smile, a word, a nod for each. One plump patron found himself being prodded in the ribs. Another laughed when Kate flicked his tie from under his vest. One pretty girl simpered when Kate whispered: "Gosh, kid! I'm jealous of you—you're so darn lovely." Scar came to his feet as the last of the line passed and bellowed for the drinks. Kate held up her hand for silence.

"Wait, please," she said. "Will the tall gentleman in dinner clothes, the one at the last table—you, handsome—; the girl with the black hair and the red dress; the man who left his hair at home but wore a horseshoe pin in his tie—and you, Mister Red Necktie—all please come forward?" The four responded somewhat sheepishly.

"I want you to search my new pal, Speedball," Kate said smilingly. "I think he's turned dip. Look in his left, outside pocket."

Speedball did not wait to be searched. He felt in the pocket himself and gaspingly brought forth a watch, attached to which was a fine chain and gold key; a gold mesh coin purse wrapped in a handkerchief, a diamond stickpin and a thin, but costly, cigarette case.

The crowd roared with laughter at Speed's consternation. No other group could appreciate better what had happened. None had even a remote suspicion of the youth. He was a known gunman and gangster, and as such, he looked down on the dip as dips in turn look down on doormat thieves.

Kate waited until there was a measure of silence.

“That’s one of the New York night club tricks,” Kate laughed as she restored the property to its owners. They get you all hot and bothered over something that’s happening and then the waiters and house dips put the vacuum to you. One man swore somebody’d stolen his underwear while he waited to kiss a toe dancer whose number he’d drawn in a lottery!”

“What a dame,” someone croaked admiringly. “She’s oke for me,” another chimed in. For minutes the place buzzed with admiration for Kate’s deftness. Scar bought for the house. The two losers of property would not be outdone in generosity and the girl in red, whose coin purse was restored, argued her boy friend into loosening up as well.

It was daylight when the last patron left. That was Speedball, who had waited for Kate. She dismissed him with a shake of her head.

“See you tonight, pal,” she said. “And wear your rod.”

When Scar counted up, he found a take for the night of \$900.

Cougar Kitty was an established institution in Seattle’s underworld.

As she walked to the corner of First Avenue to catch a cab, Kate noticed one of the waiters slipping from door to door behind her. As she entered the taxi, she saw him sprint forward and flag down another.

“Drive around for half an hour,” she told the driver. He nodded joyously at such luck at the beginning of his day’s work. Kate, sitting in the center of the rear seat, used her compact mirror to watch the street behind her. She was not mistaken, the other car was dawdling along half a block behind her.

“Keep ahead and when you get a chance pretend to try to lose a cab that’s following us,” Kate told the driver, putting a folded bill into his

hand. "Then when you get a chance, make him pass you and cut him off at the curb. I want to talk to his passenger."

The driver looked at the bill and smiled knowingly. "I'll have him in two blocks," he said.

At the next corner he slipped along the right hand curb until traffic changed for east-and-west travel. Then he meshed his gears and swung right up the hill to Second Avenue, going at a furious pace in low gear. At First Avenue he turned south again and stopped with a shrieking of brakes just past the building line. In a few moments the other cab charged up the hill and turned right also.

"Get him!" Kate commanded. Her driver swung wide from the curb, ran even with the other cab and forced it slowly but surely against the curbing despite the other driver's shrill curses and the sounds of his horn.

A policeman ran up. "Here!" he demanded. "What's goin' on?"

Kate opened the cab door and smiled at the officer.

"The man in the other cab has been following me all over town," she said, "and I wish to prefer a charge against him, if you please, officer."

The policeman dragged the luckless waiter from the cab by his collar.

"Tell me about it," he demanded of Kate.

"He works at Scar Argyle's," she replied. "I was there for awhile and when I left this fellow got in another cab and followed me."

But great was the power of Scar in policedom.

"I wouldn't do that, lady," the officer replied. "You go on about your business and I'll keep this baby here. If you have him pinched, you got to

go to court.”

“All right, officer—and thanks,” Kate said as her cab moved off.

It was late afternoon when Kate emerged from her tiny apartment in a huge building on the shores of Lake Union to go abroad again in a taxicab.

Her first stop was at the office of The Hour, greatest of the city’s newspapers. Largess properly distributed to a reception clerk and office boy bought her way into the paper’s morgue of photographs and clippings.

A chubby, partly deaf statistician was in charge. His sole desire seemed to be to prevent any intrusion into his domain. A five dollar bill again wrought wonders and soon Kate was deep in a huge envelope of clippings out of the “H” file.

When she departed, the attendant also dumped out the clippings and studied them.

“Humph!” he grunted. “Now I wonder?”

From the newspaper office she drove to a tall building given over to plastic surgeons, beauticians and hair dressers. One of the latter “touched up” the roots of her dark-red hair. A dermatologist on the floor above injected a white liquid under her skin at the temple, massaged it, and said:

“Lay a good cold-cream base under the powder. When you are ready I will radium-peel your face and we’ll hide that scar entirely.”

“Thanks, doctor,” she replied. “But I’m a busy girl now.”

Dinner at one of the better cafés, a picture show afterward and then Kate

took a cab to the Argyle Club where she found a deferential corps of barmen and waiters ready to extend her a grinning welcome. Also she found the place well filled. Her name and fame had spread rapidly among the cannons and molls of South of Yesler.

Scar too waved a warm welcome. She walked to his side in response to a beckoning finger.

"Where you livin', kid?" he demanded. "It's a police regulation, you know." He produced a soiled memorandum book and a stub of pencil expectantly.

"Find out like you tried to this morning," Kate jeered, but she softened the taunt with an amused smile.

"That's a bet!" Scar replied. "Think I can't, huh?" He was in nowise disconcerted.

"Not by using a waiter for a gumshoe, anyway," Kate replied, seating herself at his table. "What did it cost you to get him loose?"

"Crook of me finger," Scar jeered in turn. "The bulls don't want none of my boys."

"Right, Scar. Now tell me, how did you like my stuff last night? Shall I keep it up?"

"That's what I hired you for." Scar was becoming wary now.

"Then we'll have a novelty night once each week, beginning tonight. You know what I mean? Funny light flashes, contests with everybody doing goofy things like they do at highbrow parties? Get everybody into it and the losers have to buy. Get the idea?"

"The dump's yours from now to closin' time. Take it apart if you want to." Kate rose, smoothed down her skirt, and said casually.

“By the way, I ordered a regular stage electrician to be here at 11 o’clock to handle the lights. He’s bringing a dimmer; the rest we’ll do with the master switch.”

“Bring two,” said Scar grandly, “or three—if he’s triplets. Keep on getting in the jack and you can hire the devil himself.”

“No need, Scar old thing,” Kate laughed. “He’s here already—and wearing your union suit.”

Scar grunted happily, the nearest to a laugh of which he was capable.

“Wrong,” he said. “Mine’s two-piece.”

Meanwhile Kate was going from table to table, welcoming the friends of the night before and newcomers, attracted by the news of the tiger-girl hostess at the Argyle Club.

The bleak-faced victim of the pocket-picking episode of the previous night was back at his usual table in a corner across from the orchestra and not more than three feet distant from Scar’s customary seat. As Kate stopped before him, he stared at her searchingly.

“Did I ever see you before?” he asked suddenly.

“Surely you did,” she laughed. “I’m King Tut’s daughter. Remember how you used to hold my hand under the purple Egyptian skies—or what have you?”

“Can the jokes,” the man snapped. “I’m serious.”

“Oh-h-h!” Kate said derisively, “so, Mister Kinney, racketeer-in-chief and Big Fixer mustn’t be kidded by a night club hostess.”

“Drop it!” the man snarled. “Forget that name here. It’s ‘Hanson’ now.

What the—Say, did you know me in Detroit?” With the question he snatched at her wrist, his fingers pinching deep into her flesh.

The girl did not reply, nor did she wince. Instead she leaned slightly forward, bringing her sneering, ice hard glance on a level with his own.

“All right, Kinney-Hanson,” she said, and there was a deadly chill in her tones. “Don’t move that other hand. I can get you before you ever could touch your gun—and believe me, it’ll be one big pleasure to do it.”

Hanson’s hard eyes searched hers angrily. The smile clung to her lips but he recognized the basilisk expression of the natural killer seeking the slightest excuse to slay. Yet he held to her wrist, trying to probe her mind—to find some reason for such bitter hatred from the mere touch of his hand.

“Let go!” Kate rapped the words out venomously. “I said last night that nobody is permitted to touch me. If I let you get away with it, then I’m sunk here.” Then, in a louder tone for the benefit of those nearby, she said airily:

“Unhand me, vill-yun—and when are you going to buy a drink?”

Hanson’s steely fingers relaxed. He gestured to a seat across the table.

“You’re a nice, pleasant little thing,” he said sarcastically, “but tell me what you want to drink—and all about Detroit.”

“Champagne,” Kate replied with a disarming smile. “Detroit? No, I don’t know much about things there. A girl friend of mine was married to a boy named Wilbur Bealey—‘Wib the Gun,’ they called him. He was mixed up in a booze running gang, and soon after I left there he was killed. Someone said his own gang finished him.”

“Know him pretty well?” Hanson demanded.

“Oh, in a way,” Kate replied nonchalantly. “Daisy, his wife, was an old sidekick of mine, but Wib was away most of the time when I was visiting her.”

“Who else did you know there?” Hanson continued.

“Let me see—why, you were there! I saw you out at a Grosse Pointe roadhouse the night Merrill Orrum, the criminal lawyer, was killed.”

Hanson’s eyes were pinpoint lights of green now, but his poker face did not change. Quietly he produced a cigarette and lighted it. Kate noted that the hand which held the ornate gold lighter did not tremble.

He let a thin cloud of smoke drift from his mouth and Kate felt his eyes studying her critically. Her expression was bored, a trifle uninterested.

“Ah yes, Merrill Orrum,” he said musingly. “I’d forgotten his name. And by the way”—he almost hissed the words—“how does it happen that you, a stranger, remember it? That was a whole year ago.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” she shrugged her shoulders as though tired of the subject. “Probably it was because it was an unusual name and the papers said they—the other mobsmen—called him ‘Mary Lorum’ for a nickname, sort of a pun name. Things like that stick in one’s mind, don’t you think so?”

“Not so you’d notice it,” Hanson replied quickly. “You haven’t told me all of it. Damn it, you remind me of someone—”

“Some dizzy blonde from over the river in Windsor probably,” Kate suggested teasingly. Hanson’s eyes narrowed to mere slits.

“Blonde!” he said explosively. “What do you know about a blonde in Detroit?”

Kate laughed merrily.

“Listen, Big Boy,” she replied, “What I know about all Detroit blondes is plenty. Did poor, little Hansy-Hanson get all mixed up with a fuzzy yellow-head?”

Hanson flared up again at the derisive note in her voice.

“Hell with her!” he growled. “I fixed her up good and plenty; don’t worry. But it’s you I’m wondering about. What’re you holding out on me?”

“What would you give to know?”

“Nothing or a lot; I don’t know which. I’ve got a hunch about you, Miss Cougar Kitty whatsyourname, and the first thing you know I’ll be calling the turn on you. Don’t figure me for a dumbbell.”

“Do your prettiest, Big Boy,” she replied as she rose. “And if you guess right—you’ll have something coming to you. I said—‘you’ll have something coming to you!’”

She accented each of the drawled words. Hanson caught a note of menace in her voice; frowned as he watched her retreating form and sought for the answer to the riddle.

He motioned to Scar to come over.

“Where’d you get that damned twist?” he said in a low tone. “She just called the turn on me in Detroit—cracked about ‘Wib the Gun,’ and that lousy mouthpiece, Orrum.”

Scar grinned knowingly.

“She’s a wise head,” he husked. “Doin’ all right here and maybe’ll stand a little watchin’. If she gets flossy she’ll go for a ride—but I ain’t worryin’ none about her. Don’t you, neither.”

Further conversation ended with the entrance of Speedball Kane.

“Whoopee!” Kate sang out. “Solomon in all his glory! Lookit the boy friend!”

Speed was attired in his first dinner clothes. His broad shoulders filled the pinch waisted coat perfectly. He had been shaved, pomaded and massaged into the condition of pink shininess which in Gangland is accepted as perfection.

It is true that he hitched once at the harness of his shoulder holster, but in Argyle Club circles that meant no more than button-fiddling meant in the higher walks of life.

“Everybody give the dressed-up boy friend a hand!” Kate demanded. The guests obliged. “Boy friend and I will buy a drink now.” She continued. There was more applause. Kate drew Speed to a place near the orchestra.

