



"I ain't going to argue about this," Arky said. "This kid deserves a chance. Slums don't matter. When he grows up, he can figure out what he wants"



The Story: When an underworld organization goes to pieces, it's pretty difficult for the big men to get out from under. Now the forces of law and order are closing in on ORVAL ("ARKY") WANTY. Arky has been a key figure in an organization dominated by JUDGE GREET. Now the judge is dead, killed by a member of a rival gang. Arky's mistress, ANNA HUNCHUK, is also dead, shot by a gunman who was trying to get Arky. GORDON KING, the organization's paymaster, is seriously ill; and Police Captain CARL DYSEN, boss of the corrupt 17th Ward, has suffered a nervous breakdown and is now under arrest. Police Commissioner THOMAS STARK, with the help of a shrewd newspaper reporter named BEN REISMAN, has finally obtained damning evidence of the Greet ring's operations, and now he has caught up with Arky, who has just been arrested in connection with the murder of HARRY RADABAUGH, the front man of the out-of-town gang that took over the local rackets after Judge Greet's death. Arky did kill Radabaugh, but in such a clever way that he knows they can't pin the murder on him. He doesn't even expect to be questioned much, and has made plans to escape from the city for good, leaving his bookie joint in the hands of his partner, ZAND, and Zand's girl, LOLA, and taking with him only his new girl, ROBBIE, and his chauffeur, JOE BATZ.

Now Arky is to be questioned by Commissioner Stark. He orders Joe to drive the car to Gordon King's house, where Robbie and he and little Orv, the baby left in his care by Anna's young niece, have been staying, and wait for him there.

CONCLUSION

COMMISSIONER STARK was sitting at the desk in his old office in the dingy, antiquated city hall. It was very hot downtown, and though the windows were open, the heavy air was polluted by smoke from one of the commissioner's cheap stogies.

There was a sharp knock at the door, and big Balch, the commissioner's secretary, put his head in. "Excuse me, sir. Very important. A former D.A. investigator was murdered at the Regent bar a little while ago. Can Lieutenant Morgan see you about it?"

The commissioner nodded, and in a moment Lieutenant Morgan came in. He was a big red-faced, heavy-set man in his late thirties. His face was square; his eyes were dark and far from soft. He got his education the hard way. He did everything the hard way, but he did it thoroughly, and the commissioner had had his eyes on the Welshman for some time now, considering him loyal and trustworthy, though perhaps not exactly brilliant.

"Sit down, Lieutenant," said the commissioner. "What about this murder at the Regent?"

"A rat by the name of Harry Radabaugh was killed right in the middle of the evening rush."

Speaking carefully, the lieutenant gave the commissioner a quick run-down on Radabaugh, explaining that there had been rumors for some time that the ex-D.A.'s man was fronting for the Big City corporation which was trying to take over the gambling. In fact, word of it had got to the D.A., and the D.A. had braced Radabaugh about it. Getting no satisfactory answers, the D.A. had thrown Radabaugh out of his job.

Giving no indication that these facts were not news to him, the commissioner showed marked interest. "And who killed Radabaugh?" he asked. "Do you know?"

"No," said Morgan. "But the rumor flying around is that he should have been shot by a small-time bookmaker known as Arky. Never heard of him before. But I understand he has a place in the 17th Ward. I've talked to nearly a dozen what you might call eyewitnesses, and none of them saw a thing—and it's not a coverup. But one thing all of them do say is that Arky couldn't have done it. He was standing right beside Radabaugh. He was in his shirt sleeves, with his coat over his arm. He got into some kind of an argument with Radabaugh, and Radabaugh pushed him. Just as he pushed him, somebody shot Radabaugh."

"Isn't there a possibility this Arky might have done it?" asked the commissioner.

"No, I don't think so, and I'll tell you why, sir. Before the trouble started, a boy from the D.A.'s office named Watrus frisked Arky and said he was clean."

"Why was Arky searched?" asked the commissioner sharply.

"I'm sorry, but I'm not sure, sir. I neglected that."

"First thing tomorrow morning you take this up with the D.A. personally. If the D.A. is smart—and he is—he'll want a word with that man of his. Too much connivance between certain enforcement officers and lawbreakers. How do you know that Arky wasn't deliberately given a clean bill of health?"

Morgan flushed slightly. "I don't, sir."

"Well, make it your business to find out about that. All right. Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. Quite a few men think that somebody was trying to kill Arky and killed Radabaugh by accident."

"Why should anybody want to kill Arky?"

"There is something funny there, sir. No one seems to have any theories about that."

"Has Arky been picked up?"

"Not that I know of. The word is out for him, though."

"Check with Downtown. And stay outside. I may need you."

"Yes, sir," said Morgan, and he went out.

The commissioner puffed meditatively on his stogie. With his inside knowledge of the background, he felt reasonably sure that Arky had killed Radabaugh. But proving it was another matter.

Strange coincidence! The commissioner had had a general pickup bulletin sent out on Arky, apparently almost simultaneously with the killing of Radabaugh. He had intended to question him secretly about his relations with the late Judge Greet. But the killing of Radabaugh put a different complexion on the matter. Now Arky, if picked up, would be in the commissioner's hands, and could be held as he saw fit.

BEHIND him, the back door opened, and he turned. It was Markland, one of the best detectives in the city, and now assigned to the commissioner personally as a special investigator.

"The Lutheran minister's here, sir," said Markland. "Is it all right to take him in to see Captain Dysen?"

"Yes. How's Dysen?"

"Bad. I don't like the look of him. His face is gray. He don't do anything but groan."

"You think he'll sign that statement? I could use it to very good purpose."

Markland nodded. "I think he will, sir, after he talks to the minister. No fight in him at all. Makes me sad to see a man like Dysen in that shape."

"It's not your business to feel sad, Markland," snapped the commissioner. "Too many people feeling sad about crooks, lawbreakers, corrupt officials. Not enough people feeling sad about their victims."

"Yes, sir," said Markland, flushing. "The only thing is, sir—I've known Carl Dysen for fifteen years."

"We all have. Does knowing a man excuse his guilt?"

"No, sir," said Markland.

"I must say I'm disappointed in you," said the commissioner. "All right. Go ahead. Take the minister in to visit him. Then see if Dysen will sign that statement."

"Yes, sir," said Markland; then he hesitated. "I want to say something, Commissioner. Makes no difference how I feel—all men got feelings—I do my duty."

"If I didn't think you did, you wouldn't be here."

Markland sighed and went out.

The commissioner smiled slightly to himself. He had plans for Markland, so he felt that he might as well start giving him a few lessons. Later on he intended to advance Markland to a captaincy, and

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perhaps in a little while put him in charge of the Paxton Square District. Megher, though a good man in many ways, had, under the general laxity, grown more and more corrupt. His suspension might teach him a lesson.

Megher had allowed himself to be corrupted, but in a minor sense. His case was nothing like Dysen's. The captain from the 17th was a hoodlum in uniform and had used the men assigned to his station as a personal police force. This was anarchy, and Dysen would have to pay for it.

The ordinary policemen themselves could hardly be blamed. Like soldiers, they carried out orders. Not too well paid, they had families to worry about and retirement pensions and the future, always problematical. Why should they be expected to defy their captain? You could not expect the impossible from human nature.

The commissioner did not worry too much about the rank and file. With honest men in authority, the rank and file would be honest. No system, no matter how idealistically devised, could be any better than the men administering it. The security of a city, of a country, or of the world, for that matter, could not be guaranteed by law, but was dependent ultimately on the decency, good will and ability of a handful of men.

The commissioner always found this thought staggering. Brushing it aside, he lighted another stogie. There was a quick knock at the back door, and Markland put his head in.

"The minister did the trick, sir," said Markland. "Captain Dysen wants to get the whole business off his chest. Says he won't sign the prepared statement. Says it is true, but does not go deep enough."

"Ah!" cried the commissioner, jumping up. Then he paused, and grew thoughtful. Finally he spoke. "This statement will be dynamite, Markland. You take it yourself. No stenographer. I don't care how long you spend at it."

"My shorthand's fair, Commissioner."

"And, Markland—prepare yourself for a shock."

BOTH of the young cops rode up in the elevator with Arky. The old man who was running it joked amiably with them, paying no attention to Arky.

Arky felt completely shut out, but in his present state of mind it was not an unpleasant feeling. The excitement of the evening had entirely worn off, and he was at peace with the world. It was almost as if his real life had come to an end, and now all that remained was a brief and unimportant epilogue. Anna and the judge could be tranquil now, wherever they were.

Both Balch and Morgan looked up curiously when the two cops brought Arky into the commissioner's anteroom.

"General Bulletin," said one of the cops. "This is Orval Wanty, known as Arky."

Morgan got up at once, almost overturning his chair. "General Bulletin!" he snapped. "This man is wanted as a suspect in the Harry Radabaugh business at the Regent."

"That, too," said the cop, mildly. "In fact he seems to be a badly wanted boy."

"Sit down," said Balch to Arky, then he turned to dismiss the cops. "All right, boys. You delivered him."

"What's the General Bulletin?" asked Morgan.

"Special priority," said Balch. "Commissioner sent it out."

Morgan showed amazement but made no comment.

Balch buzzed the intercom. "Orval Wanty's here, sir," he said.

In spite of himself, Arky felt a slight tightening of his stomach muscles.

"All right, sir," said Balch. "You buzz me when."

Balch clicked the intercom, then picked up a magazine, ignoring Arky. . . .

Inside, the commissioner, with a stiff face, was reading the newly written statement that Captain Dysen had signed. Mark-

land, his face ashen, sat near by, with a sort of horror still showing in his eyes. A whole world had fallen down about him. Judge Greet? Gordon King? Impossible! Fantastic! Nightmare stuff!

But the commissioner read on and on without change of expression. Finally he glanced up and noticed Markland's discomposure. "I warned you, didn't I? How's Dysen?"

"The doctor's with him now. He looks to me like a very sick man."

The commissioner sighed. "The judge dead. Gordon King not expected to live. And now Dysen. Shall we talk to Orval Wanty?"

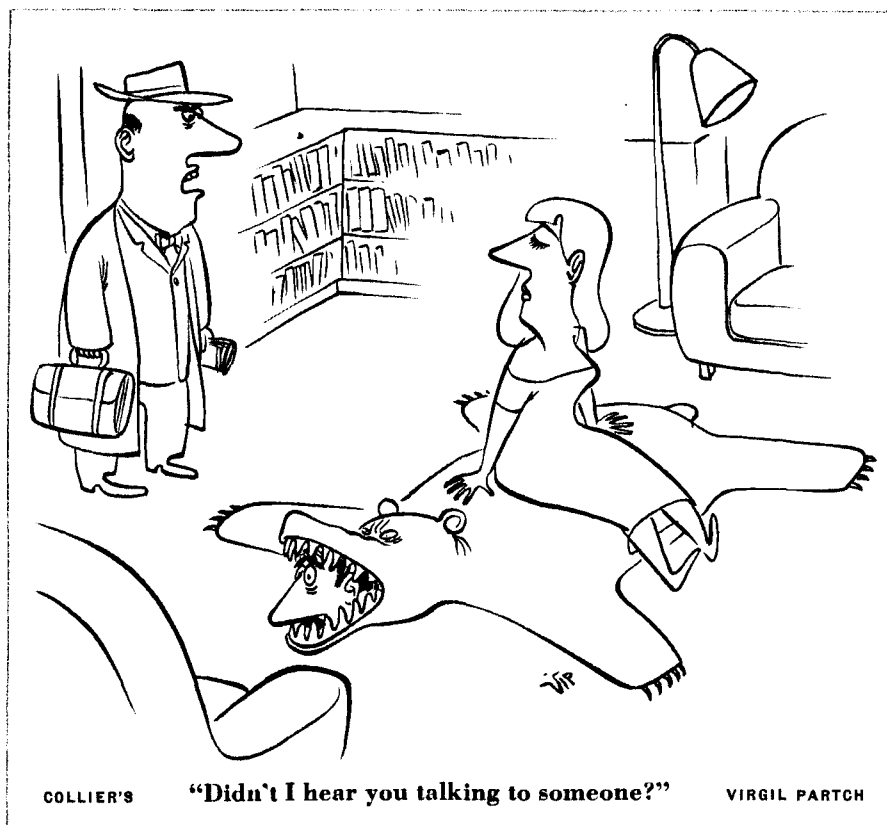
Markland's eyes showed a flash of life, and the color began to come back into his face. "Yes," he said. "There's a man I'm curious about."

The commissioner turned and buzzed the intercom. "Send Wanty in. Morgan still there? Have him wait. He can book Wanty at Downtown later." The commissioner

Bulletin had been sent out, he was almost certain, before the commissioner had had any knowledge of the Radabaugh business. The commissioner was a big man, almost as big as the judge had been: he didn't fool around with penny-ante stuff. Could Dysen have talked? Arky felt a tightening in his chest at the thought. Dysen had been in bad shape the last time he'd spoken with him. All the same, he'd ordered the raids! Unlikely he'd talk. Arky crossed his legs and tried to appear at ease.

THE commissioner went to his desk, sat down, and began to shuffle some papers about. "Wanty," he said finally, "I've got quite a few questions I'd like to ask you. But first, let's have your version of the Radabaugh business."

"Yes, sir," said Arky; then he glanced over at Markland. "I see he's going to take it all down, and by rights, I shouldn't answer no questions at all without talking to a lawyer. However, Commissioner, I've



glanced at Markland. "How's your shorthand coming along?"

"Not bad. I did pretty well with Captain Dysen."

"I'll go slow with Wanty. Get it all down. This man is going to be questioned a lot—in regard to the Radabaugh business, at least—and I want to keep a check." . . .

