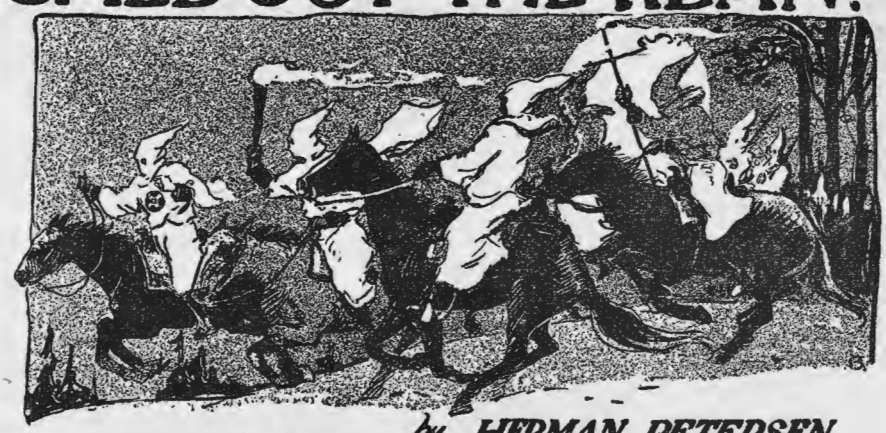
CALL OUT THE KLAN!



by HERMAN PETERSEN

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(Complete Novelette of the Invisible Empire)

A swift-action tale of the Blue Ridge Mountains proving that "all is not KKK that wanders by night in white robes."

IN the west a low sun was slipping down behind the mountains of the Blue Ridge. Shadows were lengthening in the valleys, but the mountain-tops still stood bold against a changing sky, a sky of carmine, lilac, and then a deeper purple—lingering day painting in the Western heavens, with all the color-glory of massed rhododendrons.

Down the upper road that wound in from the north and dropped steeply to the valley where flowed the river, there swung, with a most eager stride, a tall young man dressed in dusty khaki. Strapped to his flannel-shirted back was a pack now thick with road-dust. Behind him trailed a dun-colored dog, huge, yet lithe—a Great Dane. He trotted silently, that dog; his tongue did not loll, nor did he pant—and he had trotted, steadily, and for many mountain-miles that day.

Bruce Martin stopped on the last little rise of land after which the road dropped swiftly to the valley. The dog stood silently by his side.

"Well, Canute," Bruce addressed himself to the dog; "we're nearly there now. There's Burton's Knoll with the old, dead pine tree that looks just like a great cross. And there's the Lodge—and home. Old Ebony doesn't expect us, and Diana will fly around like a hen

with her head off trying to scrape us up a bit of supper."

At the last word the dog looked up and sniffed. He seemed to understand perfectly what Bruce had said. Bruce laughed, delighted.

"Supper! You know what that means, eh, Canute? Diana's supper!"

The great dog rumbled deep in his throat.

Bruce laughed again.

"All right, Canute. I'm hungry, too. Let's go—and see how Diana welcomes us."

They started down the road again.

It was dark now. The sun had dipped down behind the mountains, the shadows had crept up from the valleys and all the glory was gone from the sky. Stars twinkled out; and ahead, down the road, a light blinked forth, a bright beacon, shining from a window of the Lodge.

The Lodge, as he called it, was Bruce Martin's castle—a rambling cabin built of logs and perched up on the mountainside. Bruce was a Northerner, but the South had called him, and in the mountains of Virginia—the Blue Ridge—he had elected to build his home.

At heart Bruce Martin was a wanderer, but of late he had turned his face most often toward his home. In a way, the World War was largely responsible for that—war-ridden Europe and her torn and blood-soaked battlefields for months had claimed him, months he forgot to count. And he did not want to count them; they were done; they had been months of Hell—he had served as a lieutenant with the British Tank Corps, and later with the 2nd Division, A. E. F. — and now the rambling log cabin seemed a heaven to him.

And, to be sure, it was a heaven not without its angel. Lois was her name, the dark-haired, dark-eyed, soft-voiced daughter of peppery, old Colonel D'Aprix who lived just a mile down the valley from the Lodge.

The previous summer Lois and Bruce had been secretly married. There was, really, no earthly reason for the secret, save that they wished it so, or that they feared to rouse the Colonel's spicy temper; anyway, they had been married in a distant township and no one in their locality knew of the marriage save themselves.

A chorus of barking, baying dogs greeted Bruce and Canute as they turned in from the upper road and walked toward the Lodge. Old Ebony, the colored caretaker, kept a mongrel, and noisy pack of curs, and now they gave tongue and wrecked the quiet of the mountain night with their clamor.

The old negro flung open the door of the log cabin, and a broad path of light streaked toward the brush.

"Hi! Yo' dogs!" he yelled at his hilarious pack. "Be still! Is de debbil loose dat yo' howl like dat? Hi, yo'! Bell—Rover—Blue! Hi dey—yo' lousy Hank! Git yo' back tuh de bahn! *Git!* An' shet yo' yappin'! Don' yo' stop yo' noise den sho' de Kluxers come an' cut off yo tails."

That last—and dire—threat subdued the dogs. They had no desire at all to rouse "de Kluxers" and so part with their tails. Not a bit of it—or of tails! They stuck those same tails tightly between their legs and slunk off toward the barn, casting anxious glances, as they ran, back over their shoulders.

"Ain't they de fools—dem dogs now!" Old Ebony giggled as he watched the pack slink out of sight.

Bruce had stood quietly by. Now he chuckled. Ebony heard him and whirled to peer fearfully toward the road.

"Who dey?" he demanded in a quavering voice.

"Who whey?" Bruce asked gruffly.

"Whey yo' is."

"Me!"

Bruce stepped into the path of light streaming through the opened cabin door. Old Ebony, when he saw him, flung up both hands.

"Lawdy! Lawdy! Miste' Bruce! Is yo' home—sho nuf?"

The old negro ducked and bowed and scraped, and he shuffled through a few steps of a real dance of joy. Then he turned to face the door and bawled out in a loud, exultant voice:

"Hi, yo' dey Dianah! Slap on some suppah! Dis Miste' Bruce! He's heah!"

There came a startled, though delighted, squawk from within the cabin —a clatter of pans and rattle of dishes as Diana flew to her task of preparing supper for the new arrival.

Bruce stepped into the Lodge and dropped off his pack.

"And now, Ebony," he said, stretching his strap-wearied shoulders, "how's every old thing in these mountains?"

In the caretaker joy turned to darkest gloom. He rolled his eyes and groaned dismally. He wagged a most sorrowful head.

"Tings ain't like what dey was, Miste' Bruce," he said sadly. "Dem Kluxers sho' am raisin' hell!"

II

"SO the Klan's stirring up things in the moutains, eh?" Bruce said as he rose from the table after vanquishing Diana's supper.

"Miste' Bruce, yo's sho'ly sayin' mo' den words," Ebony told him. "Dey's raisin' a dust what ain't got no time tuh settle. Ah thanks de Lawd dey ain't campin' on dis niggah's trail."

Bruce got out his pipe and filled it. He walked to the fireplace and with a pair of tongs picked up a glowing coal.

"What seems to be the big idea?" he asked.

"De what, suh."

Bruce held the coal against the tobacco crammed in the pipe-bowl and he puffed the fragrant weed to a light. Then he dropped the hot coal back into the fire.

"What's the Klan trying to do, anyway?"

"I dunno suh—'zactly. Needah does dey, seem like. But I reckon dey's aimin' fo' tuh mop up dis den o' niquity like what dey calls it an' make it fit' fo' decent folks tuh live in. But, gawd, Miste' Bruce, decent folks dey selves is like fo' t'git reckless *sometimes* —like tuh roll de bones and take a nip o' moonshine liquor. But wid de Kluxers ridin' 'roun o' nights—Lawdy! We-all's jes' skeered fo tuh do it."

Bruce puffed thoughtfully at his pipe.