“Speed is to be associate master of ceremonies tonight,” she continued. “So I told him to bring his rod. His job is to see that everybody does just what I tell them to. We’re going to raise hell tonight and put a chunk under it, but we can’t do it unless everybody helps. The first number will be a button busting contest, with Scar Argyle leading off.”

“Huh?” Scar grunted in amazement. “Run your own damn show.”

“Burn him down, Speed, if he don’t mind,” Kate laughed. “Oh come on, chief, it’s easy. Draw a big breath, lean against the inside of the old vest and see what happens. Snap into it, dearie, take a big breath and do your stuff.”

Scar’s mind dealt largely in cash-register terms. Kate had said the loser would buy the drinks. Very well, then, the idea was for him not to lose.

Slowly he inflated his huge chest. His cheeks began to purple as he set his muscles and began to expand. Quickly the vast mountain of fat and muscle pressed outward. An audible “pop” followed and a button tinkled on a glass table top across the room.

“One!” cheered Kate. As she spoke there were three other “pops.” “Two, three, four!” she counted. “Don’t anybody wisecrack. If Scar laughs now he’ll undress himself.” The final button held but tore its way through the buttonhole.

“Fine!” Kate exclaimed. “Four buttons and one buttonhole. Now, who’s next?”

Several of the gunmen patrons went into a huddle. Presently ‘Shanty’ Boles turned and said:

“Us four’s buyin’ for th’ house, Kitty. Name it an’ we pays. Dat’s cheaper’n buyin’ new vests!”

“Lovely!” Kate responded. “Did someone tell me Shanty wasn’t bright?”

As the round of drinks was being served, the electrician touched Kate’s arm and told her the dimmer was connected.

“Don’t test it,” she ordered, “just follow up the orders I gave you.

Everybody out now,” she demanded, turning to the patrons. “There’s another surprise for you. We start off with a march around the room.

When the lights go out, drop your partner and take the girl ahead of you for a partner. That leaves an extra man and he goes to the end of the line.

“When the orchestra stops playing, everybody buys a drink for the girl with him. Remember now—no cheating or hitting in the clinches.”

The orchestra struck up a jazz march and the patrons, hard-boiled

thieves and killers playing a “kid” game for the first time in their lives, began to parade about the room. Kate nodded and the electrician pulled the main switch. Stygian darkness followed.

“One, two, three, four, five, six!” Kate counted slowly. “Lights on!”

As they flared forth everyone went into shrieks of laughter. From a recess back of the stage where Kate had concealed her, an immense negro girl had emerged, taking a place silently beside Scar. She had been well coached for, as the light came on, she leaned confidently toward the proprietor and snuggled her head against his shoulder.

Scar leaped up, glaring ferociously at Kate while the patrons vented jeers and catcalls. Kate raised her hand and said:

“The house buys on that one, gang—and Scar ought to be thankful that we didn’t see her coming in with him.”

The negress, grinning happily, waddled out. Kate patted Scar’s shoulder and whispered:

“We’ve got to give ‘em stunts, Scar—and we can’t kid the money customers all of the time.”

The evening was off to an auspicious start. Stunt followed stunt in rapid succession. The lights, on dimmers now, went up and down the range of their power; again they flashed like lightning’s play. They would go out and come on again, occasionally disclosing grim gunmen and their molls engaged in the softer process of “necking.” This brought jeers and another round of drinks.

Kate kept it going at fever heat. Between dances she had the girls balancing on beer barrels laid on their sides, or trying to step through the “U” made by their arms and a broom handle. It was a real novelty to the

socially starved tough boys and girls and through it all Scar sat and listened happily to the tinkle of the cash registers.

Here and there heads not hard enough to resist the kick of Scar's raw liquor, had succumbed. Shanty Boles and his moll slept side by side, their heads pillowed on the table before them. Someone had taken a lipstick and painted Shanty's nose a violent crimson.

Through it all, Hanson sat sipping his liquor, smoking innumerable cigarettes—but always watching Kate narrowly. He seemed to enjoy chatting with one of the chorus girls—Gladys King—whom he had chosen for his companion of the evening.

Once, as the lights came back on, Kate saw him slip a heavy automatic back under his arm. He was taking no chances of an attack in the dark. She slipped to Speed's side and asked:

"What's the matter with Hanson? He's out with the gat every time the lights go down."

"He'd better," Speed whispered. "He's a wholesale junkie. There's a gang back east gunnin' for him, and some of the big boys here figure to spot him if they can get him right. He's nudgin' in on their racket."

As they talked, a clock outside chimed the hour of four. Thereafter, Kate kept a close check on the face of her watch.

Fifteen minutes later she snapped into action. First she nodded to the orchestra with a signal for a mad jazz number, calling to the electrician, "Use your own judgment, Johnny."

With this she stepped over beside Scar and Little Laura. It seemed to Scar that her fingers, pressing on his shoulder, were unduly heavy. Thus

she stood while the electrician ran the gamut of his light changes. Scar still could feel the weight of her fingers on his shoulder when the lights went completely out.

There followed a moment of silence, punctuated by minor squeals of fright and laughter. Suddenly someone grunted as though in pain.

A gun roared heavily in the blackness. A girl's screaming moan sounded as a body struck the floor. The music had been silenced with the sound of the shot.

Out of the babel of sound came Kate's clear voice: "Lights—quick," she commanded.

As they came on the horrified merrymakers saw Gladys King squirming on the floor, blood flowing from a wound high up on her right shoulder. Scar leaped up and barked angrily:

"Shut up your damn noise—want the bulls in here?"

Kate knelt beside the injured girl. A cool-headed waiter brought water and Kate began bathing the girl's forehead.

"What was it, dear?" she asked tenderly. "What happened?"

"He—he—shot me!" Gladys replied. She pointed weakly at Hanson.

From the others there came a growl of anger. Gladys was a favorite. Then followed a concerted rush to the table where Hanson sat, apparently unperturbed. His eyes were half closed. But as the foremost of the gang reached him his body seemed to sag. Then he toppled and his chin struck the table with a thud.

The color had drained from the flesh in his neck. Right at the edge of the hair a single drop of blood stood for a second. It rolled down inside the dead man's collar and another welled slowly in its place.

Hanson unquestionably was dead. Too many present knew the marks of the coming of the Dread One. An unerring hand had struck once at the base of the brain, severing the spinal cord.

Scar glared around the room ferociously. A mighty anger shook his frame. Hanson, as an individual, meant nothing to him. As a racketeer, head of a junk-running organization of no mean proportions, his murder spelled trouble.

“Who done this?” Scar roared. “Get up on your damned hind legs and have the guts to say so—” A stream of horrible profanity welled and bubbled from his lips.

Kate whispered something to Speed under cover of the noise. The gangster moved quickly to Scar’s side. He talked rapidly in an undertone. At first the proprietor shook his head impatiently. Speed continued talking until silenced with a gesture.

“Listen, guns and molls,” Scar said after a moment of thought. “This here thing ain’t goin’ to do us any good. Now, we’re all-right guys here tonight; there ain’t a rat or snitch in the joint. Hanson’s croaked. Nobody knows who done it, but me and Speedy figgers it will be a good idee for him to be found somewhere else. What say?”

“Take the blankety-blank out and dump him in the bay,” someone growled. “That’s the ticket—out in the streets some’rs,” another said. Scar and Shanty Boles turned to the gruesome task of dressing the corpse in overcoat, gloves and soft gray hat.

“Whose car are you going to use?” Kate asked quietly. Then before anyone answered, she suggested: “Better steal one, Speed, and leave him in it out in the residence district. And while we’re about it, poke a

gun in his ribs hard. The blood will settle there and the dicks will think his kidnappers did it.”

“Damn smart,” Scar applauded. “Go ahead, Speed. Find a likely lookin’ bus and shoot her in the alley. I’ll have a lookout waitin’.”

Thus it was arranged. Hanson’s body, with a gangster on each side of it, was loaded into a stolen limousine, Speed at the wheel. Larry Michaels, his buddy, followed in another car. Within thirty minutes all were back at the Argyle Club.

Scar closed soon afterward. Kitty, en route home, made certain she was not being followed. When she had disrobed and made her night toilet, she unfastened a secret compartment in a suitcase and brought to light a small memorandum book.

Then she drew a heavy black line through the first of three names inscribed on its fly-leaf.

The name was “Lester Kinney.”

Seattle morning newspapers had good reason for first-page streamer lines that morning.

Henry Wilson, a milkman, discovered Hanson’s body, rigid behind the steering wheel and with the gloved hands in driving posture. It was in a shining limousine, standing before one of the beautiful homes in the exclusive Queen Anne Hill district.

Wilson notified the police and detectives made several startling discoveries. The first was a footprint in the mud of the gutter where apparently someone had stood beside the car. Plaster casts were made, but later the sleuths were chagrined to find it matched perfectly to the

milkman's brogans.

Next came the news that the limousine had been stolen from a patron of the Elk's Club. Atop of this came the medical examiner's announcement that Hanson's death had been brought about by someone thoroughly skilled in surgery.

Then the discoloration on the side of the body was discovered. As Kate had predicted, the detectives seized on this as proof that someone had jammed a gun against the victim's side, had kidnapped him and taken him for a ride.

"Gawd, kid!" Scar said to Kate when she entered the club that night, "you sure saved ol' Scar's bacon with quick thinkin' last night. Hereafter they's another five per cent in the cut fer you."

"Thanks, Scar," Kate said listlessly. "Who do you think did it?"

Scar ruminated for a time, then said in a low voice:

"If you hadn't stood with your hand on my shoulder all the time the lights was out, I'd have said, 'Mebbe you!' I seen you and Hanson glarin' at one another, an' I copped you two watchin' each other all evenin'. But I ain't answerin' any questions—nor askin' any. I know where you was every second."

"Who was against him in the dope game here?" Kate asked after a brief pause, during which she studied Scar's face attentively.

"Mugs Dietrich," Scar replied. "He was the big junkie until Hanson showed up nine-ten months ago. Hanson nudged in on the alky racket, but as soon as he'd built up a gang, he hijacked a trunkful of dope, coming from Kansas City to Mugs.

"They was better'n fifty thousand dollars worth in it. Hanson sent for

Mugs, covered him with a rod and they talked turkey. When Mugs left, he had half the dope and Hanson had half the town. That's how Hanson worked. Since then, he's been edgin' in on Mugs and four-five boys on both sides has been croaked. Mugs got sore last week and cracked that Hanson better come smokin' next time they met. That's why the dicks is figgerin' last night's job as a gang-spottin'."

"Who is Hanson's Man Friday—his next in command?" Kate asked.

"A guy twicet as hard as Hanson ever wanted to be. They call him Sugarface Mallon. He's the reason I didn't want anybody to know Hanson was croaked here. This pritty boy came from the East with Hanson, and after the first week none of our gunnies wanted any of Sugarface's game. He throws hot lead faster 'n easier than anybody I ever did see—and some of the best of 'em has come through that door there."

Thrill-seeking and curiosity brought back all of the crowd of the night before and yet others who had heard of the live-wire Cougar Kitty. It was by that title she was known in Gangland now; few could have told her last name.

But it was an apathetic crowd. Even Kate's flaming personality could not evoke a real response, except from the newcomers. The shadow of tragedy still lingered over the place.

The bar patronage was holding up well, however. Some of the patrons seemed anxious to drink themselves insensible in the shortest possible space of time. These were succeeding admirably. Such failed to witness the new situation which unfolded itself suddenly.

During an interval when the orchestra was silent, the doorbell pealed

shrilly. When the doorman swung the steel-faced portal open, two well-dressed men stepped into the room. Both stood looking the crowd over coldly.

One, the taller, might have posed for magazine collar advertisements. Nature had given him a trig slenderness, height, a handsome face and a certain air of real gentility. His companion was shorter, dark and glowering, seemingly dissipated and he had a hangdog air. As he turned it was apparent that one of his ears was badly cauliflowered. Both had one thing in common. Their air was purposeful and either could be depended on to do what was needful, no matter what the circumstances. Scar started to struggle to his feet, but sank back at a signal from Kate. Straight to the pair she went, eyes shining, teeth flashing in a smile of welcome.

“Greetings, Mr. Sugarface Mallon,” she called from the middle of the floor. “Come on in, both of you. The water’s wet—and we haven’t any.”

Mallon eyed her with evident admiration, yet curiously. His companion scowled darkly and whispered something. Sugarface stepped forward and took Kate’s outstretched hand.

