

Genius Jones

By LESTER DENT

CHAPTER XXV

TRAIL OF THE LAMB

THE hands of the electric clock on the apartment living room radio said seven minutes until eleven. Funny Pegger glared at the clock, unable to get his foggy mind to think of anything but crap games, and resenting the coincidence of the seven and eleven on the clock. It was dark outside, and in the kitchen the electric refrigerator buzzed as it cooled itself. Funny Pegger let go the chair to which he had been holding, and promptly fell down.

"I do rather well," he remarked. "All things considered."

He lay there for a few minutes, wanting to go back to sleep but knowing he ought to go help Jones. After his better nature had emerged victorious, he got up and lurched to the table.

"Wake up!" he said thickly, to Vix.

This serial, herein concluded, began in the issue for November 27

Getting no answer, he fumbled around on the table, sprawling among the dishes, until he got three glasses and sloshed what water was in them onto Vix. Vix rolled her head on her arms just enough to show one blue eye. She winked the eye two or three times.

"Where did all this smoke come from?" she inquired drowsily. "There's a good deal of it."

Funny Pegger peered at her. "Wake up!" he said. "There's not any smoke."

"What?"

With as much clearness as he could manage, Funny Pegger said. "The place is on fire! Wake up! Wanna get burned alive?"

Vix moved her head again, a very little, then gave it up and shut her eyes. "That's too bad," she mumbled, and dozed off.

Funny Pegger went into a small futile rage during which he rubbed a thumb and middle finger together soundlessly under the impression he was snapping them in desperation.

"Jones!" he yelled.

"Leave him alone," Vix suggested drowsily. "He's probably sleepy."

"Jones—" screamed Funny Pegger "—is gone!"

Vix squirmed.

"Jones," roared Funny Pegger, "has gone with Glacia to find that crap game!"

"What?" Vix pushed herself up by pressing on the table top with both hands. She pulled her eyebrows together, pushed out her lips and shook her head. "What's wrong with me?" she asked. "Where is Jones?"

"Jones switched that sleeping powder on us!"

Vix rubbed her eyes and kept on shaking her head. "How? Didn't you put it in his chocolate?"

"I put *something* in his chocolate."

"Then what—"

"Oh, shucks! You remember I hid the stuff in a drawer while I helped you get dinner. He must have got it out and put sugar or something in the box. And he put the powder in our soup. I remember he came fooling around in the kitchen and offered to put the soup on the table. And the soup tasted funny."

"Why didn't you say so?"

The gag man groaned. "I thought it was the way you made soup."

"I must be good! You can't tell when my soup has Mickey Finns in it."

Funny Pegger shuffled from one room to another again and came back and said, "He's sure enough gone." Then he thought of something else and ran stumbling to the electric clock and put his round face close to the round one of the clock.

"We've been asleep two hours!"

Vix asked: "Where would he go?"

"How do I know?" Pegger planted himself in the middle of the room and looked in different directions. "He's with Glacia. She's taking him to that crap game."

"You said that before!" Vix experimented to see if she could stand. She could. She said: "We're wasting time."

It seems to be the misfortune of man to have his foibles become his necessities. The

uniformed doormen, for instance, in front of all New York apartment-houses.

The doorman of Vix's apartment was taller by a foot than the average, and he had a noteworthy development of forearm and biceps muscles, as well as curly hair, and a grin both engaging and remarkable for the number and dimensions of the white teeth it revealed. He looked rather Irish, except that his skin was as black as that of Haile Selassie.

"Yass'm," he said. "I'se done been noticin' dat young gen'lman what's stayin' with you-all."

"By any chance," asked Vix, "did you notice him about two hours ago?"

"Hot doggie!" The doorman rolled his eyes.

"What do you mean—hot doggie?"

"Dat boy sho' done pick himself a scintillator fo' a mama," declared the doorman.

"Having seen Glacia," remarked Funny Pegger, "we understand you perfectly."

Vix glared, clenched her fists, stamped one foot and otherwise imitated a small auburn bull which had been shown a red flag.

"Where did they go?" she demanded.

The doorman shrugged mighty shoulders. "Dev done go where Boze take 'em, Ah guess."

"Who is Boze?"

"He's a frien' of mine."

"By any chance," Vix inquired patiently, "does Boze drive a taxicab? And was he hired by Jones and the —scintillator?"

"He sho-nuff does."

"Where can we find Boze?"

"Ah wouldn't know. Ah sho' wouldn't. Guess maybe he might come monkeyin' around again tonight. Gen'lly he does."

Vix produced a five dollar bill and held it under the doorman's dark nose long enough for him to become interested.

"Find Boze," she said, "and you'll be rich."

"Mah goodness!" the doorman said.

JONES had not been enthusiastic about eating a second dinner that evening. But Glacia hooked herself onto his arm,

gazed up warmly into his eyes, and asked him if he wanted her to starve, and of course he didn't, so they went to a Japanese place on Forty-seventh Street for *suki yaki*. He paid the check and added another sum to the total mentally designated: invested in Jones, personally.

Glacia looked at him and smiled a siren smile. She had been propped on an elbow, absently studying two chop sticks which she was moving about with her fingers.

Glacia arose. "Excuse me," she said. "I'm going to do things to my face. Back in a little."

She walked to the rear of the place, through a door, up a flight of steps, and into a private dining room where Lyman Lee waved to her from a table.

"Hello, there."

Glacia gave Lyman Lee her hand and looked past him at Tray Marco, who was of steel coolness, and Paul Shevinsky, who gazed at her with a loose-lipped intensity. Harold Hover, the bacteriologist, sat behind a half-emptied pint of scotch; he looking more strained than the last time Glacia saw him. Forgetful Osborn peered at Glacia as if he couldn't remember who she was. The five men greeted her in their various ways.

"All set?" Tray Marco asked suddenly. His voice was so like a knife blade snapping that Glacia winced.

"Yes, I—guess so."

Tray Marco's eyes held her and she could not get away from their coldness even after she looked away. The eyes were not sleepy nor lifeless—just emotionless. The whole man did not seem to have a movable muscle. The cigarette between the fingers of his left hand gave off a curl of bluish smoke that might have arisen from an Indian signal fire.

"I'd hate to see you showing doubts," Tray Marco said.

Glacia wanted to say something cool and hard, but her mind would not supply the words, and her throat was too tight to make them if it had; she was scared of Tray Marco. The man was so obviously deadly. Something was happening inside her. Sud-

denly she hated the thing they were doing, and hated, most of all, her part in it. And abruptly she wanted to tell them that she was not going through with it. She was surprised that she should feel that way; she could not have explained it. She raised her eyes, intending to refuse to go any farther. But Tray Marco's look froze her.

"We're all rigged," he said. "Steer him to my gambling house on Forty-ninth Street. Better do it right away." He lifted the cigarette in his left hand and drew on it. "Forgetful, here, is going to run the crap table," he added.

Forgetful Osborn said, "I had something to tell you—let me think—Oh, yes. 'I'm going to wear a disguise.'"

Lyman Lee chuckled softly. He looked at Glacia. "You can get rid of Jones as soon as we take him. I'll have your money. You get everything we take him for, as we agreed. We'll go somewhere and celebrate."

Glacia's lips felt dry.

Tray Marco looked at his cigarette. "The dame is getting a big cut. Forty-nine grand, the sucker has left, hasn't he?"

"That's all right," Lyman Lee said. "She's steering Jones for us."

Tray Marco frowned. "And me, I'm using one of my houses. What if Jones yaps to the cops? They'll close me up."

Lyman Lee shook his head. "Jones knows that the police want to arrest him for murder. Do you think he would go to them?" He grinned at the gambler. "I'm paying for this. If the price isn't satisfactory, I might sweeten it a little. Say five hundred and fifty for Forgetful."

Forgetful Osborn said, "You can see who is low man around here."

"This is swell!" Tray Marco put his cigarette on his lower lip and got up, paced once around the table, then took the cigarette away. "It's so swell, it stinks! It's too easy. There ain't nothing to it. And I don't like things there ain't nothing to!"

Forgetful Osborn said, "I remember that I've been telling you good gentlemen that this Jones may be an Arctic wildcat—"

"Shut up!" Tray Marco said. Forgetful Osborn subsided and looked as mild as he

could. Tray Marco went to Glacia and put his forefinger, rigid, against her chest. "Look, babe," he said. "I don't know about you. I don't know about any woman. But I figure that it won't hurt you to know something you don't—"

"Marco!" Lyman Lee interrupted.

Tray Marco looked at Lyman Lee. "This is my part of the show and I'm running it. I'm telling the girl off." He pressed the forefinger against Glacia. She could feel its pointed harness. "Did you know," Tray Marco asked coldly, "that your boy friend Lee hired Hover to knock off that German liner-captain?"

Glacia's lips twitched apart. "I—"

"I just wanted you to know," Marco said, "how deep it is. And you're swimming in it with the rest of us."

Glacia swallowed.

"So I'd play the game if I was you," Marco added. He sat down and lit another cigarette off the one he had been smoking.