"It sometimes seems to me," he said slowly, "that the Klan is just a bunch of would-be reformers. They think they know how all of us should live. They've got a lot of radical ideas about a person's conduct, and in some localities they've got the power to put, or try to put those ideas across. But I think they've picked the wrong place when they picked these mountains in which to make a clean-up. There is no lawlessness here. The mountain-folk are quiet and ordinarily peaceful; they're easy going, but they will resent any interference with what they consider are their rights. And it's perfectly natural, too."

"Yes, suh, it's nachel," Ebony instantly agreed. "An', den, it's mighty unconvenient fo' de rest ob us when de interfeahin' an' de resentin' commence."

Bruce laughed.

"That's true. I don't know much about the Klan. Of course, I've read about them in the papers. The newspapers do play them up a lot. According to items I've read, the creed of the Klan seems to be reformation done with violence whenever necessary."

"Yes suh," said Ebony, wagging his head. "An' de people what's stuck tuh

de reforms, dey objects tuh de reformin' wid violence—an' den de debbil's loose sho' 'nuff."

"It's bad business," Bruce went on. "It breeds lawlessness rather than stamps it out. I don't believe in it. It is an unnecessary organization, and I can never defend it until I see it perform one act of good."

He smoked in silence for a time.

"Have the Klan been after anyone in particular — anyone around here, I mean?" he asked Ebony.

"Dey sho has!" the old negro exclaimed. "Fo' ah five months back dey done took after dat wuthless Sammy Brett."

"Is that so! What did Sammy do to fall foul of the Klan?"

"He forgit he wa' a niggah. Dat's all—but it sho' wa' plenty!"

"I thought Sammy had a lot of white blood in him."

"He hab, suh, mos'ly white—but he a niggah jes' de same—a white-niggah. Miste' Bruce, yo' done come f'om de No'th. Yo' don' think 'bout'n us niggahs like de folks do here. Here's whar we's *niggahs*. If'n we's nine-eights white, we's niggahs jes' de same like'n we's coal-black. It don' make no diffunce."

"But what particular thing did Sammy do?" Bruce insisted.

"He obahlook de colah-line—dat's what he done. He got moony 'bout Gus Bates's gal. Now Bates—he's jes' white-trash—yo' know dat—but he *white!* An' so's he gal—nachelly. An' Sammy—he's a niggah. So de Klan dey whip im an' run him f'om de country."

"Rather hard on Sammy," Bruce commented. "But are they just picking on the colored people?"

" 'Deed dey ain't! Dey's after a few ob de white folks, too. Jes' a spell ago dey took after ol' Dave Hinton."

"The old moonshiner?"

"He de one. He got pow'ful hint f'om de Klan fo' tuh quit makin' de moonshine. But Dave—he don' take de hint. He reckon maybe de Klan am handin' im de bull. He keep on makin' liquor wid he still up in de mountains. Gawd, he sho' do make pow'ful liquor! It got the kick! An' he peddle it. He take a load down tuh Meadowbrook one Satday night an' sell it 'round de dance-hall. An' dat dance don' break up like usual. It turn intuh a jamboree an' nigh wreck de hall."

"What did the Klan do with Dave?"

"A heap! Dey fetch 'im a ways up in de mountains an' dey bus' he still. Den dey treat 'im wid a coat ob tah. An' dey stick de tah full of fedders—'bout a peck, mebbe—f'om some chickens Dave he done swipe f'om Jedge Morehouse place. He sholy wa' a keerless sight when dey got done!"

Bruce laughed. He was not amused at the word-picture Ebony painted him of old Dave Hinton's plight after he had taken on a coat of tar and feathers; he was amused simply by the great concern old Ebony so plainly showed over the doings of the Klan.

"Well, Ebony," he said to the old caretaker, "if you go to church every Sunday—"

"Chuch!" Ebony interrupted. "Lawdy! Dat ain't no prevent'tive! Even dey got de Parson Willows!"

"For what?"

"Fo' bein' what dey call pre-sumpt-u-ous. Fo' preachin' tuh his bunch o' Howlin' Methdists dat dey ain't no hell fo' niggahs. My Jesus, but dat niggah sho' pull a *awful* bonah wid dat sermon. He sho' did! An' t'mek it wuss, de fool coon wha he preach to, dey done believe it. An' nex mon'nin' dey wa' a bunch o' cocky niggahs down tah de Cornahs.

"Den de Kluxers dey got hot an' dey tuk de parson down tuh de rivah an' dey tie 'im tuh a tree an' wid a whip dey flay off half he hide. He meek like Moses now, an' he allows dey's sho'

'nuff a hell fo' niggahs an' dat de parsons ain't erscluded none a-tall."

Bruce rapped out his pipe. He shook his head.

"These mountains certainly have changed some since I was here last year," he said to Ebony. "They've changed a lot—and for the worse. They're getting warm. I'll be almost afraid to ramble around much at night."

"Don' yo' ramble none too fah," Ebony warned him hastily. "Tain't healthy! Dey ain't nobody what de Klan lays off'n f'om once dey cuts loose. Even dey's after de ol' Kunnel."

"Colonel D'Aprix?" Bruce stiffened suddenly. "What has the Colonel done?" he demanded harshly. He could scarce believe his ears.

"Only de good Lawd knows—not me," Ebony answered solemnly. "An' ef de Colonel know what it all about he keep it to hisself. Dey's what dey calls a niggah in de wood-pile somewheres. It ah queer! Jes' a week ago de Kunnel done git nailed to he doah a note wid de writin' done wid blood. It tell him: *'When de Klan order—obey'.*"

"What did the Colonel do about it?"

"Sho', he git riled an' wham 'roun de collah like he genlly do. He take dat note hot-foot tuh de Cornahs an' on de stoop ob de general-store he burn it. An' den he tell de worl de Klan kin go tuh hell."

Bruce thoughtfully filled his pipe again and leaned back in his chair. Colonel D'Aprix was Lois' father, his father-in-law—and the peppery Colonel had somehow fallen foul of the Klan. The Klan had commanded him apparently to carry out some order, do something. The Colonel had refused, heatedly, to consider the command. And then he had been warned to obey the Klan's orders or— Or what? Suffer such punishment as the Klan might consider advisable to inflict?

In answer to the warning the Colonel had publicly denounced the Klan and had condemned it and its members to the over-heated lower regions of the damned. And now Bruce wondered what the result, the answer would be to that. Would the Klan resent the condemnation? Would it dare hurl its wrath against the hot-headed Colonel?

Canute, the Great Dane, jumped suddenly to his feet from where he had been lying beside the fire. The short hair along his spine bristled stiffly and he growled, deep and rumbling, in his throat.

"He heard it!" Bruce exclaimed. "I thought my ears had tricked me. I thought I heard a shot."

Old Ebony got up and shuffled to the door and threw it open.

"It wa' a shot," he said knowingly. "An' it come f'om down de road—f'om de Kunnel's place. Maybe some fool niggah's foolin' 'round de chickens."

Bruce got up from his chair and went to the door. He listened. The mountain night was quiet, all serene.

Ebony sniffed the air.

"Taint nothin'—" he began.

Then a quick drumming broke the silence of the night—staccato hoof-beats of a racing horse. And that horse was thundering toward the cabin, up the upper road.

"The Klan?"

Both white man and negro uttered the word simultaneously.

"My gun!" snapped Bruce at Ebony, and the old colored man fetched a shotgun quickly from the cabin.

He stood trembling by Bruce's side.

A girl, mounted bare-back on a furiously ridden horse which she guided with but a halter, crashed through the rhododendron thicket surrounding the Lodge cabin. Without checking the lathering horse, she slid from its back and almost fell into Bruce's arms. It was Lois.

"Bruce—Bruce!" she sobbed and clung weakly to him. "The Klan—they shot—father!"

III

AFTER she had sobbed out her sore message, Lois sagged limply against Bruce and collapsed in a dead faint. He gathered her tenderly up in his arms and carried her into the cabin. Diana with a light led the way to a bedroom, and Bruce placed the unconscious girl carefully down on a bed.

"Take care of her, Diana," he commanded. "Get her undressed and under the covers—and get her to sleep."

"Yo' go 'long," Diana told him. "Ah'll tend to huh. Yo go see 'bout de Kunnel."

