

# Master of Sinister House

By  
E. Phillips  
Oppenheim

*The Story Thus Far:* MARTIN HEWS, a cripple born without legs, is an unscrupulous collector of art treasures. He lives in a mansion at Breezeley with his niece, Beatrice Essiter.

Jim Donkin, a London gangster, who wars against Hews' greatest enemy, Joseph, another gangster, steals Joseph's girl, Rachel. He flees to Breezeley. Hews promises to keep Rachel.

Major Owston, hired by Hews, undertakes to hunt Joseph. He and Beatrice Essiter attend Lady Bonofar's reception. Afterward they go, with Mr. Leopold, Lady Bonofar's brother, to the Blue Skies night club.

On their arrival Owston enters the office to sign the register. Everything turns black, and he awakes in a police cell accused of drunkenness. In court Leopold testifies that Owston was drunk.

As soon as possible Owston hurries to Claridge's, finds Beatrice has not returned, and seeing Leopold in the lobby tells him of this. Leopold seems surprised but not in the least worried.

Later Owston goes down to Breezeley with two letters: a cipher stolen from Leopold, and one from Joseph, stating that he has taken Beatrice and finds her far superior to Rachel.

Martin Hews, with cruel cunning, shows the letter to Rachel and releases her, for Donkin has died.

Owston returns to London with Rachel and sees her enter a taxi-cab. He then pays a short and seemingly casual visit to Leopold.

Returning to his flat he sits down with a Bible when a welcome visitor, Inspector Bloor of Scotland Yard, is announced.

## IX

**F**ORTUNATELY my evening meal was equal to the demands made upon it by an unexpected though diffident guest. I followed the latter's lead, and refrained from embarking upon serious topics until we were alone with our coffee and liqueurs.

"I got your note, Major," he said. "Couldn't come before. Things have been a bit parky with us today. So you found a spot of trouble last night?"

I nodded gloomily.

"They were too clever for me," I admitted.

"Let's have the whole story, please."

I told him everything. He listened with his eyes fixed upon his coffee cup.

"Damned clever," he conceded. "And suggestive too. All goes to prove your theory that Joseph's turned West Ender. They don't want you poking about in these parts evidently, and they took the cleverest means of stopping it. You're banned from the Blue Skies now as an ordinary visitor, and all the affiliated night clubs where we fancy that Joseph sometimes meets his friends. I suppose the cards of invitation will stop too. I see the point. What I don't quite get is why he's taken this big risk for Miss Essiter. Had he ever seen her?"

"Not to my knowledge," I answered. "I rather imagine it's a counterstroke to Martin Hews. You see, Donkin and Joseph were all the time fighting for little Rachel, the Jewess. Donkin was Martin Hews' man, and when he got into trouble Martin Hews helped him to escape, and shut up the girl at Breezeley."

Bloor was looking a little grave.

"I don't like the sound of that," he admitted. "Tell me about the young lady, Major. You knew her fairly well, I suppose?"

"I have only known her since I have known Martin Hews," I reminded him. "I should say that she's had a very unhappy life lately, and that she is a little embittered. She's inclined to be supercilious; she is undoubtedly fastidious; she is not in the least nervous, has plenty of courage, and I should think she'd make a brave fight anywhere, anyhow."

Bloor looked at me for a moment kindly.

"Rotten sort of show for you last night, Major."

"I would sooner have lost my right arm," I told him, "than have had it happen. As it is, there isn't a single thing in the world I can think of except getting her back. I don't care a damn about the rest of the business. If I want to get at Joseph still, it is simply to tear the life out of him if he's hurt her, and, by God, I'll do that!" I declared, letting myself go for the first time.

"We'll get her back," Bloor promised cheerfully. "Sometimes, I fancy, Major, that there's a sort of rude chivalry about Joseph. I don't think he'd dare to do anything brutal, even though she is Martin Hews' niece. I don't suppose you've had any news of her during the day?"

"Nothing except this," I replied, handing him Joseph's latest communication. He read it carefully.

"Gosh, what a nerve!" he muttered. "You showed this to her uncle? What was his reply?"

"He passed it on to Rachel, the little Jewish girl, and let her loose."

**B**LOOR was a big man and a man with a big nerve. Nevertheless I saw him shiver, and I knew that he was experiencing that same cold wave of horror which had swept over me when Martin Hews, with his cynical leer, had first expounded his scheme.