GLACIA was pale as Lyman Lee and Forgetful Osborn accompanied her as far as the head of the stairs. They stood and watched her descend, going slowly, as if she was dazed. "I was just thinking," Forgetful Osborn said, "that maybe Tray Marco hadn't ought to have done that."

Lyman Lee shrugged. It'll scare her into line if she had any ideas about stepping out on us."

"Marco is great at scaring people," Forgetful grumbled. "He scares me all the time."

Lyman Lee said nothing. He was frowning after Glacia. She went through the door at the bottom of the stairs and Lyman Lee removed his monocle and fingered it, still not saying anything.

"Tray Marco," said Forgetful, "reminds me of a trained tiger."

Lyman Lee scowled at the foot of the stairs.

"I once had a friend who owned a trained tiger," Forgetful continued, "but it ate him up one day."

Lyman Lee gestured at the stairs.

"Dammit!" he said. "I believe Glacia

has got a yen on this Jones." He chuckled. "Now wouldn't that be one for the book?" He glanced at Forgetful. "What was that about lions?"

"It was tigers," Forgetful sighed. "It didn't mean anything—much."

The two men went back to the others.

Glacia had been struck by lightning. She sank into a chair in the ladies' lounge and got out a handkerchief, although her eyes were dry. There was pounding all through her. She felt the way she had the time her car turned over twice.

There wasn't anything she could do about it. She had thought wildly all the way out of the private dining room and down the stairs, and the distance had seemed five miles. She wanted to flee from the Japanese restaurant. Run away. But she couldn't. She had no money. Neither had her mother. There was no one she could borrow from; they had exhausted the gullibility of the people who had been her mother's friends before she married the foreign nobleman who frittered her fortune away.

Even before she had learned of the murder, Glacia knew she had stopped liking the plot. She knew the reason. She was a girl who prided herself on being cool and calculating, and she had tried to fool herself about why she had changed. But she knew. She had fallen in love with Jones. And it irritated her, because he was so absolutely naïve. How could she even like anyone so—so boorish? But Jones had some quality about him that had tripped her.

And now she was scared.

She had supposed the death of the German captain was what the papers said it was—the result of an infection. Infection. An infection was germs, or bacteria, and Harold Hover was a bacteriologist. . . . She shuddered. Her hands and face felt hot and the rest of her cold. Tray Marco wouldn't play—with murder, she thought first! And second, that one killing breeds another, often.

She got up and went out to the dining room, walking stiffly.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHIPS

JONES was pleased with everything. He had been fed well, he was in interesting surroundings, had an attractive companion, and what was best of all, he seemed to have a fair number of his troubles crowded into a corner and was all set to knock them in the head. He could not escape the conviction that he was approaching a high point, bringing everything to a head. Little, as they say, did he know.

"Apex," he remarked, "comes from the Latin *apices*, meaning a small rod in the top of a priest's cap, and can refer to a part of a Hebrew letter, a diacritical mark, a section of a copper vein, the tip of a mountain, or the culmination of an activity."

Glacia reached the table, sank into a chair and stared at Jones. "I was referring," Jones said, "to the present array of circumstances."

Glacia smiled rather woodenly. Her lack of enthusiasm moved Jones to offer an excuse for his unusual remarks.

"Dogs," he said, "like to sit in front of igloos and bark at the moon."

His companion looked puzzled.

"I believe that they do so to relieve their canine feelings." Jones smiled apologetically. "My remarks serve the same purpose."

When they were in a taxicab, Glacia made an intent business of putting light to a cigarette. Jones leaned back on the cushions, watching the glitter of Broadway through the windows, feeling warmed by the brilliance.

"An improvement," he stated, "over the Aurora Borealis."

"Over which?" Glacia asked absently.

"The Northern Lights. Aurora Borealis." Jones rolled down the window to get a better view. "This is—er—the first time I have felt a preference for this form of illuminative display."

"Oh," Glacia said. "I wasn't noticing. I'm sorry."

Jones looked at her intently. She was

preoccupied. And that, for Glacia, was unusual.

"Is something wrong?" he inquired.

Glacia put her head back so that the line of her neck and chin was a smooth sweep from quadratus muscle to clavicle, with a small and entirely rhythmic pulsing from an artery. "Everything," she said, "is perfect...."

The sign in front said, *Bar*. In the rear was a door, beyond the door a corridor half way down which was another door and a flight of steps leading up to an enormously fat man who sat at a desk. A sign said, *Theater Tickets*, and there were four telephones on the desk. The fat man got up and nodded at Glacia and looked speculatively at Jones as they passed through another door into a long room with a low ceiling, full of refrigerated air, and tables were scattered about. Well-dressed people sat at some of the tables, having good food and excellent service.

Jones said: "I do not believe I could eat another meal immediately."

"The food is free," Glacia explained. "And very good, too."

Jones frowned. "But I thought you were going to show me where I could find the speculative business called craps."

"This way," Glacia said. "I was just telling you that the house gives food to its patrons."

THEY crossed that room and went through a door hung with velvet. The walls were dark, the ceiling low, the lights subdued. A number of tables of assorted variety stood about, surrounded by a fashionable, fast crowd.

"The dice table," Glacia volunteered, "is over this way."

Jones was pleased. "Am I to understand that the—er—performance of craps is only a partial activity of this establishment?"

"That's right."

"What are these other tables?"

"Roulette, faro, poker—"

"Are they all a means of making money quickly?"

"They're all gambling." Glacia looked at

Jones. On impulse, she said, "You know that you can lose money here as well as win it."

She knew that she wanted Jones to say that he hadn't dreamed of such a possibility, then she wanted him to get frightened at the idea of losing money, and hurry away to some place where he would be safe from Lyman Lee and Tray Marco and the rest.

"Yes," said Jones. "I know I can lose."

Glacia stared at him. "Then why are you going through with it?"

"I have to make fifty thousand dollars."

There was a quality in his voice that made Glacia look at him and think that it was as though something had cracked open and let her see grim determination to make fifty thousand dollars at any cost.

"I have to acquire the sum to replace funds which were swindled from me," Jones added, with a trace of desperation. "I have learned enough to know that I am not competent to earn such a considerable sum in the time which I have. Ah—I had thirty days after the yacht docked."

Glacia bit her lips. "But you may lose!"

Jones looked determined. "I have made up my mind," he said, "what I am going to do."

"But—"

A sleepy voice at their side said, "Good evening. Is there something I can do to help you?"

Glacia shrank inwardly from Tray Marco's leaden manner.

"We—we're looking for the crap table," she said.

"This way."

In a moment Jones found himself before a table ten feet long, five feet wide, edged by sideboards eight inches high. The whole interior was lined with green felt. A black leather cup stood on the table, and two amber dice with white spots.

Behind the table stood a squarish man with dark curly hair, beetling black brows, and a carefully waxed moustache. He wore full evening attire, had a scarlet ribbon across his shirt bosom. He manipulated a small rake, dragging in the dice and plac-

ing them in the black leather cup. The rake was black, with a blade a foot long, an inch and a half high, and three-fourths of an inch thick.

Glacia looked at the rake wielder a second time before she recognized Forgetful Osborn.

"I think," Jones remarked, "that I shall watch, in order that I may see how to do this."

Glacia moistened her lips. Tray Marco was watching her. Forgetful Osborn watched the dice. They rolled, stopped with four spots showing. A man muttered, "Little Joe! Hit me again, boy!" The man was Harold Hover. His hands shook so that he dropped a few chips on the floor. Forgetful Osborn reached out with the rake for the dice, and Hover rolled again. The dice came Little Joe. The house paid.

Forgetful sent the rake after the dice again. This time, he squeezed the rake handle at the right instant, and a cleverly concealed trap in the rake blade opened and two different dice dropped out, and simultaneously another little contrivance whisked the original two dice out of sight in the rake-blade. It happened with lightning speed, and only a faint click. No one noticed. The only way they could have noticed was by the slightly altered position of the dice against the rake blade, which was almost impossible with the rake moving. The rake was retailed at ninety dollars by houses which dealt in such equipment.

Hover threw three consecutive sevens. The house paid.

Glacia touched the table edge.

"This," Jones declared, "seems to be what I have been looking for."

Tray Marco asked, "You want to try it?"

Jones examined Tray Marco. "I came here to do so," he explained seriously. "However, I should first like to ask some questions."

"Go ahead," Tray Marco said.

"Er—they may be of delicate nature."

"Go ahead."

Jones took a deep breath. "Is this honest?" he asked.

GLACIA caught her breath involuntarily—she knew Tray Marco's temper. But Tray didn't move a muscle. "It's honest," he said and smiled thinly. "But I run the place and you don't have to take my word. Suppose you circulate around and ask some of these people."

"Why," Jones said uncomfortably, "that will hardly be necessary. Your word will be enough."

Tray Marco nodded. "Want to try a small bet?"

"Er—may I?"

"Of course."

Jones' looked enthusiastic. "Then I should like very much to indulge."