Bruce left the bedroom. He got his pack, which he had brought with him to the Lodge, and he opened it and from it he took a holstered pistol and a belt of clipped ammunition.

Canute stood by the fire trembling with eagerness.

"Come, boy," Bruce called to the dog. "I may have need for you tonight."

The dog followed him as he went out of the door.

Ebony had, in the meanwhile, captured Lois's horse. The animal was very nervous and the old negro had hard work to hold her still.

"Can we both ride her?" Bruce asked.

"No, suh," Ebony answered with a quick shake of his head—and the horse shied violently. "Dis is Nancy, de Kunnel's own horse. She won't carry double."

"I'll ride her, then," Bruce said. "You get the shotgun and take Canute and follow along on foot. Better get a lantern."

He swung to the horse's back. With a snort the animal plunged toward the road. Canute ran after. Old Ebony got a lantern, grabbed up the shotgun Bruce had stood against the door and started down the path on a shambling run.

The D'Aprix house was a good mile down the upper road from the Lodge. Bruce gave his horse her head and she thundered down the mile of steeply pitched mountain path at a pace that threatened disaster should she stumble. Scarce a yard behind her flying heels, Canute raced like a sinister shadow.

The furious ride was brief. Nancy seemed to understand what her rider demanded of her. She swerved into the drive leading to the Colonel's house and galloped toward the back steps. Then suddenly she planted all four feet and slid to a stop.

The house was brightly lighted. The back door was open. Bruce dismounted and went in. Inside, in the kitchen, he found several badly frightened negroes huddled together in a corner.

"Where's the Colonel?" was Bruce's first demand.

One of the negroes, trembling as if with the ague, led Bruce into the library. The colored man stopped just inside the door and pointed with a hesitating finger toward a davenport pushed against one side of the room.

The Colonel lay stretched out on the davenport, still, white-faced—dead.

Bruce crossed the room. The Colonel was coatless. He wore a white shirt, opened at the throat, and now the white over the left breast was stained with red. Gingerly Bruce opened the shirt and bared the chest. A gaping hole lay beneath the stained and punctured cloth—a bullet wound.

Bruce turned to the trembling negro. "Who shot him?" he snapped roughly.

The negro gulped and several times swallowed audibly before he could find his voice; and when he did speak it was scarcely in more than a whisper, strained, quavering, awed.

"De—de—de Kluxers done it," he finally managed to stammer, after several vain attempts.

"When did it happen?"

"Jes' happen, sah."

"Was that the shot I heard just a while ago?" Bruce asked.

In a way it was a needless question, but it was the first that came into his mind and he asked it simply because he desired to get the negro started in to talk.

The colored man nodded.

"I reckon—yassah, I reckon it wa' de shot yo' hea'd."

"Where were you when the shot was fired?"

"Please, sah, I wa' in de dinin' room servin' de suppah."

"Dining room! You don't mean to tell me that the Colonel was shot in the dining room!"

"No, sah. He wa' shot at de front-doah. *I* wus in de dinin' room. De Kunnel an' Miss Lois dey had jes' set down tuh eat dey suppah when de Kluxers come. Dey called de Kunnel tuh de doah. Den dey shot 'im down."

"Did you see any of the Klansmen?"

"No, sah. I don tol' yo' *I* was in de dinin' room, Miste' Bruce. I didn see dem. Buckwing seed 'em. He wa' jes' comin' f'om de bahn."

"Go get Buckwing!"

The negro pattered eagerly back to the kitchen. Presently he returned to the library. Behind him tiptoed Buckwing, a coal-black youth of perhaps seventeen.

"Yassah, Miste' Bruce," he said in a stagey whisper as he shuffled uneasily into the room.

He kept his eyes turned determinedly away from the davenport on which the Colonel lay.

"Buckwing, Eli tells me that you saw the men who shot the Colonel," Bruce said. "Is that a fact?"

"Yassah, Miste' Bruce—I seed 'em. Dey wa' Kluxers," Buckwing replied.

"Are you sure about that?"

"Yes, suh!" Buckwing declared, and not without a little emphasis. "I seed 'em—plain as ghos's. An' dey wa' dressed like dat, Miste' Bruce."

"You mean they were dressed like ghosts?" Bruce queried the negro lad.

"Yassah! Dey had on de ghos's dress which ain't got pants an' wid big, black holes fo' de eyes. An' de hosses wa' dress jes' de same way only de ears an' de legs ain't kivered none."

"How many horsemen were there?" Bruce asked further.

"Nigh a hun'red—I reckon two hun'red," Buckwing told him. "I didn't 'zactly count 'em. I hea'd de shot."

Bruce's eyes narrowed.

"How many horsemen did you actually see, Buckwing? I don't care how many you thought you saw or how many you might have seen—how many did you really see?"

"Well, Miste' Bruce, dey wa' one right by de doah."

"One, eh! What did you do when you heard the shot?"

"I scoot like hell fo' de bahn, sah, an' I stay dey 'till Miss Lois she hollah fo' de hoss."

"What did you run to the barn for? Why didn't you go to the house and make an attempt to help Colonel and Miss Lois?"

Buckwing gasped with surprise. His eyes rolled and opened wide.

"Lawdy, sah!" he exclaimed as though to him the idea was unthinkable. "When de Kluxers am ridin' in de night it sho' ain't no time fo' niggahs tuh be loose."

Bruce questioned the negroes but little further. By this time Ebony had arrived. He lighted the lantern he had brought with him and he accompanied Bruce to the front-door of the house where the shooting of Colonel D'Aprix had taken place.

There was not much to be discovered. Hoofprints were plentiful enough in the grass and drive about the house, but the Colonel had a score of horses of his own and the whole grounds were so trampled that it was impossible to pick out the Klan-riders' tracks. One or one hundred horsemen might have helped commit the crime; there was no way of telling.

Bruce turned his attentions to the door. As he fully expected to do, he found tacked to one of the door-panels a fluttering scrap of white paper on which several words had been scrawled with red ink. He tore down the note and held up the lantern that he might read by the flickering light.

"Niggers and others—bewear. This man defied the klan. K. K. K."

Bruce folded up the bit of paper and tucked it carefully away in a pocket.

"I'm afraid," he remarked sadly to Ebony, "that we're stuck. We won't find much in the way of clues."

Ebony wagged his old, gray head and took a step toward the opened door. As he did so, his foot struck against an object that lay on the porch and which rolled away, tinkling metallicly across the boards of the floor, glinting brassily in the light from the now low-held lantern in the old negro's hand.

With a low exclamation, Ebony bent and picked up the thing. He looked closely at it and then dropped it into Bruce's palm.

It was an empty cartridge case.

IV

IT was noon. Hep Logan pulled up his horse, shifted a mouthful of tobacco and spat copiously into the dust of the road. He eased himself in the saddle and greeted the burly mountain-farmer who was repairing a piece of fence by the side of the road.

"Wall, Jackson," he said in a drawling voice. "I reckon yo' heard tell 'bout the Colonel."

Andy Jackson drew a sleeve over his flushed, perspiring face, rested the heavy post-maul on the ground and added another flood of tobacco-juice to the road.

"I reckon I did," he answered with a grunt.

Logan pushed a battered black felt hat back on his head. He nodded thoughtfully and chewed, open-mouthed, somewhat noisily, for a time.

"I reckon," he said slowly and spat again. "I reckon it wa' the Klan. But I sho' can't figure it out what the Colonel done or why they should want to kill him."

Jackson leaned his huge body against a fence-post he had just driven into the ground. His dark eyes glittered.

"I reckon," he said thickly, "it ain't what he done—it's what he didn't do."

"An' what wa' that?"

Jackson's dark eyes shifted.

"How should I know?" he answered.

Logan twirled his mustache about a grimy finger.

"Yo've been tryin' t' cou't the Colonel's daughter fo' nigh two years—ever since yo' come here—an' I jes' kinder thought yo' might have heard him drop a remark."

Jackson laughed unpleasantly.

"I reckon I've heard him drop several remarks," he said bitterly. "But I ain't heard him drop none 'bout the Klan 'cept maybe t' damn 'em."

Logan sighed heavily.