"It's damnable!" he muttered. "The girl knows where to go to, all right, but—"

There was a pause. Neither of us cared to utter our thoughts.

"Did he have her followed?" Bloor inquired.



A queer little whistle broke from Bloor's lips. My own exclamation was profane but exultant

likely to now. It was a marvelously planned coup. All that we know is that the men went off in a closed motor car traveling westward."

"A bad business," I observed, with as much sympathy as I could muster for anyone else's trouble.

"It's a very bad business, indeed, for us," Bloor agreed, "because it's the seventh affair of this sort within the last few weeks. There are three men dead and two in the hospital, and sixty thousand pounds' worth of jewels gone. The chief and I and the rest of us are just as certain as anyone could be that it is Joseph's gang at work, but we can't lay a finger upon them. The only important capture we've made at all was, thanks to you, Major, down at Breezeley, and of course, quite properly, the Essex police got the credit for that. I tell you we're getting hell down at the Yard. We'll have to do something or there'll be half a dozen resignations asked for."

**S**MART made a brief reappearance with the whisky and soda. I filled our glasses and produced my own pipe. Then Bloor asked me a question concerning the matter which I knew had been puzzling him.

"Supposing you tell me now what you were doing with the family Bible when I came in?"

"I will with pleasure," I assented, "but, first of all, do you know anything about Mr. Leopold, a brother of Lady Bonofar?"

"The man who took you to the Blue Skies?"

I nodded. "He took us there, and I am convinced that he knew what was going to happen to me when he made an ex-

"I don't think so. He was too clever for that. The girl would have been up to every trick of that sort."

My visitor pulled out his pipe, and filled it with savage fingers.

"If one could only know where she went," he muttered—"east or west. If one knew where to pull down the curtain—"

I had never seen Bloor so depressed. I made some remark about it as I refilled his cup with coffee. He nodded.

"You're in trouble all right, Major," he acknowledged, "but so are we. There's hell to pay at the Yard. We had the Home Secretary down this afternoon. I suppose you don't bother much about the papers these days?"

"Not much," I admitted.

"Golder's in Cheapside was burgled early this morning, the watchman shot, and fifteen thousand pounds' worth of jewels taken clean away. I'm confident the men came out of a bolt hole in Joseph's section. One of my men saw them go, but we're trying to keep things quiet down there, so he didn't interfere. He only obeyed orders. The idea was that they'd come back again if they were out on a job. Well, they didn't come back, and I should think they're not





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There was nothing more to be said. Bloor commenced his task, blandly deaf to Leopold's protestations

cuse for getting me into the secretary's office. It was he too, according to his own story, who put Miss Essiter into a taxicab to go home. I have come to the conclusion, Inspector, that Leopold is one of Joseph's West End associates."

Bloor was listening intently. He made no observation.

"For that reason," I went on, "when I saw him yesterday morning I resisted my first impulse to take him by the throat and choke the life out of him. I decided that to give him the hiding he deserved wouldn't do any good. I pretended instead to accept his story. I had a cocktail with him at Claridge's and I stole a letter out of his overcoat pocket."

"Good for you!" my companion murmured. "What was in the letter?"

I PASSED it across to him. He glanced through it with declining interest, and finally shook his head.

"I'm afraid it is scarcely worth while taking it to our code department," he pronounced.

"Why not?"

"Because it is obviously one of those codes," he pointed out, "which are made up by arrangement between two people, and probably changed with every communication. It could be based upon a copy of the daily newspaper, a magazine, anything, but unless you knew what it was, you might try in vain for the rest of your lifetime to decipher the thing."

"What about a book?" I suggested.

"A book certainly, but, then, what book? You see, that would probably be decided upon *viva voce*."

"What about the Bible?"

"Quite a possibility. Where did you get the idea from, though?"

"Well, I'll tell you. I went to Leopold's room tonight, as I have told you, to have a cocktail and give him the opportunity of persuading me once more not to move hastily in the matter of Miss Essiter but to leave it in his hands. He had a magnificent collection of books in the room, but the only one

which looked as though it had been disturbed for weeks was the Bible, and that was half out of the shelf."

Mr. Bloor rose almost hastily to his feet. He came over and patted me on the back.

"Well, I'll be blowed, Major!" he exclaimed. "Whether this works out or not, it shows you've got more of our instinct in you than I gave you credit for. Come along. Let's get at it!"