Although Arky felt a slight nervous tremor when Balch told him he was wanted inside, and also a certain curiosity, he could not shake off the basic feeling of indifference—of apathy even—that he had felt ever since he'd been picked up.

But his attitude changed almost at once when he stepped into the commissioner's office and saw Stark and the big dick, Markland, waiting for him. His nerves tensed up, and his normal feeling of wariness came back on him so suddenly that his eyes flashed before he could veil them.

Then he brought his feelings and his face into control, smiled easily, indicated his cigar, and said, "Excuse me, Commissioner. I didn't realize this thing was in my hand."

"That's all right, Wanty," the commissioner said. "You can smoke. Sit down."

Arky picked out a straight chair near the commissioner's desk, sat down, and took a puff or two on his cigar. His curiosity grew as the seconds ticked past, and the big dick put a notebook on the table in front of him and toyed with a pencil, and the commissioner walked to the water cooler and got himself a drink. What did the man want with him? The General

heard you're a man that can be trusted, so I'll waive all that and dive in."

"Go ahead," snapped the commissioner, not liking Arky's attitude of doing the police a favor, nor his flattery. "I assure you your rights will be protected."

"I figured so," said Arky; then he calmly gave his version of the Radabaugh business.

"All right," said the commissioner. "Now I'd like to ask you a question or two."

"I'll do my best to answer."

"Were you a regular customer at the Regent?"

"No."

"Why did you go there to get a drink, then?"

"I was driving past. I needed a drink. I saw the sign. So I went in."

"Why did you need a drink?"

Arky hesitated. "I think, sir, that I should refuse to answer that question, as the answer might tend to incriminate me."

"In regard to the murder of Radabaugh?"

"No, sir."

"Well, that's the matter in hand. Anything else is irrelevant, and will be treated as such, so answer the question."

"Well, you see, Commissioner, I'm a bookmaker. Things are getting rough. The police are knocking the boys over one by one lately. I was figuring I might be next, so I needed a drink."

The commissioner nodded to himself. Shrewder and shrewder! "I see. All right, Wanty. I guess that answer is sufficient."

Now—why did Watrus search you for a gun?"

"I'm not sure, sir. But I think it must have been Harry's idea. Harry was a jumpy kind of fellow."

"But why you? Did he have anything to fear from you?"

"No. But maybe he thought he did."

"Why?"

Arky hesitated. "It's a long story, Commissioner, and it's one I don't think I ought to tell. Informing's not my business."

"Clearing yourself is."

"In this case, I'm clear, sir. You can't hang a shooting on a man who didn't have a gun. However, I'll say this much: The story has to do with the gambling setup in this town. And in a way, Harry was on one side and me on the other. Of course, Harry was a big man and I'm nothing but a small bookmaker. But I was one of the bookies getting crowded by Harry and his bosses, so he might have figured I came in to get him. He always hangs out there. Everybody knows it."

The commissioner glanced at Markland, who was writing busily, and paused to give him time to catch up. His respect for Arky's cunning was growing.

"All right," he said finally. "Another question: You say Radabaugh quarreled with you and refused to drink with you because you took your coat off. That's a little thin, Wanty."

"Sometimes the truth is kinda thin," said Arky. "However, you can check all that, sir. Plenty of witnesses. He told me I looked like a hick who'd just come in for the State Fair; then he pushed me and told me to get going. Then he got it. Somebody right behind me. I could feel the heat."

"I see. All right. Why didn't you stay there, then? Why did you run away?"

"I figured it might be a good idea. First, I'm searched for a gun by one of Harry's friends. Then Harry gets killed. I got no friends in the place. Harry's got fifty. I was figuring I might get one in the back. Could happen."

"Where did you go afterward?"

Arky hesitated for a second. "I went out the side entrance and grabbed a taxi."

"Just a minute," said the commissioner. "Same taxi? Did it wait for you?"

"Same taxi? I didn't drive up in no taxi."

"Well, where was your car, then? Why take a taxi?"

"This is getting more and more complicated, Commissioner. But okay. I have a boy drives my car for me. I'm a lousy driver and people have kept telling me for so long I'd kill myself that I don't drive much any more. Well, Commissioner, I sent this boy on to the newsstand at the Metropole to pick up a lot of newspapers and magazines for me. Told him to wait, I'd come along in a taxi in a few minutes."

"I don't understand all this, Wanty. Elaborate."

ARKY laughed quietly. "I'm telling you it's getting complicated. I wanted him to pick up these papers and magazines because I was figuring on taking a long trip."

"Why?"

"I was taking it on the lam, Commissioner. I figured the gambling game was played out. I turned my place over to my partner. That's why I was feeling low and went in for a drink."

"When the police picked you up, you were where?"

"I was in my car going to Chicago."

"I see. And the boy? Wasn't he picked up, too?"

Arky looked at the floor to veil the triumph in his eyes. "No, sir. He wasn't."

The commissioner hit the ceiling. Markland jumped up, almost upsetting his table, and ran out into the anteroom, leaving the door open. Arky could hear three voices going at once, then he heard Balch calling Downtown and giving the switchboards a blanket call for a certain special radio car. The young cops were really going to get hell.

"Excuse me, sir," said Arky, "but I think maybe I can help you. I told the kid to

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take the car to the garage till he heard from me, so—"

"Wait till Markland comes back!" shouted the commissioner, his eyes blazing; then he took out a stogie and gnawed on it.

In a moment, Markland returned, and Arky gave him the address of the Greek's garage in the 17th Ward; then he added, "The kid ought to be there by now unless he's picked up his girl and took her out for a ride. Though I don't know why you want him."

"What's the license number?" asked Markland.

"That I don't know," said Arky. "I got no head for remembering figures."

"Where's your driver's license?"

"I haven't got any. I told you I don't drive much any more. That's why I got the kid."

"How's that car registered?" asked the commissioner.

Arky hesitated. He felt a strong and growing antagonism for Stark. Anger nagged at him, but he controlled it. Right now was a good time for a guy to keep his head. "I refuse to answer," he said shortly.

"You better co-operate," said Markland, showing a flash of anger.

"I been co-operating. If I ain't careful, I'll end up in jail co-operating over stuff that's got nothing to do with what we're talking about. A guy gets killed standing next to me. I'm in my shirt sleeves, and I got no gun. And what happens? Now I got to prove who my car's registered to. So I answer no more questions about this till I talk to my lawyer."

IGNORING Arky, the commissioner said, "Sit down, Markland. Start a new section. I'm through questioning him about Radabaugh. We'll now take up another little matter."

Arky felt that tightening in his chest again. This was real trouble.

The commissioner glanced at Markland to see if he was ready; then, turning to Arky, he asked bluntly:

"Do you know Captain Carl Dysen?"

Arky's face did not show a quiver. "Yes, sir."

"How well?"

"To say hello to. I been within hollering distance of him for maybe ten years."

"He's not a friend of yours?"

"No, Commissioner," said Arky, with a straight face. "I got no policemen friends. You see, I'm a bookie."

This was insolence, but the commissioner let it pass. "Without policemen friends, how can you operate?"

"I'm pretty small. Just a little book. I'm what is known as a weak tap."

"You look prosperous enough."

"Well, I been operating a long time, and I'm careful with my money."

"You say, then, that Captain Dysen is a mere acquaintance?"

"Very mere, sir. In fact I doubt if he'd remember me. Maybe he would. I been around the 17th long enough."

The commissioner glanced at Markland, who seemed to be doing very well. Then, fooling with some papers on his desk, not looking at Arky, he said, "There are a couple of what, for want of a better word, I must refer to as public figures I want to ask you about. Leon Sollas and Rudy Solano. Do you know them?"

Arky spoke without hesitation. "Rudy I don't know, only what I read in the paper. Leon I know."

"How do you know Leon?"

"He set me up in business, Commissioner. He was a big man around town."

"You think he was murdered?"

"I wouldn't know, sir."

There was a brief silence. Then, in a quiet voice, the commissioner asked: "Do you know Gordon King?"

Arky gave a start, but controlled himself and answered at once, "Yes, sir."

"How do you happen to know him?"

Arky thought this over for a moment, then he said, "Well, sir, I've managed to get myself in a little trouble here and there—never convicted of anything, though—and

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about ten years or so ago somebody—maybe it was Leon—recommended Dighton & Black to handle things for me. Well, Mr. King—a very fine gentleman, by the way—was the boss at Dighton & Black then, and that's how I happen to know him."

There was a long silence. The commissioner sat drumming on his desk. Although Arky's face was blankly calm, cold sweat was beginning to trickle down between his shoulder blades. This was bad—very bad. Little by little the commissioner was linking up the chain. Had Dysen really spilled the beans? Or was the commissioner, knowing little but suspecting much, out on a fishing expedition? Would he get as far as the judge? Very unlikely; and if he did not, none of the rest mattered very much.

The commissioner woke him out of his thoughts by demanding explosively, "Did you know Judge Greet?"

Arky paled, and both Markland and the commissioner noticed it. "Yes, sir," said Arky.

"How did you happen to know him?"

Arky explained at length about how the judge had saved him from prison and befriended him, and how he'd worked five years for the judge as a chauffeur. "Finest man that ever lived," Arky concluded warmly. "Salt of the earth."

For a moment the commissioner said nothing and narrowly studied Arky. There seemed to be little doubt of Arky's sincere regard for the judge. Was there, then, something in this strange man besides hardness and duplicity? Almost in spite of himself, the commissioner began slowly to revise his initial opinion of Arky. Finally he asked, "Why did you leave the judge's employ?"

Arky smiled slightly. "By request."

"You mean you were discharged?"

"Well, more or less. The judge put up with my driving as long as he could. He had iron nerves, sir; but I shook 'em. We parted friends, however."

"Did you see him regularly?"

"Haven't seen him for over ten years. Talked to him on the phone a few times."

There was a long silence and the commissioner sat lost in thought. Finally he said, "To sum up: You admit knowing the following men: Carl Dysen, Leon Sollas, Gordon King and Judge Greet. Now, Wanty, I want you to do something for me."

"All right, Commissioner."

Stark took a document from the top of his desk and handed it to Arky. "Read this. Then give me your opinion. Take your time."

THE document was Captain Dysen's final statement. Arky tried to keep his hands from shaking as he read it. Finally Arky handed the document back, after examining the signature.

"You have any comments to make?"

"Yes, sir. Dysen is crazy, and you better have him locked up in a padded cell."

"For your own part, you deny everything in there, is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You deny that you bossed the vice and gambling of the town, and practically bossed the police of the 17th Ward?"

"I can hardly keep from laughing."

"You deny that you sent police from the 17th to protect the judge and that one of them shot or shot at the assassin?"

"I tell you the man's crazy."

"What motive would Captain Dysen have for telling such a story if it weren't true?"

"If he's crazy, he don't need no motive. Look, Commissioner, you can't ruin the reputation of a man like Judge Greet just on this big lobster's say-so."

"Why are you worrying about the judge's reputation, Wanty? You'd better worry about your own hide." The commissioner spoke with unnecessary sharpness because Arky was touching on a sore and vital point. The naming of Judge Greet in this affair was going to cause an appalling scandal. And after all, what good purpose did it serve? The ring was broken up.

Arky was shouting with sudden animosity, "My hide ain't on the barn door yet. And neither is the judge's. I'll give the lie

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to every word he says—and in court, too.”
 “Fine!” shouted Stark. “Lie under oath and we’ll also have you for perjury.” He turned to Markland. “Explain to Morgan that this man is to be held as follows: for questioning in the killing of Radabaugh, and as a material witness; for questioning in the disappearance of Leon Sollas; also for bribery and corruption of police officials, maybe a hundred counts; also for running a gambling establishment in defiance of the laws of the city—and if there is anything else I can think of, I’ll call Casey.”

“I sure got my rights protected, all right,” said Arky.

“You are innocent until proved guilty. I will shortly leave your fate to the D.A. and to the grand jury. All right, Markland. Turn him over to Morgan.”

But Arky held back. “Look here, Commissioner,” he said mildly, “you mean to tell me you’re going to let a thing like this about the judge get out? Why, he was a friend of yours, wasn’t he?”

“Yes,” said the commissioner. “But that is irrelevant. He’s going to have to take the consequences of his acts.”

“But he’s dead.”

The commissioner winced slightly and shifted. Turning, he noticed that Markland was studying him curiously, and suddenly he remembered the “lesson” he’d given the big detective not so long ago. “Does knowing a man excuse his guilt?” he’d said. Now the big detective was watching him, wondering. “There are still consequences,” said the commissioner. “Dying doesn’t settle everything.”

“That’s a hell of a note,” said Arky. “What about his family?”

“You might have asked the judge that, some time back.”

Arky swallowed, then took the plunge. “Supposing he’s guilty—which he ain’t—it’s not their fault.”

“Are you leading up to something, Wanty?”

“Yes, sir. A deal.”

“I don’t make deals.”

“All right,” said Arky. “But it’s like this: Dysen’s already confessed. Mr. King’s about dead, I hear. But I’m still alive and kicking. Wouldn’t it be enough to send me and Dysen up? Dysen—he could be the Big Boy.”

“What about you?”

“Well, I might hold still for this, but it makes me laugh.”

“You still deny everything?”

“I sure do.”

“Then why do you want to do this?”

“On account of the judge. Finest man I ever knew in all my life.”

THE commissioner looked at Arky for a long time. Loyalty was a great virtue, and a rare one, misguided or not.

“Wanty,” said the commissioner, at last, “I don’t make deals. I’m against them on principle. They are always unfair. Goats and favorites. And in this case, it would be particularly unjust. The judge was without a doubt the ablest man I’ve ever come across. He made other men seem pretty tame and flabby and conventional. He had the makings of a great leader, and God knows we need them. But, Wanty, he evaded his social responsibilities; he turned against the very people he should have helped. He—”

Arky broke in. “All I know is, I never met a man in my whole life that I liked as well as the judge.”