“A stranger in town, yet she calls my name,” he said suavely. “Who am I—to be so honored?”

“Tell you later,” Kate said in a low tone. “Play up now.”

Now Scar came lumbering forward. Mallon gave him a cold nod; his companion struck the owner’s outstretched hand aside. Scar turned and waddled back to his chair.

Two of the waiters removed a somnolent drunk from one of the tables, brought a third chair and Kate, Mallon and the other man sat down. Kate

and Mallon faced each other across the table; the other's back was to the dance floor.

"This is Kid Sharkey," Mallon said, pointing to his companion. "He's with me always—now that Hanson's dead."

"Oh yes," Kate said nonchalantly, "I read of it in the papers. You were his associate, weren't you—both here and in the East?"

Mallon's eyes probed hers ominously, curiously, for a moment.

"See here," he said as though in sudden decision. "They tell me you're a wise head; anyway you look it, and I'm going to lay 'em right out before you. There is a whisper that Hanson was done in right in this room. It is a whisper that hasn't reached the police, however. One of my boys heard a girl stew talking about it and came to me with the story.

"Now get me right; I'm not caring one half-witted damn about Hanson being rubbed out. Probably it saved me the trouble. He was a bad one and would knock me off in a minute, but he knew I could let him draw and then kill him. For the last six months when we talked he sat with his hands folded over his most recent meal. I'd warned him to.

"But I'm head of the gang now. I'm taking over where he left off. If it was one of Muggsy's gang that croaked him, then I know where to watch. If it was done here, then there's a new enemy for me to go gunning after.

"What would you do in my place?"

He fairly hissed the last words.

"I'd buy a drink!" Kate said nonchalantly. "Waiter!"

A red surge of color leaped to Mallon's pale face.

"Damn it!" he snarled. "Answer me, you rotten—"

Kate's hand—the right one—slipped over the edge of the table. With the index finger of the left Kate pointed casually toward it. Mallon's eyes dropped; visioned the deadly steel muzzle of the little plunger-gun between her fingers. Kid Sharkey gasped. For the fraction of a second the weapon turned on him, then flashed back to Sugarface.

"Rotten—what—?" she demanded. "Say anything that's in your system—and if I don't like it, then it's my turn to say or do something—you fool. Say it!" she demanded coldly. Now she was Cougar Kitty indeed.

Speedball Kane, who had lost no item of the byplay from a distance, came slipping to the table. His body was poised on the balls of his feet. The right hand was under his left lapel.

Kate sensed, rather than saw him.

"My affair," she said over her shoulder. "Don't interfere unless things get hot—and if they do, then burn Kid Sharkey down and burn him fast."

"Baby," Speed said with deep conviction. "He's afire now."

"What a broad!" It was Kid Sharkey's unwilling tribute as he realized just how hot things had become.

Mallon it was who broke the tension.

"Stand off all around," he said putting his hands before him on the table. "I'm apologizing—not because of the palm-gun, but because they taught me as a kid not to call girls bad names."

The deadly muzzle slipped out of sight beneath the table. Mallon had a dubious impression that it still covered his stomach.

"Right," Kate snapped. "Now what do you want to know?"

“Was Hanson fixed up here? That’s all.”

“He was not,” she replied steadily. “He left here about two.”

“Alone?”

“Alone. I think he had a telephone call.” Then, before Mallon could stop her, she called over her shoulder, “Oh, Scar!” When he lumbered over, she asked:

“Hanson left last night about two, didn’t he—alone?”

“Uh-huh, about then,” Scar said easily. “I got th’ idee somebody was waitin’ for him—or did he get a ‘phone call?”

“Thanks!” Mallon said carelessly after a moment’s close scrutiny of the scarred, evil countenance before him.

“S’all right,” Scar rumbled. “Let’s us have a drink.”

“Why not?” the younger man replied lightly. “Kid, you go along and see about the trucks. I’ll be at the hangout later.”

Sharkey started to protest, then rose and lurched from the place. His last glance at Kate was one of reverent worship. Kid Sharkey had seen his first real gun-moll.

Mallon rose as Kate did and accompanied her to the table adjoining Scar’s lookout chair, unwittingly dropping into the seat where his chief’s body had been but a few hours before.

Suddenly Kate felt his eyes on her and turned about to surprise the same searching, calculating expression she had encountered in Hanson’s eyes. She smiled, blandly, seated herself across from him and said:

“Want to tell an inquisitive girl something, Mr. Mallon?”

“What?” he demanded. She paused before replying, holding his glance

by sheer willpower for a moment.

“How is it that a man of your class, who could be anything he set out to be, is in the booze and dope game?” she said at last.

“Just naturally bad, I guess,” he replied, but Kate saw she had scored her first victory in her fight to draw his interest to her personally.

From then until the moment later when Mallon, now warmed by a number of drinks, began paying her elaborate compliments, Kate used her every art to let glances and half spoken sentences show him that she was not indifferent to him. At last, while the electrician had dimmed the lights to almost out, he leaned across the table and whispered:

“I’m waiting for you tonight, baby—and every other night, if you say so.”

Kate did not answer, contenting herself with letting her hand touch his for a moment in a quick, firm pressure. Then she excused herself and turned to the other patrons. The crowd was thinning out now. Several of the more intoxicated still slumbered in their chairs.

Not more than fifteen couples were on the dance floor when Kate stopped the music with a wave of her hand and said:

“Not enough pep, gang. We’re closing soon now, and let’s make it all hot ‘n everything in the meantime. Make it snappy now, for Speed and I have a surprise for you pretty soon.”

The orchestra swung into a mad jazz number, quickening the cadence until the dancers’ feet literally were flying. Kate called Little Laura to her away from Scar’s side, and whispered something. The girl laughed and took a chair at a vacant table.

Kate caught the electrician’s eye and nodded, holding up a silver chime

whistle as a signal. He nodded and began a furious succession of light changes. They flickered up, then dimmed down to mere red-brown shapes within the globes. On again—and the electrician snapped the main switch off and on rapidly, giving the effect of lightning flashes. Once Kate caught Mallon's eyes and tossed him an airy kiss from her fingertips. Scar, sitting three feet distant from him, scowled wonderingly. Occasionally couples would barge together on the dance floor, the girls screaming curses or ribald commands. Kate's eyes narrowed calculatingly watching the unconscious distribution of the couples about the floor.

Suddenly she sounded a musical trill from the whistle. The music rose to a shrill crescendo of noise as the electrician pulled the main switch and threw the entire club into darkness.

But over the music, the shouts of laughter and the scrape of feet, there sounded ten clearly spaced blasts of Kate's whistle as though she was marking time for the next stunt.

Three sharp blasts followed one another in rapid succession. The lights flared on and the music ceased in the middle of a bar.

For an instant there was a grave-like silence; then gasps of surprise—here and there a nervous titter from one of the molls.

There was reason. Midway down the room, clear of the dancers and at a point where every person in the room was under her eye stood Cougar Kitty, in each hand a thirty-eight automatic. Flanking her, four at each side, stood the club's eight waiters. Now they were masked with handkerchiefs tied across their noses to conceal mouths and chins. Each carried two snub-nose, small caliber automatics! These were trained on

the dancing group and the orchestra.

Kitty's guns covered Mallon and Scar.

"Up with them," she demanded dramatically. "Drag me down a star and let me look at it. This is a stick-up and I don't mean perhaps."

Mallon and Scar laughed happily, admiringly.

"Some twist, that one," Scar said out of the corner of his twisted mouth.

"Who else'd think of a stunt like that?"

With the words the tension broke. The waiters snapped the handkerchiefs from their faces, broke the seeming automatics and disclosed that they were cigarette guns, made in the shape of pistols. These were distributed to the dancers as they crowded about the smiling hostess.

Kate, meanwhile, stood toying with the weapons hanging loosely at her side. She looked anxiously about for Speedball. He was at one of the tables, retying a shoelace. He looked up at her and grinned.

It was Scar, master of the double-cross and personification of vileness, who was the first to sense the tenseness which had descended on the room.

As he dropped his hands to the chair arms, ready to derrick his great body to a standing position, Kate whirled and leveled both guns.

"Down!" she snapped savagely. "Up with them—both of you—you're in on this too, Mallon. "Quick—fingers together behind your heads."

The muzzles of both guns jumped in unison. With the roar came a splintering crash as the missiles flew past the heads of the two men and buried themselves in the wall behind them.

There was no question now of obedience. Mallon, white, silent but watchful as a snake, cradled the back of his head in his hands. Scar was slower and his gross face was splotched and purple as he too withdrew his hands from his holster.

The girl's tense figure, alone in the center of the floor as she held two redoubtable gunmen helpless, appealed to their sense of the dramatic. They were breathless with suspense when at last she broke silence to say in a lifeless monotone:

"Listen everybody—I'm going to tell you about a couple of damned, lousy skunks—the two sitting there, and another I got last night—Hanson.

"In a little while, I'm going out of here. It is up to you—you boys and girls who, like me, have had to fight for yourselves—it's up to you whether I go out of here—or whether I don't! But I'm going to take Skunk Mallon and Skunk Argyle with me! It'll be the hot seat for them! And I've nothing on you!

"I'm a slum kid from Brooklyn. My dad was a drunk; mother was a decent woman. I had two brothers, Wilbur and Merrill. Our family name was Orrum. Merrill, the older brother, was a good kid. He made me go to school just as he did. The other was weak, a sneak thief at twelve and an ex-con at twenty. They called him 'Wib the Gun.' "

Scar's arms jerked at the words and the girl's finger tightened for an instant on the trigger of the weapon in her right hand.

"Means something to you, doesn't it, Skunk Argyle?" she taunted. "Wib was the lad you and Hanson and Mallon, jobbed into killing his own brother that night in Detroit—the lad Mallon and Hanson killed later to stop his mouth."

Someone in the crowd grated out a curse. She continued her story.

“Merrill had worked his way through law school and had taken up criminal practice. In a few years he was known as the best crook mouthpiece in Detroit. I was his helper—his private investigator.

“But Merrill fell out with Hanson and Mallon, and also with Scar who was the big money back of their booze and dope running. They got poor Wib drunk one night and planted him out to kill a Federal dick near a roadhouse. They decoyed Merrill to the spot and let Wib kill his own brother.

“When he found out what he’d done, he went into hiding. It took me days to find him and when I got there he was croaking. He had just enough strength to tell me the story and to let me know that Mallon had run him down and shot him to silence him.

“I went crazy then. When I found where Hanson was planted out I went there one night and got into the house. I hoped to get him as he slept. But Sugarface Mallon was on the prowl and got me before I could shoot.

“He tied me up. He didn’t call Hanson. He just gagged me—and for that night I was his prisoner. Figure that for yourselves.

“The next morning he threw me down the front steps. He’d finished wrecking the Orrum family. Nice boy—Skunk Mallon—isn’t he?”

“Hanson and Mallon disappeared,” she continued, and now she was tumbling the words forth with machine-gun speed. “But I found they were here, working with Scar Argyle on a new dope underground.

“My hair was gold-yellow. I dyed it red. My figure was slight. I ate sweets, drank heavy cream, stuffed like a Strasbourg goose until I had gained twenty pounds. I went to Chicago and then New York to establish a new

identity, but always I kept track of the three skunks.

“You know most of the rest of it. I came here and tricked Scar into giving me work. Last night I stood beside Scar, pressing my fingers into his fat shoulder until the lights went out. Then I got Hanson in the neck with a thin, knife. I was back beside Scar when the lights went on again. He thought he had felt my hand on his shoulder all of the time.”

She paused for a quick glance about the tables, flashed her eyes toward the doorway where waiters and barmen were grouped.

But even that brief second of respite was enough for Sugarface. As she turned back his right hand was flitting under his coat lapel, fingers clawing for the gun butt nestling there.

Cougar Kitty's left gun jerked twice and a horrible oath spat from Scar's lips as two black holes appeared, one above the other, in Mallon's smooth, white forehead. He teetered for a moment in his chair, then fell sideways across Scar's feet.

The death threat in the girl's eyes as they flickered to Scar nerved the gross man to action. He threw himself, wedged as he was in his great chair, sideways to the floor. His hand flashed with incredible speed to the butt of his gun.

Cougar Kitty, her eyes pinpoints of blazing hate, waited as the thick fingers grasped the weapon, started to raise it.

Crash! Crash! Crash!

Her gun spoke thrice in rapid succession. A jet of blood leaped from Scar's lips as the first bullet smashed against his set teeth.