We pondered over the code for some minutes, and then made our first essay. Number 2 we took as being the Second Book of the Old Testament; 39 we accepted as the chapter; 21 as the verse. We counted the words until we arrived at 20. A queer little whistle broke from Bloor's lips. My own exclamation was profane but exultant, for the verse was this:

*"And they did bind the breastplate by his rings unto the rings of the ephod with a lace of blue, that it might be above the curious girdle of the ephod, and that the breastplate might not be loosed from the ephod; as the Lord commanded Moses."*

And the twentieth word was blue.

After that we went at it breathlessly. 18 was the Book of Job, and the eighteenth verse of the thirty-seventh chapter was:

*"Hast thou with him spread out the sky, which is strong, and as a molten looking glass?"*

And the eighth word was SKY.

The First Book was Genesis, and the nineteenth verse of the first chapter ran as follows:

*"And the evening and the morning were the fourth day."*

"Blue Sky Wednesday!" Bloor exclaimed. "Major, I hope you haven't any engagement?"

I laughed at him, and we made our plans.

An hour or so later we left our taxicab at the corner of the narrow street in which the Blue Skies Club was situated, and walked down as far as the entrance. Bloor drew me back into the shadows and looked around. Across the

street from us there was a man selling matches, another standing on the curbstone, with a bundle of evening papers under his arm. A taxicab driver was seated upon the front seat of his vehicle, smoking, and reading the latest sporting edition. A chauffeur, in a small two-seated car, was facing him on the other side of the entrance. There was plenty of space between them for anyone to take up or set down a passenger at the club, but their places were so arranged that anyone passing in or out would be within their reach. Bloor beckoned to the newspaper man, who touched his hat and hurried across. We both of us selected newspapers, we both of us needed change, and all the time Bloor talked.

"You understand, Richards," he said, "it isn't the people who are coming into the club you need be interested in; it is the people who come out."

NO REPLY, only a little nod. The young man was laboriously counting out change.

"Anyone who looks to be a messenger from the club, whoever he is, is to be detained," Bloor went on. "You have plenty of men to fall back on. There are six policemen at the next corner and six at the Oxford Street end. 'Apple' is the word. You understand? We want a man who is expected here tonight, and we want to stop any message being sent out to warn him against coming. We will see to the telephone ourselves."

The young man, pocketing his change, touched his cap and ambled off. I watched him in some admiration. He stopped to beg a fag end from the taxi driver and a light from the chauffeur, and during those few moments he passed on to both the message he had received. According to our arrangement, I presented myself alone at the swinging doors of the club, and what we had expected promptly happened. A commissionaire, holding out his hand, blocked my further progress.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said

gruffly, "but are you a member of the club?"

"I am not," I acknowledged, "but I wish to have a word with the secretary."

His hand fell heavily upon my shoulder. He was a Goliath of a fellow, but I affected to hesitate.

"I have a friend outside," I confided.

"Well, out you go to him," was the brusque reply. "You're not wanted in here. Manager's orders."

The swinging doors revolved once more, and Bloor stood by my side.

"What's the trouble?" he inquired.

"This fellow won't let me in."

"Not you nor your friend neither," the man declared truculently. "Out you go, both of you. I don't want your card," he went on, as Bloor produced one. "If you're not out of here in ten seconds—"

Bloor slipped back his coat. The man gazed at his badge, transfixed.

"If you don't wish for my card," the former said, "let me tell you who I am. I am Detective Inspector Bloor of Scotland Yard. This gentleman is with me. Go and tell your secretary that we wish to see him, and don't stop anywhere on the way."

THE man still hesitated, his eyes fixed upon me. Evidently his orders, so far as I was concerned, had been decisive.

"You know that this gentleman was turned out of here for drunkenness last night?" he asked the inspector.

"I know all about it," was the terse reply. "Do as you're told."

The man turned reluctantly away. A few yards from us he paused and seemed about to enter the dancing-room. Bloor moved across to him swiftly.

"Straight to the secretary's room," he ordered. "If you want to keep out of trouble, my man, you won't trifle with the law."

After that there was very little more delay. The door of the office through which I had passed was opened, and a middle-aged man wearing gold spectacles, and looking a little heated, came hurriedly out.

"What's the trouble, Inspector?" he asked.