“I liked him, too,” said the commissioner. “But that is beside the point, Wanty. The point is that the way we live is a matter of choice. We have to go one way or another. No one can have it both ways. The choice is often a hard one. But for the judge it should have been easy. He had everything: health, looks, brains, ability, education and money. He deliberately took the wrong way. In other words, there is no excuse for him, so why should he be protected at the expense of others?”

With his lips compressed, Arky shifted, took a step toward the door. “No deal?”

“Listen, Wanty; you knew the judge in-

timately. Wouldn’t you say that he was a man who knew perfectly well what he was doing at all times?”

“Yes, sir, I would.”

“All right. Then the judge knew that at any moment there might be a crash. It was inevitable. He gambled and he lost. If he was alive, do you think he’d let you make a deal for him and go to prison to save his reputation?” Arky swallowed but said nothing. “He’d take his medicine, wouldn’t he?”

“Yes, sir, he would,” Arky agreed.

“All right, Wanty,” said the commissioner. “Think that over.”

Arky turned and went out into the anteroom, followed by Markland. The commissioner took out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

THE police car was moving slowly along at the edge of the dingy city park. A young policeman was driving. Morgan and Arky were in the back. The traffic was very heavy, and the driver kept cursing the taxis, which were darting in and out.

Morgan glanced at his prisoner, who was

boulevard, darting here and there among the cars; and in a moment he disappeared into the shrubbery of the city park. . . .

The taxi driver, a shrewd-looking, middle-aged little man, pulled up in front of the Paymaster’s house. “This it, mister?”

Arky got out. “Yeah,” he said, “this is it.” Then he laughed. “Just went out for a walk, ran into a friend of mine in the village, and ended up downtown. Didn’t even put my coat on.” He gave the driver a five-dollar tip.

“Thank you, sir,” said the driver, smiling and touching his cap.

Arky called good night, and went up the path. Dim lights were showing in the cottage, and Arky saw the Cadillac parked at the far end of the drive, beyond the garage. As he stepped across the narrow porch, the front door was opened from within and Robbie looked out.

“Ozark!” she said in a rather unnatural voice. “Where’s your coat? I was getting worried about you.”

Joe was just beyond her. “I kept telling her not to worry,” he called.



COLLIER'S

“Remember the funny ending yet, dear?”

JOHN RUGE

leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, staring apathetically at the floor. Arky hadn’t said a word since they’d left the commissioner’s anteroom. He seemed completely sunk, Morgan thought, and he had a right to be. It was obvious that the commissioner, for reasons of his own, intended to see to it that the book was thrown at this fellow, who seemed, to Morgan, singularly inoffensive. Not a loudmouth or a braggart.

“Sure is a warm, close night,” said Arky finally. “I keep sweating. You mind if I take my coat off?”

“No,” said Morgan. “Help yourself.”

Arky removed his coat and held it across his lap, then he leaned forward again and sat with his elbows on his knees, his hands dangling.

“Sure feel low,” he said in a melancholy voice.

“I can understand it,” said Morgan.

“That little commissioner,” Arky went on, “he means well, but he can sure be rough and tough on a fellow. He just wouldn’t listen to me at all. He just kept talking. A fellow can’t make no headway with him. He just won’t pay no attention. . . .” Arky went on and on in his sad, monotonous voice, lamenting his fate.

The young cop driver was still cursing the taxis. Morgan, lulled by Arky’s voice, sat contemplating the crowded boulevard.

Suddenly Arky acted. With his right hand, he flung his coat in Morgan’s face, then he reached forward and with his left hand jerked the wheel sharply to the right, and there was a shuddering crash as the police car banged into a taxi, and at once there was a general shrieking of brakes all along the line of traffic and many collisions; tires whined as they skidded on the asphalt; and there was the crash and tinkle of breaking glass.

Arky leaped out the car door into the middle of the traffic jam, ran across the

“Hi,” said Arky. “Never mind the coat.” Then he hugged Robbie and stepped into the cottage.

Robbie closed the door. She and Joe stood looking at Arky, waiting for him to explain.

“You all ready to blow?” asked Arky.

They nodded.

“Okay,” said Arky. “But I kind of changed my plans a little. Sit down. I’ll be with you in a minute. I got to call Zand.”

It was some time before Zand answered the phone. “Arky!” came Zand’s agitated voice. “Where the hell are you?”

Arky told him, then asked, “What’s up?”

“Cops been here twice, looking for you. They also combed the Greek’s garage for the Cadillac. The Greek came and told me about it. He just left. What is all this?”

“Never mind about that. Now listen carefully, Zand. First thing, don’t open the bookie joint tomorrow. Lock it up and keep it locked until things quiet down. This town’s going to be hotter than a Fourth of July picnic for a good long while. Just keep your head down. Okay. Another thing. Do you remember the street number of Anna’s old lady’s house?”

“Anna’s old lady’s house? Wait a minute. I’ll ask Lola.”

A long pause, then Lola came on the phone. “Arky? We sure miss you down here—you and Orv. Place seems empty.”

“How about that address?” snapped Arky.

“I got it wrote down here. It’s 2371 Kosciusko Street, near Parkway.”

Arky made a note of it on the telephone pad. “Okay. Put Zand back on.”

“What’s all this about Anna’s old lady?” Zand demanded.

“Don’t ask questions. Just listen. If you don’t hear from me in a week I want you to start sending Anna’s old lady a couple of hundred a month. Understand?”

“Yeah,” said Zand. “But—”

“No buts. When I get around to it, I’ll make some kind of arrangement with Dighton & Black. The thing is, I don’t want to hand them Polacks a whole hunk of dough at once. They might go wild and blow it.”

“Okay, Arky,” said Zand wearily.

“One more thing. Get a car out here to me as fast as you can. I’m lamming. Read your paper carefully tomorrow and you’ll know why.”

“It ain’t going to be easy, Arky. The Greek’s out on account they got coppers hanging around. I can’t bring the Ford; they’ll tail me. But I’ll see what I can figure out. Call you back when I get a chance.”

When Arky came back into the hallway, Robbie was sitting near the door, holding Orv on her lap. The baby was looking about him sleepily and from time to time he waved his little fists vaguely in the air. Joe was leaning against the wall, smoking.

Arky handed him a slip of paper. “There’s an address on there. That’s where I want you and Robbie to go.”

Joe glanced at the slip of paper, then looked up blankly at Arky. “Polishtown?”

“Yeah. Deliver this kid to Mrs. Hunchuk. She’s a big fat good-natured dame about sixty.”

“Deliver—the—kid?” Joe stammered. Robbie was staring. “What are you talking about, Arky? I thought we were all going to Detroit.”

“We are,” said Arky. “All but the kid. He’s going to stay where he belongs—with Anna’s people. No sense us dragging him all over hell and back. For what?”

“For what?” cried Robbie. “You want him to grow up in the slums? Polishtown!”

“Anna grew up there, and she was a hundred per cent okay. Now I ain’t going to argue about this. I was talking tonight with a guy who knows what he’s talking about. This kid deserves a chance. Slums don’t matter. When he grows up, he can figure out himself what he wants to do. You kidding yourself about us being the right people to raise him?”

“Why not?” cried Robbie defiantly.

Arky looked at her for a long time. She slowly lowered her eyes and studied Orv, who was nodding on her lap.

“Now listen,” said Arky, “you and Joe deliver the kid. Here’s a hundred bucks. Give it to the old lady. Tell her a friend of mine’s gonna check on it every once in a while. And be patient with her. She don’t understand English so good.”

THERE was a long silence. Then Arky asked Robbie, “What’s a good little hotel in Detroit? Not one of the swell ones.”

Robbie thought for a moment. “The Randall. Nice place.”

“Randall, huh? All right. I’ll meet you there.”

“Aren’t you going with us?” Robbie demanded.

“I can’t,” said Arky. “I’m hot. Nice mess if they’d happen to run up on me with you and Orv and Joe in the car. Damn’ fine mess. No. I got to go by myself. Zand’s getting me a car. Okay, Joe. You wait outside.”

Joe shrugged and went out.

Arky went to a small table, unlocked the drawer with a key he took from his wallet, and extracted a thick Manila envelope, from which he counted out a stack of bills.

“Here’s five G’s, Robbie,” he said. “Put ‘em in your purse. You might need ‘em.”

Robbie glanced up at Arky, searching his face, then delicately took the bills from him. Arky smiled. Robbie was an all-right kid, and she really liked the baby; but with her, money talked—and loud.

She stood up, holding Orv. “All right, Arky,” she said. “Whatever you say.”

“You and Joe deliver the kid, then keep on going. It’s on your way. Come on.”

Arky opened the front door, then took Robbie by the arm and led her across the porch and through the shrubbery to the parked Cadillac. Joe got out and opened the rear door. Robbie leaned in and put Orv in his basket.

“Well, good-by,” she said, looking at

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Arky strangely. "Be seeing you soon in Dee-troit." Robbie was like she used to be now.

Arky grinned. "Okay, ball of fire."
"Okay, Elmer."

He kissed her perfunctorily. A curtain seemed to drop between them. They looked at each other uneasily, and laughed, then he helped her into the back seat.

"Just keep moving, Joe," said Arky. He handed the kid a few bills. "Spending money."

"Thanks, mister," said Joe, his face stiff.

Arky stood watching the Cadillac drive off. Then he turned and started back to the cottage.

INSIDE, he went to his bedroom and took a small revolver from a dresser drawer, then returned to the living room. Putting out all the lights there but one, he lay down on the big davenport, slipped the gun in between the cushions, settled himself, and tried to relax.

Things were rough now and maybe Zand wouldn't be able to deliver. It didn't matter too much, however. For the moment, he was safe. If he didn't hear from Zand by morning, he'd go to the village, grab a taxi, give the driver some cock-and-bull story, and have him drive to the nearest town where Arky could catch a train for Detroit.

Arky sighed and lay staring at the ceiling. He felt nervous but tired, and finally he dozed. Vague scenes began to pass before his eyes. Anna when he'd first met her: wearing a tight pale-blue dress, her yellow-blond hair to her shoulders. Big Anna—nobody like her: goodhearted, amiable, human—a fiery temper, but no meanness. She seemed to be looking at him through a pale haze, smiling at him. Then she had Orv in her arms. Now she was gone, and he could see Robbie holding Orv and weeping. Robbie in a white dress—her thick black hair long and hanging down her back. . . .

He woke with a start, sweating, sat up, and glanced at his watch. What a doze! He had been out for over an hour and a half. His head ached and he had such a heavy, lethargic feeling all through him that he could hardly force himself to get to his feet and walk to the kitchen.

He made himself some coffee and as he sat at the kitchen table, drinking it, he wondered if he really would see Robbie again. And, strangely, the idle thought that he might not brought no regret. An all-right kid, Robbie; but no Anna. Nobody could ever take Anna's place; just as nobody could ever take the judge's place, no matter what the commissioner thought of him.

Arky gradually realized that he was now looking out on a different world and was greatly surprised that such a familiar, taken-for-granted place could change so radically. Was that all there was to it—people? Didn't a man in himself mean anything at all?

Arky tried not to think about the future, but visions of it kept rising in his mind in spite of himself. A new life? What kind? Arky had plenty of money; too much, if anything. Most of it free of taxes, it had accumulated like corn in a bin over the years. But he was not much for spending money. The thought of traveling left him cold; and as for leisure, loafing, all he knew of it was an armchair or bed, four walls, some cigars, maybe a fifth of gin, and a few newspapers, like the Racing Form and the Sporting News. You didn't need money for that. And as for women—well, women were damned interesting and necessary, but they didn't fill your life.

Arky sighed heavily, finished the last of his coffee, then rose and went back to the living room.

"Damn it," he said to himself, "I feel like a watch with a broken mainspring!"

He searched the living room, then the study, for a deck of cards but couldn't find any; finally he went back and sat on the davenport, stared at the floor, and waited for the phone to ring. Two clocks ticked in staggered time, lulling him. At last he lay down and put his hands under his head.

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Once or twice he sighed heavily, then his eyes closed, and he fell asleep.
This time he did not dream. . . .

He woke up with a start. Dawn was showing gray at all the windows. A big man was standing over him with a gun in his hand. The man had a set, determined look in his eyes. Arky's right hand fumbled sleepily among the pillows.

"Go ahead," said the big man. "Reach for it. Give me an excuse."

Arky blinked rapidly and came fully awake. Lieutenant Morgan was standing over him with a police revolver in his hand.

"Hello, Lieutenant," said Arky, smiling slightly. "This is sure a surprise."

"What do you take us for—idiots?" snapped Morgan. "Didn't you know the first thing we'd do was check with the taxi companies? And just to make sure the driver wouldn't forget you, you give him a five-dollar tip. Brother! If I didn't know better, I'd say you just wanted us to trail you." Morgan pulled a pair of handcuffs out of his pocket. "I want to see you get out of these."

"Well," said Arky, rising slowly, "looks like the hounds treed the coon after all. I guess that's nature. The coon ain't got a chance."

Morgan made no reply. He clicked on the heavy cuffs with a feeling of satisfaction and jerked Arky toward the door.

What he would never know was that as they moved across the dewy grass through the lavender-gray twilight of early morning, his prisoner was experiencing a swiftly growing sense of relief.

REISMAN felt good. He was sitting in his cluttered office with his feet on the desk. The city room was dark and deserted, but here it was light and cheerful.

And he had visitors. Red Seaver, diffusing a strong odor of bourbon, was sitting with his feet propped up too, smoking a cigar. And young Downy was perched on the window sill, also diffusing an odor of bourbon. They were all mildly drunk.