"Now that's sho' too bad," he said with genuine regret. "I wa' sho'ly hopin' yo' could hand me a clue. As sheriff of this here county it's sohter up to me to ketch the pusson responsible fo' the crime."

"Then yo'd better ketch the Klan," Jackson told him.

Logan shifted uneasily in his saddle.

"I hear yo'," he responded softly. "But I ain't enthused none a-tall. Man, I ain't no army!"

"Army!" Jackson jeered. "Yo' don' need no army. All yo' needs is guts. Jes' find the men who wa' at the Colonel's place an' arrest 'em."

Logan leaned over and drowned a beetle struggling in the dust of the road.

"If yo'll permit me to remark," he drawled, "I'll tell yo' that they wa' a hell o' a bunch o' those thems—an' which ones does I arrest! Buckwing allows he saw nigh a hun'red, mo' o' less. I reckon it wa' less, but they all wore the white Klan robes an' they all looked alike. Even the hosses was kivered."

"An' did they all do the shootin'?" Jackson asked.

"No," said Logan. "Only one man shot. At leas', the niggers only tell 'bout one shot an' they wa' only one bullet in the Colonel's body. It wa' a fo'ty-five."

"Fo'ty-five!" Jackson echoed. "Ain't no man carries a gun o' that caliber—no one in these parts."

Logan agreed to that.

"I know it. An' that's the p'int! Mos' o' the boys 'round here uses thirty-eights when they git keerless. If I can ony find out who owns that cannon—then I reckon I got my man."

"To git," Jackson finished contumeliously.

Then he chewed vigorously for a while; his brow was furrowed. Then his eyes gleamed with a new light.

"Maybe the killer wa' a stranger," he suggested.

"Maybe," Logan admitted slowly. And he added:

"Bruce Martin come home last night."

"Bruce Martin!" Jackson scowled fiercely. "What in hell's that damn' No'therner doin' here ag'in?"

Logan shrugged expressive shoulders.

"I ain't asked him—not 'zactly. I kinder hedged 'round, but it didn't git me no satisfaction. But I reckon maybe he come t' cou't the Colonel's daughter. Anyway, she's at his cabin now."

"At the Lodge?"

"Yes."

He spat.

"Last night she went there r'arin' when the Kluxers shot her pappy. Old Eb tol' me she fell right off'n her horse into Martin's arms. I suspicion they's pow'ful interested in each other."

Jackson, the heavy scowl with each moment growing darker on his coarse, red face, bent and picked the heavy post-maul from the ground. He swung it above his head and brought it viciously down on a fence-post. That single blow drove the post a full two inches deeper into the ground. Then with an oath Jackson hurled the maul from him.

"Yessah," the tobacco-chewing sheriff drawled on—"I reckon they's pow'ful interested in each other. I reckon even maybe they'll be married—sometime er other. Tain't jes' respectful fo' a lady to live with a man which she ain't married with."

Without offering an answer, Jackson picked a board from the ground and nailed it to the fence-post. Infuriate hammer-blows were demonstrative of the malignant, impetuous passion that possessed the man.

The sheriff watched the angry, burly farmer, and his grey eyes twinkled.

"Yes," he drawled on, continuing for his own complacency the one-sided conversation. "I sho' reckon they'll be married. 'Course, they may not be married right off. 'Twouldn't look jes' right with her papy ha'dly col'. It would appear kinder funny. An' it appears kinder funny not to, with her livin' with him in his cabin. Doggone! It sho' look kinder funny which ever way 'round."

Jackson dropped the hammer and whirled to face the sheriff.

"Don' it!" he snarled. "Don' it! I wa'

wonderin' how come yo' don' get that through that thick head o' yo'rn. 'Course it looks funny! An' when yo' stop fo' to consider the situation, it *is* funny!"

"Meanin' which?"

"Meanin' that Martin comes back the very same night the Colonel's murdered. An' then, jes's soon's the Colonel's dead, *she* goes off hot-foot to live with him. An', fu'ther, the Colonel is shot with a fo'ty-five bullet."

Logan nodded and spat again into the road.

"That's a fact," he said.

"Yeh—an' did yo' stop t' think that Martin served across with the army?"

"I aint thought on it," the sheriff admitted.

"Then yo'd better think! He wa' an officer—an' them officers carried fo'ty-fives."

"Sho'! I didn't know that!"

"Did yo' know that Martin brought a fo'ty-five back with him?"

"No, I didn't," said the sheriff.

"Wall, yo' know it now. He did! I've seen it. I seen it last year—I seen him carrying it one day."

Jackson turned again to the board he had nailed to the fence-post. He lifted from the grass a small and battered tin can containing some red paint and a small brush.

"Just think it over," he advised the sheriff.

V

WHETHER he realized it or not—he was perspicacious for all his easygoing ways—Sheriff Logan had left with Jackson a most bitter pill to swallow. The thought of Bruce Martin was gall, no less, to the farmer; and there was a reason for it. That reason was Lois, the Colonel's daughter.

Jackson had come to the mountains two years previous. Where he had come from the mountain-folk—curious as they are—could but guess at. Jackson was mighty vague and untalkative about his past; he was not at all a friendly man, and he kept apart from from his neighbors, living with himself and within himself. He took a small farm—down near to the Corners, purchasing it from Colonel D'Aprix. With Liberty bonds he paid down one-half of the purchase price of the farm and each month, with unfailing regularity, he called at the D'Aprix house and made a partial payment, with more bonds, on the balance due the Colonel.

Such an unheard of procedure was entirely without precedent in the district, and it branded Jackson as a man of means. It was natural, of course, that the mountaineers should be curious concerning Jackson's money—how he got it and how much he had; and he kept them curious. Even the inquisitive Logan could get, apparently, nothing from him. Nor could the marriageable girls of the locality. They began casting sheep's-eyes at the burly, red-faced farmer, but to them all he was unresponsive.

The man was not without avidity. He had eyes; he had a bestial covetousness typical with his kind. But his rapacity was in a measure strained. He had no moment for any of the mountain women; he looked audaciously beyond himself and found his omnivorous desires embodied in Lois, the Colonel's daughter.

And once each month Jackson called at the D'Aprix house to pay the installment on his farm. He often met Lois, spoke to her and felt the desire within him burn. He could not always conceal his thoughts. The Colonel noticed it and rebuked the man.

"Jackson," he said coldly to the farmer one night, "you come here to make payments on your farm, not talk with my daughter. Bear that in mind."

Jackson did bear it in mind, and not

graciously. He was a mountain-farmer and he knew that the Colonel looked upon him even less favorably than he did upon a worthless negro. He was white but in the mountain parlance he was *trash,* nobody, less than the dust of the mountain roads.

Then Bruce Martin came from the North, and in Jackson there began to seethe a hot, red fury. From the very beginning Lois had shown more than a passing interest in the friendly, likable Northerner, and Jackson resented it. In his heart the red fury grew.

Now he stood, trembling slightly, and watched Sheriff Logan lop down the valley road. Then he kicked the can of red paint viciously into the road where the can tipped over and the paint spilled out and stained the dust. With a grunt, he bent and picked the post-maul from the ground, flung it over a shoulder and stamped in bad humor toward the house. Wittingly, or unwittingly, the sheriff had added dry kindling to the fury that burned in the farmer's heart.

A young bull tied to a stake in the door-yard, with a rope fastened to a ring pierced through its nose, stood in Jackson's path. The farmer stopped before the animal. His dark eyes flamed.

"Move!" he bellowed at the beast that stood placidly chewing its cud.

The bull did not move.

With an oath, Jackson swung the maul from his shoulder. The heavy sledge struck the bull squarely on the forehead, between the eyes, and the beast dropped without a moan. Jackson spat on it, stepped over it and strode on toward the house.

"At his cabin, is she! Livin' with him, is she!" he repeated over and over as he walked along. "I'll see about that. I'll see about that—tonight."

And he did.

When darkness dropped a thick blanket down over the mountains and the stars came out and hung gold lanterns in the sky, Jackson left the house and made for the upper road. The D'Aprix house was unlighted, silent, when he passed it. He paused for a brief, undecided moment. Then he shook his head and continued on. Halfway to the Lodge he left the road and struck off through the brush.