The second smashed through the center of the scar under the victim's right eye and ploughed into the brain.

The third struck squarely between the eyes—a small, purple edged perforation which wrote the final period on the life-tale of Scar Argyle.

For a moment Cougar Kitty stood silent, staring at the two unmoving bodies on the floor. “Killing was too good for them!”

Then with a gesture of finality she let the guns crash to the floor. Turning, her hands outstretched toward the silent group of grim-faced onlookers, she whispered:

“And now—the verdict. Getaway—or?”

Tense eyes stared back into hers. Still no word was spoken.

Suddenly, as though an invisible wedge was driving into the group, they began to fall back.

White lipped, staring unseeingly before her, Kitty passed the grimly watchful cannons and molls who lined her pathway.

Tod Robbins
“Spurs”

Jacques Courbé was a romanticist. He measured only twenty-eight inches from the soles of his diminutive feet to the crown of his head; but there were times, as he rode into the arena on his gallant charger, St. Eustache, when he felt himself a doughty knight of old about to do battle for his lady.

What matter that St. Eustache was not a gallant charger except in his master's imagination—not even a pony, indeed, but a large dog of a nondescript breed, with the long snout and upstanding ears of a wolf? What matter that M. Courbé's entrance was invariably greeted with shouts of derisive laughter and bombardment of banana skins and orange peels? What matter that he had no lady, and that his daring deeds were severely curtailed to a mimicry of the bareback riders who preceded him? What mattered all these things to the tiny man who lived in dreams, and who resolutely closed his shoe button eyes to the drab realities of life?

The dwarf had no friends among the other freaks in Copo's Circus. They considered him ill-tempered and egotistical, and he loathed them for their acceptance of things as they were.

Imagination was the armor that protected him from the curious glances of a cruel, gaping world, from the stinging lash of ridicule, from the bombardments of banana skins and orange peels. Without it, he must have shriveled up and died. But these others? Ah, they had no armor

except their own thick hides! The door that opened on the kingdom of imagination was closed and locked to them; and although they did not wish to open this door, although they did not miss what lay beyond it, they resented and mistrusted any one who possessed the key.

Now it came about, after many humiliating performances in the arena, made palatable only by dreams, that love entered the circus tent and beckoned commandingly to M. Jacques Courbé. In an instant the dwarf was engulfed in a sea of wild, tumultuous passion.

Mlle. Jeanne Marie was a daring bareback rider. It made M. Jacques Courbé's tiny heart stand still to see her that first night of her appearance in the arena, performing brilliantly on the broad back of her aged mare, Sappho. She was a tall, blond woman of the amazon type. She had big, round eyes of baby blue, which held no spark of her avaricious peasant's soul, carmine lips and cheeks, large white teeth, which flashed continually in a smile, and hands which, when doubled up, were nearly the size of the dwarf's head.

Her partner in the act was Simon Lafleur, the Romeo of the circus tent—a swarthy, herculean young man with bold black eyes and hair that glistened with grease, like the back of Solon, the trained seal.

From that first performance M. Jacques Courbé loved Mlle. Jeanne Marie. All his tiny body was shaken with longing for her.

Her buxom charms, so generously revealed in tights and spangles, made him flush and cast down his eyes. The familiarities allowed to Simon Lafleur during the course of their act, the bodily acrobatic contacts of the two performers, made the dwarf's blood boil. Mounted on St. Eustache, awaiting his turn at the entrance, he would grind his teeth in impotent

rage to see Simon circling round and round the ring, standing proudly on the back of Sappho and holding Mlle. Jeanne Marie in an ecstatic embrace, while she kicked one shapely bespangled leg skyward.

“Ah, the dog!” M. Jacques Courbé would mutter. “Some day I shall teach this hulking stable boy his place! *Ma foi*, I will clip his ears for him!”

St. Eustache did not share his master’s admiration for Mlle. Jeanne Marie. From the first he evinced his hearty detestation for her by low growls and a ferocious display of long, sharp fangs.

It was little consolation for the dwarf to know that St. Eustache showed still more marked signs of rage when Simon Lafleur approached him. It pained M. Jacques Courbé to think that his gallant charger, his sole companion, his bedfellow, should not also love and admire the splendid giantess who each night risked life and limb before the awed populace. Often, when they were alone together, he would chide St. Eustache on his churlishness.

“Ah, you devil of a dog!” the dwarf would cry. “Why must you always growl and show your ugly teeth when the lovely Jeanne Marie condescends to notice you? Have you no feelings under your tough hide? Cur, she is an angel, and you snarl at her! Do you not remember how I found you, a starving puppy in a Paris gutter? And now you must threaten the hand of my princess! So this is your gratitude, great hairy pig!”

II

M. Jacques Courbé had one living relative—not a dwarf like himself, but a fine figure of a man, a prosperous farmer living just outside the town of

Roubaix. The elder Courbé had never married; and so one day, when he was found dead from heart failure, his tiny nephew—for whom, it must be confessed, the farmer had always felt an instinctive aversion—fell heir to a comfortable property. When the tidings were brought to him, the dwarf threw both arms about the shaggy neck of St. Eustache and cried out: “Ah, now we can retire, marry, and settle down, old friend! I am worth many times my weight in gold!”

That evening, as Mlle. Jeanne Marie was changing her gaudy costume after the performance, a light tap sounded on the door.

“Enter!” she called, believing it to be Simon Lafleur, who had promised to take her that evening to the Sign of the Wild Boar for a glass of white wine, to wash the sawdust out of her throat. “Enter, *mon chéri!*”

The door swung slowly open, and in stepped M. Jacques Courbé, very proud and upright, in the silks and laces of a courtier, with a tiny gold-hilted sword swinging at his hip. Up he came, his shoe button eyes all aglitter to see the more than partially revealed charms of his robust lady. Up he came to within a yard of where she sat, and down on one knee he went and pressed his lips to her red-slippered foot.

“Oh, most beautiful and daring lady,” he cried, in a voice as shrill as a pin scratching on a window pane, “will you not take mercy on the unfortunate Jacques Courbé? He is hungry for your smiles, he is starving for your lips. All night long he tosses on his couch and dreams of Jeanne Marie!”

“What play acting is this, my brave little fellow?” she asked, bending down with the smile of an ogress. “Has Simon Lafleur sent you to tease me?”

“May the black plague have Simon!” the dwarf cried, his eyes seeming to flash blue sparks. “I am not play acting. It is only too true that I love you, *mademoiselle*; that I wish to make you my lady.

And now that I have a fortune, now that—” He broke off suddenly, and his face drew up into angry wrinkles till it resembled a withered apple. “What is this, *mademoiselle*?” he said, in the low, droning tone of a hornet about to sting. “Do you laugh at my love? I warn you, *mademoiselle*—do not laugh at Jacques Courbé!” Mlle. Jeanne Marie’s large, florid face had turned purple from suppressed merriment. Her lips twitched at the corners.

It was all she could do not to burst out into a roar of laughter. Why, the ridiculous little manikin was serious in his love-making! This pocket-sized edition of a courtier was proposing marriage to her! He, this splinter of a fellow, wished to make her his wife! Why, she could carry him about on her shoulder like a trained marmoset!

What a joke this was—what a colossal, corset-creaking joke! Wait till she told Simon Lafleur! She could fairly see him throw back his sleek head, open his mouth to its widest dimensions, and shake with silent laughter; but she must not laugh—not now. First she must listen to everything the dwarf had to say, and draw all the sweetness out of this bonbon of humor before she crushed it under the heel of ridicule.

“I am not laughing, M. Courbé,” she managed to say. “You have taken me by surprise. I never thought, I never even guessed—”

“That is well, *mademoiselle*,” the dwarf broke in. “I do not tolerate laughter. In the arena I am paid to make laughter; but these others pay to laugh at *me*. I always make people pay to laugh at me!” “But do I

understand you aright, M. Courbé? Are you proposing an honorable marriage?"

The dwarf rested his hand lightly on his heart and bowed.

"Yes, *mademoiselle*, an honorable marriage, and the wherewithal to keep the wolf from the door. A week ago my uncle died and left me a large estate. We shall have a servant to wait on our wants, a horse and carriage, food and wine of the best, and leisure to amuse ourselves. And you? Why, you will be a fine lady! I will clothe that beautiful big body of yours with silks and laces. You will be as happy, *mademoiselle*, as a cherry tree in June!" The dark blood slowly receded from Mlle. Jeanne Marie's full cheeks, her lips no longer twitched at the corners, her eyes had narrowed slightly. She had been a bareback rider for years, and she was weary of it. The life of the circus tent had lost its tinsel. She loved the dashing Simon Lafleur; but she knew well enough that this Romeo in tights would never espouse a dowerless girl.

The dwarf's words had woven themselves into a rich mental tapestry. She saw herself a proud lady, ruling over a country estate, and later welcoming Simon Lafleur with all the luxuries that were so near his heart. Simon would be overjoyed to marry into a country estate; and these pygmies were a puny lot. They died young! She would do nothing to hasten the end of Jacques Courbé. No, she would be kindness itself to the poor little fellow; but, on the other hand, she would not lose her beauty mourning for him.

"Nothing that you wish shall be withheld from you as long as you love me, *mademoiselle*," the dwarf continued. "Your answer?"

Mlle. Jeanne Marie bent forward, and with a single movement of her

powerful arms raised M. Jacques Courbé and placed him on her knee. For an ecstatic instant she held him thus, as if he were a large French doll, with his tiny sword cocked coquettishly out behind. Then she implanted on his cheek a huge kiss that covered his entire face from chin to brow. "I am yours!" she murmured, pressing him to her ample bosom. "From the first I loved you, M. Jacques Courbé!"

III

The wedding of Mlle. Jeanne Marie was celebrated in the town of Roubaix, where Copo's Circus had taken up its temporary quarters. Following the ceremony, a feast was served in one of the tents, which was attended by a whole galaxy of celebrities.

The bridegroom, his dark little face flushed with happiness and wine, sat at the head of the board. His chin was just above the tablecloth, so that his head looked like a large orange that had rolled off the fruit dish. Immediately beneath his dangling feet, St. Eustache, who had more than once evinced by deep growls his disapproval of the proceedings, now worried a bone with quick, sly glances from time to time at the plump legs of his new mistress.

Papa Copo was on the dwarf's right, his large round face as red and benevolent as a harvest moon. Next him sat Griffo, the giraffe boy, who was covered with spots, and whose neck was so long that he looked down on all the rest, including even M. Hercule Hippo, the giant. The rest of the company included Mlle. Lupa, who had sharp white teeth of an incredible length, and who growled when she tried to talk; the tiresome M. Jejongle, who insisted on juggling fruit, plates, and knives, although

the whole company was heartily sick of his tricks; Mme. Samson, with her trained baby boa constrictors coiled about her neck and peeping out timidly, one above each ear; Simon Lafleur, and a score of others.

The bareback rider had laughed silently and almost continually ever since Jeanne Marie had told him of her engagement over a glass of white wine at the Sign of the Wild Boar. Now he sat next to her in his crimson tights, with his black hair brushed back from his forehead and so glistening with grease that it reflected the lights overhead, like a burnished helmet. From time to time he tossed off a brimming goblet of Burgundy, nudged the bride in the ribs with his elbow, and threw back his sleek head in another silent outburst of laughter.

“And you are sure that you will not forget me, Simone” she whispered. “It may be some time before I can get the little ape’s money.”

“Forget you, Jeanne?” he muttered.

“By all the dancing devils in champagne, never! I will wait as patiently as Job till you have fed that mouse some poisoned cheese. But what will you do with him in the meantime, Jeanne? You must allow him no liberties. I grind my teeth to think of you in his arms!”

The bride smiled, and regarded her diminutive husband with an appraising glance. What an atom of a man! And yet life might linger in his bones for a long time to come!

M. Jacques Courbé had allowed himself only one glass of wine, and yet he was far gone in intoxication. His tiny face was suffused with blood, and he stared at Simon Lafleur belligerently. Did he suspect the truth?

“Your husband is flushed with wine,” the bareback rider whispered. “*Ma foi, madame*, later he may knock you about! Possibly he is a dangerous

fellow in his cups. Should he maltreat you, Jeanne, do not forget that you have a protector in Simon Lafleur.”

“You clown!” Jeanne Marie rolled her large eyes roguishly, and laid her hand for an instant on the bareback rider’s knee.

“Simon, I could crack his skull between my finger and thumb, like this hickory nut!?” She paused to illustrate her example, and then added reflectively: “And perhaps I shall do that very thing, if he attempts any familiarities. Ugh! The little ape turns my stomach!”