Occasionally Red reached down, picked up a copy of the final edition of that day's Journal from the floor, and stared at it with a bemused expression.

"You sure had me fooled for a while, Ben. I was thinking many unkind thoughts about you. But I might have known you'd come through." Red smiled happily and slapped the paper where it read:

Commissioner Stark acknowledges the help given him by the Journal, in tracking down the Greet Ring, the greatest source of corruption our city ever saw in its long history. Commissioner Stark, now Director of Public Safety as well as Justice of the Supreme Court, goes further than a mere acknowledgment; he names names. And we, with the commissioner, want to cite the following trio for their services as public servants as well as crack newspapermen: Ben Reisman, well-known columnist and former police reporter; Langley "Red" Seaver; and Francis Downy III. . . .

Red and Downy were glowing with triumph and had been taking bows all afternoon, and allowing people to buy them drinks. Up to now, Reisman had maintained an air of becoming modesty. But back here in his office, alone with Red and Downy for the final nightcap and the closing round of mutual congratulations, his pride and self-esteem were flowering.

By the grace of God, he'd run the thing down. Luck, hunch and random information had done the trick. Actually, there was nothing to it at all, and in a few days it would be forgotten. But he still knew a big story when he saw one. Or maybe that should be when he felt one. With him, of course, it was just a matter of knowing whether that pain in the mid-section was a hunch or the ulcer. This time it had not been the ulcer.

"Gentlemen," said Reisman, addressing the others with a smile, "you may quote me as saying that all any good reporter needs is a stomach for news."

THE END

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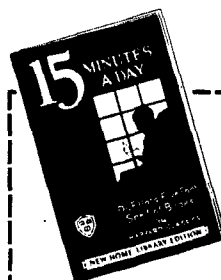
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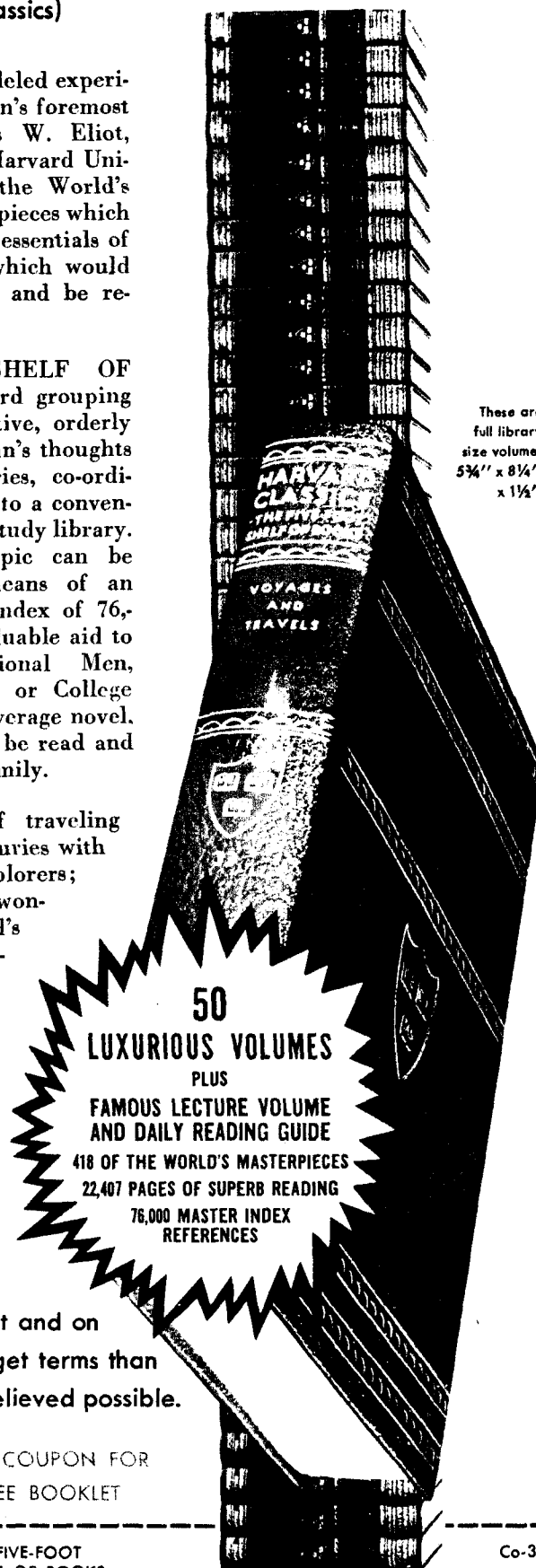
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Co-33

Elliman's Elegant Eldorado

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

the real-estate world the news was sensational. Even the daily papers carried lengthy stories about the transaction.

There was, however, no rush of competitors into the apartment field. After the first excitement, other brokers decided that Elliman's feat was merely a freakish success. As a result, for several years he had the business almost entirely to himself; he thus gained virtually complete dominance over it.

Then in 1910, the first of the great buildings rented and managed by him and devoted entirely to luxury apartments was completed. Located at Fifth Avenue and Eighty-first Street, it consisted of 18- to 20-room units to rent at prices of up to \$25,000 a year.

"When the rest of us at the office went over the plans," Lawrence Elliman recalls, "we were badly frightened at what Douglas had done. It didn't seem possible that the building could be filled."

But Douglas knew what he was about. His first step was to approach Elihu Root, who had been Secretary of State under Theodore Roosevelt and who had recently built a home on Park Avenue. Elliman made to Root the startling proposal that he sell or lease his new house and move into one of the apartments. He demonstrated that the apartment would be more convenient and would involve fewer responsibilities, and he proved that its rent would be no more than the upkeep of the house. Root was convinced.

Discreetly told in the proper places, this story ended all doubts about filling the building. Well before it was ready for occupancy, every apartment had been rented and a waiting list established.

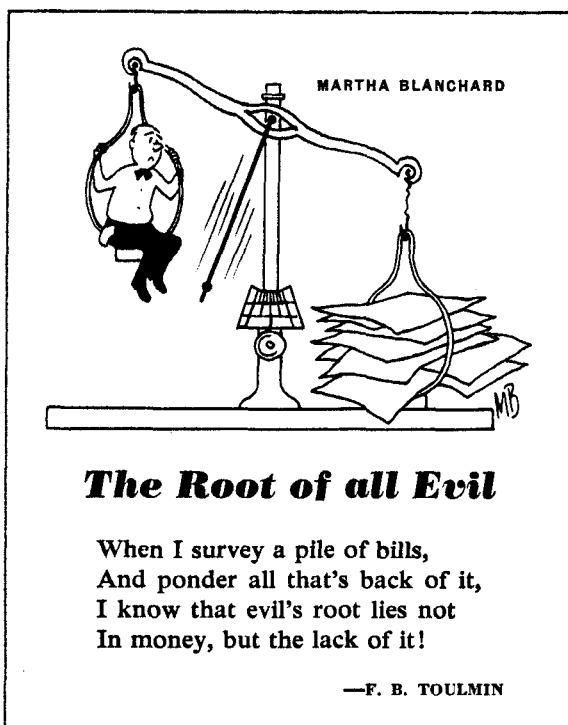
A Realtor Advises Caution

That officially launched the modern era of high-priced apartment living, although there still remained some viewers-with-alarm. "The stability of real estate," intoned the president of a large company with heavy investments in the field, "will be menaced by unrestrained building of multi-family dwellings."

He was quite right about the menace to stability. For many decades much of Manhattan east of Park Avenue had been stabilized as a noisome wasteland. A horse-drawn railway built in 1834 along the line of Park Avenue northward from the city—which then occupied only the southern end of the island—had laid the groundwork for this state of affairs. When the steam locomotive came along, it followed the same line and began belching forth a blanket of soot which was to go on accumulating over the area for more than half a century. By 1880 the tracks had been sunk in a deep cut and partly roofed here and there with bridges which carried the cross-town streets, but dense clouds of smoke still poured upward continuously and hung there day and night.

Then, on January 8, 1902, the engineer of an incoming train got lost in the obscuring smoke, smashed head on into a commuters' special and killed 17 passengers. There had already been much agitation to have the railroads electrify their tracks, and the accident clinched the argument. Along with electrification went the complete roofing of the tracks, which made possible the apartment buildings now lining the avenue—and so completely unstabilized real-estate values that sites once almost worthless now are assessed in the millions.

But electrification was a long, complicated process, and while it was still going on Douglas Elliman lent a powerful hand in the hoisting operation which brought Park



Avenue to its present high repute. In 1911 he parted company with Pease & Elliman to set up, along with several associates, including his younger brother Roland, the Douglas L. Elliman Company.

From the beginning, the firm announced that it would specialize in high-class upper East Side apartments. A specialty it developed was persuading prospective tenants to put up the money for erection of buildings to be owned by them co-operatively—as in the case of 300 Park Avenue. One such client invested \$180,000 in an apartment and paid an \$18,000 a year maintenance fee. Another spent \$450,000 for the apartment and several hundred thousands more furnishing it.

Such deals convinced even the most stubborn dissenters that apartments could be profitable, and by the end of World War I the boom was on.

The fate of the mansion built at Fifth Avenue and Seventy-seventh Street in 1901

by copper tycoon William A. Clark of Montana, an ex-senator, was a good example of the trend. A 121-room, seven-story granite monstrosity roofed in solid bronze and bedizened with gold leaf, it contained a swimming pool, four art salons, several dining rooms and 31 baths, and cost \$6,000,000 to erect. In 1927 it was brusquely razed to make way for an Elliman-promoted and -managed co-operative apartment building.

An even better example was the story of one of the last houses built on Fifth Avenue, purchased in the early twenties by an heiress of many millions. Not long after she moved in, she suddenly decided that what she really wanted was not a house but an apartment. She called in a construction firm and made a deal for demolition of her mansion, erection of an apartment house on the spot and room-by-room reconstruction of her home as an enormous penthouse atop it. Ten years ago she vacated the 54-room apartment and it has been empty since. Recently it was sold, and the present plan is to break it up into small apartments.

As high-priced apartments skyrocketed in popularity, Elliman rode the crest of the wave. His firm grossed \$30,000 in commissions in its first year, 1911. In 1929 it took in over \$1,700,000, and he turned down an offer of \$2,000,000 for its name and good will.

He also branched out from apartments to participate in some of the biggest deals of that age of big deals. Hotels such as the Roosevelt and the Savoy-Plaza and business skyscrapers such as the one housing the New York Daily News were part of his handiwork.

Another of his ventures was on behalf of Tex Rickard, the gold-dusted boxing promoter out of the West. When Rickard hit town with his plan to build a new Madison Square Garden, Elliman took him in hand, found the site and secretly bought up the individual parcels of land. In the end he also had to scare up most of the financial backing for the project.

"It takes courage," he recalls with a glint in his eye, "to go into deals like that. Even the most courageous shiver a little before they take the plunge. Sometimes they shiver so hard they shake themselves right out of the mood."

It's difficult to imagine Elliman indulging in such tremors. Certainly, he weathered the severest test of all—the Great Depression—with a minimum of shakiness. In fact, he kept his company so triumphantly afloat in the midst of the wreckage all around it that when a letter arrived at the New York Post Office from England in 1930 addressed simply "To a House, Flat & General Property Agent of Repute," it was automatically delivered to him. The envelope is one of his most prized mementos.

Celebrities on Firm's Books

A list of the firm's customers over the years reads like a cross between the Social Register, which is standard equipment for Elliman brokers, and the newspaper headlines. Among assorted Whitneys, Astors, Vanderbilts and such have been names like ex-Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, the Gish sisters, Mrs. William Randolph Hearst, Presidential Envoy Myron Taylor and songstress Mary Martin.

Elliman's own way of life is on much the same scale as his top-bracket clients'. He lives with his wife and coed daughter (he also has four older sons) in a nine-room Park Avenue apartment which he owns. He usually dines at home and lunches at one of his clubs—the stately Racquet & Tennis or the businesslike Downtown. Although he golfs in the 90s, his real passion is sailing, which he now does mostly on friends' yachts, having parted with his own schooner some years ago. He usually spends most of a month sailing in summer on Long Island Sound or Martha's Vineyard and a week or two in winter at Nassau in the Bahamas.

Not long ago, a man turned up at the Elliman office seeking, he said, a small apartment. One of the brokers took him at his word and offered a three-room place. But it developed that the customer was a Texas oil millionaire and what he meant by small—and what he eventually rented—was an expensive 12-room penthouse. And that done, the Texan further announced that he had a yen to buy him one of those big buildings.

"How about the Empire State?" the broker jested.

"No, that's a little too big," was the dead serious answer.

The broker stopped being funny and got down to cases, and the oilman finally decided that what he had in mind was one of New York's toniest hotels. The broker called Elliman, and between them they eventually managed to buy the Texan the one he wanted for several million dollars.