It was hard going in the darkness, but his fury drove him and he crashed on, stumbling often, swearing continually—a night-prowling beast possessed of a red-madness.

He smashed through the last barrier of rhododendrons which grew an almost impenetrable thicket about the Lodge.

A light shone from a window of the cabin. Jackson stopped. Then, crouching, he crept slowly, softly, to the window and peered into the room.

Bruce Martin was there. He was pacing back and forth across the width of the rug-strewn floor—his hands clasped behind his back, his head bent thoughtfully forward, his forehead puckered with his thoughts. He puffed steadily on a short, curved pipe clamped between his firm set teeth.

Jackson ground his teeth. His hand crept toward the rear pocket of his trousers. Then he sucked in his breath with a sharp hiss and stood rigid.

Lois, carrying a lighted lamp in her two hands, came in from another room.

"Bruce," Jackson heard her say, "tomorrow I want to get some things from the house."

Bruce stopped his pacing. He removed his pipe from his mouth and turned to face her with a smile.

"All right, honey," he said. "And now you go to bed and *sleep* 'til tomorrow."

She nodded.

"I'll sleep," she promised. "I'll probably dream. I always will dream now at night—these nights, in these mountains."

"I know," Bruce said softly to her. "But not for long. After tomorrow—then we'll go. We'll leave the mountains. Tomorrow we'll get your things and then—then we'll go rambling off—on our honeymoon."

Lois smiled, though wanly.

"I'll like that," she said. "Perhaps, then, I'll forget." Her lips quivered. "Just now—Oh! I don't like these mountains! They seem so quiet—too—too quiet—ominous they are—treacherous. And the Klan—"

Bruce placed a finger quickly against her lips.

"Forget the Klan," he commanded quietly.

Lois leaned her head against him. And Bruce smoothed her hair gently.

"I'll try to forget," she said. "But, Bruce—I'm afraid. I'm afraid for you. I feel a threat and sense a danger in the night. You're all I have now—and if they take you—"

He bent his head and kissed her, apparently trying to prevent her speech.

Lois murmured something which Jackson could not catch. Then she left the room.

Jackson watched her go, until her light vanished. Then he stepped back a pace from the window and clutched at his pocket.

"So—you're all—she's got, eh!" he snarled brokenly. "All she's got! An' she ain't gonna have yo' long! She ain't gonna have yo' long!"

But he never drew the pistol. Before his fingers could close about the butt, a long, lithe form hurtled from the darkness and pounced upon his shoulders, sprawling him flat and shaken to the ground.

Lip-bared fangs gnashed within an inch of his convulsively working throat, and baleful eyes glared into his—eyes that warned of death, eyes of a silent, savage dog, a killer—Canute. For a moment Jackson lay half stunned.

VI

THE dog did not make a sound. He stood tense, waiting, his very attitude spelling doom. And Jackson did not make a move. He knew well that to do so was to court instant disaster—the Great Dane's bared fangs were too eager, too near to his throat.

The farmer lay very still. But his mind was nimble, worrying with the great question of the moment—how to get free from the dog? True, he had a pistol in his pocket, but he dared not risk the move to get it. He was lying on his back and the pistol was behind him; it would be almost impossible to get it out without rolling over. And there was no chance for that; the dog's jaws were strong and once they closed about his throat and those big fangs tore through the flesh, Jackson knew his life would be the matter of but a moment. And he had no wish to die.

Jackson was a powerful man, but in his position he was helpless. Doubtless, had he been standing, he could have killed Canute with his bare hands. But he wasn't on his feet. He was on his back; and he, manlike, had to resort to trickery to defeat the beast.

As was usual with him, Jackson was chewing tobacco. Now he lay quietly, working nothing but his jaws. He masticated the mouthful of rank weed thoroughly. Then suddenly he spit full into Canute's glaring eyes.

With a snort the dog leaped back. Instantly Jackson was on his feet and had the pistol from his pocket. He caught the gun by the barrel and smashed the butt down on Canute's shaking head. Then he fled toward the road, crashing noisily through the rhododendrons.

Temporarily blinded by the tobacco-juice, Canute for several minutes made no attempt to follow after Jackson. Too, he was somewhat dazed from the blow upon the head. He staggered about in

drunken circles, stopping at every step or two to rub with his paws his smarting eyes.

It took Canute several minutes to clear his sight. When, finally he had done so, he made a wide circle, running with his nose close to the ground. He picked up Jackson's track and with a short, roaring bellow of a bark, he plunged into the thicket and took up the trail.

The fleeing Jackson heard Canute's warning, the challenge he flung to the night, the bellowed hunting cry. The farmer knew what it meant—the dog was on his track.

The panting farmer redoubled his efforts to get to safety. He short-cut down a steep, brush-tangled bank to the shallow river in the valley, splashed in and stumbled. He fell down in the gurgling water and lost his pistol, an old one. He had no time in which to stop and looked for it. He got hastily to his feet, waded across the stream and clambered up the further bank. Then he hurried across the fields toward his house.

Canute lost time at the river. Jackson's track ended abruptly at the water and for a minute or two the huge dog raced determinedly back and forth along the water-edge trying to recover the trail. Then his dog-canniness sent him plunging into the river. He swam across and soon picked up the farmer's tracks on the other side.

There again, he gave to the night the short, roaring hunting-cry.

Jackson was just crossing his door-yard when Canute's second warning came to him on the wind. He knew he did not have time enough to reach the house. There was a tree in the yard and he ran for it. He stumbled over the stake to which had been tied the bull, and the length of rope still lying in the grass looped about his ankle and threw him down.

Without attempting to loosen the rope from about his foot, he tore up the stake and legged it for the tree. He grasped a low limb and swung from the ground. Then he climbed up several feet. Suddenly his strength gave out and he slipped. He flung his arms hastily about the tree-trunk and hung giddily for long gasping moments while he closed his eyes and fought to regain his spent breath. He heard the dog come up and stand panting beneath the tree.

When Jackson recovered enough strength to fling a leg over a limb and make secure his perch up in the tree, he discovered that the rope was still looped about his ankle. He leaned over, caught the rope in a hand and drew it up. In one end of it he made a running noose.

Canute stood almost directly below the limb on which Jackson sat. His head was tilted up as he kept his eyes upon the farmer.

Jackson coiled the rope. Then leaning cautiously from the limb he cast down the noose. It dropped neatly over Canute's head and drew taut about his neck.

With an exultant cry Jackson yanked up and raised the great dog from his feet. Then he stubbed the rope and slid down from the tree. Canute's hind feet barely touched the ground.

Winding the rope about the tree, Jackson secured it and started on a run for the house. He was gone for several minutes. When he returned he carried in his hand a heavy, long-lashed stock-whip.

"Now my beauty," he cried at the dog, "here's whar yo' git yo'rs!"

The huge farmer swung the heavy whip above his head. The long lash made a whistling sound; then it hissed down and curled with a sharp, biting crack about the hanging dog's stretched body.

Canute struggled, mutely, but the strangling rope held firm. Again and

again Jackson swung the whistling whip and cracked it down.

The whip-lash grew red and flipped off drops of wet, and some clung warm to Jackson's face; but he continued to flog the dog, until his arm grew weary with the flailing, until Canute no longer struggled but hung and swayed with the blows.

Then Jackson threw down the whip and loosed the rope, letting Canute to the ground where the dog lay still as death. This done, the farmer started off once more toward the upper road.

VII

WHEN Lois had gone to bed, Bruce Martin, pipe in mouth, took up again his pacing of the room.

It was very quiet in the cabin and outside the night was hushed; a great silence had settled down upon the mountains, even the night-winds seemed stilled; the darkened world was soundless, mute, with a sort of quivering breathlessness of that tense calm which sometimes heralds a storm.

Bruce's mind was busy with serious matters; it was puzzled with a mystery, for the murder of Colonel D'Aprix was no less than that. And to Bruce it seemed a mystery that was unsolvable. He viewed the affair from every conceivable angle, but always he came to the same unproved end—that the killing had been wanton murder, murder done without a single uncoverable, underlying motive.