He produced his roll of forty-nine thousand-dollar bills. He peeled off one.

"I shall wager this," he said, "to begin with."

Tray Marco smiled at the cigarette in his left hand. "The banker," he explained, "is over this way."

"Banker?"

"You buy chips," Tray Marco explained, "and bet the chips."

Jones considered this. He frowned. "I thought," he said, "that money was wagered."

Tray Marco was patient. "Sure. You bet chips. They're money."

Jones picked up a red chip and examined it, then scrutinized a blue and a yellow chip. His conclusions called for a quotation.

"Chip," he announced, "derives from the German *kippen*, meaning to clip. It also means a crack or fissure, to break into a bud, or designates a Cuban Palm, a wrestling trick or a trivial object."

Tray Marco frowned. "Huh?" he said.

"My point," explained Jones, "is that I do not need chips. I need money. Therefore, I wish to play for money."

Tray Marco got rid of his frown and looked patient. "That's all right."

"I may wager money?"

"Yeah. We'll humor you."

Humoring him meant, it soon appeared, taking him for the tune of two hundred and fifty dollars in four smooth passes. Jones' eyes were brightly interested, and he

seemed neither surprised nor upset that he lost. Tray Marco, watching Jones as closely and as impassively as Jones was watching dice and rake and croupier, could not tell whether Jones was spotting the tricky antics of that dishonest, oh-so-clever little rake. Jones' face was impassive. And so was Tray's.

After the fourth pass, he turned to Tray with a pleasant smile.

"You—pardon me—is there a washroom anywhere about?"

Tray told him.

As he crossed the gambling room, Jones stared intently at a blank-faced, beefy man in tight-fitting dinner jacket who stood in the doorway, obviously a bouncer or guard of some sort. Although Jones was not familiar with the term, he found it simple enough to place the man.

On his way through the door, he stopped for a few seconds' earnest conversation with the blank-faced husky. A bill changed hands—quite a small one—and Jones had secured the other's cooperation. Jones, it appeared, was expecting a young lady with blue eyes and very black hair. She would be gowned in green lace and wearing a corsage of yellow roses. Her cape would be mink, trimmed, with a red velvet tie at the throat.

The bouncer nodded woodenly.

"It's important that I know the moment she arrives," Jones said. "So if you would just report to me—I shall be at that table over there—every three or four minutes. Be very careful that the young lady with me doesn't hear what you tell me." He smiled in a creditable imitation of the Casanova-about-town manner, and continued on his way to the washroom, where he stood watching a fat man who was washing his hands. When the fat man had gone, Jones unscrewed one of the light bulbs, standing on a toilet seat to reach the bulb.

He took a dime out of his pocket, also his handkerchief. He folded and rolled the handkerchief until he had a tight cylinder of cloth nearly three inches long and not more than half an inch in diameter. He

balanced the dime on one end of this, and inserted it in the light socket.

When the dime short-circuited the socket, there was a devil-spit burst of blue sparks and whizzing and popping.

The lights went out. It got very black.

Jones walked out of the men's room, hurrying, and crossed, with skill born of a life spent where the nights were six months long, to the crap table. He felt around. He got hold of the rake. Then he got hold of Forgetful Osborn's arm. He put his lips close to Forgetful Osborn's ear.

"I wish," Jones said, "to converse privately with you."

Forgetful Osborn recognized the voice. "Gleeps!" he said.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE LAMB'S GOLD FLEECE

FUNNY PEGGER was never a patient man. He came rushing out of the apartment kitchen now with a bottle.

Vix frowned at the bottle. "That's swell," she said. "Get drunk!"

"What else do you expect me to do?"

"Nothing. It's exactly what I expected."

Funny Pegger planted the bottle on the table. "Watch me take an oath!" He raised one hand dramatically. "I do hereby pledge me to have nothing more to do with Jones, so help me." He picked the bottle up. "Where's the corkscrew?"

Vix said, "So you're walking out on him?"

"Out on *him*? He walked out on *us*!"

"Maybe," Vix said gloomily, "we shouldn't have tried to give him that Mickey Finn."

"I don't know what we shouldn't have done." Funny Pegger put the bottle down again, and said, "It's time for my regular five-minute visit to that doorman." He left.

He was back in a moment shouting and shoving two flustered-looking colored men ahead of him. One of the darkies was the doorman. The other was a smaller, rounder piece of ebony with a taxi driver's cap.

"They were standing out front talking."

Funny Pegger yelled. "*Talking!* And us in here with our wheels about to fly out!"

"Boze only jes get back," said the doorman.

Boze looked injured. "Ah don' do nothin'," he insisted.

"Where'd you take him?" Funny Pegger roared.

"Ah don't know."

"You don't know?"

"Ah don't know what you' all talkin' 'bout."

Funny Pegger explained that he was talking about a tall, well-built young man who was a magnet for trouble and who had, it was rumored, hired Boze's taxicab for himself and a glittering female companion. The explanation was emphasized with arm wavings.

"Oh, dem folks," Boze said. "Dey went—"

"Can you take us there?" the gag man interrupted.

"Sho', Mike," Boze said.

FUNNY PEGGER sat on the taxicab cushions, and every two minutes, regularly, he poked Boze in the back and asked him why he thought he was driving a hearse. The rest of the time he sat with his fingers fastened on his knees and his mind stabbing itself with thoughts.

The taxicab shaved a parked car, two-wheeled a corner, scared a cop pale, and kept going.

"This ain't a funeral!" Funny Pegger yelled. "Get a—move on."

He grabbed his knees again. Maybe Jones would be all right. Jones had a lot of that scarce commodity, horse sense.

The more he thought about it, the nearer Funny Pegger came to concluding that Jones' Genius, Inc., was the best piece of clear thinking he had seen since Roosevelt made the banks insure the depositors' money. The taxi came in to the curb like a badly disturbed rabbit. Boze looked around.

"Dey go to a rest'rant fust," he said. "Den heah."

Vix got out. "Whew!" She stared at

the cab. "What a ride! I feel accordion-pleated."

"You may be yet," Funny Pegger muttered, peering at the establishment they were about to enter. "Know what this is?"

Vix examined the place. "It's made of brick."

"And Tray Marco," the gag man muttered, "is made of trouble. This is one of Tray Marco's joints."

Vix pondered. "I seem to have heard of a Tray Marco."

"Your education," said Funny Pegger, "wouldn't be complete if you hadn't." He squared his shoulders. "Well, here goes."

They went past the bar through the door and up the stairs to the sign that said, *Theater Tickets*, and Funny Pegger said, "Hello, Atom," to the enormously fat man behind the sign, then, after that they went on.

Inside the door, a slick man with dark skin and large teeth looked them over, then looked away, and Pegger breathed, "Joe Kirx, who got stuck in the vice racket trials." Of a man who might have been a banker, Funny Pegger said, "Collector for policy."

"Nice people," Vix suggested.

"Uh-huh."

"You know them so well, I'm getting suspicious."

They had paused near the door.

Suddenly Funny Pegger stopped. His jaw dropped. He grabbed Vix's arm.

"There he is!"

Vix stared at a knot of people, all well-dressed, who were doing everything but climb over each other to get close to something that was happening. A moment later, she saw Jones' head appear above the other heads, remain for a moment, then sink from sight.

"They've already taken him!" Funny Pegger croaked. "A mob like that would only gather to watch a killing!"

"Come on!" Vix raced forward.

"But what can we do?" the gag man wailed.

Vix didn't answer. She sank an elbow in a fat man's ribs, twisted and pushed.

Funny Pegger struggled in her wake. They reached the craps table.

"Jones!" Vix gasped.

Jones, who was holding the black leather dice box aloft, looked at her. His face lighted.

"Eight," he announced, "is one more than seven. In Iceland, the word eight is called *atta*, in Gaelic it is *ochd*, in Danish *otte*, in Gothic *ahtau*. Rowing crews have eight members. Er—these amber cubes have five combinations totaling eight."

He rattled the dice in the box. "Eightur from Decatur!" he announced seriously. He threw the dice.

They came eight.

Vix clutched Jones' arm. "How much have you lost?" she asked wildly.

Jones gravely accepted the leather cup after Forgetful Osborn had raked the dice back into them.

"It is my wish," Jones said with dignity, "to permit accumulations to remain astride whatever it is they remain astride of."

A voice gulped, "He's letting it ride!"

The dice sailed against the bump wall, staggered back, end over end and stopped six and ace.

"Oh, criminy—he's doing *that* again!" an onlooker groaned.

Jones picked up a stack of greenbacks and gravely counted them. He looked at Vix.

"I have won," he announced, "one hundred seventy-two thousand and ninety-eight dollars, six wrist watches, eleven rings reputed to contain diamonds, other jewelry, and a deed to an item called a Rolls Royce."

"Don't forget," a man croaked, "my sixty-foot yacht!"