"None, I hope," Bloor answered. "I wish to make a few investigations here. We should like to go straight to your office."

The secretary turned toward me.

"Delighted to assist you in any way, Inspector," he said, "but this gentleman has been struck off the rolls of the club."

"He was never a member," was my companion's curt reply. "At present he is accompanying me. If you are wise, you will make no further difficulties."

The secretary stood his ground.

"You know that he was fined forty shillings and costs this morning, sir? It's in all the papers. Major Owston of Down Street."

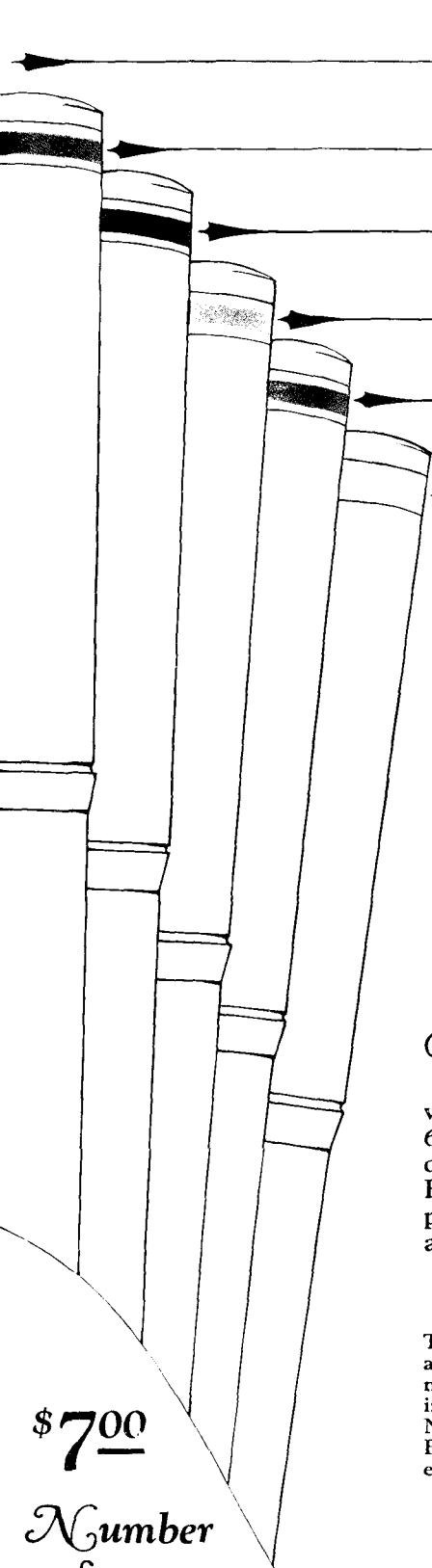
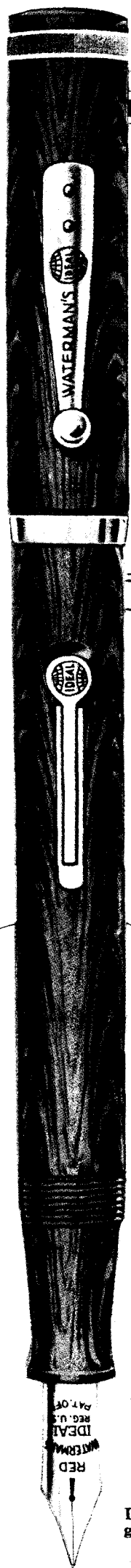
"Quite enough of that. Show us the way to your office."

The secretary led us there, mumbling to himself. I crossed the threshold exactly as I had done on the previous night, and stood inside, looking around. The room was precisely as I remembered it, except for the absence of Mr. X from his place by the desk.

"I don't really see, Inspector, the object of this visit," the secretary said nervously. "We did all that was possible as regards to Major Owston, both for our own sake and his. The moment that we realized he was incapable we sent him off in a taxicab to his rooms."

Bloor did not even take the trouble to listen. He walked slowly around the office, tapping the walls here and there, even lifting the carpet in places. Finally he seated himself at the secretary's table.