Murder without motive! It was unthinkable. To Bruce the idea was unacceptable. He questioned his wife, Lois, about it.

"No," she had said in answer to his questions, "I can think of no reason why *anyone* should have murdered father."

"Had he no enemies?" Bruce had insisted.

"Enemies—yes! Yes, he had those," she had answered. "What man has not? but that doesn't account for the Klan. And now it will seem strange to you—but on that point I'll defend the Klan. Father would have done so had he lived.

"The Klan is private, but it is not personal, Bruce. They would not proscribe my father because of the enmity of any man, whether that man was a member of the Klan or not. The Klan is an organization, not in any sense local; it is an Empire in power, and it has a constitution by which it is governed just as any State is governed.

"If a man offends the Klan, he offends because he in some way has gone contrary to one of the great principles embodied in its constitution. And that man is warned—usually all of three times. If, after the third warning, he continues to do what the Klan considers wrong—then, and not before, it may use violence in dealing with that man. It may even kill him. That's wrong, of course—but so far as I know of the affairs of these mountains, the Klan never gets the wrong man. And it always has a reason for its actions."

"Then you think the Colonel did something to rouse the Klan?"

"I don't know," Lois had answered. "But I think not. To tell the truth, father favored the Klan. That is, he favored some of its principles. And because of that the local den or chapter sought him as a member. But I know that he had not joined. You know, Bruce, father was of the old school; he was a *Southerner*. He could never forget that. And the men belonging to the local den of the Klan are men of this locality — mountaineers. Need I say more? Father could not, would not associate with them."

"Perhaps that's the answer. What about those notes he got?"

"So far as I know, he got but one. That just told him to obey all orders of

the Klan. For some reason or other it made him very angry."

Bruce nodded.

"I heard about that. Ebony told me he went to the Corners and denounced the Klan."

"He did. But the whole affair was not taken seriously. All the men who were at the general-store at the time were members of the Klan. They were all greatly amused by father's temper. I think they did it just to take him down a peg, so to speak—because he held himself above them. They did it just to make him angry, and they succeeded. They knew well enough what he would do, and they all were there at the Corners, waiting for him, to hear what he'd have to say."

At midnight Bruce was still pacing the cabin floor. The fire had died down and the air in the room was noticeably chilly. Bruce went to the fireplace stirred up the embers and laid on fresh logs.

Suddenly he thought of Canute. The dog had not as yet returned from his hunting trip, nor had Bruce heard him since the Great Dane had first challenged the night with his bellowed hunting-cry.

Bruce went to the door and opened it. He whistled shrilly for the dog. Then he listened. There was no responsive bark, even faint. And if Canute was within hearing he always answered Bruce's call. He whistled again. Again he listened. The night was silent, unbroken with sound.

Bruce went back into the cabin and closed the door. The fresh logs he had laid on the embers had caught fire and flame was beginning to mount up in the chimney. Bruce pulled a chair before the fire, filled his pipe and sat down.

Then he dozed. How long he slept he did not know. He woke with a start to hear a faint scratching at the door.

Bruce crossed the room and flung the cabin door open to the night. Canute, his dun colored hide flayed into one mass of raw, red, dripping flesh, staggered into the room. He lurched toward the fireplace and on the hearth he sank down and moaned.

Bruce stood stunned and for a moment just looked at the dog. The blood left his cheeks and crept into his eyes.

"Whipped!" he gasped between his teeth. "Whipped! Some dirty beast whipped that dog."

He took one single step toward the fire. Abruptly he stopped. The glass in one window shattered and tinkled to the floor. A hard, white object struck the further wall, rebounded, and rolled across the rugs to his feet.

He picked it up. It was a stone about which paper was twisted. He removed the paper and smoothed it out on the table. And he saw on it written words penned in red. The message was terse:

"You are next Yank—bewear.
K. K. K."

VIII

NEXT day, just before noon, Colonel D'Aprix was quietly buried on the top of a little knoll up in the mountains back of his house. The knoll had been a favorite spot of the Colonel's, and it was at Lois' request that he was buried there.

The services were very short. In hardly an hour after the funeral cortege had left the D'Aprix house, Lois and Bruce returned to the place to gather up a few of Lois' personal belongings.

They entered the house by the front-door and just inside the door they stopped short and stared about with amazement. The place was in the wildest disorder. During their brief absence the house had been most thoroughly ransacked.

For a moment Lois was stunned. Then, with a little cry of alarm, she rushed into the library. Bruce followed her.

No cyclone could have disarranged the room more completely. The drawers had been pulled from the Colonel's desk and the contents had been ruthlessly dumped upon the floor. Every book had been hurled from the bookcases which lined two sides of the room. The rug had been torn up from the floor and flung into a corner. All pictures had been pulled from the walls and many were now on the floor in fragments. Even the ashes and dead charred coals of a fire had been swept from the fireplace and now were littered all about the room.

Lois ran to the fireplace. She slid her small, white hand beneath the shelf of the mantel. For an instant she felt about. Then her fingers stiffened. She pressed against a hidden button. A faint click sounded. Part of the mantel shelf dropped down and disclosed an opening.

Lois unhesitatingly thrust her arm into the opening. She drew it out again and in her hand she held a long, black, metal box. This box she carried to the table where she made room for it. Then she threw back the cover.

"All here," she said faintly, but there was a great measure of relief expressed in her voice.

Bruce picked his way across the littered floor of the disordered room and looked into the opened box. It was filled—full to the very top, and very neatly and orderly packed—with large, bulky, white envelopes.

"Papers?"

For a full minute Bruce looked intently at his wife. She felt his questioning gaze upon her and glanced up quickly.

"Papers," she said with a smile. "Bruce, these are father's war records. He never would trust them in a bank vault."

"H'm! They must be interesting," Bruce said to her. "And now I'm thinking I can explain the meaning of this wreck."

"Of course," Lois said sweetly. "Of course they were after the box. I knew that the instant I stepped in at the door."

"Did you?" Bruce answered her, speaking slowly. "I didn't know. I was wondering what wrecked the place."

"But *you* didn't know about the box," Lois replied.

"No," he admitted . "I didn't know about that. But somebody did."

"That's evident."

"It certainly is. And, I'm beginning to think that that somebody was—"

"Yes?"

"The Klan."

Lois looked at him sharply.

"Don't be silly, Bruce," she said.

"Well, why not?" he demanded quickly.

"The Klan aren't thieves," she said shortly.

"No—they're murderers!"

"Are they?"

"Aren't they?"

"I can't say," Lois answered him.

She tucked the box under her arm, and turned toward the door.

Tight-lipped he followed his wife through the door. Silently he helped her gather up the things she wanted to take with her from the house. He packed trunks down to the wagon old Ebony had made ready and had waiting at the door.

When all the trunks—there were four of them—had been stowed in the cabin bedroom, Bruce and Ebony climbed back into the wagon and drove off to the D'Aprix place. There were no barns at the Lodge; Bruce owned no horses and he had no way of taking care of

any, so the team had to be taken back to the Colonel's barn.

Canute, stiff and sore, his swollen, broken hide odorous from a yellow salve Ebony had plastered thick upon his sides, trotted after the wagon.

When they arrived at the D'Aprix place Ebony put up the horses. Bruce walked on to the Corners to purchase a supply of tobacco and some provisions for the Lodge. He took his time, for he had a new, a fresher mystery to ponder over, and it was quite dark before he got back to the Colonel's house. He found Ebony and Canute waiting for him.

Together they started on foot up the road toward the cabin. They had not gone far when both men, white and black, brought up short, exclaimed and looked questioningly at each other.

Canute stood stiff-legged beside them. His ears were cocked forward and he growled harshly, threateningly, deep in his throat.

The night had been quiet. There had been no sound save the tread and shuffle of the feet of the two men. Then, from somewhere in the mountains, a scream, eerie, wavering, rising high in pitch and long drawn-out, shivered the very night. It ended, as though cut off short, abruptly.

"Panther!" gasped Bruce.

He had heard a panther scream in the mountains once before.

Old Ebony wagged his head.

"No, sah! Dat wa' a woman!" he declared with positive conviction. "An' it's f'om de Lodge."