BOZE, the blackamoor taxicab driver, was waiting at the curb downstairs, and he did not seem surprised when Funny Pegger and Vix come flying out on the street dragging a reluctant but elated Jones. With wild haste, Boze opened the door, helped hurl Jones into the cab, slammed the door, jumped behind the

wheel, and took the cab away from there with the speed and noise which will probably characterize interplanetary rockets.

"From de way you-all look," he said, "Ah done figger somethin' happen."

Vix leaned back, took two or three deep breaths and patted her chest with her left hand.

"Ah done figger it's jes' beginnin' to happen," she said.

"Ah-men," muttered Funny Pegger. "And ah-me!"

"I earned," Jones said proudly, "much more than fifty thousand."

Jones devoted some of his attention to remaining upright on the swaying taxicab cushions and the rest of it to stowing currency, jewelry, deeds and I.O.U. slips more securely in his pockets.

Vix looked at Funny Pegger. "They let us walk out of there with Jones."

"You're not as surprised as I am," Pegger said. "We ran, not walked, however."

Having completed stavedoring his winnings, Jones gazed amiably at his two companions. "My financial condition has improved."

"That's all that has improved, I'm afraid," Funny Pegger muttered.

"I only needed fifty thousand dollars," Jones pointed out. "But I made—"

"One hundred and seventy-two thousand and ninety eight dollars, six watches, eleven rings, and the Rolls Royce item," said the gag man. "We remember."

Jones was elated. He had to hand himself a bouquet.

"Er—I did rather well, don't you think?" he inquired.

Funny Pegger wiped his forehead. "Ask me again in a few days, after I see what Tray Marco is gonna do about this."

Vix echoed this sentiment with a grim kind of nod.

Jones felt deflated. Having just completed a major coup, he had reasonable expectations of being approved—if not dancing in the streets in celebration, at least some dignified elation. Instead of assuring him he had done well, they were acting as though he had stepped on the baby's kit-

ten. Maybe it was after-effects of the sleeping powder. He held to the seat as the cab skidded around a corner.

"You—ah—seem in excellent health," he remarked.

Vix grimaced. "Just give us time."

"I refer," Jones explained, "to your recovery from the sleeping potion which you—er—consumed unwittingly."

"Unwittingly is right." Vix eyed Jones. "We wish to confess that we had ideas of feeding you a Mickey Finn to keep you out of that crap game. We admit we were in error. And we state that henceforth we believe in miracles. Lastly, we wish to know how *we* got the Mickey Finn instead of you?"

Jones smiled.

"I am endeavoring to become a student of human nature," he said.

"Eh?"

"I noticed a strange note in your behavior. Er—I formerly noticed a kindred note in the deportment of my pet seal after it had consumed a fish to which it had no right. I—well—I eavesdropped, saw where you hid the sleeping potion, and the rest was—ah—rather simple."

"I like the seal part," Vix said.

"The *simple* is descriptive, too," agreed Funny Pegger.

Jones beamed on them.

An unavoidable encounter with a cop who had a loud whistle and an extensive vocabulary chastened the progress of the taxicab, and also equipped Boze with a slip of paper informing him he would be expected in court the following day to consult a judge about speeding, reckless driving, running past traffic lights, and the oversight of not having his meter registering. They arrived at Vix's apartment house in a spell of silence.

"Ah sho' is havin' bad luck," Boze complained.

"You're around where it's contagious," Funny Pegger informed him.

Jones examined Boze with concern. "Do you," he asked Boze, "own this vehicle?"

"Nope. After what done happen," ah jus' same as don' own no job, neither."

Jones explored pockets until he located a thousand-dollar bill.

"Here," he said. "Buy a taxicab for yourself, and pay the money back out of your profits."

Boze made sounds.

"The money is loaned to you by Genius, Inc.," Jones advised, "for the purpose of setting up a small business for yourself. There is no interest or security required."

"De Lawd," Boze said, "mus' love black men."

JONES was not unaware that Vix and Funny Pegger were regarding him as if he was something weird, as they entered the red-headed young woman's apartment. Vix flung off her hat, turned on an electric fan, fell into a chair, lighted a cigarette and began to smoke it industriously. She did not say anything. Funny Pegger did not say anything either. But both he and Vix looked at Jones. They seemed expectant. They were waiting for something. Jones didn't know what.

Jones began to feel uncomfortable. He ambled around the apartment, then emptied his pockets of wads of bills, and jewelry, making a stack on the table. He hoped that would break the conversational ice. It didn't. Vix and Funny Pegger just stared at him.

Jones feigned indifference, ambled over to the electric fan and contemplated it. In a moment, he did what every person does at one time or another in his life. He put a finger in the fan blades just to see what was happening in there.

"Ouch!" he said.

Funny Pegger got up out of his chair, came over and took Jones by the arm. He led Jones politely to a chair, carefully forced him to be seated in the chair, then patted Jones' arm.

"Please," he said pleadingly. "Please, all we ask of you is to be patient with us. We are trying to understand you. We really and truly are."

Jones was puzzled. "I do not comprehend. Both of you seem to be acting queerly."

9 A—I

"It's reaction," Funny Pegger said. "After-effects."

"I—"

"It's the lobwollies," Vix said. "We've got them."

"It is amazement," said Funny Pegger. "Simple and pure wonder. We feel like Darius."

"Er—the Darius named Green, with the flying machine?" Jones queried.

"No," said Funny Pegger, "The one who saw Daniel come out of the lions' den."

"Oh."

"Would you like to keep us from going entirely mad?"

"Why, I—"

"Then tell us how you *won*."

Jones frowned. "It was—ah—simple. I merely placed my money on the table, shook the little box and let the small cubes roll out."

"Oh!"

Jones smiled self-consciously. "I—er—also talked to the little cubes. Such things as, 'Baby needs new shoes!' and 'Come a natural!' Various persons were kind enough to coach me as to the accepted remarks."

Funny Pegger looked at Vix. They both shook their heads.

"Jones," said Funny Pegger, "there must be an explanation. There's got to be." He frowned. "What happened before you started playing?"

Jones considered. "Well, I asked if the establishment was conducted on an honest basis."

"You—ahem!"

"They said it was," Jones explained.

Funny Pegger swallowed and waited.

"Hire," Jones remarked, "is a word derived from the Greek *heuer*, which is similar to the Latin *hircus*, meaning the he-goat, or buck."

Funny Pegger wiped his forehead with the backs of both hands.

"So," said Jones, "I hired the gentleman who operated the craps table to work for me."

"You *what*?"

"It seemed quite a logical thing to do,"

Jones explained seriously. "They assured me the place was honest. Therefore I saw no harm in employing the operator of the table. I—ah—asked him what he considered a fair night's income for himself. He replied, naming a sum called 'five grand.' I was surprised to learn this designated five thousand dollars, so I inquired if he thought my chances of winning were good enough to warrant such an outlay. He replied in the affirmative. In fact, he said: 'Brother leave it to me!' So I hired him." Jones gazed about.

"Ah—my employee is to call here sometime tomorrow evening for his salary," he finished.

Funny Pegger shook his head.

"Wait!" He held tightly to his chair. "Wait, wait! I think my head will stop swimming in a minute."

"When it does," Vix said, "paddle over and rescue me."

Then Vix got up slowly, came over and peered at Jones. "Where was Tray Marco when you were doing this *hiring*?"

"I—he didn't notice."

"Why not?"

"Ah—I had extinguished the lights for the interim."

"You—"

"Yes," Jones said. "To tell the truth, I did not like the looks of this Tray Marco, who was the proprietor."

Vix seemed to have difficulty with her breathing.

"You hired the house man to throw the game to you!" she croaked.

"I—what?"

"You mean you didn't know what you'd done?"

Jones swallowed uncomfortably.

"Craps," he explained, "means a gallows from which people are hung, as well as the dice game in which the odds are 251 to 244 against the caster of the dice."

Jones grinned, almost boyishly. That was the only thing he could have done that would have prevented Vix from heaving the electric fan at his head.

"There was more to it than that," she said darkly. "A lot more."

"Well, yes," Genius admitted. "There was. You see it seemed to me that the croupier bore a strange resemblance to the gentleman who got me to back that spurious orphanage. In fact, I am equally positive it was the same man. And I am equally positive that he knew I knew who he was. . . ."

"It certainly," Vix said, "was dandy for you to get it all straightened out so nicely."

"I think also that the little man was afraid I might—ah—retaliate," Genius went on. "I decided to play upon his fears. In addition to *hiring* him to be on my side, I made dark hints. A sinister-looking individual made regular trips to the table to whisper in my ear. I told the croupier that this fellow was watching him and that if he did not live up to his bargain, there would be—well, violence."

Funny gasped. "I wish I understood about logarithms. Or relativity. Or something. On account of I certainly do not understand what you are talking about. Who was the sinister-looking gentleman and what made him come up and whisper menacingly in your ear at three-minute periods?"

"I made him. I hired him to do so, in fact. He was, I believe, one of Mr. Marco's employees."

Vix made a strangling noise. "You hired one of Marco's men to come up and frighten Marco's croupier? I mean, that is what you said, isn't it?"