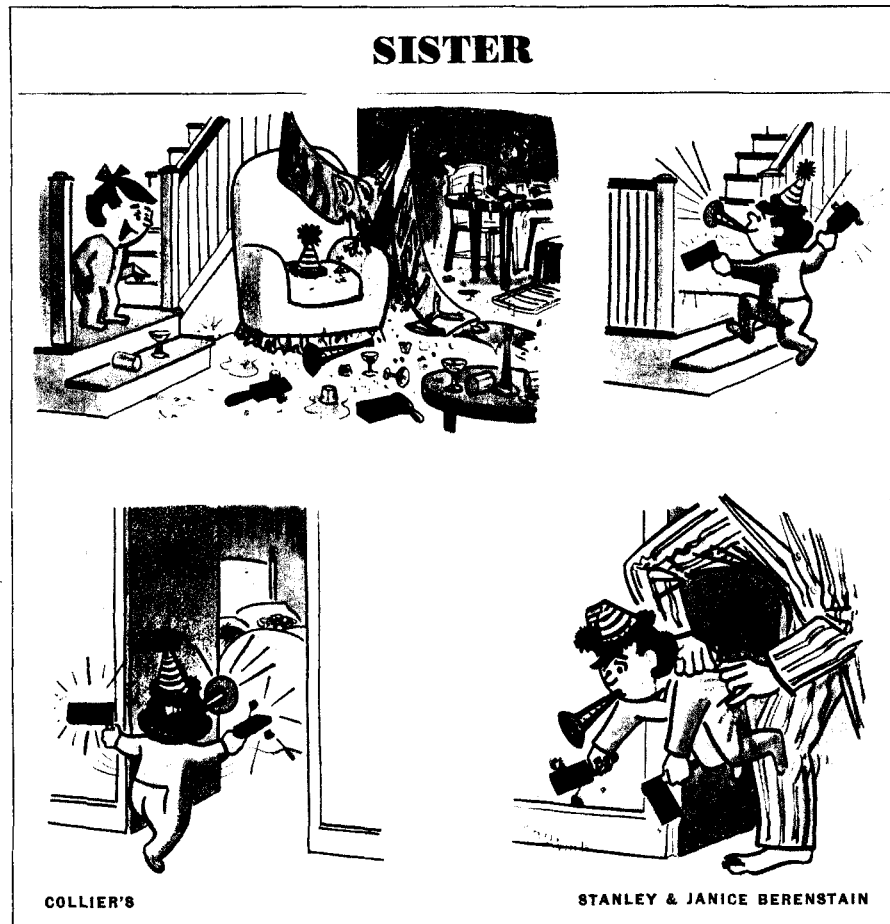
But the taste for this sort of thing and fortunes big enough to permit its indulgence are growing scarce.

"It used to be possible," Elliman recently remarked a little wistfully, "to deal with just the wealthy. Now a lot of our business is with the middle-income group."

On further inquiry you learn that what he means by middle income is \$15,000 to \$30,000 a year. Still, this does represent a change from the firm's old days, when \$15,000 a year often was not enough to rent an apartment in one of its buildings. Some of the luxury buildings now going up in the Elliman bailiwick have apartments with as few as two rooms and rents as low as \$1,500 a year.

But the changing standards have not thrown Elliman off stride nor given him any inclination to retire. Large slum scars on the upper East Side still present a challenge. He firmly intends to remain one of the plastic surgeons in charge of excising them.

THE END



Collier's for January 6, 1951



Revolt of the Triffids

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

radio but I soon got sick of it, and switched off. The last thing I heard was that the display was diminishing fast and that we'd probably be out of the debris area in another few hours.

There could be no doubt that all this had taken place the previous evening—for one thing I should have been a great deal hungrier even than I was if it had been longer ago. Very well, what was this, then? Had the whole hospital, the whole city, made such a night of it that they'd not pulled out yet?

My train of thought was interrupted as the chorus of clocks, near and far, got around to announcing nine.

For the third time I played hell with the bell. As I lay waiting I was aware of noises beyond the door: whimperings, slitherings and shufflings punctuated occasionally by a raised voice in the distance.

Still no one came to my room.

IT CAME at last to the straight question: Was I more scared of endangering my sight by taking off the bandages, or of staying in the dark with the willies growing every minute?

"Well, hang it," I said, "there can't be much harm if I use common sense. After all, the bandages were due to come off today. I'll risk it."

One thing I put to my credit. I was not far enough gone to tear them off wildly. I had the sense and the self-control to get out of bed and pull the shade down before I began on the safety pins.

Once I'd got them clear and found I could see in the dimness I felt a whole lot better. Nevertheless I made myself take a whole hour gradually getting used to full daylight. At the end of it I knew that, thanks to swift first aid followed by good doctoring, my eyes were as good as ever.

Still no one came.

On the lower shelf of the bedside table I discovered a pair of dark glasses thoughtfully put ready against my need of them. I cautiously put them on before I went right close to the window. What struck me most and at once was the sharp, clear definition of everything—even the distant house-top view across the opposite roofs. And then I noticed that no chimney, large or small, was smoking...

I found my clothes hung neatly in a cupboard. I began to feel more normal once I

Collier's for January 6, 1951

had them on. There were some cigarettes still in the case. I lighted one, and began to get into a frame of mind where, though everything was undeniably queer, I no longer understood why I had been quite so near panic.

I went to the door again and peered into the corridor. I was forced to realize that whatever had happened was affecting a great deal more than the inhabitant of Room 48.

There was no one in sight at the moment, yet in the distance there was a murmur of voices. I could hear shuffling footsteps, too, and occasionally a louder voice echoing hollowly in the bare corridors. I stepped out cautiously.

It was difficult in that echoing building to tell where the sounds were coming from, but one way the passage finished at an obscured French window with the shadow of a fire-escape railing upon it, so I went the other. Rounding a corner, I found myself out of the private-room wing, and on a broader corridor.

At first I thought it was empty, then as I moved forward I saw a figure come out of a shadow—a man who wore a black jacket and striped trousers—and I judged him to be one of the staff doctors; but it was curious that he should be crouching against the wall and feeling his way along.

"Hullo," I said.

He stopped suddenly. The face he turned toward me was gray and frightened.

"Who are you?" he asked, uncertainly.

"My name's Masen," I said. "William Masen. I'm a patient in Room 48. And I've come to find out why—"

"You can see?" he interrupted swiftly.

"Certainly. Just as well as ever," I assured him. "It's a wonderful job. Nobody came to unbandage my eyes, so I did it myself. I don't think there's any harm done. I took—"

But he interrupted again. "Please take me to my office. I must telephone at once."

"Where's that?" I asked, bewildered.

"Fifth floor, west wing. The name's on the door. Dr. Soames."

"All right," I agreed, in some surprise. "Where are we now?"

The man rocked his head from side to side, his face tense and exasperated.

"How the hell should I know?" he said bitterly. "You've got eyes, damn it! Use them. Can't you see I'm blind?"

There was nothing to show he was blind. His eyes were wide open, and apparently looking straight at me.

"Take my arm," he directed. "You turn right as you come out of the elevator, then take the first passage on the left, and the room is the third door."

I followed his instructions. We met no one at all on the way. Inside the room I led him up to the desk and handed him the telephone. He listened for some moments, then rattled the signal bar impatiently. Slowly his expression changed. The irritability and the harassed lines faded away. He put the receiver down on the desk. For some moments he stood silent, looking as though he stared at the wall opposite; then he turned.

"It's useless—dead. You are still here?" he added.

"Yes," I told him.

His fingers felt along the edge of the desk.

"Which way am I facing? Where's the damned window?" he demanded, with a return to irritability.

"It's right behind you," I said.

He turned and stepped toward it, both hands extended. He felt the sill and the sides carefully, and stepped back a pace. Before I realized what he was doing, he had launched himself full at it, and crashed through...

I didn't look after him. It was the fifth floor.

Instead, I sat down in the chair, took a cigarette from the box on the desk, and lighted it shakily. I sat there for some minutes while I steadied up and let the sick feeling subside. After a while it did. I left the room, and went back to the place where I had first found him, though I still wasn't feeling too good.

At the far end of the wide corridor were the doors of a ward, set with panels of obscured glass. I reckoned there ought to be someone on duty there to whom I could report about the doctor.

I opened the door. It was pretty dark inside. The curtains had evidently been drawn again after the previous night's display—and were still drawn.

"Sister?" I called, hoping a nurse was there.

"She ain't 'ere," a man's voice said. "What's more," it went on, "she ain't been 'ere for ruddy hours, neither. Can't you pull them bloody curtains, mate, and let's 'ave some flippin' light? Don't know what's come over the ruddy place this morning."

"Okay," I agreed.

I pulled back the curtains on the nearest window, letting in a shaft of bright sunlight. It was a surgical ward with about twenty patients, all bedrid. Leg injuries mostly, several amputations, by the look of it.

"Stop foolin' about with 'em, mate, and pull 'em back," said the same voice.

TURNING, I looked at the man who spoke. He was a burly, dark fellow, with a weather-beaten skin. He sat up in bed, facing directly at me and the light. His eyes seemed to be gazing into my own, so did his neighbor's, and the next man's...

For a few moments I stared back at them. It took that long to register. Then: "They—they seem to be stuck," I said. "I'll get someone to come to see to them."

And with that I fled from the ward.

I was all shaky again, and could have done with a stiff drink. The thing was sinking in. I found it difficult to believe that all the men in that ward could be blind, too, and yet...

The elevator wasn't working, so in a panic I started down the stairs. Down and down the circular staircase I ran until I reached the final turn where one could stand and look down into the main hall. Seemingly everyone in the hospital who could move must have made instinctively for that spot either with the idea of finding help or of getting outside. Maybe some of them had got out. One of the entrance doors was wide open, but most of them couldn't find it. There was a tight-packed mob of men

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and women, nearly all of them in their hospital night clothes milling slowly and helplessly around.

The place looked—well, maybe you've seen some of Doré's pictures of sinners in hell. But Doré couldn't include the sounds: the sobbing, the moaning, and the occasional shriek.

A few minutes of it were all I could stand. I searched for and found another staircase, a narrow service flight which led me out by a back way into the yard. As I stepped out into the yard I still half refused to believe what I had seen.

But one thing I was perfectly certain about. Reality or nightmare, I needed a drink as I had seldom needed one before.

There was no one in sight in the side street outside the yard gates, but almost opposite was a pub. I can recall its sign now—The Alamein Arms, and one of its doors stood open. I made straight for it.

THERE was no one in the public bar, but there was certainly something going on round the corner in the saloon bar. There was heavy breathing. A cork came out with a pop. A pause. Then a voice said:

"Gin, blast it! T' hell with gin!"

There followed a shattering crash. The voice gave a sozzled chuckle. "Thash th' mirrow. Wash good of mirrors?"

"Hi!" I called. "I want a drink."

There was a pause. Then: "Who're you?" the voice inquired cautiously.

"I'm from the hospital," I said. "I want a drink."

"Don' 'member y'r voice. Can you see?"

"Yes."

"Well, then get over the bar, Doc, and find me a bottle of whisky."

"I'm doctor enough for that," I told him.

I climbed across, and went round the corner. A large-bellied, red-faced man with a graying walrus mustache stood there clad only in trousers and a collarless shirt. He was pretty drunk.

I took down a bottle of whisky from the shelf, opened it, and handed it to him with a glass. For myself I chose a stiff brandy with very little soda, and then another.

I looked at my companion. He was taking his whisky neat, out of the bottle.

"You'll get drunk," I said.

He paused, and turned his head toward me. I could have sworn that his eyes really saw me.

"Get drunk! Damn it, I am drunk," he said scornfully. "Gotta get mush drunker." He leaned closer. "D'you know what? I'm blind. Thash what I am; blind's a bat. Everybody's blind's a bat. 'Cept you. Why aren't you blind's a bat?"

"I don't know," I said.

"S that comet, damn it! Thash what done it. Green shootin' shtarsh—an' now everyone's blind's a bat. D'ju shee green shootin' shtarsh?"

"No," I admitted.

"There you are. Proves it. You didn't see 'em; you aren't blind. Everyone else saw 'em." He waved an expressive arm. "All's blind's bats. Damn comets, I say."

I poured myself a third brandy. "Everyone blind?" I repeated.

"Thash it. All of 'em. Prob'ly everyone in th' world—'cept you," he added, as an afterthought.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"S easy. Listen!" he said.

We stood side by side, leaning on the bar of the dingy pub, and listened. There was nothing to be heard—nothing but the rustle of a newspaper or poster blown down the empty street. There was such a quietness over everything as these parts could not have known for a thousand years.

"See what I mean? 'S obvious."

"Yes," I said, slowly. "I see what you mean."

I decided that I must get along. I didn't know where I was going but I had to find out more about what was happening.

"Are you the landlord?" I asked.

"Wha' f I am?" he demanded.

"Only that I've got to pay someone for three double brandies."

"Forget it, mate. D'ju know why? 'Cause

what's the good 'f money to a dead man? An' that's what I am—'s good as. Jus' a few more drinks."

He looked a pretty robust specimen for his age, and I said so.

"What's the good of living, 's blind's a bat?" he inquired, aggressively. "That's what my wife said. An' she was right—only she's more guts than I have. When she found as the kids was blind too, what did she do? Took 'em into our bed with 'er, and turned on the gas. That's what she done. An' I hadn't the guts to stick with 'em. She's got pluck, my wife—more'n I have. But I will have, soon. I'm goin' back there—when I'm drunk enough."

He groped his way to the stairs and disappeared up them bottle in hand. I didn't try to stop him, or follow him. I drank off the last of my brandy, and went out into the silent street. . . .

This is a personal record—and one involving much that has vanished from the world. I can't tell it properly without going over material that probably already is familiar to you from the history books. My

The commercial exploitation of these products began almost immediately, and threw the world's markets into dizzying cycles of competition. The firm I worked for was called Arctic & European—probably the largest food combine then existing. An enterprising Argentinian (his name isn't important) who had founded a colony on Venus walked into the offices of A. & E. one day and displayed a bottle of pale pink oil which he proposed to sell them. He left a sample, and the firm's researchers went to work on it.

At first they thought it was a fish oil of some sort, but they soon discovered that it wasn't: it was vegetable, though they could not classify the origin. Then they learned that its vitamin content made their best fish oils look like grease-box material. That threw a scare into them—not the researchers: the board of directors of Arctic & European. If this mysterious oil from whatever-it-was on Venus were to be produced in quantity, that would be the end of A & E—unless they could control production and distribution of it themselves.



"I tell you we'd better be stopping them Communists or they'll be over here making vodka . . ."