As he spoke, Canute, with a roaring bark, bolted up the road.

IX

The Ku Klux Klan

WITHOUT another word both men started forward on a run, up the road and after the dog. Bruce, of course, could out-run the old negro. He tossed over to Ebony the several bundles he had purchased at the store and rushed up the hill.

The road lay all uphill. Bruce soon was panting, but he did not lessen his stride nor did he check his pace. It was almost a mile to the cabin, a mile of killing road for a runner, but the cruel spurs of fear and wild imagination rowelled him and he ran almost as fast as the dog.

Almost—but not quite as fast. Canute was the first to reach the cabin. Bruce heard him bark. The Great Dane bellowed out roars that were furious, and the mountains trembled with the echoes. Something was amiss to make the dog bark like that. Bruce increased his pace.

Near to the Lodge he jumped from the road and smashed through the rhododendrons. A light burned in the cabin. Then he saw that the door was open. Canute stood in the doorway bellowing at the night.

Bruce ran up to the door. There he stopped. The door had been a stout one, built of good two-inch pine, but now it was a shivered, battered wreck. It hung weakly from its hinges and its panels were splintered in. A heavy sledge lay on the doorstep.

Bruce sprang into the cabin. A fire burned brightly in the fireplace, a lighted lamp stood on the table. In one corner a chair was overturned and broken. The floor-rugs were disarranged as though shuffling, scuffling feet had rumpled them and moved them from their customary places.

Bruce took up the lighted lamp from the table and went quickly to a bedroom. Lois was not there. One of her trunks stood open and some of its contents were spilled out on the floor, as though some object had been snatched from it in haste.

Still bearing the lamp in his hands, Bruce went hurriedly, fearfully, into one room after another. In none did he find Lois, and he searched through every room of the rambling house.

Then he returned to the long combined living-room and dining-room. Canute stood in the centre of the floor. The dog's short hair was bristling along the back of his neck. The Great Dane faced the table and alternately sniffed and growled quite low.

Bruce looked toward the table. It had been set for supper and nothing seemed displaced. Then his eyes shifted to the floor, and from behind the table he saw a foot thrust out. It was a big, misshapen foot, archless, and as he watched it the shoe moved, just slightly.

Placing the lamp carefully on the table, Bruce stepped behind the table. Diana lay there on the floor. The old colored woman was unconscious. She twitched a little, spasmodic jumpings of her blow-shocked nerves. Bruce could see a broken lump, swelled and purplish on her forehead. She moaned faintly and breathed quite heavily.

Bruce ran to the kitchen and seized a bucket of water and a dipper. He went back to the dining-room, filled the dipper and dashed its quart of cold water into Diana's face. Bruce emptied the contents of the pail upon her. She did not revive.

With an exclamation of despair, Bruce lifted her by the shoulders and dragged her into Lois' bedroom where he tumbled her on to the bed. There he tried to rouse her by shaking her, by calling in her ear, but Diana remained dead to the world, unresponsive.

Bruce went to the smashed door and called into the night for his wife.

"Lois! Lois!" he shouted, and after each call he listened for an answer.

But there was no answer, save a low, rumbling growl from Canute who stood beside him. The shadow-lips of night were sealed.

He looked at the flayed, whip-broken hide of the quivering Canute. He recalled the terse note which had been hurled through the window at him the night previous, and with one damning word he answered every question that seared through his fired mind—

"The Klan!"

The Klan had struck at him. First it had whipped his dog. Now his wife—

He caught Canute by the collar and dragged him into the kitchen. He shut and bolted the door. Then he jumped to the side of the fireplace and tore down his belted, holstered pistol. He snapped the belt about his waist and stepped toward the door.

With a rasping oath he stepped back again.

Framed in the doorway, white-robed and ghostlike, backed by the blackness of the Chimerian-night, their guns held ready across their red-lettered breasts, stood two silent members of the Ku Klux Klan.

X

BRUCE MARTIN stood motionless. The two Klansmen stalked into the cabin. One of them waved his gun suggestively.

"Stick up yo' hands!" he commanded Bruce.

Bruce did not hesitate to obey. He lifted both hands above his head. One of the Klansmen stood threatening with his gun while the other stepped up to Bruce and unhooked his belt and gun. Then he patted a quick hand over Bruce's clothing and made sure he had no other weapons concealed about his person.

"Now yo' can put yo' hands down," the gun-bearer told him. "But don't make no sudden moves. I'm keerless on the triggah."

Bruce lowered his arms.

"I accept your advice," he said to them quietly. "I can readily believe that you would shoot. You certainly in the last few days have made it plain to me your love of violence—the way you treat dogs and women."

"Sho' now, that reminds me," said one of the men. "Whar's yo' dog?"

"In the kitchen. I shouldn't advise you to open the door."

"Don't worry none—we won't. Wha's Miss Lois?"

"You'll have to ask that question of your Klan."

Before either of the men could make a reply, four other robed members of the Ku Klux came into the cabin. Between them they bore tenderly a limp form, a form dressed exactly like themselves.

In silence they lowered the man they carried to the floor, and then stood back. Another figure entered the door. He was dressed like the others except that on his breast was a double cross, and about his waist a yellow sash was wound.

He walked directly up to Bruce and held out his hand, the palm turned upward. In the palm lay an emptied cartridge case.

"Our brother died by the bullet from this shell, fired by a man who tried to pass our outposts," he said in a hollow voice, nodding at the still figure on the floor. "It is a forty-five. You carry the only forty-five in the mountains."

Bruce looked at the shell the Klansman held. It was a forty-five caliber cartridge case, as he had said. Furthermore, it was rimless, like the cartridges used in an automatic pistol.

"Will you permit me to examine that shell?" Bruce asked.

"Certainly," the fellow said and he dropped it into Bruce's hand.

Bruce took the cartridge case and inspected the head. Then he nodded. He thrust a hand into his pocket and produced a duplicate, the shell he and Ebony had found at the D'Aprix place on the night of the Colonel's murder.

"It's evident that I don't own the only automatic pistol of this caliber," Bruce said to the Klansmen. "Somebody else in these mountains owns one, too. This shell you have is identical with this one which I found at the D'Aprix place the night the Colonel was shot."

"Mister Martin," the man with the yellow sash about his waist said coldly, "we are not asking you to confess to the murder of Colonel D'Aprix."

Bruce smiled grimly.

"That was neatly put," he replied. "But it doesn't hold water—quite. I admit I own a forty-five caliber automatic pistol. I carry it occasionally—one of your men just took it from me. I know such large pistols are uncommon in this locality. But my gun did not fire the shots which killed the Colonel or your fellow-member of the Klan. I do not use this make of shell."

"What make of shell do you use, Mister Martin?" the Klansman asked.

"If you will hand me a clip from my pistol, I will show you."

The clip of cartridges was removed from Bruce's pistol and handed to him. He pulled out one of the fully loaded cases and held it up so that the sashed Klansman could read the marks stamped on the head of the shell.

"This is a sample of my cartridges," Bruce told him. "They are Government cartridges—some I secured while I was in the service. You will notice that on the head they are stamped *F. A. 2 18.*"

"What of that?"

"That means they were made at the Frankfort Arsenal, February, 1918."

"They're just the same as the other shells."

"No, they're not! These cartridges—" Bruce held up the other two—"are marked *U. M. C. 45. A. C. P.* They

were made by the Union Metallic Cartridge Company."

"Well?"

"I don't shoot that brand of shell. Not one of my rifle cartridges is of that make. Or my shotgun shells. I use either Duponts or those made by the United States Cartridge Company. You are privileged to examine my stock of ammunition if you care to do so."

"Interesting," said the Klansman. "And, really, a good alibi—for the Court. But you'll have to admit that an alibi can be planned. And, further, you will have to admit, that having planned such an alibi it would be a very easy matter for you to get two U. M. C. cartridges to fit your gun and then arrange for their use."

"Oh, yes," Bruce said. "It could be planned. All that would be easy enough—even the shooting, I suppose. Only—I could not be in two places at the same time."

"Another alibi?"