"Well," Jones said. "He didn't know he was scaring the croupier. He merely came up to tell me that the black-haired girl in the green dress hadn't arrived yet."

"I," Funny announced firmly, "give up."

Vix's reaction was more feminine. "What girl?" she demanded.

"Oh there wasn't any girl. I invented one as an excuse to make the bouncer come up and whisper to me every three or four minutes. It was really very simple. I pointed out to the croupier that since money had already won over one of Marco's men, he might just as well join the parade—rather than become seriously damaged. The bouncer really was quite a

ferocious-looking gentleman. He was very convincing. So what with this croupier fellow's being apprehensive about me in the first place, and scared of the bouncer in the second, he apparently figured that he might just well come and work for me. Elementary, really."

Vix extinguished her cigarette-end with tender care. "Anything that happens from now on will be an anticlimax," she said. "With arsenic."

The telephone rang and Vix went to the instrument. She held it out toward Jones. "For you."

"Me?" Jones was surprised. "Who is it?"

"Fate, I'm afraid," Vix said.

Jones put the receiver to his ear and said a polite, "Good evening," into the mouthpiece.

He would have had no trouble recognizing the voice, although the voice lost no time in explaining who it belonged to.

"Tray Marco. Cough up, Jones. The whole take. Otherwise, flowers and slow music," the voice said.

"But—"

The owner of the ugly tones at the other end hung up. Jones put the telephone down and frowned.

"What event," he inquired, "is associated with flowers and slow music?"

"Weddings," Vix said. "But not if you were talking to Tray Marco."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WILD MEN

THEY did not go to bed as early as Jones had hoped. Funny Pegger's pre-bedtime talk was nothing to induce sleep, either. The gag man remembered a number of things, one of them being that Tray Marco might not be the best man from whom to win a hundred and seventy-two thousand and some odd dollars.

Jones was glad when the sun came up, even if it was raining again.

During the ride to the little suite of offices they had rented for Genius, Incorporated, Funny Pegger spent most of his

time on his knees on the seat cushions, peering through the rear window of their taxicab. When they got out, he was a little pale.

"Whew!" he muttered.

"Has something happened?" Jones asked curiously.

"It's getting ready to happen." Funny Pegger pointed to a large dark car which cruised past. Two rather grim-faced young men occupied the rear seat, and they made no pretense of not looking Jones over intently. "You see that?" the gag man demanded.

"Why—"

"Tray Marco's boys. They followed us from the apartment."

"They looked somewhat young," Jones decided.

"Uh-huh. That's because they don't live to get very old in their racket."

"I do not quite understand."

"They're gunmen."

Jones pondered this, and immediately had an uncomfortable sensation. "Goodness!" he muttered.

"They're waiting around to see when you pay Tray Marco back the money you earned—as you quaintly put it—in his gambling house."

Jones did not need to be reminded of that. He had surmised as much.

Funny Pegger added, "No telling when they'll get tired of waiting. They aren't famous for patience."

Jones was glad to get upstairs and plunge into the business of giving away money with his new firm of Genius, Incorporated. Fortunately, there was plenty to take his mind off other things. First, they had to wedge their way to the door, aided by Polyphemus Ward's borrowed private detectives, who were there in force to conduct the investigations of applicants to Genius, Inc. By the time he had squirmed through the mob of applicants, Jones had a hearty respect for the power of advertising, the notice he had inserted in the newspapers having been approximately the size of his thumb. He also began to feel that giving away a hundred thousand might

finally be accomplished. He would have glowed over that, under other circumstances.

The first applicant for a thousand dollars without interest or security was an Italian who wanted a fruit stand. The next was a lady who wished to lease a rooming house, and the third was another Italian who wanted a fruit stand. Fourth came an aviator who needed a thousand to finish financing a flight across the Atlantic, a project about which Jones was enthusiastic until he discovered there was already a regular trans-Atlantic passenger air service via Bermuda. Then there was an Italian for a fruit stand, a baker who wished to go into business, a tailor, a truck farmer, and another Italian, but this one wanted to make spaghetti.

ABOUT eleven o'clock, Tray Marco telephoned. "Cough. Last chance. A hundred and seventy-two grand. Or it's curtains."

"Your statements," Jones said, "are cryptic and not quite clear."

"You savvy, don't you?"

"Er—I presume you think you can coerce me into returning the funds which I earned in your establishment last evening."

"Coerce?"

"I—to constrain by threat or force."

Tray Marco said: "My boys'll go to town if you don't kitty up." He banged down the receiver at his end of the wire.

Funny Pegger peered at Jones anxiously. "Tray Marco again, eh?"

"Well—yes."

Funny swallowed.

"How'd he sound?"

"Rather violent," Jones confessed. "He said something about going to town."

Funny Pegger groaned and sank into a chair. He grasped the back of his neck, as was his habit when he was trying to get something out of his fertile mind. "This is bad," he moaned.

"I," said Jones, "am not going to fret. I have one hundred—ah—two hundred and eleven thousand dollars, that is, to give away."

"Great grief! You're gonna give all your earnings?"

Jones nodded. "Exactly."

"But why?"

"In order, as you would put it, to do the job up in a wellbaked complexion." Jones smiled. "There is a million at stake, you know," he added, not unreasonably. "The million is to be my reward if I win, along with a job of disposing of the Ward millions to philanthropies."

"Somebody's got to look out for you!"

Funny Pegger said desperately.

He wandered outside to sit in another chair and hold the back of his neck.

During the afternoon, Jones found himself losing trace of Funny Pegger. The Tray Marco possibilities were also pushed into the background temporarily. Genius, Incorporated, was doing a rushing business, and by four o'clock, the private detectives had okayed nearly a score of applicants, and Jones had reduced the firm capital by as many one-thousand dollar loans. He was pleased. Three or four boom days like this, and he would have fulfilled his bargain with old Polyphemus Ward.

At five o'clock, Jones optimistically told the other customers to come back tomorrow, and put on his hat. He found Funny Pegger outside, and noted that the gag man was in earnest consultation with several of the customers of Genius, Incorporated. When Funny Pegger saw Jones, he said, "It's all up to you, boys," and came over to Jones. The gag man seemed resigned to the future.

They got into a taxicab. Remembering what had happened that morning, Jones turned to look through the rear window. His apprehensions sprang up.

"We are being followed!" he gasped.

"How many cars?" Funny Pegger demanded.

"Oh, four or five at least."

"It ought to be quite a war," the gag man said grimly.

In a chastened mood, Jones reached Vix's apartment. He was inclined to examine the dusky doorman with an eye to the latter's potential abilities at gangster-

repelling. And for the first time, the door of Vix's apartment seemed a fragile piece of equipment.

Vix made them fried chicken and waffles.

JONES was examining a wishbone somewhat wistfully when there was a knock on the door. Jones had a peculiar sensation up and down the back of his neck, and the feeling must have been telephatic, because Vix and Funny Pegger put down their implements.

"Er—who could that be?"

Funny Pegger took a deep breath. "The police," he said.

Jones winced and his stomach lost its desire for food as he conjured up an unpleasant assortment of perhappes . . . Perhaps the police had stopped seeking a largish young man with red hair and a remarkable red beard. Perhaps they were now looking for a largish young man who had dyed his red hair black. The biggest perhaps was the perhaps that they had traced him here. The knuckles tattooed the door again.

"That," Vix said, "couldn't be a cop."

Jones looked at her hopefully. "No?"

"It lacks," Vix explained, "the copy quality."

Jones hunted around in his memory, trying to find someone else who might be visiting him. He sprang up—he had remembered something. He hurried toward the door with long strides.

"Glacia!" he exclaimed. "I lost Glacia somewhere last night!"

"If this is her, let her in," she ordered. "I'll go hunt the hatchet."

It wasn't Glacia. It was Forgetful Osborn, who still wore his disguise—curly dark wig, fake waxed mustache and full dress, although it was early in the evening for the latter. He looked as though the hounds were after him. Forgetful flew inside, slammed the door, locked it, then propped himself against the panel.

"I'm damned"—pant—"glad I"—pant—"found you!"

"Won't you sit down?" Jones suggested politely.

"I want—my—five grand," Forgetful puffed.

Jones looked solicitous. "Er—won't you have a cup of coffee? You seem to need one."

"I'll have five grand! Quick!" Forgetful peered around the apartment. "Got a telephone? Maybe there's a plane leaving tonight."

"The telephone is that doll," Vix said, pointing at a corner.

Forgetful Osborn rushed to the corner, grabbed the doll, extricated the phone, and tried to hold it with one hand while he rifled through the directory with the other.

Jones walked to the agitated con man.

"I am," Jones stated, "crediting you with the five thousand, or grands, as you call them."

Forgetful Osborn looked up blankly. "Crediting?"

"Exactly. It follows, therefore, that you owe me only forty-five thousand dollars, or as I understand it, forty-five grands."

Forgetful went pale. His words stumbled. "What—what—"

"Of course, technically, there would be some interest due," Jones continued, "but we will charge that up to—ah—experience."