"Really, sir!" the latter remonstrated. "I must protest." (Continued on page 56)



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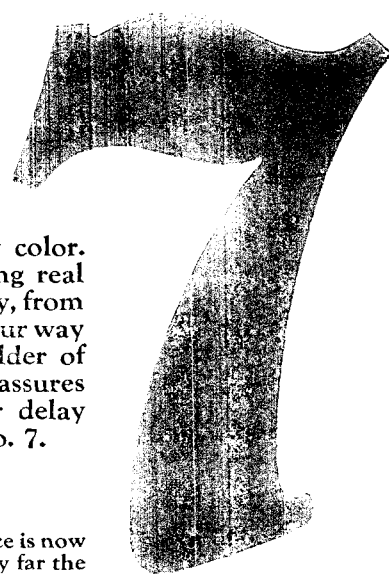


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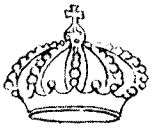
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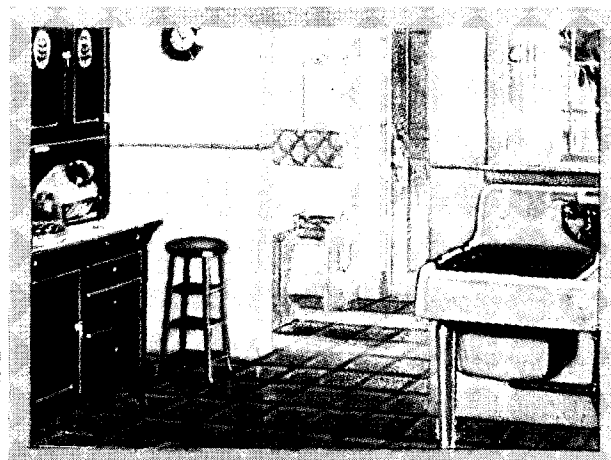
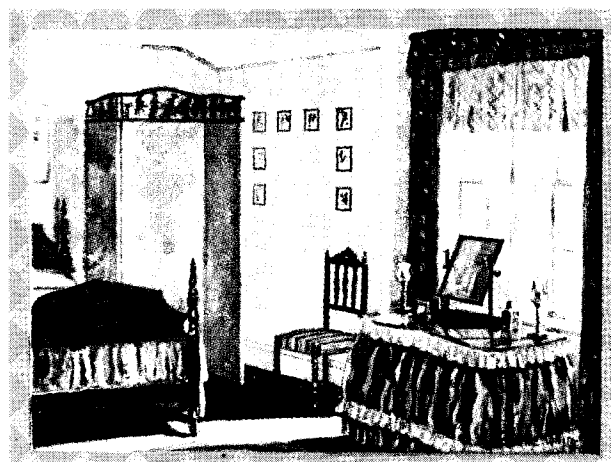
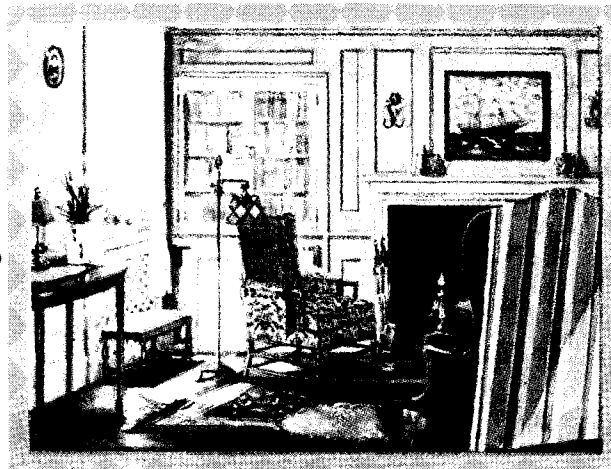
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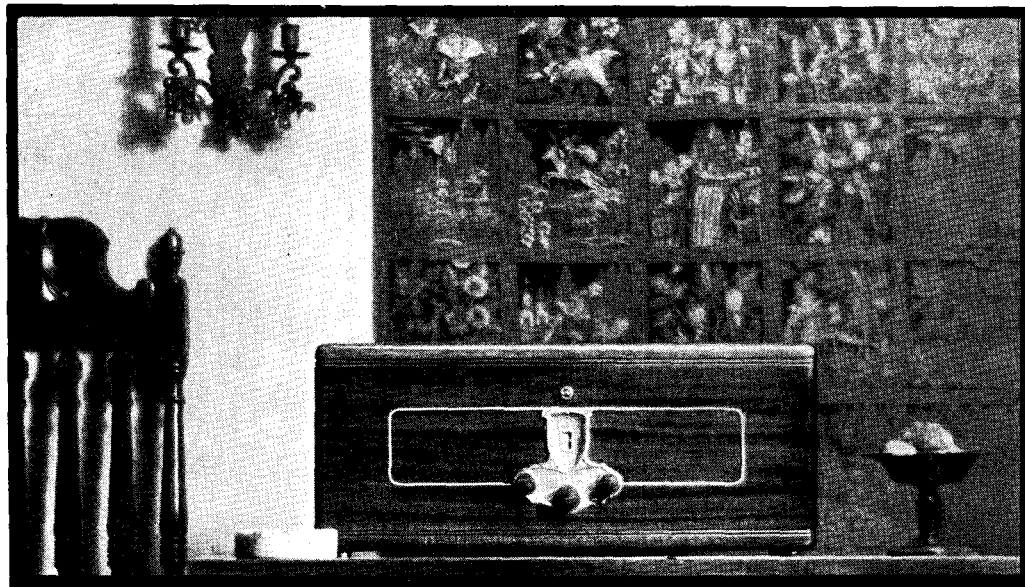
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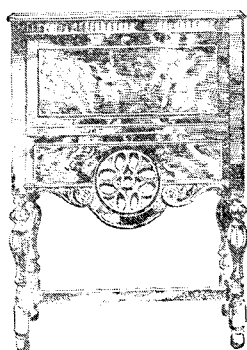
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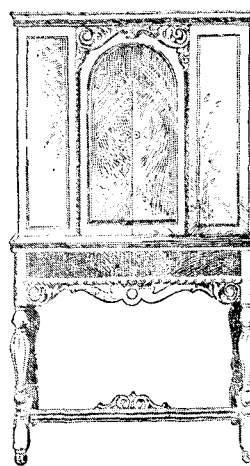
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# The Third Slip