COLLIER'S

REAMER KELLER

excuse is that I was, as the journalists say, an eyewitness to the beginning of the triffids: that I was perhaps the first victim—in a small way, at least—of the terrible power they brought with them when they came to the earth from the faraway planet of Venus.

In the history books, moreover, you will find a great deal of loose speculation on the sudden occurrence of the triffids. Most of it is nonsense. I happen to know the real how and why of it simply because triffids were my job, and the firm I worked for was intimately, if not too honorably, connected with their appearance on earth.

THE real beginning, I suppose, was the conquest of interplanetary space by those ingenious and venturesome ancestors of ours who found the earth too small a place and, after many trials, many failures and many tragedies, succeeded in building rockets and other vessels to carry them into every corner of the solar system. Long before I was born the first man-carrying vessels had reached the moon. And the world into which I was born was still excited over the establishment of the first colonies on Mars and Venus.

All of the excitement was not purely scientific; the world's great financial interests (what in older times would have been called monopolies) were less interested in the fact that men could live on the planets than they were in the wealth the planets produced. The research scientists learned very soon that certain vegetable products which flourished on the planets were enormously valuable, both as food and for remarkable medicinal properties.

They sent investigators to Venus, but their report was disappointing. It stated that some two to three square miles of the colony founded by the Argentinian had been cleared of natural growth and was under cultivation. But the investigators could not learn what was being cultivated.

The Argentinian, meanwhile, had made another trip to the earth, and was obviously looking for capital to exploit his product independently of Arctic & European. In fact, by now it was clear the Argentinian wanted nothing to do with A & E at all.

However it happened—and I don't have enough certain facts to make any direct charge against Arctic & European—a rocket ship on its way from Venus to earth was shot down in mid-air. The Argentinian must have been on board; in any case he was never heard of again. Observers who saw the shooting—or its aftermath—reported at the time that fragments of the rocket ship burst widely over the sky and began the long fall to earth. From them streamed something which looked at first like white vapor. But it didn't act like vapor; the way it spread, diffused and eddied was quite different.

Some thought the mysterious substance might be cotton, and that wasn't a bad guess. Only it was far lighter than cotton, or than thistledown. It dispersed until it was a thin veil. Seeds, infinitely light, floated and drifted even in the rarefied air. They didn't have a name then but that was the beginning of the triffids. Millions of gossamer triffid seeds drifted down, wherever the winds of the earth took them.

All this, of course, took place when I was still a child, living with my mother

and father in a quiet suburb of London. My introduction to triffids took place early, for it so happened that we had one of the first in the locality growing in our garden. It was quite well developed before any of us bothered to notice it. It had taken root along with a number of other casualties behind a bit of hedge that screened the rubbish heap. It wasn't doing any harm, and it wasn't in the way, so that when we did notice it later on we'd just take a look now and then to see how it was getting on.

Nowadays, when everyone knows only too well what a triffid looks like, it is hard to recall how odd and somehow *foreign* the first ones looked to us.

The one in our garden had a straight stem and a woody hole. There were three small bare sticks which grew straight up beside the stem. It had small sprays of leathery green leaves, and a curious, funnel-like formation at the top of the stem. Once as a child I looked inside the funnel-like cup and saw the tightly wrapped whorl within. It looked not unlike the new, close-rolled front of a fern emerging slightly from a sticky mess in the base of the cup.

The one in our garden continued to grow peacefully, and so did thousands like it all over the world. Like myself and my family, the rest of the world paid no attention to the triffids until the first one picked up its roots and walked.

That improbable event took place in Indochina, and from that moment the world became triffid-conscious, delighted with what seemed to be an interesting vegetable curiosity. I remember seeing newsreels which showed the triffids walking; and impatiently I waited for the one in our garden to walk too. I watched it every day; and then I decided I would help the thing along. I sneaked a trowel from my father's shed and loosened the earth around our triffid's roots. As I was bending down, intent on clearing the earth without injuring the plant, something—from nowhere it seemed—hit me one terrific slap, and I fell unconscious.

I WOKE up to find myself in bed, with my mother and father and the family doctor watching me anxiously. My head felt as if it were split open. I ached all over. Afterward I discovered that one side of my face was disfigured with a red blotchy raised welt. I couldn't explain what had happened—either to myself or the others. It was some little time before I found out that I was the first, or one of the first, persons in England to be stung by a triffid. Of course, our triffid was at that time only half-grown. And that was the reason I came out of the experience with no permanent damage done. . . .

The world's interest in the triffids continued to grow; and some obscure scientist gave them their name, which apparently had some relation to the fact that the things had those three sticks—"tri," "triffid," see?

Certain other facts about the triffids were soon established. It was known that they were Venusian in origin; that they were carnivorous, and that the flies and insects caught in the cups were actually digested by the sticky substance there. It seemed that the plants could survive in almost any climate, for there was hardly a country of the earth where they weren't found.

And it wasn't long before alarming stories began to be heard. The most alarming was that the whorl topping the triffid's stem could lash out as a slender stinging weapon ten feet long, and capable of discharging enough poison to kill a man if it struck squarely on his unprotected skin. Many deaths were reported, and people grew warier of triffids.

As I grew up, I read everything I could about the triffids; and I soon understood how lucky I had been in my encounter with the one in our garden, which my father had long since uprooted and destroyed. When I left school, I took a job with the Arctic & European Company, which now called itself the Anglo-Venusian Oil Company. The company announced that it was about to farm triffids on a large scale to extract valuable oils and juices, and to extract

Collier's for January 6, 1951

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highly nutritious oil cake for stock feeding. It was on one of these farms that my work as a researcher for Anglo-Venusian began. My mother and father were both dead; I was lonely, and I threw myself into the work with all the enthusiasm of the young. In some vague way I suppose I thought I had a personal score to settle with the triffids because of the bad time the one in our garden had given me long ago.

One of my co-workers was a brilliant young scientist named Walter Lucknor. Like myself, he was fascinated by the triffids and seemed to have an almost intuitive understanding of their ways. What happened to Walter on that fatal night in May years later I don't know—though I can guess. It is a sad thing that he didn't escape. He might have been immensely useful later on.

It was a year or two after the job had begun that Walter first surprised me.

The sun was close to setting. We had knocked off for the day and were looking with a pleasant sense of accomplishment at our first three fields of almost fully grown triffids. In those days we didn't simply corral them as we did later. They were arranged roughly in rows—at least the steel stakes to which each was tethered by a chain were in rows, though the plants themselves did not have a tidy sense of regimentation. We reckoned that in another month or so we'd be able to begin tapping them for juice. It was a peaceful evening with little to break the quiet but the occasional rattling of the triffids' little sticks against their stems. Walter regarded them with his head slightly on one side. He removed his pipe.

"They're talkative tonight," he observed.

"Why should—?" I began, and then broke off. "You don't really mean you think they're talking?" I said.

"Why not?"

"But it's absurd. Plants talking!"

"So much more absurd than plants walking?" he asked.

I stared at them, and then back at him.

It was a curious thing that in all my observation of triffids such a possibility had never occurred to me. But once he had put the idea into my mind, it stuck. I couldn't get away from the feeling that they might indeed be rattling out secret messages to one another.

BY THIS time the public had grown out of considering them freakish. They were clumsily amusing, sometimes dangerous, but not any more interesting than animals in a zoo. The company found them interesting, all right, and took the view that their existence was a piece of providential benevolence for everyone—particularly itself. Walter shared neither view. Sometimes when I listened to him I began to have some misgivings myself.

He was quite certain that they talked. "And that," he argued, "means that somewhere in them is intelligence. Have you noticed that when they attack they always go for the unprotected parts? Almost always the head, but sometimes the hands? And another thing: if you look at the statistics of casualties, just take notice of the proportion that have been stung across the eyes and blinded. It's remarkable—and significant."

"Of what?" I asked.

"Of the fact that they know what they're doing: they know the surest way to put a man out of action. Look at it this way. Granted that they do have intelligence; then that would leave us with only one important superiority—sight. We can see, and they can't. Take away our vision, and the superiority is gone. Worse, even—our position becomes inferior since they are adapted for a sightless existence, and we are not."

"But they can't do things. They can't handle things. There's very little muscular strength in that sting lash," I pointed out.

"True, but what good is our ability to handle things if we can't see what to do with them? Anyway, they don't need to handle things—not in the way we do. They can get their nourishment direct from the soil, from

insects and bits of raw meat. If it were a choice for survival between a triffid and a blind man, I know which I'd put my money on."

He would go on like that by the hour until after listening to him I would get things out of proportion and find myself thinking of the triffids as though they were a kind of competitor. Walter himself never pretended to think otherwise.

FOR a year or so more we were working fairly closely together. But many new nurseries were opened abroad, and I began to travel a lot to study foreign methods of working with triffids.

Walter gave up field work and went into the research department. It suited him there: he could do his own research work as well as the company's. I looked in to see him from time to time. He was forever making experiments with triffids, but the

slashed viciously for my face and smacked against the wire mask. Ninety-nine times in a hundred it wouldn't have mattered; that was what the masks were for, but this one came with such force that some of the little poison sacs burst open, and a few drops from them got in my eyes.

Walter got me back into his lab and administered an antidote in a few seconds. It was entirely due to his quick work that they were able to save my sight at all. But even so, it had meant more than a week in bed, in the dark.

Lying there, I had quite decided that when—and if—I got my sight back I was going to apply for a transfer to another side of the business. And if it didn't go through, I'd quit the job altogether.

I had built up a considerable resistance to triffid poison since my first sting in the garden. I could take, and had taken, without much hurt, stings which would have laid

horse with the remains of shafts still attached to it lay beside the artillery memorial against which it had cracked its skull.

The only moving things were a few men and a lesser number of women feeling their way carefully with hands and feet where there were railings, and shuffling with protectively outstretched arms where there were not.

I crossed in the direction of Piccadilly. Piccadilly Circus was the most populous place I had found so far. It seemed crowded after the rest—though there were probably less than a hundred people there all told. Mostly they wore queer, ill-assorted clothes, and prowled restlessly as though still semi-dazed.

In the distance came a sound which caught everyone's attention: a gradually swelling chorus:

*And when I die,
Don't bury me at all,
Just pickle my bones
In alcohol.*

From where I stood, I could see a column of men come in single file out of a side street into Shaftesbury Avenue and turn toward the Circus. The second man had his hands on the shoulders of the leader, the third on his, and so on to the number of twenty-five or thirty.

As they reached the center of the Circus the leader raised his voice. It was a considerable voice, with parade-ground quality:

"Companee-ee-ee—halt!"

Everybody else in the Circus was now struck motionless, all with their faces turned toward him, all trying to guess what was afoot. The leader raised his voice again, mimicking the manner of a professional guide.

"Ere we are, gents, one an' all. Piccadilly Circus. The Center of the World. The 'Ub of the Universe. Where all the nobs 'as their wine, women and song."

He wasn't blind; far from it. His eyes were ranging round taking stock as he spoke. Some accident such as my own had saved his sight, but he was pretty drunk, and so were the men behind him.

"And we'll 'ave it, too," he added. "Next stop, the well-known Caffé Royal, and drinks on the house."

"Yus, but what abaht the women?" asked a voice, and there was a laugh.

"Oh, women," said the leader.

He stepped forward and caught a girl by the arm. She screamed as he dragged her toward the man who had spoken, but he took no notice of that.

Considered later, I suppose I behaved like a fool. My head was still full of standards and conventions that had ceased to apply. It did not occur to me that if there was to be any survival, anyone adopted by this gang would stand a far better chance than she would on her own. Fired with a mixture of schoolboy heroics and noble sentiments, I waded in. He didn't see me coming until I was quite close, then I slogged for his jaw. Unfortunately he was a little quicker.

WHEN I next took an interest in things I was lying in the road. The sound of the gang was diminishing in the distance.

With a bit of sense knocked into me, I became thankful that the affair had not fallen out worse. Had the result been reversed I could scarcely have escaped making myself responsible for the men he had been leading. After all, he was the eyes of the party; they were looking to him to take them to food as well as drink.

Remembering that they had been headed for the Café Royal, I decided to revive myself and clear my head at the Regent Palace. Others had thought of that before me, but there were quite a lot of bottles they hadn't found.

I think it was while I was sitting there comfortably with a brandy before me and a cigarette in my hand that I at last began to admit that what I had seen was real—and decisive. It was the finish to everything I had known. Perhaps it had needed that blow to drive it home. My existence

CLANCY



COLLIER'S

JOHN RUGE

results weren't clearing his general ideas as much as he had hoped. He had proved, at least to his own satisfaction, the existence of a well-developed intelligence.

He was still convinced that the pattering of the sticks was a form of communication, and he had proved that the sticks themselves were vital, since a triffid deprived of them gradually deteriorated. Another of his discoveries was that whereas the seed of the Venusian type was one hundred per cent fertile, that of the earth-grown was about ninety-five per cent infertile.

"And that," he told me, "is a damned good thing. There'd soon be standing room only for triffids on this planet if they all germinated."

With that, too, I had to agree. Triffid seed time was quite a sight. The dark green pod just below the cup was glistening and distended, and about half as big again as a large apple. When it burst, it did so with a pop that was audible twenty yards away. The white seeds shot into the air like steam, and began drifting away on the lightest breeze. Looking down on a field of triffids late in August you could well get the idea that some kind of desultory bombardment was going on.

At the time of the accident that had landed me in hospital I was actually with Walter, examining some specimens which were showing abnormal deviations. We were both wearing wire-mesh masks, or it would have been even more serious for me. I didn't see exactly what happened. All I know is that, as I bent forward, a sting

an inexperienced man out cold. But the old saying about the pitcher and the well kept on recurring to me. I was taking my warning. . . .