By now the wedding guests were beginning to show the effects of their potations.

This was especially marked in the case of on Jacques Courbé’s associates in the side show. Griffo, the giraffe boy, had closed his large brown eyes, and was swaying his small head languidly above the assembly, while a slightly supercilious expression drew his lips down at the corners. M. Hercule Hippo, swollen out by his libations to even more colossal proportions, was repeating over and over:

“I tell you I am not like other men. When I walk, the earth trembles!” Mlle. Lupa, her hairy upper lip lifted above her long white teeth, was gnawing at a bone, growling unintelligible phrases to herself, and shooting savage, suspicious glances at her companions. M. Jejongle’s hands had grown unsteady, and, as he insisted on juggling the knives and plates of each new course, broken bits of crockery littered the floor. Mme. Samson, uncoiling her necklace of baby boa constrictors, was feeding them lumps of sugar soaked in rum.

M. Jacques Courbé had finished his second glass of wine, and was surveying the whispering Simon Lafleur through narrowed eyes.

There can be no genial companionship among great egotists who have drunk too much. Each one of these human oddities thought that he or she alone was responsible for the crowds that daily gathered at Copo's Circus; so now, heated with the good Burgundy, they were not slow in asserting themselves. Their separate egos rattled angrily together, like so many pebbles in a bag. Here was gunpowder which needed only a spark.

"I am a big—a very big man!" Hippo said sleepily. "Women love me. The pretty little creatures leave their pygmy husbands, so that they may come and stare at Hercule Hippo of Copo's Circus. Ha, and when they return home, they laugh at other men always! 'You may kiss me again when you grow up,' they tell their sweethearts."

"Fat bullock, here is one woman who has no love for you!" cried Mlle. Lupa, glaring sidewise at the giant over her bone.

"That great carcass of yours is only so much food gone to waste. You have cheated the butcher, my friend. Fool, women do not come to see you! As well might they stare at the cattle being led through the street. Ah, no, they come from far and near to see one of their own sex who is not a cat!"

"Quite right," cried Papa Copo in a conciliatory tone, smiling and rubbing his hands together. "Not a cat, *mademoiselle*, but a wolf. Ah, you have a sense of humor! How droll!"

"I have a sense of humor," Mlle. Lupa agreed, returning to her bone, "and also sharp teeth. Let the erring hand not stray too near!"

"You, M. Hippo and Mlle. Lupa, are both wrong," said a voice which seemed to come from the roof. "Surely it is none other than me whom

the people come to stare at!”

All raised their eyes to the supercilious face of Griffo, the giraffe boy, which swayed slowly from side to side on its long, pipestem neck. It was he who had spoken, although his eyes were still closed.

“Of all the colossal impudence!” cried the matronly Mme. Samson. “As if my little dears had nothing to say on the subject!”? She picked up the two baby boa constrictors, which lay in drunken slumber on her lap, and shook them like whips at the wedding guests. “Papa Copo knows only too well that it is on account of these little charmers, Mark Antony and Cleopatra, that the side show is so well attended!” The circus owner, thus directly appealed to, frowned in perplexity. He felt himself in a quandary. These freaks of his were difficult to handle. Why had he been fool enough to come to M. Jacques Courbé’s wedding feast? Whatever he said would be used against him.

As Papa Copo hesitated, his round, red face wreathed in ingratiating smiles, the long deferred spark suddenly alighted in the powder. It all came about on account of the carelessness of M. Jejongle, who had become engrossed in the conversation, and wished to put in a word for himself. Absentmindedly juggling two heavy plates and a spoon, he said in a petulant tone: “You all appear to forget me” Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when one of the heavy plates descended with a crash on the thick skull of M. Hippo; and M. Jejongle was instantly remembered. Indeed, he was more than remembered; for the giant, already irritated to the boiling point by Mlle. Lupa’s insults, at this new affront, struck out savagely past her, and knocked the juggler head over heels under the table.

Mlle. Lupa, always quick-tempered, and especially so when her attention was focused on a juicy chicken bone, evidently considered her dinner companion's conduct far from decorous, and promptly inserted her sharp teeth in the offending hand that had administered the blow. M. Hippo, squealing from rage and pain like a wounded elephant, bounded to his feet, overturning the table.

Pandemonium followed. Every freak's hands, teeth, feet, were turned against the others. Above the shouts, screams, growls, and hisses of the combat, Papa Copo's voice could be heard bellowing for peace: "Ah, my children, my children! This is no way to behave! Calm yourselves, I pray you! Mlle. Lupa, remember that you are a lady as well as a wolf!" There is no doubt that M. Jacques Courbé would have suffered most in this undignified fracas, had it not been for St. Eustache, who had stationed himself over his tiny master, and who now drove off all would-be assailants.

As it was, Griffo, the unfortunate giraffe boy, was the most defenseless, and therefore became the victim. His small round head swayed back and forth to blows like a punching bag. He was bitten by Mlle. Lupa, buffeted by M. Hippo, kicked by M. Jejongle, clawed by Mme. Samson, and nearly strangled by both the baby boa constrictors, which had wound themselves about his neck like hangmen's nooses. Undoubtedly he would have fallen a victim to circumstances, and would never have left the banquet board alive, had it not been for Simon Lafleur, the bride, and half a dozen of her acrobatic friends, whom Papa Copo had implored to restore peace. Roaring with laughter, they sprang forward and tore the combatants apart.

M. Jacques Courbé was found sitting grimly under a fold of the tablecloth.

He held a broken bottle of wine in one hand.

The dwarf was very drunk, and in a towering rage. As Simon Lafleur approached with one of his silent laughs, M. Jacques Courbé hurled the bottle at his head.

“Ah, the little wasp!” the bareback rider cried, picking up the dwarf by his waistband. “Here its your fine husband, Jeanne! Take him away before he does me some mischief. Parbleu, he is a blood- thirsty fellow in his cups!”

The bride approached, her blond face crimson from wine and laughter. Now that she was safely married to a country estate, she took no more pains to conceal her true feelings.

“Oh, la, la!” she cried, seizing the struggling dwarf and holding him forcibly on her shoulder. “What a temper the little ape has! Well, we shall spank it out of him before long!”

“Let me down!” M. Jacques Courbé screamed in a paroxysm of fury. “You will regret this, *madame* Let me down, I say!”

But the stalwart bride shook her head.

“No, no, my little one,” she laughed.

“You cannot escape your wife so easily! What, you would fly from my arms before the honeymoon!”;

“Let me down!” he cried again. “Can’t you see that they are laughing at me?”

“And why should they not laugh, my little ape? Let them laugh, if they will; but I will not put you down. No, I will carry you thus, perched on my shoulder, to the farm. It will set a precedent which brides of the future may find a certain difficulty in following!”!

“But the farm is quite a distance from here, my Jeanne,” said Simon Lafleur. “You are as strong as an ox, and he is only a marmoset. Still I will wager a bottle of Burgundy that you set him down by the roadside.”

“Done, Simon!” the bride cried, with a flash of her strong white teeth.

“You shall—lose your wager, for I swear that I could carry my little ape from one end of France to the other!”

M. Jacques Courbé no longer struggled. He now sat bolt upright on his bride’s broad shoulder. From the flaming peaks—of blind passion he had fallen into an abyss: of cold fury. His love was dead, but some quite alien emotion was rearing an evil head from its ashes.

“So, madame, you could carry me from one end of France to the other!” he droned in a monotonous undertone. “From one end of France to the other! I will remember that always, madame!”

“Come!” cried the bride suddenly. “I am off. Do you and the others, Simon, follow to see me win my wager.”

They all trooped out of the tent. A full moon rode the heavens and showed the road, lying as white and straight through the meadows as the part in Simon Lafleur’s black, oily hair.

The bride, still holding the diminutive bridegroom on her shoulder, burst out in a song as she strode forward. The wedding ; guests followed them. Some walked none too steadily. Griffon, the giraffe boy, staggered pitifully on his long, thin legs. Papa Copo alone remained behind.

“What a strange world!” he muttered, standing in the tent door and following them with his round blue eyes. “Ah, these children of mine are difficult at times—very difficult!”

IV

A year had rolled by since the marriage of Mlle. Jeanne Marie and M. Jacques Courbé. Copo's Circus had once more taken up its quarters in the town of Roubaix. For more than a week the country people for miles around had flocked to the side show to get a peep at Griffio, the giraffe boy; M. Hercule Hippo, the giant; Mlle. Lupa, the wolf lady; Mme. Samson, with her baby boa constrictors; and M. Jejongle, the famous juggler. Each was still firmly convinced that he or she alone was responsible for the popularity of the circus.

Simon Lafleur sat in his lodgings at the Sign of the Wild Boar. He wore nothing but red tights. His powerful torso, stripped to the waist, glistened with oil. He was kneading his biceps tenderly with some strong-smelling fluid.

Suddenly there came a sound of heavy, laborious footsteps on the stairs, and Simon Lafleur looked up. His rather gloomy expression lifted, giving place to the brilliant smile which had won for him the hearts of so many lady acrobats. °

"Ah, this is Marcelle!" he told himself.

"Or perhaps it is Rose, the English girl; or yet again little Francesca, although she walks more lightly. Well, no matter—whoever it is, I will welcome her!" By now the lagging, heavy footfalls were in the hall, and a moment later they came to a halt outside the door. There was a timid knock.

Simon Lafleur's brilliant smile broadened.

"Perhaps some new admirer who needs encouragement," he told himself; but aloud he said: "Enter, *mademoiselle!*" The door swung slowly open,

and revealed the visitor. She was a tall, gaunt woman dressed like a peasant. The wind had blown her hair into her eyes. Now she raised a large, toil-worn hand, brushed it back across her forehead, and looked long and attentively at the bareback rider.

“You do not remember me?” she said at length.

Two lines of perplexity appeared above Simon Lafleur’s Roman nose, and he slowly shook his head. He, who had known so many women in his time, was now at a loss. Was it a fair question to ask a man who was no longer a boy, and who had lived? Women change so in a brief time!

Now this bag of bones, which seemed to be held together by the rags she wore, might at one time have appeared desirable to him.

Parbleu! Fate was a conjurer! She waved her wand, and beautiful women were transformed into hags, jewels into pebbles, silks and laces into hempen cords. The brave fellow who danced tonight at the prince’s ball might tomorrow dance more lightly on the gallows tree. The thing was to live and die with a full belly. To digest all that one could—that was life!

“You do not remember me?” she said again.

Simon Lafleur once more shook his sleek, black head.

“I have a poor memory for faces, *madame*,” he said politely. “It is my misfortune, when there are such beautiful faces.”

“Ah, but you should have remembered, Simon!” the woman cried, a sob rising up in her throat. “We were very close together, you and I. Do you not remember Jeanne Marie?” .

“Jeanne Marie!” the bareback rider cried. “Jeanne Marie, who married a marmoset and a country estate? Don’t tell me, *madame*, that you—”

He broke off and stared at her, openmouthed. His sharp black eyes

wandered from the wisps of wet, straggling hair down her gaunt person till they rested at last on her thick cowhide boots incrusting with layer on layer of mud and dust from the countryside.

“It is impossible!” he said at last.

“It is indeed Jeanne Marie,” the woman answered, “or what is left of her. Ah, Simon, what a life he has led me! I have been merely a beast of burden! There are no ignominies which he has not made me suffer!”

“To whom do you refer?” Simon Lafleur demanded. “Surely you cannot mean that pocket edition husband of yours—that dwarf, Jacques Courbé?”

“Ah, but I do, Simon. Alas, he has broken me!”

“He—that toothpick of a man?” the bareback rider cried, with one of his silent laughs. “Why, it is impossible! As you once said yourself, Jeanne, you could crack his skull between finger and thumb like a hickory nut!”

“So I thought once. Ah, but I did not know him then, Simon! Because he was small, I thought I could do with him as I liked. It seemed to me that I was marrying a manikin. ‘I will play Punch and Judy with this little fellow,’ I said to myself. Simon, you may imagine my surprise when he began playing Punch and Judy with me!”

“But I do not understand, Jeanne. Surely at any time you could have slapped him into obedience!”

“Perhaps,” she assented wearily, “had it not been for St. Eustache. From the first that wolf dog of his hated me. If I so much as answered his master back, he would show his teeth. Once, at the beginning, when I raised my hand to cuff Jacques Courbé, he sprang at my throat, and would have torn me limb from limb, had not the dwarf called him off. I

was a strong woman, but even then I was no match for a wolf!”