Continued from page 12

was to have him go. He vouchsafed no further information saving when Mallon, coolness quite returned, asked:

"How did you know I'm the referee tonight?"

"What have you locked yourself up for since yesterday?"

He went, leaving Mallon to curse himself for his simplicity. He might have guessed that gamblers' spies would correctly interpret his self-imprisonment.

His wrist-watch told him there wasn't much time to act. But how act? If he notified the commission that he'd been offered a bribe and threatened with death, they'd believe him, sure. The police would be summoned—but Mallon wouldn't referee that night. The commission wouldn't take a chance. They'd appoint another man to make sure Mallon wasn't a trickster—or a corpse.

Weighing as many angles of his problem as occurred to him he could see nothing but loss if he raised an alarm.

AT THE park, where massed banks of humanity roared hoarsely at carbon-copy carnage, Mallon slipped in at the press-gates, donned gray ring clothes and reported to the commissioner in charge. That late he had an impulse to spring the story. But white excitement thrilled him. Joe Humphreys roared his name—Mallon's name—to an inquiring newspaperman who had seen somebody hand the announcer the list of officials.

Mallon was in the ring, arms stretched along the ropes, gaze wandering over a white sward of eager faces. Again his name was called, from somewhere behind. He turned slowly, feeling that all eyes were focused on him. Searching the ringside rows he fixed on a face. Cold gray eyes stared back. He recognized his visitor.

Mallon made no sign. Stonily he stared back. Then he turned, clapped his hands to bring Roche in a green robe from one corner and Stern in a purple garment from the other. Cameras snapped amid a terrific uproar. The men ran back to their corners. Mallon, a thin smile playing about his mouth, tucked his white referee's voting slip and the round-by-round chart in his gray shirt pocket, and the gong rang.

For the first two rounds of fighting Mallon glided about mechanically, following the boxers. He walked automatically between them when they clinched, but was so preoccupied with his own thoughts that he found himself wondering in the middle of the third round how he had scored the other two. As he sailed along the ropes while the men feinted each other in a corner he heard a gruff voice from the press-stand growl distinctly: "Mallon's inexperienced. Look at him."

That straightened Mallon and he plunged into the fight.

The fifth round had to go to Stern. Roche seemed to tire, and the dark-skinned lad rushed him all over the ring. He came back a bit in the sixth and sent Stern on his heels with a shot to the chin. The rounds passed, seven, eight, nine—ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen. No blood on either man; both fighting fiercely and skillfully.