Forgetful Osborn peered at the door, then at Jones, and evidently concluded Jones was too much obstacle in the way of flight. He crabbed sidewise to a chair and sank into it.

"I told 'em so," he mumbled.

"Told them what?" Jones asked curiously.

"That you was something to look out for." Forgetful squinted at Jones. "You spotted me, huh? I knew it! I thought so last night."

Jones nodded. "Naturally. You have a false mustache and a wig, but you are still the absent-minded person who sold me a bogus orphan home for fifty thousand dollars."

There was a pause.

"We started to discuss forty-five thousand dollars you still owe me," Jones said firmly.

Forgetful Osborn swallowed large pieces of nothing. "I—I haven't got it."

"No?"

"Lyman Lee took it. He and Paul Shevinsky, Harold Hover and Tray Marco, hired me to pull the job on you. They gave me five hundred." The con man looked disgusted. "I never took on more trouble for five hundred."

Jones frowned. "Lyman Lee has my money, you say?"

Forgetful Osborn stared at Jones. "You'd better skip town."

"Eh?"

"Tray Marco!"

Jones swallowed uncomfortably. "What do you mean?"

"Tray Marco," said Forgetful Osborn, "has blowed his top."

"He—what?"

"Came unconnected. He's a wild boy. He thinks Lyman Lee and Paul Shevinsky and Harold Hover and me and you and Glacia and this girl here and this newspaper guy—he thinks *everybody* doublecrossed him."

"Er—did what?"

"He thinks this whole thing was a rig to take him for the hundred and seventy grand."

"Goodness!" Jones said.

"Tray Marco," said Forgetful, "has his boys together."

He moved uneasily.

"His boys?"

"His gorillas. They're looking for everybody. I went out the back door of my rooming house when they came in the front."

Jones frowned. "You mean that they contemplate violence?"

"The darned fools want to kill everybody."

THEN there was another knock on the door, which did not exactly soothe any of them. Forgetful Osborn flew out of his chair and turned white on his way through the handiest door, which happened to lead into a closet where he would be satisfactorily enclosed for the time. Funny Pegger sauntered to a window with a fire escape.

Vix said, "Don't go to the door!" and Jones went to the door.

"Ah—who is it?" he called nervously.

"Lyman Lee."

On the theory that the devil never introduced himself by his true name if he was bent on any mischief, Jones opened the door.

Simultaneously, Vix said, "Count me out of this for reasons of my own!" and vanished into the kitchen.

Lyman Lee came in, looking worried, followed by two other worried people. The first was Paul Shevinsky; the second was Harold Hover.

"Er—how do you do," Jones said.

Lyman Lee spoke in low tones. "Jones," he said, "I do not want you to misunderstand this visit."

"I shall try not to," Jones announced.

"I thought it over seriously before I came," Lyman Lee explained. "I did not want to offend you. I did not want to aggravate the position."

"What position?" Jones asked, recalling that there were several.

"My position," replied Lyman Lee gravely, "wherein I find that you no longer consider me your friend."

"Oh."

"I am your friend, you know."

"Are you?" Jones looked thoughtful.

"Yes, indeed. Very much your friend. But I am sorry to say that you have been poisoned against me." Lyman Lee looked accusingly at Funny Pegger. "Poisoned," he added, "by certain persons who have an unreasonable dislike for me."

"Is that so?" Jones remarked. Funny opened his mouth, then closed it.

Lyman Lee nodded. He took out a white silk handkerchief almost large enough to be a sheet and dabbed at his forehead. Obviously, he was a young man trying to sell a bill of goods under difficulties. "Would you consider putting aside everything that has happened?" he asked.

"Gladly!" Jones said enthusiastically. "I would put Tray Marco aside with the most willingness of all."

Lyman Lee winced. "I hoped you would

let me give you some advice," Lyman Lee said earnestly.

"Advice," Jones agreed, "is certainly what I need."

"Jones," Lee said, "you've got to give Tray Marco back his money."

"Yes?"

Lyman Lee looked relieved. "That's the smart thing," he said. "I figured you would know what was good for all of us."

"The 'yes', said Jones, "was purely a conversational stimulant."

"It was—what?"

"It didn't mean anything," Jones explained. "I have not the slightest intention of giving Tray Marco any money. On the contrary, I expect to collect fifty thousand dollars from you."

Lyman Lee straightened the front of his coat and looked stunned. "Are you crazy?"

"Chestnut," Jones remarked, "is a name variously designating a nut, an elderly joke, or a callous on the leg of an ass."

Lyman Lee began to get sunset coloration.

"You are trying," Jones continued, "to pull your chestnuts out of the fire." He took a step forward. "You swindled me out of fifty thousand dollars. I now have a witness to prove this fact. The only reason I do not have you arrested at once is because I am giving you a chance to return the money. The fifty thousand will do humanity more good than seeing you behind bars, where, I will add, you belong."

"Tray Marco," said Lyman Lee wildly, "is going to shoot somebody if he don't get his money back."

Jones grabbed Lyman Lee and gave that gentleman's well-tailored behind a kick.

"If you wish," Jones shouted at Funny Pegger, "you can help me throw them out!"

Jones opened the door with one hand while he held Lyman Lee with the other.

Tray Marco said, "Thanks. I was wondering how we would get into the nest."

MARCO did not have a gun. Jones looked, first thing. Marco walked into the apartment with stiff-legged wariness, then took a quick step to one side to

get out of the way of his boys who were behind him and came in after him. They had the guns.

Forgetful Osborn sidled toward a window. Tray Marco said, "You lose something over there?" Forgetful stopped.

Jones said, "This intrusion is unwelcome—" and shut up when he found the black gullet of an automatic pistol looking at him.

Tray Marco said: "Case the lay."

Two men searched the apartment and hauled Vix out of the kitchen, after which one of them gave the *coup de grace* to that part of proceedings by announcing, "The joint cases clean."

"Any do-ray?" asked Tray Marco.

"Not a red."

"Frisk the gulls."

Jones judged from the adeptness displayed that the friskers had previous experience.

"No rods or shives," one stated.

"Any flash?"

"Just cackle."

"No folding jack, eh?"

"Nix."

With firmness, Jones put away an impulse to ask for a translation. The impulse, he realized, was out of place. "Er—what can we do for you gentlemen?" he asked nervously.

Tray Marco said: "We'll do for ourselves."

A tightness came into Jones' throat as he got his first close look at Tray Marco's eyes. They reminded him of chips off a glacier.

"Relax," Tray Marco advised. "We got some more company coming."

He glanced at Lyman Lee.

Jones was surprised. "Company—?"

Tray Marco showed his teeth unpleasantly. "I'm putting on a little get-together. I thought everybody would like to know that I expect somebody to hand me two hundred thousand dollars."

"Two hundred?" Jones frowned. "But I won—er—earned one hundred and seventy-two thousand and ninety-eight dollars. Ah—how do you account for the difference?"

Tray Marco said: "Costs of collection."

Someone rapped on the door, and Tray Marco took out a gun, held it behind his back, opened the door, presented the gun quickly and said, "Don't run away, chick. Come on in."

Glacia entered. Glacia, with fingertips pressing tightly to her cheeks and her eyes staring, and both her face and her hands slowly losing color. "But I received—a telegram—from Jones," Glacia said, with halts.

Tray Marco looked interested. "You did?"

"Yes. It—asked me to—come here."

"Did it say Jones loved you and nothing you had done mattered?"

"I—yes."

"Then it was the one I sent," Tray Marco said.

"But why—"

"You're part of my collection," Tray Marco said. "Sit down."

Glacia sat down and her lovely face proceeded to lose all of its color. Jones now expected Tray Marco to proceed with whatever he had in mind, but he was disappointed. Marco perched on the edge of a table, put a fresh cigarette between the fingers of his left hand, and waited patiently.

When the delay got on Jones' nerves, he tried to temper it with a quotation.

"Wait," he said tentatively, "means an ambush, a snare, a horn of the oboe type, a piece of music sung by serenaders, as well as to rest in expectation."

"I can't stand much of that," Tray Marco said grimly.

"Er—what are we waiting on?" Jones persisted.

"The other guest."

"Who—"

Tray Marco said: "Shut up!"

For lack of anything else to do, Jones began to notice that Lyman Lee was staring at Vix most strangely.

A CURL of smoke rose lazily from Tray Marco's cigarette. One of his men began to eat peanuts, extracting the salted

goobers from a paper sack and popping them into his mouth, crunching them with his teeth, licking and popping his lips, occasionally sucking in.

Twenty minutes later a fist practically caved in a panel of the door.

Those in the room exchanged looks, understanding looks. Instinct told every one of them who had crashed knuckles against that door. Such hard-fisted violence meant—old Polyphemus Ward.

Vix said, "Oh!" in a loud strange tone.

Jones stared at Vix. He had never seen her expression so queer.

Tray Marco went to the door, opened it, and stood so that old Polyphemus Ward could see only Tray Marco.

"Who are you?" roared Polyphemus Ward. "Where is Jones? What do you want?"