“There was poison, was there not?” Simon Lafleur suggested.

“Ah, yes, I, too, thought of poison, but it was of no avail. St. Eustache would eat nothing that I gave him, and the dwarf forced me to taste first of all food that was placed before him and his dog. Unless I myself wished to die, there was no way of poisoning either of them.”

“My poor girl!” the bareback rider said pityingly. “I begin to understand; but sit down and tell me everything. This is a revelation to me, after seeing you stalking homeward so triumphantly with your bridegroom on your shoulder. You must begin at the beginning.”

“It was just because I carried him thus on my shoulder that I have had to suffer so cruelly,” she said, seating herself on the only other chair the room afforded. “He has never forgiven me the insult which he says I put upon him. Do you remember how I boasted that I could carry him from one end of France to the other?” “I remember. Well, Jeanne?”

“Well, Simon, the little demon has figured out the exact distance in leagues. Each morning, rain or shine, we sally out of the house—he on my back, the wolf dog at my heels—and I tramp along the dusty roads till my knees tremble underneath me from fatigue. If I so much as slacken my pace, if I falter, he goads me with his cruel little golden spurs, while at the same time St. Eustache nips my ankles. When we return home, he strikes so many leagues off a score which he says is the number of leagues from one end of France to the other. Not half that distance has been covered, and I am no longer a strong woman, Simon. Look at these shoes!”

She held up one of her feet for his inspection. The sole of the cowhide

boot which incased it had been worn through, and Simon Lafleur caught a glimpse of bruised flesh caked with the mire of the highway.

“This is the third pair that I have had,” she continued hoarsely. “Now he tells me that the price of shoe leather is too high, and that I shall have to finish my pilgrimage barefooted.”

“But why do you put up with all this, Jeanne?” Simon Lafleur asked angrily.

“You who have a carriage and a servant should not walk at all!”

“At first there was a carriage and a servant,” she said, wiping the tears from her eyes with the back of her hand; “but they did not last a week. He sent the servant about his business and sold the carriage at a nearby fair. Now there is no one but me to wait on him and his dog.”

“But the neighbors?” Lafleur persisted.

“Surely you could appeal to them?”

“We have no near neighbors, for the farm is quite isolated. I would have run away many months ago, if I could have escaped unnoticed; but they keep a continual watch on me. Once I tried, but I hadn’t traveled more than a league before the wolf dog was snapping at my ankles. He drove me back to the farm, and the following day I was compelled to carry the little fiend till I fell from sheer exhaustion.”

“But tonight you got away?”

“Yes,” she said, with a quick, frightened glance at the door. “Tonight I slipped out while they were both sleeping, and came here to you. I knew that you would protect me, Simon, because of what we have been to each other. Get Papa Copo to take me back in the circus, and I will work my fingers to the bone. Save me, Simon!”

Jeanne Marie could no longer suppress her sobs. They rose in her throat, choking her, making her incapable of further speech.

“Calm yourself, Jeanne,” Simon Lafleur said soothingly. “I will do what I can for you. I shall have a talk with Papa Copo tomorrow. Of course, you are no longer the same woman that you were a year ago. You have aged since then; but perhaps our good Papa Copo could find you something to do.”

He broke off and eyed her intently. She had stiffened in the chair, and her face, even under its coat of grime, had gone a sickly white.

“What troubles you, Jeanne?” he asked a trifle breathlessly.

“Hush!” she said, with a finger to her lips. “Listen!”

V

Simon Lafleur could hear nothing but the tapping of the rain on the roof and the sighing of the wind through the trees. An unusual silence seemed to pervade the Sign of the Wild Boar.

“Now don’t you hear it?” she cried with an inarticulate gasp. “Simon, it is in the house—it is on the stairs!”

At last the bareback rider’s less sensitive ears caught the sound his companion had heard a full minute before. It was a steady pit-pat, pit-pat, on the stairs, hard to dissociate from the drip of the rain from the eaves; but each instant it came nearer and grew more distinct.

“Oh, save me, Simon, save me!” Jeanne Marie cried, throwing herself at his feet and clasping him about the knees. “Save me! It is St. Eustache!”

“Nonsense, woman!” the bareback rider said angrily, but nevertheless he rose.

“There are other dogs in the world. On the second landing there is a blind fellow who owns a dog. Perhaps it is he you hear.”

“No, no—I know St. Eustache’s step! My God, if you had lived with him a year, you would know it, too! Close the door and lock it!”

“That I will not,” Simon Lafleur said contemptuously. “Do you think I am frightened so easily? If it is the wolf dog, so much the worse for him. It will not be the first cur that I have choked to death with these two hands!”

Pit-pat, pit-pat—it was on the second landing. Pit-pat, pit-pat—now it was in the corridor, and coming fast. Pit-pat, pit-pat—all at once it stopped. There was a moment’s breathless silence, and then into the room trotted St. Eustache. M. Jacques Courbé sat astride the dog’s broad back, as he had so often done in the circus ring. He held a tiny drawn sword, and his shoe button eyes seemed to reflect its steely glitter.

Simon Lafleur made an involuntary step backward. He had been prepared for St. Eustache, but not for the wolf dog’s master.

The dwarf brought the dog to a halt in the middle of the room, and took in at a single glance the prostrate figure of Jeanne Marie. St. Eustache, too, seemed to take silent note of it. The stiff hair on his back rose up, he showed his long white fangs hungrily, and his eyes glowed like two live coals.

“So I find you thus, *madame!*” M. Jacques Courbé said at last. “It is fortunate that I have a charger here”—he patted St. Eustache on the dog’s shaggy neck—“who can scent out my enemies as well as hunt them down in the open. Without him, I might have had some difficulty in discovering you. Well, the little game is up. I find you with your lover!”

“Simon Lafleur is not my lover!” she sobbed. “I have not seen him once since I married you until tonight! I swear it!”

“Once is enough,’ the dwarf said grimly. ‘The impudent stable boy must be chastised!’”

“Oh, spare him!” Jeanne Marie implored. “Do not harm him, I beg of you! It is not his fault that I came! I—”

But at this point Simon Lafleur drowned her out in a roar of laughter.

“Ho, ho!” he roared, putting his hands on his hips. “You would chastise me, eh? Nom d'un chien! Don't try your circus tricks on me! Why, hop-o'-my-thumb, you who ride on a dog's back like a flea, out of this room before I squash you! Begone, melt, fade away!” He paused, expanded his barrel-like chest, puffed out his cheeks, and blew a great breath at the dwarf.

“Blow away, insect,” he bellowed, “lest I put my heel on you!”

M. Jacques Courbé was unmoved by this torrent of abuse. He sat very upright on St. Eustache's back, his tiny sword resting on his tiny shoulder.

“Are you done?” he said at last, when the bareback rider had run dry of invectives. “Very well, Monsieur! Prepare to receive cavalry!?” He paused for an instant, then added in a high, clear voice:

“Get him, St. Eustache!”

The dog crouched, and at almost the same moment sprang at Simon Lafleur. The bareback rider had no time to avoid him and his tiny rider. Almost instantaneously the three of them had come to death grips.

Never in the history of warfare was there a stranger combat than this at the Sign of the Wild Boar. Legend has it that the knights of King Arthur's Round Table rode out to do battle with giants; but surely never one rode such a valiant steed as St. Eustache. Here was a charger who bit and tore, and whose cruel white fangs were soon turned to crimson. It was a gory business.

Simon Lafleur, strong man as he was, was bowled over by the wolf dog's unexpected leap. St. Eustache's clashing jaws closed on his right arm and crushed it to the bone. A moment later the dwarf, still clinging to his dog's back, thrust the point of his tiny sword into the body of the prostrate bareback rider.

Simon Lafleur struggled valiantly, but all to no purpose. Now he felt the fetid breath of the dog fanning his neck, and the wasp-like sting of the dwarf's blade, which this time found a mortal spot. A convulsive tremor shook him and he rolled over on his back. The circus Romeo was dead.

M. Jacques Courbé cleansed his sword on a kerchief of lace, dismounted, and approached Jeanne Marie. She was still crouching on the floor, her eyes closed, her head held tightly between both hands. The dwarf touched her imperiously on the broad shoulder which had so often carried him.

"Madame," he said, "we now can return home. You must be more careful hereafter. Ma foi, it is an ungentlemanly business cutting the throats of stable boys!"

She rose to her feet, like a large trained animal at the word of command.

"You wish to be carried?" she said between livid lips.

"Ah, that is true, madame," he murmured. "I was forgetting our little

wager. From one end of France to the other, eh? Ah, yes! Well, you are to be congratulated, madame—you have covered nearly half the distance.”

“Nearly half the distance,” she repeated in a lifeless voice.

“Yes, madame,” M. Jacques Courbé continued. “I fancy that you will be quite a docile wife by the time you have done.” He paused, and then added reflectively:

“It is truly remarkable how speedily one can ride the devil out of a woman—with spurs!”

Papa Copo had been spending a convivial evening at the Sign of the Wild Boar. As he stepped out into the street, he saw three familiar figures preceding him—a tall woman, a tiny man, and a large dog with up-standing ears. The woman carried the man on her shoulder; the dog trotted at her heels.

The circus owner came to a halt and stared after them. His round eyes were full of childish astonishment.

“Can it be?” he murmured. “Yes, it is! Three old friends! And so Jeanne Marie still carries him! Ah, but she should not poke fun at M. Jacques Courbé. He is so sensitive; but, alas, they are the kind that are always henpecked!”

J.-H. Rosny
“Bride of a Day”

My first marriage, said Jacques Ferveuse, was of but a few hours' duration and did not break my betrothal to her who afterward became my true wife. It was nevertheless a legal wedding and without doubt the best action of my life. I have pardoned myself for many faults on account of the happiness I gave to her who was my bride for a day. At the time of which I speak I used sometimes to dictate notes on a philosophical work to an old copyist who lived in Rue de l'Estrapade. He was one of the best men in the world, but had been brought to poverty by an unusual series of misfortunes which he had a weakness for recounting to all comers. I used to listen to him willingly, for his voice was charming and his words well chosen. While he spoke his daughter, a timid blonde, would sit near us copying papers. I found her alone two or three times and could not help remarking that she seemed greatly agitated in my presence. As she was quite pretty and I saw a look of infinite tenderness in her beautiful eyes when they met mine, I felt some vague inclination toward her, but I quickly stifled it. Yes, I often spoke kindly to her that she might see I did not think her displeasing. My gentle words impressed a soul so profound that I would have shrunk back frightened could I have guessed its depth.

We had known each other for some time when I was suddenly called away from the city, and during my absence I fell in love and became betrothed. The very morning of my return to Paris some one knocked at

my door, and my old copyist entered. His thin figure was yet more meager, his face pale, his temples hollow and his eyes red with weeping. "Sir," said he, "I trust you will excuse my coming thus, but you have always been so good—my daughter—she—I fear she is about to die."

"Indeed!" I responded with more politeness than emotion.

"She is at the hospital, sir. I have come to ask you—to say to you"—

He interrupted himself, stammering, incoherent, his eyes full of entreaty, and said abruptly, without further prelude:

"My daughter loves you! Before her approaching death I believed you might be able"—

And without giving me time to recover from this strange declaration he commenced a story of love which, though prolix, was so strange and pathetic that, when he ended, my eyes were wet with tears.

"Will you see her? It would make her so happy! She has but a few weeks to live."

Three-quarters of an hour I was at the young girl's bedside. Her face shone with that ineffable beauty with which coming death sometimes transfigures the features of the young. At seeing me there her great dark eyes lighted up with a joy that touched me to the heart.

Almost at once she guessed that her father had revealed her girlish secret, and she commenced to tell me the sad, sweet story of her love; the pathetic romance of a poor little maiden resigned to death—a tale of infinite tenderness; how first she had known she loved me, then her fear that her love was not returned, then her illness and her wish to die.

For an hour she talked thus, her blond head lying upon the snow white pillow, her beautiful eyes gazing into mine. Finally she asked in a

trembling voice:

“And you—Did you ever—ever?”

What should I say? Should I play the cruel executioner by telling her the truth or mercifully console her with a lie? Pity moved me:

“I? I have loved you long!”

“Is it true?”

“It is true indeed.”

A look of joy such as I will never see again in this world—the joy of the despairing—overspread her face, and in that moment, if I loved her not, there was something very sweet in my soul—an atom of that boundless compassion which is the closest kin to love.

I know not what led her during the following days to doubt me, but one afternoon she asked:

“But will you ever marry me?”