They went into the fourteenth round on even terms. In less than the last minute of that round something happened. The redhead was crouching to avoid a vicious body attack when his right glove popped from nowhere and Stern dropped. His black eyes were leaden. Stern's seconds screamed foul. He groped on all fours. Mallon seemed

to hesitate. Then, scorn on his face, his arm swung in a deliberate count.

A Niagara of screams tortured his ears. He heard Roche panting for the kill. Stern was up and running at nine. A fusillade of catcalls shook Mallon. Then came the bell as Roche nailed Stern on the ropes.

Mallon took out his chart. His pencil moved briskly although shouts of derision showered on him. The boys touched gloves and were at it for the final round. The ball park was an inferno of din. Redhead and blackhead swung about the ring. Their foreheads met for two minutes of vicious, close-in slugging while hats and lungs were torn all about them. The timekeeper smashed his gong-hammer to stop the bout.

In a seething silence the announcer collected slips from the judges, then walked to Mallon. He glanced through the slips and paused, puzzled at one of them. Then his two arms shot out, and the crowd groaned and cursed. A draw! Police draped the ring. They needed to; battering wedges of madmen were the nucleus of a riot.

No guard accompanied Charley Mallon to his hotel room. His ears burned with epithets hurled at him as he had left the park; but, having changed to dark street clothes, he had soon lost himself in waves of home-goers.

At exactly midnight his room phone rang. A harsh voice asked Mallon if he could come uptown.

"See me here," said Mallon.

An hour later knuckles rapped at his door. The lithe intruder of the day before entered. His hands were in his coat pockets, bulging pockets, one with money, one with something else. He pulled out the money and dropped it on Mallon's bed.

"That's yours," he said flatly. "You did a good job. Saved us a pile of jack."

"How?" said Mallon.

"Ain't you heard? Them two judges are hollerin' their heads off."

"How come?"

The intruder's eyes narrowed.

"The draw," he said, curtly, and turned as if to go.

"Wait a second," said Mallon. The visitor wheeled at the creak of a door. He wasn't fast enough. Two other visitors stepped from the bathroom—one, a particularly burly visitor, bearing a gun.

"Don't be uneasy," said Mallon.

"Double-crossed, eh?" the intruder bellowed. Then he shut up. He had to—he was too busy making an exit under forced draft.

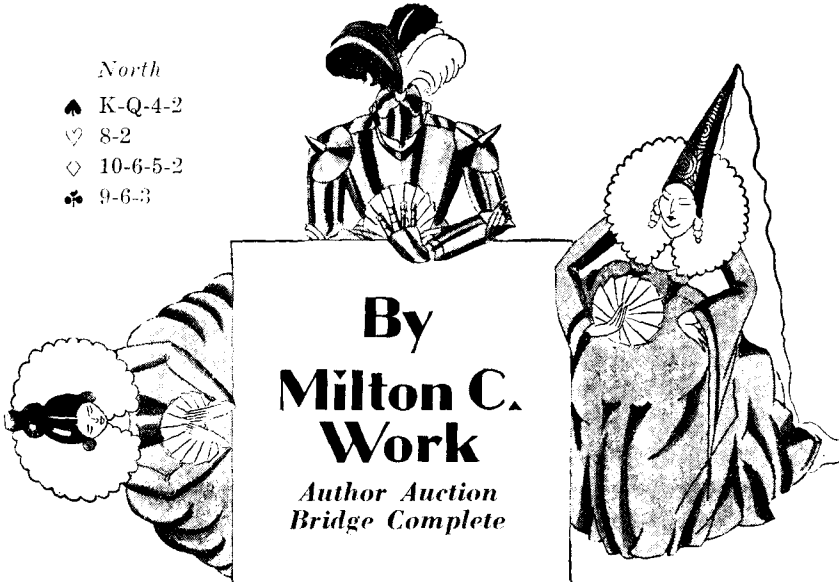
LESS than two hours later an angry crowd of newspapermen stormed Mallon's hotel room. They found him sitting on the bed with the generally relieved air of one awakening from nightmare.

"What's all this jam about?" a wild-eyed spokesman fired at him, as the others chorused questions. "One judge gives it to Stern, one to Roche. You make matters worse by calling it a draw and the commission says Roche won. Then the cops go out and pinch half a dozen gunmen. What's it all about?"