Tray Marco said: "I wanted to let you inspect a piece of my personal property."

"Personal property? What personal property?"

Tray Marco said: "This." He let one of the world's richest men look into the destructive end of his large blue automatic pistol.

Polyphemus Ward had seen gun snouts before. He cocked his head to one side and peered to see if the safety catch was off.

Tray Marco said: "I'm Tray Marco. If you haven't heard of me, you should have. Sit down!"

Polyphemus Ward yelled, "Say what kind of locoed—"

"Sit down!" Tray Marco interrupted.

The financier began to get a lobster color. "Who do you think you're talking to?" he bellowed. "I've heard of you, all right! And you've heard of me. I've roped and hogtied plenty of your kind. You tin-horn, if you think you can run a whizzer on me, you're riding the wrong range." He took a step forward. "I'm gonna take that hardware off you and make you eat it!" he roared.

He took another step. Tray Marco took a step backward. Most of his teeth were showing.

Jones began to have a rather low opinion

of the self-control of his possible future employer. Old Polyphemus Ward wasn't bluffing Tray Marco.... Tray Marco was going to kill him if something didn't happen.

Something did happen, and something quite astounding. It occurred when Polyphemus Ward, angling sidewise to get closer to Tray Marco and death, chanced to turn enough to see Vix. The auburn-haired young woman's gaze met Polyphemus Ward's.

The two of them stared at each other with hypnotic intentness. Their lips parted, parted at almost identical instant; their lips moved a little; neither of them made any sound.

Old Polyphemus Ward took in a deep breath, shut his eyes and fell on his face on the floor. Vix ran to the financier, dropped at his side, and her throat ached with apprehension.

Tray Marco sprang back.

"Watch it!" he flung. "Something screwy here!"

Jones felt confused. Events had turned into rabbits that were coming too fast out of the magician's silk hat. There was obviously a connection between Polyphemus Ward and Vix. Jones realized he had suspected this before. On an occasion or two, Vix had reacted strangely when Polyphemus Ward was mentioned. Vix had also known Glacia, and Glacia was distinctly not of the circle to which Vix belonged at the present time. Vix had known a great deal about Polyphemus Ward, so much so that Jones had been led to suspect some kind of an association, a nice one, of course. The discrepancy was that Vix claimed to be a radio singer. Jones perceived that Tray Marco was staring at Vix with intense interest. The man began to grin thinly.

"Get the dame!" he commanded. "That one."

His men looked blank. Tray Marco said: "Kayo her. Take her out to the cars. If anybody says anything, tell 'em she got tight and passed out."

One of Tray Marco's boys said, "You—we—you—"

Tray Marco said: "We're gonna snatch her."

"Snatch?"

"Sure. Get going."

"But the Feds! The G-men—"

"It's worth the chance," Tray Marco said grimly. "It's a chance at the biggest snatch in the world. It's worth a million, if it's worth a dime."

"A million?"

"She's the old buzzard's girl."

"His sweetie?"

Tray Marco said: "Not his sweetie, you fool. She's old Polyphemus Ward's missing daughter."

CHAPTER XXIX

EVERYTHING HAPPENS AT ONCE

JONES felt rather proud of himself, because he had reached an identical conclusion a few moments earlier. It was all perfectly logical. Polyphemus Ward's daughter had left home because she was afraid she'd get to be like her male parent. But it was natural that the girl would want to keep tab on her father and see how he was taking her absence. It was logical for her to use Funny Pegger, the moneybags' public relations counsel, to do the checking up. That explained how Vix happened to know Funny Pegger in the first place. Jones saw that it was all clear enough.

Tray Marco ordered: "Get her out of here!"

Three men grabbed Vix. She struggled, struck at them. One of them struck back and hit her mouth. A red string of blood came off her lip and wriggled over her chin.

Something hot and wild blew up inside Jones, and he jumped, swung a fist at Tray Marco and connected. Tray Marco very nearly turned end for end. After he hit the floor, he kicked, his hands twitched, and his gun let out noise, lead and cordite smell.

The door opened. A man came in. A dark, short, wide man, whom Jones thought looked familiar. The man ran and grabbed one of the boys struggling with Vix. Jones then recognized the dark, short, wide man as one of the beneficiaries of a thousand-

dollar loan. More men came in the door. Some of them had clubs, others had bottles. In from the window fire-escape came another man. He was an Oriental gentleman who wished to start a laundry. Jones became confused. More guns were going off. The Chinamen shouted in Mandarin. The others shouted in English.

Harold Hover, who had been stumbling around wildly, holding his hands above his head, ran suddenly and jumped out of the window. Another man instantly jumped out after him. And a third man climbed half out of the window but came back in when he saw three floors down to a hard concrete courtyard.

Jones upended the table at Paul Shevin-sky, made a chest-hit, and the rush of air blew a set of false teeth out of the shyster lawyer's mouth. The man rolled on the floor and coughed. Jones headed for Lyman Lee; he had a large juicy bone to pick with Lyman Lee. But Funny Pegger got there first with a chair, and turned Lyman Lee's profile into a difficult job for a plastic surgeon.

"I hated him before you did," the gag man explained to Jones.

The fighting was down on the floor for a while, before it slowly subsided. A final fist smack or two, one splintering report of a chair, and comparative quiet came inside the apartment.

However, an uproar arose outside as excited tenants dashed around inquiring what had happened, and spreading rumor that the G-men had cornered another public enemy and were fighting it out.

Jones grinned widely at the wreckage, at Funny Pegger, at Tray Marco, at everyone. The fireworks were decidedly over. But he was wondering who had lighted the fuse.

The Italian of the fruit stand, the Chinaman of the laundry, the baker, two Irishmen who had received funds for trucks, and assorted other clients of Genius, Inc., stood around and grinned back at Jones. They seemed pleased with themselves.

"I am surprised to see you gentlemen," Jones remarked when he had recovered his breath.

"Sure, and we figured yez wouldn't be mindin'," said one Irishman.

"Oh, no," Jones said. "Not at all."

"Hope velly much you all lightee," volunteered the Celestial.

Personally, Jones was feeling fine, but he glanced around to see about the others. With two exceptions, everyone was present, and after more or less patching up, would be able to get into a taxicab or a police wagon. The exceptions were Harold Hover and the other man who had jumped out of the window.

Several, however, were not moving.

"I cannot understand how you gentlemen"—Jones surveyed his benefactors—"how you gentlemen came to arrive so conveniently."

Boze, the taxi driver, said, "Boss, yo' sure ain't think us is gwine let nobody make an angel out'n you, does you?"

"But how did you know about the angel proclivities of the—ah—boys?"

"Oh, dat was what de vice president done tell us all about."

"De—I mean, the vice president of what?"

Funny Pegger said: "He means me."

"You?"

"Sure." The gag man grinned. "I'm the vice president of Genius, Inc."

"Why," Jones said, "I didn't know that."

"Well, I intended to get around to telling you. This other thing was sort of on my mind. I knew you couldn't call in police protection. The cops want to arrest you. So I thought of tipping these people off. They're your friends. I told them the whole story. They volunteered to see nothing happened to you."

JONES was touched. He had tried for several days to throw bread on the waters, had finally cast part of it without it bouncing back, and now some of it had already returned. The occasion seemed to call for a quotation.

"The word grin," he announced, "means, variously, a noose for hanging persons, a trap, or an instrument of torture, as well as to draw back the lips from the teeth to

show merriment or good humor. Er—the latter is my present impulse.”

An additional client of Genius, Incorporated, came in through the door. He was a fat man who stuttered and who had been financed for a lunchroom, and he seemed perturbed.

He said: “The gug-guy who fell outa the window kik-kik-kik-kik—”

“It has been my experience,” offered Funny Pegger, “that a drink of water helps.”

“—kik-killed the German captain,” finished the future proprietor of a lunchroom.

Jones took a step forward. “What?”

The fat man said, “He was huh-hired by Luh-Lyman Lee. His name is Hover. He used germs to do the job. He thinks he’s duh-dyin’, but he ain’t.”

“What,” Jones inquired, “is wrong with him?”

“He luh-lit sitting down.”

There was some doubt in Jones’ mind about the court value of a confession from a man who had descended freely for three stories and landed seated. The question revolved around the number of witnesses present at the confessing.

“How many persons overheard this statement?” he asked anxiously.

“A dozen, anyway.”

Jones relaxed. A dozen witnesses should convince a jury by sheer majority.

“Goodness!” he said wildly.

Funny Pegger peered at him. “Now what’s wrong?”

“I do believe,” Jones said, “that I haven’t a trouble left, comparatively speaking.”

At this point old Polyphemus Ward grumbled, turned over on his back and sat up, then peered around at the battlefield.

“Who hit me from behind?” he roared.

* * *

On a typical early September day in New York City—it was drizzling rain steadily—Jones tipped back in a swivel chair, glanced at the clock on his desk, and

noted that it was now thirty days to the hour since he had stepped ashore from the Polyphemus Ward yacht. The occasion called for a pronouncement.