I swore to her that I would. She smiled up at me with adoration. She prayed aloud, thanking God for his great goodness. One day I was so moved by the depth of her love for me that I wished to give yet more happiness, it would cost me so little. Alas! Was she not irredeemably condemned?

“I am going to publish the banns,” I cried.

Her joy was almost terrible in its intensity. Her face shone with a marvelous splendour, and while she drew down my face to hers, while she laughed and cried in reciting to me in broken words the prayer of her love while she spoke to me as fervent devotees to God, I felt that I had given to one human being the equivalent of a lifetime of happiness.

I will not tell you how I arranged to obtain the consent of my guardian. I did not ask that of my fiancée I knew she would pardon me afterwards. The banns were published, and I made all the preparations for a regular marriage.

During the weeks which followed she lived in ecstasy. Her malady seemed relenting. A miraculous beauty seemed to shine about her like an aureole. She dazzled me; she filled my heart with a sad love, like that of mothers for frail, beautiful children who cannot live. I had her placed in a special room at the hospital, where she received the care of the best physicians and had a sister of charity to watch over her night and day. I passed the greater part of my time with her. I could not satiate myself with that adoring gaze, with that beatitude with each word, each gesture of mine bestowed.

How well I remember the twilight hours when I would sit beside her, watching her pale face blend harmoniously with the shadows, while she murmured to me her words of love like the verses of a song:

“Better than God! Better than the Virgin! Better than my life and the life of the universe!”

Thus time flowed by, and the wedding day came. After the civil marriage they set up an altar in her chamber and dressed her in rich bridal robes. She seemed to live in an atmosphere of perfect bliss. She was as beautiful as a day in springtime when it draws toward sunset and a misty glory rises over the hills and lakes and the drowsy flowers droop their heads in sleep. She lived 20 years in that hour. I have but to close my eyes, and I see her again. Her eyes were so large and bright that they seemed to efface her pale visage. A saintly smile played upon her lips.

Her little hands were clasped as she listened to the voice of the priest. Our fingers joined, and she trembled when, at last, she pronounced the great "Yes," for she put in it all her religion, all the force of her being; then sank back, her strength exhausted. But what delicious fatigue, what blissful weariness! Tenderly she whispered as she dreamed and drew me near her lips. The murderous shadow of death crept rappidly onward. Her spirit wandered in the far-off land of twilight. I saw her cheek grow leaden hued and her temples hollow. She felt not the approach of death, but continued to love, to be happy, to forget herself in her dream divine. Her head was pillowed on my arm, and I watched her dark eyes grow wider, wider yet. Her hair shone upon her pillow like a mesh of gold. The silken bridal robe enveloped her like a cloud.

The sun had set, and the daylight was fading, when she murmured: "Thou lovst me, Jacques? Thou lovest the poor girl? Mon Dieu! We will live long. I feel that I cannot die. I cannot die now."

Her voice sounds as if she had turned back at the entrance of that mysterious land to call to me once more—it is like bells heard far off upon the sea. Her body grows cold in its rich winding sheet, but she no longer suffers. She repeats:

"I cannot die!"

A vague smile hovers over her face, which always wears that look of infinite love, of happiness without a shadow. My heart is still. At that moment I am all that loves in the world—I am a mother, a father, a lover. She murmurs again:

"I love thee. We will live in the country—the violets"—

Her lips part with a smile of ineffable joy, and she is at rest forever.

It is evening, and I gaze through the gathering shadows at the outline of the slender figure in its bridal robe. My sorrow is as profound as it is sweet, for I feel that much will be pardoned me because I have soothed one poor, loving little heart and sweetened with happiness the bitter cup of death.

Poems

Michael Henrik Wynn
“Once Upon a Time”

The demon rises
Loathsome spawn
Spreading its sinewed arms like wings
Razor tongue, you whispering creature
alone
in a crescent landscape
till dawn.

On the rainy plains
Far from sooty licks of fire
Step by step in slush and mud
Icy gusts from storms subdued
And memories that suffocate
Again and again.

Mortal silence
as showers drift away:
exposing those thousand stars
you listen,
frantically,
to the pulse of night and day.

Three creaking knocks on my door.

Robert E. Howard
“Babel”

Now in the gloom the pulsing drums repeat,
And all the night is filled with evil sound;
I hear the throbbing on inhuman feet
On marble stairs that silence locks around.

I see black temples loom against the night,
With tentacles like serpents writhed afar,
And waving in a dusky dragon light
Great moths whose wings unholy tapers char.
Red memory on memory, tier on tier,
Builds up a tower, time and space to span;
Through world on world I rise, and sphere on sphere,
To star-shot gulfs of lunacy and fear—
Black screaming ages never dreamed by man.

Was this your plan, foul spawn of cosmic mire,
To freeze my soul to stone and icy fire,
To carve me in the moon that all mankind
May know its race is futile, weak and blind—
A horror-blasted statue in the sky,
That does not live and nevermore can die?

Angel Uriel Perales
“The Bondage Quintet”

1. Breakfast On Colossus

Here they come again, the bristled hyenas,
skulking, yipping around the standing ankles,
laughing, in their manner, to the toppling
of yet another impotent god.

The homoioi eat their rations under the shadow
of their hoplons propped up by their spears.
Some lean against the warming brass of the arms
and wish for rain, wish for the churning of the tides,
wish for buttermilk, and better dipping wine.

A helot pushed me down into the ground
yesterday and pointed lance to throat.
“Be glad I am not seventeen, slave,”
he said, “be glad you have no gold.”

“Don’t bother clothing yourself, batman.
You contribute nothing to humanity
and will die a poor timid soul
who knows neither victory nor defeat.

No statues will be built to remember
you or your kind. No homage ever made,
just you and your vestiges in hell.”

Look at them flinging lees at one another
from the kylixes scattered all around
an oversized pillowed thumb,
a makeshift reclining eating couch,
hosting three. Three of them strike
pompous poses emulating the dead warriors
found at the bottom of the red terracotta.

Naked I climb the head and nestle in silent
and comfortable into the crook of the left ear.
I break my fast with dry fried tangenite
and gaze into the horizontal spelt.
I think I see the ships carrying the end,
transporting Nebuchadnezzar’s 900 camels
all the way over from Edessa or maybe
I’m thinking of Homs, previously Emesa.

2. Do Not Disturb My Circles

What do I care if the peacocks strut proud
amongst the ruins of Syracuse? The maggots

nestling in the stale bread taste the same
to them as they do to me and if not consumed
then the flies alight on the same tired eyes
annoyed with the same lack of sleep.

Yea, I opened up the gate near the dry fountains.
The nymph can't save you if she can't swim
and the dolphins in her hair have long abandoned
the red waters of the gulf to the whitetip's froth,
a fine saturated human blood broth for the gods.

The master died with his logic stuck in his craw.
The oaf who took the master's life became enraged
at a casual dismissal. I wish I had witnessed
this last offhanded remark, something about not
disturbing the dust in his lab. The dust in his lab!
I can envision the exhausted legionnaire's sword
shaking in his hand. Do not disturb the dusty circles
drawn in the master's sanctum. I would have given
twenty tetradrachms on the spot to have seen that!

I may yet live another day. My fellow surviving
confederates already label me the traitor and a coward.
I merely traded one insecurity for another. Such is war.

But after the Romans neutralized the man they sought,
I could hear the death knell for the rest of us. They
are merely angry at themselves I beat them to the act.
May slavery apportion them a chaff and chafing life.

What the fools don't realize is that our repulsion tactics
never actually worked! The claw clanged against the side
of one sambuca and the mythological mirrors never existed!
We scared a stupid captain into rowing a floating siege tower
into the rocks and the rest we sunk with fire from ballistas
and the onagers. We had no secret power deriving from the sun.
When the outer city fell my only rational thought was to run!
I needed no augurs from the birds to know where the wind
had blown. Should I have forgotten Leontini or Casilinum?
Please don't answer that question, please just don't.

3. Forked Tongues of the Gorgon

I, Africanus, not counted among the glorious thirteen,
bereft yet of proper name and human dignity,
am afraid. I am afraid for my immortal soul.

I have seen omens fulfilled too dreadful to behold,
committed atrocities unseen and unforgivable if told.

I have subsisted on the slime of poisonous snakes
and turtle eggs and languished in the mangrove swamps.

This for the fever greed of gold I'm never going to hold.
All this fevered gold, I am never going to hold. Perdón.

I was the second to disembark behind Alfonso de Molina.
All the locals touched my skin and made me wash my face
and when they saw the blackness was my own, they invited
me personally into their homes. One beautiful runa proposed!
Candia scythed through the center of Tumbes, all six feet ten
with his calculating eyes, a Greek artillery man, him they loved
the most. The virginal mamaconas grabbed between his legs!
The temple, a small local gilded temple, glittered in the sun.
Molina lost his power of speech. Bocanegra jumped ship when
we tried to go. Forgive me Lord, guide me to sin no more.

Then pestilence preceded us down coast. A legend arose
of a dwarf accompanying a black man wearing a black cloak
carrying a box, a gift, when opened paper butterflies flew out
and dissipated. Smallpox in Pandora's Box, Michicana died,
Wayna Capa was mummified and carried to all the villages.
When I returned I was regarded with suspicion, left untouched,
same bitter status as before, Lord, help me to sin no more.

Cajamarca square, chichi and maize beer poured upon the floor.
Oh this angered them but the armored horses also terrified them.

Atahualpa carried in his usmo, golden throne, thousands crowded in, Pizarro smiled his deadly squint. Friar Vincente performed the rituals of submission, crucifix and breviary, claimed all lands and wealth for Spain and benefit of God.

Something happened, Friar Vincente's bible thrown and stomped. My Toledo sword fighting hydrae, decapitate a head, stab two. Bile and blood, gun smoke from the porticoes, Incas crushed under horses hooves, here is an arm which I cut off. Oh God, I think I am the one who sliced De Leon in the upper thigh, forgive my clumsiness, forgive my hide, forgive my vainglorious pride in stride. Pray for the lost to be saved according to your will.

Pray for God to send laborers to harvest. Pray for a witness of love to all the brethren, for the host. Pray for the righteous fear of the Lord. Pray for Satan to be bound, for miracles of God. Pray for the door to be opened for the preaching of the gospel. Pray for unity among believers. Pray for wisdom among believers.

Shush. Be quiet. All the buildings now filled to the brim with gold and jewels and gems, carved jaguars, exotic birds, golden bowls, gathered and stolen from the temples of the land for weeks, months. The whispered echoes changing rumor of who fought brave, struck first, saved whom, all for a choice apportion of the gold.

The priest now spoke loud, the king mocked, grabbed the breviary,
pissed on his robes, who knows? Vincente Valderde blessed or
did not bless the king, who knows. El requerimiento, I suppose,
as treacherous as the forked tongues of the gorgon. None died.
Five Spaniards died. I can tell you De Leon died from his infection.

Or maybe De Leon was smothered in his sleep. This will begin,
the jostling for position, elimination of the extra shares of spoils.
But all the gold will eventually go to the infamous disciples,
who crossed the line in the sand for all that fervent gold,
for their fervid lord currently fomenting dissent amongst his peers.

Mamacona! I grabbed you for my loot, took you from the temple.
You will guide me out of here. Don't worry about the old king,
he will be betrayed once his usefulness has been fulfilled.
You will come with me if you want to live, so help me God.
Where is this Vilcabamba, this El Dorado? Where is this gold?

4. The Legend of Kana'ti Longfoot

By the time we walked to Ooltewah
we knew we had a killer in our midst.

When the men went hunting on Lookout Mountain,
Brandywine Sue never returned. His canvas tent

was given over to the widow Crow-eater, Sue's rifle usurped by Tams Trixbee, ended up in his hands when he shot Harridan Jones, the Commissioner from Hopkinsville, after the marriage to Blossom. They hung Tams for that.

The widow Crow-eater lasted as far as Monteagle, she and her children died feverish inside Sue's tent which we then had to burn. I knew Needles had complained of his silver knife theft and then ended up with rusted steel stuck in his neck. Young Luga was found drunk wearing the empty sheath and taken by a poplar tree and shot in the teeth. I took the remainder of Sue's moonshine jugs and dumped them empty into the Elk River, which runs through Estill Springs and Lost Creek, ends at the sweet water lake in Cave Springs Hollow. I was separated for a week but I returned to the contingent with gopher and groundhog and a bagful of mast. Galen'e'go had left with his herbs. Rinda had been raped.