"Just a minute, boys," said Mallon with quiet dignity. "The commission can supply details; but I'll tell you this: I voted for Roche—in the ring. Wait. When I gave Humphreys my slip there was a warning on one side that gunmen were present and to call it a draw and that he'd find my verdict on the other side."

"That was for Roche, as the commission has told you."

# How would You play it?



**By**  
**Milton C. Work**  
*Author Auction Bridge Complete*

**North**

- ♠ K-Q-4-2
- ♥ 8-2
- ♦ 10-6-5-2
- ♣ 9-6-3

**East**

- ♠ A-7
- ♥ K-6-4
- ♦ 9-8-7-4-3
- ♣ K-8-5

**West**

- ♠ J-10-9
- ♥ 7-5
- ♦ A-K-Q-J
- ♣ J-10-7-2

**South**

- ♠ 8-6-5-3
- ♥ A-Q-J-10-9-3
- ♦ None
- ♣ A-Q-4

THE above Auction Bridge hand was given in last week's Collier's; the description follows:

## The Auction

South opened the bidding with three Hearts and West, North and East passed.

This is another of the hands with which there might be some difference in expert opinion as to whether a bid of one or a preempting bid is more advisable. But if South should start with one Heart he might have to raise his bid to four.

## The Play

West's opening lead was the King of Diamonds, which South ruffed with the Nine, not the Trey, of Hearts. He appreciated that he might need that small Heart later on.

South could see that he would make five or six Heart tricks, depending upon whether he could catch the adverse King; one or two Club tricks, depending upon the location of the adverse Ace of Spades. To go game, he must find two of the three high adverse cards (Ace of Spades, King of Hearts, King of Clubs) in the location in which he desired such cards to be.

To avail himself of the possible fortunate location of these adverse cards Declarer must lead Spades from the Closed Hand and Clubs and Hearts from the Dummy. The lead being in the Closed Hand at trick 2, he selected a Spade and was careful to lead the Five and retain the Trey. West played the Nine of Spades, and Dummy the Queen. East's Ace won the Queen of Spades. To make his game Declarer now must find both of the adverse Kings in the East hand. Trick 3 consisted of a Diamond from East which South ruffed, using the Ten of Hearts and retaining the Trey as before.

Trick 4, South led the Six of Spades; North won with the King. North now led the Eight of Hearts, and South obtained the benefit of his clever high ruffing by having the Trey left to play under it. When the finesse won, North continued with another Heart which South won with the Jack; and, to trick 7, led the Ace of Hearts, dropping the adverse King.

Up to here the breaks of the hand had

been equal. The Ace of Spades had been wrong, but the King of Hearts had been right. The Declarer, at trick 8, proceeded to establish his Spades; still keeping the Trey he led the Eight, which was captured by West's Jack. A third Diamond lead by West took South's last trump, and he now reaped the benefit of his foresight in retaining the Trey of Spades by being able to put Dummy in with the Four.

On the last two rounds of Spades, East discarded two Diamonds (she naturally considering it more important to keep Clubs than Diamonds) so, when leading to trick 11, North, who was left with two Clubs and one Diamond, could count that only one adverse Diamond (the Ace) remained unplayed and that almost certainly was in the West Hand.

The Declarer had planned his Spade play so as to put North in the lead at this point to try the finesse of South's Ace-Queen of Clubs; but with the Spades and Hearts all played, and with only one Diamond left, a much better opportunity offered itself. By putting West in the lead with a Diamond, he secured a lead up to his Ace-Queen of Clubs. He could not make more than two Club tricks, no matter where the adverse King happened to be located; but if he led a Club himself, he would make only one Club trick if West had the King. He therefore cinched the game by leading the Diamond from Dummy and forcing West, at trick 12, to lead up to South's Major Club tenace. It so happened that the King of Clubs was in the East hand and that the finesse would have worked, but that does not detract from the credit due Declarer for his play.

Next week's hand is given below; make up your mind how you would bid and play it before you read next week's description.

North	East
S. A-Q-9-5	S. J
H. Q-6	H. A-K-2
D. 8-7	D. K-9-4-2
C. A-Q-10-8-4	C. 9-7-6-5-2
South	West
S. K-10-8-1	S. 7-6-3-2
H. J-9-7	H. 10-8-5-4-3
D. A-Q-J-5-3	D. 10-6
C. J	C. K-3