“Months,” he declared, “are of several types, namely: The calendar month, the lunar month, and the synodic, anomalistic, nodical, draconitic, tropical, sidereal, solar and consecution months, not including the colloquial month of Sundays.”

The Jones desk was an impressive affair of mahogany, ornamented with six telephones, and an article resembling a midget radio for communicating with Vice President Funny Pegger in the office next door. There was a dictaphone and a conference chair and the walls were mahogany, paneled with white, the windows offered an excellent view of Radio City, if anyone cared to look.

On the desk, anchored with a paper-weight so that it would not blow away if there had been a draft, lay a greenish-colored slip of paper. This was a check, duly signed by Polyphemus Ward.

For the tenth or twelfth time, Jones scrutinized the figures on the check. As on the previous ten or twelve occasions, he looked rather pleased. “One million dollars,” he said aloud, just to hear how the sum reacted on the ear.

One of his new secretaries appeared in the door.

“A lady,” she announced, “to see Mr. Jones.”

“Er—which lady?”

“Glacia Montignat de Grandrieu.”

It struck Jones as appropriately synonymous for Glacia to appear so hot on the heels of mention of a million dollars.

“Show her in,” he ordered.

He watched the door expectantly, and he was not disappointed. A moment after Glacia appeared, there was a bump-bump inside his chest. He relaxed. If by chance he had not bumped, he would have been worried, convinced that his reflexes were off. If you were normal, you at once bumped when you saw Glacia at her best.

And today Glacia was definitely her best. She gave him her most electric smile.

"Darling," she murmured, "you've been neglecting me."

"Ah—have I?"

"Of course," Glacia admitted, "you have been terribly busy, what with the trial of Lyman Lee, Tray Marco, Paul Shevinsky and Hover for murdering that poor German liner-captain. Do you think they will be electrocuted?"

Jones frowned. "I am afraid so. A foreign gentleman by the name of Adolph Hitler keeps cabling that there will be another war if they aren't."

Glacia sighed.

"You naughty boy!" she exclaimed.

"Er—"

"You haven't called me once! You might have. Just one tiny time."

"I telephoned you half an hour ago," Jones reminded.

"Your secretaries," continued Glacia dramatically, "always said you were out. I was heartbroken."

"I—you were?"

"I was distraught."

"Distraught?"

"Actually ill!"

"Goodness!" Jones said.

He took a moment to put his more impressionable emotions back in the box, then arose. Of late, he had become an addict of the motion pictures, and as a result, in taking Glacia in his arms, his technique showed great improvement over the last occasion nearly a month previous.

"Pardon me."

INVARIABLY, when he had kissed Glacia before, there had been explosions. Not just a bang. Explosions! Something distinctly worth remembering, usually starting at his toes, and getting more cataclysmic as it climbed. This time, it started off all right—but got about to his ankles and fizzled.

"That," said Jones cheerfully, "is all I wanted to know."

"Darling, I don't understand!" Glacia was astounded.

"Er—it didn't happen."

"What didn't happen?"

"The explosion."

"Explosion?"

"For the first time," Jones explained, "there wasn't any."

"But, darling—"

"I am rather pleased." Jones' smile widened. "The event proves conclusively that it would be a mistake for our engagement to continue."

"Mistake—"

"I do not," said Jones, "wish to be engaged to anyone who does not cause me to explode."

Glacia's glamour slipped a trifle. "I do not understand!"

"It's off. Starting now, it is off. Our engagement."

Glacia took a step forward, put a forefinger against Jones' large chest and tapped.

"Listen, my pet!" she said. "You're engaged to me! If you think you're not, you're crazy. I'll sue you for every penny you ever hoped to have. I'll—"

"Would you mind leaving?" Jones asked.

"Listen, you iceberg hitch-hiker—"

"Either get out," Jones said gravely, "or I shall take you by the nape of the neck and the equivalent of the seat of the pants, and throw you out!"

Glacia glared. However, when Jones took a purposeful forward step, she wheeled and fled through the door.

Hardly had Glacia made her departure when Vix appeared in the same doorway and gazed quizzically at Jones. He gazed back, thinking she was rather remarkable this morning. Vix was rather remarkable any morning for that matter. She lacked several things that Glacia had, but he heartily approved of the shortcomings. To-day Vix wore a trim rust outfit and a saucy little hat which sat on her wealth of auburn hair and went very well with her pert little face.

"There," Vix remarked, "went a woman who looked as if she'd been fighting for her honor."

"I—honor had very little to do with it," Jones stated uncomfortably.

He swallowed several times, and realized

they were in the middle of a silence, the overly still kind of a silence that frequently precedes a stroke of lightning.

"I—ah," Jones said. "That is—well—"

Vix tilted her bright little face to one side. "Word trouble, eh?"

"No, no, not at all," Jones said. "It—er—ah—well—that is—I guess so."

"That's too bad."

"I—yes."

"It's really something."

"Well—"

"Well?"

"I—well?"

"We're certainly making progress."

"I—oh, my!" Jones said miserably.

Vix had been waiting patiently and rather expectantly, but it began to appear that this might go on and on far into the day, and she showed traces of exasperation. She threw the victim a rope.

"Love does 'it,'" she declared. "Also a bump on the head."

"I—is that so?" Jones mumbled.

The silence returned and if anything, it was more silent. Even the clock on the desk seemed to bog down with its ticking. Jones heard his own loud breathing.

"With that opening," Vix said disgustedly, "you fall down!"

Jones gulped. "Ah—" he said. "Well—" "Darling," Vix said desperately, "what are you waiting for?"

"Great Scott!" Jones burst out. "What am I?"

There was a kind of paralyzed moment or two when it seemed there was not going to be any explosion on this occasion, either, but that was misleading. The blast was just winding up, crouching, digging in its spikes, and getting set.

Old Polyphemus Ward was a man who liked to come through doors yelling at people, and when he stamped onto the scene, he bellowed, "What is keeping you? My lawyers are here to draw up those papers about your job. D'you think they've got all day?"

He stopped and took a second look. "What is this?" he yelled.

Jones came up for air, but it was necessary to get his breath. "Explosions," he said.

"What?"

"Explosions," Jones said, "that assuredly are explosions."

THE END

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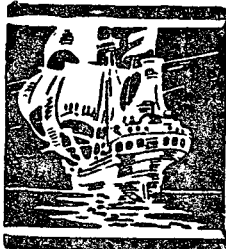
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The Readers' Viewpoint



WE HAVE made it a habit of late to let you know, on the first of each month, a little of what lies ahead for you in ARGOSY. This week, because we have so many fine stories scheduled for future issues, and because we're starting a new year as well as a new month, we're going to peer even a little further into the future.

First of all, of course, there's the new Burroughs serial, *Carson of Venus*, starting next week. We believe that this story, a continuation of the thrilling adventures of Carson Napier on Venus, is one of the finest things Mr. Burroughs has written in a long time. But we aren't resting on that alone. The following week Garnett Radcliffe, the author of *Doomed Liner*, comes back to us with a long novel, *London Skies Are Falling Down*—an absorbing story of revolt in London and a strange ray that pierced the fog from above, seeking its victims.

Ere you've gotten well into these two tales, we're coming right back at you with a new novel of the old West by Luke Short. It's the kind of Western we've been looking for, not the hard-riding, shoot-'em-down sort, but one filled with real people and genuine color. You won't want to lay it down. (No title as yet.)

After that, who should appear but our old friend Borden Chase, in a gripping story of New York cops on the trouble-wagon, at present entitled: *Hell's Kitchen Has a Pantry*. As exciting as *Blue-White and Perfect*, as real and moving as *Sandhog*, this yarn has already been snapped up by Universal Pictures before we've even had time to publish it.

You've been asking for a historical

serial. Remembering the high standard set by *The Golden Knight*, we've been hunting for one. We've found it. Late in February *A Ship of the Line*, by C. S. Forester, will appear. If you've already read this author's *Beat to Quarters*, published last year by Little, Brown and Company, then you already know that sturdy British sea-dog, Captain Hornblower—but whether you have or not, you're going to find this rousing yarn of battles and loves at sea in the days of Napoleon a rare treat indeed.

We'd like to go on now about some of the novelets and shorts lined up ahead; but we haven't the space. We haven't the space because the Poetry Department demands it. Usually, we keep the bards locked up in a gloomy loft on the floor above, but—overcome with seasonal sentiment—we let them out last week and, since then, they've scribbling doggerel on bits of waste paper. Pick-a-back, a moment ago, they came rhyming up, the lyric wretches, and this is what they handed us. They call it, in their forthright way, *Ode to the Authors of Dear Old Arg: Circa '38*. And here, so help us, it is:

Ho for the New Year!— the weather's
fierce.

And it's time for benisons to Frank R.
Pierce.

And here's to Four Corners' favorite
son, Roscoe,

We wish him Legions of luck with a dash
of tabasco.

And to fans with dewlaps and fans with
juleps,

And give you a favorite—Judson Philips.
The old year is sown and we'll plow new
furrows