At Ft. Nashborough, they watched us like guardian bull-bats. I don't know but I had heard a few angry and bitter ones painted themselves red and black and white and red, went over to The Hermitage and encountered armed slaves,

only managed to kill a dog and throw the body in a well.
One conductor was thrown off his horse the next morning
and stabbed eighteen times while writhing on the ground.
Taylor ordered a slow drumming of the drums and swore
we were all ensconced cold and hungry in the stockade.
Some nurses brought us bread and linens and used blankets.

The march got considerably worse after leaving Nashville.
Tams would proclaim loudly remember Tsali, remember Utsali,
remember the great Tecumseh, the stomping of the earthquake.
Children and widows whispered of a long-haired shadow man
always dripping wet and leaving turkey feathers in his wake.
Pregnant Cherry Stem, Cherry Cheater, Otter Sitter, always
flirting with Captain Breckinridge and lover of Gainsborough
and Timothy Thomas Thompson, the doodler and illustrator,
can't get pregnant twice she would entice, and they would ply
her with fruits, salt, and the best cuts of ham. She refused
to nurse the dying twins of Nanny Lightfoot for free, very least
demanded candles, soap, a copper pot, eggs, and rising yeast.
We found her drowned facedown in a creek, teats exposed
and milked, siphoned flat like a dairy beast. The twins got
stronger for a week or two only for both to perish near Cadiz.

One eve I ate delicious tripe stew with acorn meal and pepper.

I was told Black Hat had accidentally caught a wild squealer and then almost got bored through by the pursuing sander. But when Gainsborough was found disemboweled on top of an old Shawnee burial mound, I knew I had to go or I would soon be laid to rest wearing the next heavy death shroud. Or maybe not, bodies had been stripped naked of all possessions and clothes redistributed, tobacco, beads, shells, rings, everything. I had my guns, knives, coins, bedroll, smoking pouch and pipe. I began to wonder when Kanati the Hunter would glance in my direction. I sharpened twenty wooden spears and tracked all the way upriver to Kuttawa before spearing a big fat catfish and offering this to the group. In this way I hoped, for the sake of my soul, to have spoiled Kanati's thirsty and bloody saliva.

After Tams was hung, I took my lovely purple flower lanthe, took Eumenides the orphan, and the half-breed Mrs. Andrews, paid a man named John Berry all my coins to ferry us across the river at Golconda, and spent the winter at Cape Girardeau. After that, I traveled south to Arkansas and settled happy farming as a sharecropper near Pine Bluff. Mrs. Andrews broke her ankle outside Jonesborough, we left her at a clinic last time we saw her. Eumenides ran away after a scolding from lanthe. Our first year we grew pole beans. Our second year we grew pole beans. I was forced to grow cotton next.

We have never been to Oklahoma or west of Fort Smith.

My name is Charlie "Teehee" Longfoot. My wife is lanthe. Our children are Charles Jr., Benjamin, (Red) Clay, Ashwin, Cynthia, Madi, Lily, and little Usdi. Certainly we are blessed by Grace and Jesus Christ our Savior. This is our legend.

5. Shiloh's Glow

Son, wheel me out this morning to face the sun
and, if you want to hear, I shall talk and tell you
about what I have seen, about what we have wrought.

I was not a surgeon, never have been a man of science.
We had one regimental doctor who was discovered
among the enlisted and conscripted for field medicine.
He taught me how to dress a wound, use a bone saw,
administer anesthetic. A naval gunboat shell overshot
the river batteries at Ft. Donelson and landed in our
pharmaceutical tent taking out our chloroform supply.
I then became senior medical personnel and was known
for a while simply as Payne. Here comes the Payne again.
I was saved from death, by the Grace of Almighty God,
only because of an opportune trip to the latrine.

You heard how that Jewe loving Lew Wallace was late with reinforcements or got lost on the River Road, was given erroneous directions. I'm here to say his cowardly flapdoodles would not have mattered. By the time he joined the battle, we had already expended ourselves fully against the Hornet's Nest. A dozen frontal assaults with nothing to show except churned mud, dead horses and dead men. General Johnston died leaning up against a tree, his boot full of blood, could not even find where he was shot, somewhere behind the knee. Ruggles finally organized us and lined up 65 cannons and blasted that field close range and put a stop to them. They surrendered then, gave over their rifles, ammunition which we sorely needed. The rest scurried back towards the Pittsburg Landing, how they knew to retreat in that direction I have no idea. I blame a nigger spy from Beauregard's camp. Never teach a nigger to read much less talk. You better learn that if anything.

We took them completely by surprise but God had other plans. Don't believe this balderdash about clumsy raucous marches or test firing wet rifles. They were caught flat-footed and unprepared when we came out screaming out of the downpour.

But our gunpowder was soaked, our flintlocks misfired, guns no longer accurate in the deluge, the slush underneath our feet sucked us in, I lost both raggedy brogans early on in the muck and had to temporarily stop and fight off Crazy Sutler for a pair of crest tops from a dead soldier ironically named Mudd, don't laugh. Sunken road wasn't sunken at all just a rut six inches deep but their defensive trenches had spikes in them and filled up with slough and Sutler drowned barefoot stuck like a hog in some damn ditch, an arm over his head with one finger up accusing the sky.

I fell down on all fours, lost my musket, found a useless blunderbuss which only helped me pull myself up. I ran up a hill. Jessup got shot right in front of me. I fall on top of an enemy corpse. I grab an Enfield rifle, no, a Springfield rifle, no an Enfield. I get up on one knee, load and aim. I have a blue cap dead on sight. A 12 pound Napoleon explodes. The earth shakes. I slide helplessly all the way down only to be ordered to assault that point again. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't catch my breath.

I wake up cramped, stare at a canopy of stars, tinnitus in one ear. I am half buried under a fat Union Colonel. I find a pearl handled dirk in scabbard, which I appropriate. No hill behind me, this disorients. I see bivouac fires in the distance in a distant field. My boots pinch.

I first notice her, the Angel of Shiloh, floating over the battlefield.

She stops and bends and touches a moaning soldier, wherever
she touches the spot glows green or the spot glows blue.
I cup my ringing ear and my right hand comes away blue.
She has already reached me. I see her ghostly white, floating,
feel her beckoning as she disappears into Owl Creek marsh.
I get up wobbly and follow. The first I help up is Norfleet.
He has a glowing blue gash on his right side. Then we spot
Eireland with a green wound on his forehead. I had to slap him
before he could walk. Together we follow this strange luminous
will-o'-the-wisp of greenish-blue glowing blood to other fallen
brothers-in-arms and bring back to Major General Braxton Bragg
eight surviving bodies and five who would eventually die.

I collapsed early the next morning without ever telling my story.
Others saw the spectre and the glowing injuries, no need
for me to repeat. After a prolonged fevre dream where I thought
I married a girl named Annabel Lee and we had lost a baby girl
named Lenore, when they took my bandages off, I could see no more.

Yes, I know you don't believe an old blind fool like me.
You are a man of religion not of superstition.
How could she have been a divine apparition
when we lost the war so bitterly? I don't know.
I just know what I seen. Do me a favor, please,

wheel me back into the house. The sun is burning
midday overhead and this porch has become quite warm.
Are you even still here? Are you listening still?
Don't leave me out to rot in this unrelenting sun.

Aleister Crowley
“The Summit of the Amorous Mountain”

To love you, Love, is all my happiness;
To kill you with my kisses; to devour
Your whole ripe beauty in the perfect hour
That mingles us in one supreme caress;
To drink the purple of your thighs; to press
Your beating bosom like a living flower;
To die in your embraces, in the shower
That dews like death your swooning loveliness.

To know you love me ; that your body leaps
With the quick passion of your soul; to know
Your fragrant kisses sting my spirit so;
To be one soul where Satan smiles and sleeps;—
Ah! in the very triumph-hour of Hell
Satan himself remembers whence he fell!

Joshua Kwesi Knowlife
“The State of the Mind”

The mind can be a whole world

Bigger than universe

Infinite in space

It can be liquid

It can be stone

It can change into any state of matter

aurora borealis?

it could be alive anywhere

as long as you crave it

The mind can satisfy desires

Just as it can leave you obsessed

The mind can be a place

your wildest dreams

It can form the impossibilities realities refrain from

The mind has no boundaries

there's no fantasy nor reality

it's a Utopia

A different state on it's own

guarded by its unique rules
it's programmed by you
it could be home when the world fails you
But it can be an abyss too

Falling inside your head is endless
Your screams will echo
No one will hear you
You could be gone forever
It proclaims consciousness and seem to prove existence

So watch how you program it
Man is defined by his thoughts
Your mind can be your weapon
so can it be your flaw
Your mind is your story
Give it a worthy climax

Alfred Lichtenstein
“The Drunkard”

One must guard oneself ever so carefully against
Howling, without any reason, like an animal.
Against pouring beer over the faces of all the waiters,
And kicking them in their faces.
Against shortening the disgusting time
Spent lying in a gutter.
Against throwing oneself off a bridge.
Against hitting friends in the mouth.
Against suddenly, while dogs bark,
Tearing the clothes off a well-fed body.
Against hurling into any old beloved woman's
Thighs one's dark skull.

Isaac Rosenberg
“In Piccadilly”

Lamp-lit faces, to you
What is your starry dew?
Gold flowers of the night blue!

Deep in wet pavement's slime
Mud-rooted is your fierce prime,
To bloom in lust's coloured clime.

The sheen of eyes that lust,
Which dew-time made your trust,
Lights your passionless dust.

Michael Henrik Wynn
“Acute Deafness”

When an old woman dies,
her face is washed in the sand
where naked children play,
the clocks fall silent.
Ding dang dong,
the bells say gone.
Flowers wither
like regular steps over linoleum,
divine choreography, our sincere condolences.

Hysterical laughter in chaotic measure
Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha
Fingers drum like drops of rain on the office desk
while each man reaches for his umbrella:
Can you hear what we're saying? Can you hear what we're saying?
About forms that must be completed
because the curtains must be drawn aside
before you can sleep.

Stephen Vincent Benet
“Ghosts of a Lunatic Asylum”

Here, where men's eyes were empty and as bright
As the blank windows set in glaring brick,
When the wind strengthens from the sea -- and night
Drops like a fog and makes the breath come thick;

By the deserted paths, the vacant halls,
One may see figures, twisted shades and lean,
Like the mad shapes that crawl an Indian screen,
Or paunchy smears you find on prison walls.

Turn the knob gently! There's the Thumbless Man,
Still weaving glass and silk into a dream,
Although the wall shows through him -- and the Khan
Journeys Cathay beside a paper stream.

A Rabbit Woman chitters by the door --
-- Chilly the grave-smell comes from the turned sod --
Come -- lift the curtain -- and be cold before
The silence of the eight men who were God

Joshua Kwesi Knowlife
“Embers”

When the beat softens
And the floodlights go down
And all the cheers recede in the cold
and the night takes over
There I am in the shadows
Reliving the days when we were

Having walked on shells before
I have come to know what silence is

Having burned myself for light
I have come to know what pain is

Having loved you so hard and lose you in a whim
I come to know what falling is

Having breathed life and known the imminent nature of death
No news inflates me anymore

I am a house on fire
I breath through a burning fire

And I will die out when the cold comes

Okamoto Jun
“Night train”

crowded warehouses
a steel tower
the signal
water supply tank
the empty places where goods were kept
lines of freight cars were there
as if they were left there
by someone in forgetfulness
all of them lying silently
at the midnight station yard.
the huge frame of the locomotive alone
on the cold shining rail
keeps coming and going
suddenly, violently
spouting its flame-colored smoke
writhing like a beast
as if dragging the rail behind it
with the violent sound of the steam whistle
the engine hurls itself
against the wagon trains
it seems that its anger cannot

be contained easily

(Translated from Japanese by Haider A. Kahn)

Amy Lowell
“A London Thoroughfare. 2 A.M.”

They have watered the street,
It shines in the glare of lamps,
Cold, white lamps,
And lies
Like a slow-moving river,
Barred with silver and black.
Cabs go down it,
One,
And then another,
Between them I hear the shuffling of feet.
Tramps doze on the window-ledges,
Night-walkers pass along the sidewalks.
The city is squalid and sinister,
With the silver-barred street in the midst,
Slow-moving,
A river leading nowhere.

Opposite my window,
The moon cuts,
Clear and round,
Through the plum-coloured night.

She cannot light the city:
It is too bright.
It has white lamps,
And glitters coldly.

I stand in the window and watch the
moon.
She is thin and lustreless,
But I love her.
I know the moon,
And this is an alien city.



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