The pub door swung to behind me. I made my way to the corner of the main road, and there I hesitated.

To the left, through miles of suburban streets, lay the open country; to the right, the West End of London, with the City beyond. I was feeling somewhat restored, but curiously detached and rudderless. I had no glimmering of a plan, and, in the face of what I had at last begun to perceive as a vast and not merely local catastrophe, I was still too stunned to begin to reason one out. I felt forlorn, cast into desolation. In no direction was there any traffic. The only signs of life were a few people here and there cautiously groping their ways along the shop fronts.

It was a perfect early-summer day. The sun poured down from a deep blue sky set with tufts of woolly white clouds. It was clean and fresh except for the smear made by a single column of greasy smoke coming from behind the houses to the north. I stood indecisively for a while. Then I turned east, Londonward.

But even Hyde Park Corner, when I reached it, was almost deserted. A few derelict cars and trucks stood about on the roads. There was not much, it seemed, that had gone out of control when in motion. One bus had run across the path and come to rest in the Green Park; a runaway

simply had no focus any longer. Plans, ambitions, expectations were all wiped out along with all the conditions that had formed them. I suppose that if I had had any relatives or close attachments to mourn I should have felt derelict, but in that I was lucky. My mother and father were dead, my one attempt to marry had miscarried some years ago, and there was no particular person dependent on me.

What I did feel—with a consciousness that it was at odds with what I ought to feel—was release. It wasn't the brandy, for the feeling persisted. It was, perhaps, the sense of facing something quite new. All the old problems, the stale ones, had been solved at a stroke. Heaven knew what new ones might arise—and it looked as though there might be plenty of them.

There was, too, the little question of what to do next, and how and where to start. But I didn't let that worry me for the present. I left the hotel to see what the new life had to offer me.

In order to give a reasonable berth to the Café Royal lot I struck up a back street into Soho.

Perhaps hunger was beginning to bring more people out of their homes. Whatever the reason, the parts I entered now were more populous than any I'd seen since I left the hospital. There were constant collisions on the sidewalks of the narrow streets, and the confusion of those who tried to get along was made worse by the knots of people who clustered in front of broken shop windows.

None of them seemed to be quite sure what kind of shop they faced. The cautious sought to find out by groping for some recognizable object; others took the risk of disemboweling themselves on standing splinters of glass, and climbed inside.

I felt that I ought to be showing these people where to find food. But should I? If I were to show them a food shop as yet in-

tact there would be a crowd which would not only have swept the place clear in five minutes, but would have crushed a number of the weaker ones in the process.

It was a grim business, without chivalry, with no give and all take about it. A man bumping into another and feeling that he carried a parcel would snatch it and duck away on the chance that it contained something to eat, while the loser clutched furiously at the air or hit out indiscriminately.

I was becoming uneasy. Fighting with my civilized urge to be of some help to these people was an instinct which told me to keep clear. They were already fast losing ordinary restraints. I felt, too, an irrational sense of guilt at being able to see when they could not. It gave me an odd sense that I was hiding from them even while I moved among them. Later, I found out how right that instinct was.

I WAS about to turn the next corner when a sudden piercing scream stopped me. It stopped everyone else, too. All along the street they stood still, turning their heads this way and that, apprehensively trying to guess what was happening. The alarm coming on top of their distress and nervous tension started some of the women whimpering; the men's nerves weren't in any too good a state either, but they expressed it mostly in short curses. The scream was an ominous sound, the kind of thing they had been unconsciously expecting. They waited for it to come again.

It did. Frightened and dying into a gasp, but not quite so alarming now that one was ready. This time I was able to place it. A few steps took me to an alley entrance, and as I turned the corner a cry that was half a gasp came again.

A few yards down the alley, a girl crouched on the ground while a burly man beat her with a thin brass rod. It had torn the back of her dress, and the flesh beneath

was showing red welts. As I came closer, I saw why she did not run away—her hands were tied together behind her back, and a cord tethered them to the man's left wrist.

I reached the pair as his arm was raised for another stroke. It was easy to snatch the rod from his unexpected hand and bring it down with some force on his shoulder. He promptly lashed out in my direction with a heavy boot, but I'd dodged back quickly, and his radius of action was limited by the cord on his wrist. He made another swiping kick at the air while I was feeling in my pocket for a knife. Finding nothing, he turned and kicked the girl for good measure, instead. Then he swore at her and pulled on the cord to bring her to her feet.

I slapped him on the side of the head, just hard enough to stop him and make his head sing a bit. I couldn't somehow bring myself to lay out a blind man, even this brute. While he was steadying himself, I stooped swiftly and cut the cord which joined them. A slight shove on his chest sent him staggering back, and half turned him so that he lost his bearings.

With his freed left hand he let out a fine raking swing. It missed me, but ultimately reached the brick wall. After that he lost interest in more or less everything but the pain of his cracked knuckles. I helped the girl up, freed her hands, and led her away down the alley while the blind man still blistered the air behind us.

As we turned into the street, the girl began to come out of her daze. She turned a smeary, tear-stained face, and looked up at me.

"But you can see!" she said, incredulously.

"Certainly I can," I told her.

"Oh, thank God. Thank God. I thought I was the only one," she said, and lapsed into a fresh burst of tears.

(To be continued next week)



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CITY _____ Zone No. _____

STATE _____

Uncle Sam Goes to Press

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

\$10,000-a-year post. Born in Washington, practically within sight of the lights of the Government Printing Office, Deviny has spent virtually his entire life in government service. To keep him from being lured away to plusher fields in private industry, Congress upped his salary to \$15,000.

The secret matter turned out by GPO is only a dribble of the great flow of material coming from its presses. The GPO prints the blanks the census taker uses to record your arrival in these United States, either by birth or immigration; its blanks will record your departure, by death, emigration or deportation.

Listing a Few GPO Jobs

The GPO turns out all the government penny postals you send (just under 4,000,000,000 a year); the money orders you fill out (250,000,000 a year); the income tax forms you use (327,000,000 a year); the government pamphlets you receive (632,000,000 a year) and the speeches that congressmen mail you (too many a year). Your Social Security card is a GPO product. If you apply for farm benefit payments, you fill out a GPO form. If you served in the war, GPO printed your original greetings from the draft board and will print the forms used if you are "selected" again. GPO literally offers a cradle-to-grave service. In short, it prints or directs the printing of nearly everything the government has to put down on paper.

Economy-minded people sometimes ask whether the government's printing bill could be cut substantially if the work were turned over to private printers under contract. The answer is difficult because it is almost impossible to compare costs as between GPO and private printers.

On one hand, GPO does not have to pay taxes, earn a profit or pay for its plant, since

Congress provides the latter by direct appropriation.

On the other hand, no private printer could show a profit if obliged to give its employees all the benefits enjoyed by GPO employees. For instance, the law requires GPO to give preference to veterans, even though they might not be as productive as nonvets. Furthermore, the GPO is obliged to give generous retirement pensions, as well as 26 working days of annual leave and 15 days of sick leave each year—with pay. An employee may take "sick leave" even though it is no more than an "illness of convenience," occurring on Mondays after a strenuous week end. Sick leave alone cost GPO \$1,300,000 last year.

GPO claims it forced down the price of V-mail during the war from \$1.25 to 76 cents a thousand, by threatening to go into competition with private printers, who, on the other hand, claim they can do some types of printing more cheaply than the government. GPO does, in fact, farm out some of its work to commercial establishments. During World War II, it farmed out great quantities.

Regardless of cost, GPO appears to be as permanent as the national debt. For one thing, it's more convenient for the government to have its own plant, located in Washington, where the work can be done first and the cost determined later. Second, there's the security angle; security can be enforced much more rigidly than if the work were farmed out to scores of printers scattered throughout the country.

Most important of all, Congress is jealous of its control of GPO, which comes under the legislative rather than the executive branch of government. If Congress ever relinquished that control, it would constitute one of the most striking instances of political self-denial since George Washington rejected a third term.

The legislators periodically exorcise other governmental agencies for the amount of material they ask the GPO to turn out. But Congress itself is one of the wordiest outfits. Last year, it ran up a \$7,775,000 printing bill with GPO, second only to the \$14,450,000 spent by the National Military Establishment.

Next came the Treasury Department, which needed \$5,000,000 worth of income tax and customs returns, and then the Post Office Department with \$4,800,000 worth of post cards, money orders and the like. The smallest GPO customer was the Panama Railroad—with \$9.80 for letterheads. Each department gets its own printing appropriations from Congress, and GPO then charges for each job done.

Since Congress is its boss, GPO pays closest attention to printing the Congressional Record, which records remarks of congressmen on the floor of both Houses. The high cost, now \$82 a page, pricks the conscience of economy-minded legislators and occasionally gives rise to warm debate.

Which Party Debated Most?

In 1949, Republican senators accused the Democrats of using most space in the Record. For eight pages, the Senate debated whether Democrats or Republicans were doing the most debating—all at a nonpartisan cost of \$656.

When a congressman asks to "revise and extend" his remarks in the Record, or publish something as a government document, permission is invariably granted. Speeches which he mails out to his constituents bear the euphemistic notation: "Not printed at government expense." However, the speech was originally printed in the Record at government expense, and the government paid for the envelopes, the handling and postage. All the congressman paid for was the cost

(Continued on page 68)

Collier's for January 6, 1951

Week's Mail

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

pleased that you decided to inform the public on a subject about which little has been published.

ROBERT H. MURDY,
Assistant Superintendent of Schools,
New Bedford, Mass.

... This article was very well written and surely hit the nail on the head. The sooner the public is acquainted with many of these problems, the sooner it will begin to realize how important is this which we call education. Few people ever stop to realize what goes into the publishing of the textbooks which their children use from year to year.

ANDREW WILSON, Director of Elementary Education, Faribault Public Schools, Faribault, Minn.

... Your recent article pertaining to public schools is of interest and value to those of us who are concerned with public education today. We recommend that you continue to give some consideration to this important subject.

R. D. HORSMAN,
Superintendent, Mount Lebanon Public Schools, Pittsburgh, Pa.

... Many feature articles on some phase of education are appearing in popular magazines but often they are too broad to be sources of real information to the reader. Selecting a specific phase strikes me as being a definite contribution.

Certainly parents should be more aware of the texts placed in the hands of their children. As an experienced staff member, I know we in the schools have neglected this angle of parent education.

ANN G. MCGUINNESS, Elementary Supervisor, Endicott Public Schools, Endicott, N. Y.

Marty's Friends & Relations

EDITOR: I read with great interest the article *The Old Sergeant* (Nov. 18th), as it concerns my Uncle Marty.

However, I noticed that in describing Marty's present home, several important members of the family were omitted. First, my husband, Frank Matone, Jr. (I am Margaret Maher Matone, now), our six-month-old daughter, Debby, and our two German shepherds.

This is to clarify the impression many of our friends got when they noticed that only I was mentioned. As you see, our group is a trifle larger than just Marty and I.

MARGARET MAHER MATONE,
New City, N. Y.



... I think that every cadet who knew Marty Maher even a little bit got a very heartwarming glimpse of him in your November 18th issue. Irish as they come, the inescapable twinkle in Marty's eye is still even now an amiable beacon of friendliness to those of us who many years later remember him but who in his eye are only lost

faces in the "long gray line" that he has seen pass through the bold ivy-covered walls of our alma mater.

SAM H. LANE, Austin, Texas

About That Best Seller

EDITOR: Congratulations and loud acclaim to the writer of that masterly, magnificent squelch entitled: ... and New Champion (editorial, Nov. 18th). It is a healthy and a comforting sign when a significant journal thus willingly leaves off politics to perform a necessary duty in behalf of balanced judgment in the appraisal of English letters.

DENYS GOULET, Ottawa, Ont.

... Your editorial opinion of John O'Hara's laudation of Ernest Hemingway was very gratifying, and I sympathize with you over the editorial restrictions and ethics which prevented you from giving us the concise expletive opinion which I am sure you felt.

A. M. CHURCH, Salem, Ore.

... Please let a long-time reader of Collier's express surprise and regret that the November 18th issue uses such an offensive—some say disgusting—caricature of Hemingway. This is from no slightest disagreement with the editorial characterization of Hemingway.

WILLIAM H. ALLEN,
New York, N. Y.

... With much hemming, in a not very subtle way, your editorial writers managed to drown in Mr. O'Hara's river of witty writing. Could it be that he was pulling someone's leg when he reviewed *Across the River and Into the Trees* for *The New York Times*? I guess you couldn't see the forest for the trees of your own amazement.

MARK HILL, Belmont, Mass.

Free Counsel

EDITOR: Your article *Justice on the Cuff* (Nov. 18th) should not give the reader the idea that all court-appointed attorneys and the courts which employ them are inefficient. In Cleveland, Ohio, the presiding criminal court county judge appoints an attorney to defend indigent prisoners. In murder cases two experienced men are appointed, and each is paid at least \$500.

Several years ago I was appointed to defend a man on an unarmed robbery charge. The defendant was tried, found guilty, but I secured a new trial for him and he was acquitted. Later he was again charged for another robbery, and again acquitted.

I spent a great deal of time on these cases and I was paid by the county adequately for my work. I was appointed well before the trial and had ample time to prepare the case, interview the defendant and seek witnesses.

ROBERT C. COPLAN,
Cleveland, Ohio

There is no intent in the article to imply that all court-appointed attorneys are inefficient. In fact, we can't see where lawyer Coplan got any such idea.

They're Indignant

EDITOR: In reply to "Where was the great big U.S.A. in 1939-41?", asked by Messrs. Murphy and Kelly of Winnipeg, Canada (Week's Mail, Nov. 18th), may I say that U.S.A. was minding its own business. It had no right and no intention to enter the war until it was attacked.

A. L. NEOFOTISTOS, Dracut, Mass.

... In a magazine which prints such fearless editorials as Collier's does, I am disappointed to find an editor's note of such definite meekness as your note to Messrs. Murphy, Kelly and Fletcher. Their letter made my indignation register 212° F.

MRS. CHARLES R. TRYON,
Cedar Rapids, Iowa



"A man should have a girl who can share his interests and I'm interested in everything you have a share in!"

JANE SPEAR KING

Uncle Sam Goes to Press

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 67

GPO incurred in making plates and running off additional copies from the standing type.

The Joint Congressional Committee on Printing, which sits as a sort of board of directors over GPO, tries to hold down costs by keeping its colleagues from becoming too fancy. It has, for instance, successfully resisted efforts to insert cartoons in the *Record*, presumably feeling the remarks themselves offer enough comic relief. Back in 1913, the late Senator Tillman of South Carolina did succeed in getting into the *Record* the cartoon of an allegorical cow, which he depicted as being fed by the farmers and milked by Wall Street. When fellow Senators realized what he had slipped over on them, the practice was thenceforth banned. Senator Huey Long even tried to get his photograph printed with his remarks, but failed.

No newspaper has the production problems which confront GPO in putting out the *Record*. The 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ -by-9 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-page daily release may vary from 16 to 250 pages in size. Regardless, copies must reach the breakfast tables and offices of Senators and Representatives, by special messengers who use a fleet of light delivery trucks, the next morning before eight o'clock.

Speeches May Be Revised

It is seldom that the words spoken and the text as carried in the *Record* next day tally word for word. Congressmen have the right to revise their remarks after stenographers take down the words. They can polish up, tone down, improve the syntax or correct slips of the tongue. Then it goes to the GPO's proofreaders.

"If a congressman makes a speech full of Biblical misquotations," one Representative explained, "those smart guys down at GPO go to work on it. The next day, the congressman's constituents see what a scholarly gentleman he is."

Sometimes, perhaps, GPO has waxed too enthusiastic in brushing up the copy of government officials. One such attempt led to an unpleasant encounter with President Woodrow Wilson, when proofreaders corrected his spelling of "honour" and "labour" to the Americanized forms. Wilson got the

Public Printer on the phone. "It was not a mistake," he declared firmly. "I typed that speech on my own typewriter and that is how the spelling shall remain."

To cut costs, GPO has dispensed with certain printing jobs which it formerly undertook. It no longer prints calling cards for bureaucrats—on the grounds that they are a personal rather than governmental expense. Embossed stationery is now supplied only to the President and members of the Cabinet. Almanacs, previously issued by various government departments, have been left for private publishers.

While it has given up a number of such extraneous jobs, GPO still performs numerous miscellaneous assignments. For his third inaugural in 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt got the bindery department to make a glass cover for his 200-year-old family Bible. The weatherman had predicted rain and sleet, and Roosevelt feared that the treasured volume on which he had taken all his oaths might be spotted. GPO designed a walnut-trimmed glass cover, with a door on the side so F.D.R. could slip his hand inside for the oath taking. During his years in the White House, Roosevelt paid out several thousand dollars from his own pocket to compensate GPO for printing copies of his speeches and D day prayer, which were given as Christmas presents.

The GPO bindery department also works periodically on the Bible which President Truman appropriated from his secretary, William D. Hassett, after using it to take the oath of office on April 12, 1945. On that day, aides scurried about the White House hunting for a Bible, and finally located a Bible on Hassett's desk. Truman not only kept the Bible, but uses it when other high officials take the oath in his office. Beforehand, he sends it to the GPO for insertion of a fresh flyleaf, which the official is asked to autograph after the ceremony. GPO would like to do a fancy binding job on the Bible, but the President has steadfastly refused to permit any alterations.

In addition to its main building, GPO has three branch plants throughout the city of Washington for specialized departmental jobs. One of these, in the Supreme Court

Collier's for January 6, 1951

building, is manned by six workers who print the court's opinions. The justices are GPO's most exacting customers, because a misplaced comma might well alter the meaning of a whole opinion.

One of the most closely guarded of all GPO's branch operations is the branch plant doing work for the State Department and the Atomic Energy Commission, a plant located in an inaccessible building also housing the super hush-hush Central Intelligence Agency. This GPO branch turns out super-secret publications, in contrast to the third branch, which prints cards and fixes bindings for the Library of Congress.

Book on Cats Draws Protests

By and large, however, the GPO's products are turned out in its main plant. Kept there is a copy of nearly every government publication issued—1,320,830 books, pamphlets and maps of an astounding range and variety, from Posture in Housework, The Birds of North America, which solemnly advises against interfering with birds while mating, to Control of Vagrant Cats, which recommends kitty-drowning (the latter infuriated cat lovers who could not understand how any cat could be vagrant to the point of needing such drastic control).

The most universally popular GPO publications include: You Can Make It—Practical Uses of Secondhand Boxes and Odd Pieces of Lumber (15 cents—284,000 sold to date); You Can Make It, for Profit (15 cents—197,734 sold); Care and Repair of the House (265,000 sold at 50 cents); Prospecting for Uranium, of which 64,000 have been snapped up at 30 cents per. But the best seller is the perennial favorite, Infant Care, which has sold more than 6,000,000 copies at 15 cents.

To dispose of GPO's gargantuan output, Congress created the office of Superintendent of Documents in 1895. The office of Superintendent of Documents, nicknamed "Soup Doc," probably carries more titles (40,000) than any other bookstore in the world.

Last year "Soup Doc," who in person is 33-year-old Roy B. Eastin, sold 38,386,225 pieces of government "literature" by mail or over the counter, for \$3,228,819.

These cash sales represent but a portion of the total number of pieces distributed, because "Soup Doc" makes free distributions of another 4,000,000 copies annually to libraries designated as repositories, and another 80,000,000 pieces are sent out in behalf of congressmen and government departments.

In so gigantic an enterprise, it is amazing that the GPO has been so free of skulduggery on the part of its employees. Back before loyalty investigations, there was one case of "inside" lawbreaking. Because it was such a piddling effort, GPO officials refer to it with a smile as "the case of the larcenous researchers."

During the era of shoe rationing, two employees, one a printer and the other an engraver with a passion for working overtime, swiped a dozen sheets of chemically treated safety paper and printed up a batch of ration stamps on a GPO proof press. They were so delighted with the result they succumbed to the temptation of passing a couple of them. But instead of going to a Washington store, where their scheme might have succeeded, they sent in a signed mail order to Sears, Roebuck.

Mail-order houses were particularly sensitive to the perforation patterns of ration stamps, and those two varied just enough to be spotted immediately as phonies. The "researchers" were dismissed by GPO and were given a suspended sentence by the judge.

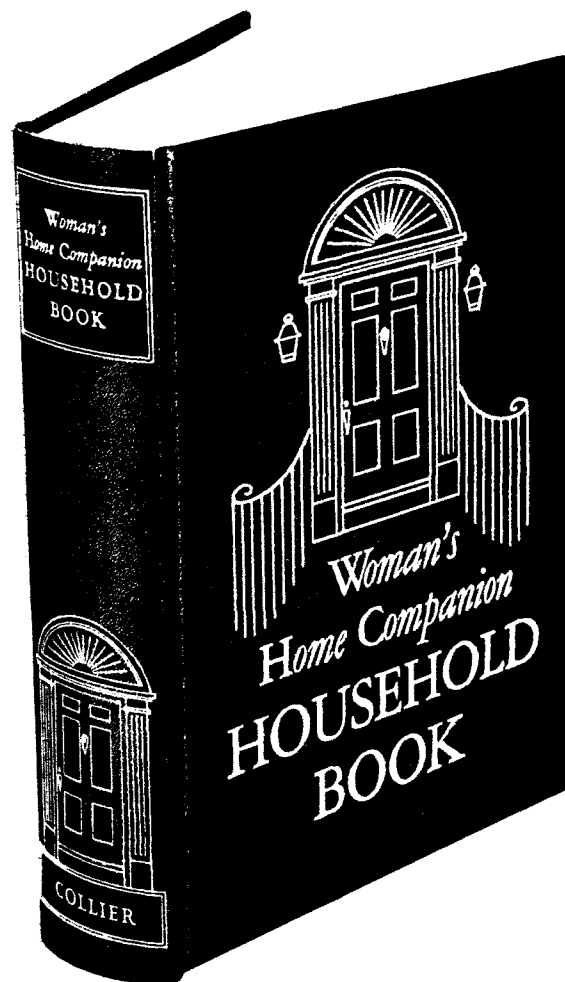
But illegalities are rare in the productive history of GPO. Since its inception each President has paid tribute, in one way or another, to the work of the department. And in a letter received by Deviny last October, Secretary of State Dean Acheson reiterated what countless grateful officials have said during the last 90 years.

"This is not the first time," he wrote, "that the Department of State has had occasion to recognize the sterling performance of the GPO . . . I am therefore happy to make the acknowledgment and trust you will convey it to the members of your staff."

Hardly a governmental agency has escaped without making someone unhappy. But GPO—that Washington phenomenon which knows all and keeps its mouth shut—is everybody's pet.

THE END

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(If you prefer to send your check or money order for \$1.95 with this coupon, we will pay the postage. Same return privilege and money-back guarantee if not satisfied.) Co-34

BUTCH



"I just dropped in to say thank you for the Christmas card—one of the nine dozen missing from the Manor Gift Shop"

COLLIER'S

LARRY REYNOLDS

Collier's for January 6, 1951



COURTESY H. M. TALBURT AND SCRIPPS-HOWARD NEWSPAPERS

Could It Have Been H.S.T.?

*Could be it was the President who threw the overalls—
Could be he overplayed his hand by starting needless brawls.
Could be that "no good" label he applied to most Repubs
Inspired the No Goods to disprove the notion they were dubs.
They went to work on Harry with a fury unexampled
And kept it up until a lot of Demos had been trampled.
Neither the Demos nor Repubs have cornered sin or virtue,
Don't kid the voters on that score or they may up and hurt you.
And so the thought emerges o'er the cheers and caterwauls,
Could be it was the President who threw the overalls.*

WHEN WE CAME TO WORK on the Friday after the first Tuesday in November we found the above cartoon, by Scripps-Howard's gifted Hal Talburt, and the appended verses lying on our desk. The verses are by a modest colleague who begs to remain anonymous. But he doesn't mind our saying that the cartoon moved him to re-examine the election upset and inspired him to a short spell of creative endeavor.

The resulting explanation seemed to us to be sensible as well as amusing. So we saved this rhyming political analysis to use around the time that the new Congress opened.

We suspect, along with our poetic colleague, that Mr. Truman himself is considerably responsible for the failure of his predicted Demo-

cratic landslide to come off. It is true that he made only one campaign speech as such. But his policies and politics were quite naturally the big feature of the Democratic campaign. And that one speech struck us as being—well, demagogic doesn't seem too strong a word.

He told his multimillion radio-and-television audience that the Republicans were the agents of the "special interests" and that they were, in effect, against the workingman, the businessman and the farmer, and in favor of low wages, unemployment and weak unions. The Republican campaign, he said, was a "pack of lies," and the GOP was "just trying to get votes."

There must have been a good many members of that multimillion audience who wondered

whether the President really favored the two-party system, and whether he thought it a shameful thing for the opposition party to go around "just trying to get votes." They might even have suspected that Mr. Truman was trying to do precisely the same thing.

Perhaps some even wished that, in this time of crisis, the President who first took office in a spirit of humility would now show a little more dignity and a little less of the ward-politician side of his character.

At any rate the landslide, as Arthur Krock remarked in the New York Times, went that-away. Some of the top politicians in organized labor laid the reverse to the Korean war. A few of them also interpreted the election results as a blow to the unions. But we doubt that Korea was entirely responsible for the impressive victory of Senator Taft, for instance, whom the labor organizations had worked hardest to defeat. Nor do we think that the cause of organized labor was weakened because the voters didn't play Santa Claus and give the union leaders everything that was on their Christmas list.

We give the union leaders credit for a hard and unrelenting fight for what they believed in. But here again it strikes us that Mr. Truman's supporters went too far. They exaggerated and they oversimplified. And they virtually commanded union members, at the peril of their economic souls, to vote against Mr. Taft.

Mr. Taft carried 86 of Ohio's 88 counties, including all the counties which contain the state's big industrial cities. So we can only conclude that a great many union members didn't agree with their leaders that the Taft-Hartley law, which Mr. Taft admits is not perfect and which he has already sought to amend, is a "slave labor" law which must be repealed *in toto*. We believe the fact that these union members made up their own minds and voted their own convictions is a healthy sign of soundness and democracy and strength in organized labor.

The Taft contest was probably the biggest one of the election. But Ohioans weren't the only ones who were thinking and voting independently. The voters split their tickets all the way from New York to California. And their decisions, we believe, reflected a lot of intelligence and independence. For instance:

Ohio showed that a solid occupational or racial or religious vote cannot be "delivered."

Chicago, in repudiating the Cook County Democratic organization, showed that citizens will not tolerate forever a corrupt hookup between organized crime and machine politics.

New York City showed that citizens can also get out of patience with machine-dictated candidates when its voters chose for mayor Vincent Impellitteri, a Tammany insurgent who had no organized support from any party.

The country generally showed that Mr. Truman's "give 'em hell, Harry" technique of 1948 isn't so effective in the tense and serious world of today. It also showed that the American people are more interested in containing present war and ensuring future peace than they are in social and economic panaceas.

It remains to be seen whether the Eighty-second Congress is any different or any better than its predecessor. It remains to be seen how far both Congress and the President will go in accepting reality and working together. But if there are no significant changes it will not be because the people have failed to indicate quite clearly their present temper and desires.

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