"Yes. At the moment of Colonel D'Aprix's murder I was here in this very room. I heard the shot. As to your Klan brother—I know nothing about that. I can account for every moment of today."

"Who are your witnesses?"

"Ebony, my caretaker, and Diana, his wife, and—"

The Klansman made a discrediting motion with his hand.

"Mister Martin," he said with a rather heavy intonation of voice that in a way was familiar to Bruce, "the Klan can not accept the word of a negro, any more than the Court can accept the word of a criminal."

"You mean you discredit my witnesses and accuse me of these murders?" Bruce demanded unbelievingly.

The Klan spokesman inclined his white-draped head.

"The Ku Klux Klan, Bruce Martin, accuses you of shooting a member of the Klan. Further evidence, suggested by yourself—all circumstantial, I'll admit—points you out as the murderer of Colonel D'Aprix."

"But—but—" stammered Bruce in bewilderment. "This is all impossible—unthinkable. Just because I own a forty-five—"

"There are other things," the Klan leader interrupted. "The Klan condemns you for immorality—for having in this cabin a woman who is not your wife. That woman was the Colonel's daughter. So there is apparent collusion between the two of you."

"And about what would we collude?"

"That is immaterial. We are not concerned with motives, nor with the source of plots. We concern ourselves with the results only. We believe you were collusive, and evidence which has come to light strengthens our beliefs. We directed one of our members to watch you and this Lodge. That man has been killed and the finger of accusation points at you."

"But Lois is my wife," Bruce cried hotly. "We were married last year—"

"There are no records of such a marriage," the leader cut in harshly. "And the young lady is not in evidence to defend your claim."

"No—damn you!" Bruce shouted. "You've seen to that! You took advantage of my absence, broke into my house and carried her off. Go to Pendleton if you want to find records of our marriage. But I suppose, first, it will be more convenient for you to bump me off."

"Exactly!" the Klansman replied icily. "For the offense of immorality in our district, Martin, the punishment is the whip—but for murderers it is the noose. In this district I represent the Ku Klux Klan; here I am judge; in my eyes you are guilty of two murders—perhaps three, if the girl is missing—

and for that, in the name of the Klan, I condemn you to die."

So speaking, he turned and strode briskly out, through the splintered wreck of the cabin door.

XI

THE six Klansmen, with Bruce Martin in their midst, marched from the cabin and followed their leader into the woods. By a fire, which had been lighted near to a tall pine tree, some twenty white-robed men stood in a silent circle.

Bruce was led into the very center of the circle, to the pine tree. From a limb that stretched out into the darkness over head a rope hung down and in the end a noose had been run that now swayed shoulder high from the ground.

A horse was brought from some hidden picket-line in the night-bound woods, and the other end of the noosed rope was fastened securely to a ring in the saddle. The noose was placed over Bruce Martin's head.

A Klansman mounted the horse.

The man with the two crosses on his breast and the yellow sash about his waist approached Bruce.

"Martin," he said, "the time is short. Is there anything you care to say?"

Bruce shook his head.

"Nothing," he replied. "What is there I can say to you? String me up—and may you be damned for it!"

The Klan leader stepped back and held up his hand. The man on horseback gathered up the rein.

"God have mercy on you," the leader said solemnly.

He turned toward the waiting horseman; then he stiffened suddenly.

Sheriff Logan, his jaws working furiously, spitting tobacco-juice at every step, walked into the circle of firelight.

A gasp of surprise ran round the line of Klansmen. They shifted uneasily.

"Logan!" the leader spat savagely. "How'd you get past the guard?"

Logan spat and squinted at the rope which hung down from the limb of the pine and ended in the noose now tight around Bruce Martin's neck.

"Shucks!" he said. "Seth Hopkins ain't no gua'd. He's a joke—an' a doggone dazed one jes' now. He tried ter persuade me this affair wa' entirely pussonal an' I whammed him on the jaw."

He spat again and thoughtfully regarded the tense circle of men.

"Appears ta me like yo' boys is aimin' t' git keerless," he drawled.

The Klan leader barked a short, nasty laugh.

"Logan, we're twenty and more against you," he said suggestively.

"I can count," Logan told him. "But I ain't countin' none. I sho' feel unnecessary enough as it is. Pussonally, I grieve."

He shifted the tobacco in his mouth and spat thoughtfully.

"Boys, yo'-all are friends o' mine. Doggone, but I reckon I mus' have pinched nigh all o' yo' once er twice since I been sheriff o' this yeah county. Ain't I right?"

"I reckon yo' pinched me a-plenty," one of the men admitted with a chuckle, and a laugh went 'round the circle.

A laugh has saved many a situation, and now the tension of the circle broke.

"What do yo' want, Logan?" someone asked.

"I'd like fo' one o' yo' boys to take that noose off'n Martin's neck before Howlitts gits nervous."

One of the men stepped from the circle and removed the noose from Martin's neck.

"An' now," said Logan, "I'd like to know what it's all about."

"This man committed murders—" the Klan spokesman began.

"Yeh!" said Logan. "But that ain't

no reason why you should try ter do the same, Wells Richmond."

He hooked his thumbs into his belt and hitched up his trousers.

"What's all this yere fuss about, Martin?" he turned to Bruce and asked.

"They accuse me of killing a Klansman," Bruce informed the sheriff.

Richmond, the wearer of the yellow sash, spoke up.

"He was killed tonight, Logan—with a forty-five bullet—and by a man disguised as a Klansman, who has been raising hell in these mountains. Our brother had been stationed to watch for him."

Logan raised his eyebrows.

"Fo'ty-five! Sho' now that's queer—pow'ful queer. So wa' the Colonel."

"They also accuse me of shooting the Colonel," Bruce said. "And they brand me immoral for living with my wife."

Richmond objected at once.

"If the woman had been your wife, Martin, the Klan would have had no cause for complaint."

"She is my wife, I tell you!"

Richmond sneered.

"That's a lie!"

"An' that's a ha'd word. Wells Richmond," put in the sheriff. "It ain't fit'n t' call a man a liar when he speaks the truth. Lois D'Aprix an' Bruce Martin is married. Doggone, if I didn't go ovah t' Pendleton an' found out fo' myself today."

"And they accuse me of making away with her," Bruce informed the sheriff.

"Makin' 'way with her? What do yo' mean?"

"Lois has disappeared."

Logan chewed vigorously and spat several times.

"Disappeared? To where?"

"I don't know. I left her with Diana while Ebony and I took a team back to the Colonel's barn. While we were coming back up the road, on foot, we heard a scream. I ran to the cabin, found the door smashed in and Lois gone. Diana was behind the table, unconscious. She had been hit over the head."

"An' Miss Lois is gone?" queried the sheriff skeptically.

"She's gone," Bruce said dully.

Logan turned to Richmond.

"Know anything about it, Wells?"

"No, sir," Richmond said doggedly. "No, sir! The Klan doesn't deal with women."

Logan looked questioningly at each member of the silent circle. Every man shook his sheeted head.

The sheriff emptied his mouth of tobacco.

"Boys, I believe yo'! Yo' have come doggone near makin' a miscalculation when yo' aimed ter string up Martin. He ain't no killer. Common sense'll tell yo' that. Fo' once yo'-all picked the wrong man. An' the right man is gettin' away. That ain't like the Klan."

"My fault," Richmond admitted tremulously. "It's Dave, my brother—who was shot tonight. I blamed Martin because he owned a forty-five. I wanted quick revenge. As Grand Cyclops of the local chapter I've exceeded my authority in taking this matter to the Klan. I submit to arrest."

Logan pushed back his battered hat.

"Yo'll do mo'n that, Wells, my boy—or I don' know yo' a-tall. Yo'll help me an' Martin find his missus. I got a hunch we'll sorter settle up these murders, too."

"I'm willing to do all I can," Richmond said earnestly.

"Good!" snapped Logan. "Now do it! *Call out the Klan!*"

XII

The Fiery Cross

LOGAN took a clasp-knife from his pocket and opening the blade he went to Bruce and cut the cords that

bound the Northerner's wrists and ankles.

"Boy," he whispered in Bruce's ear, "now jes' yo' sit tight. Now yo's goin' see *the* Klan in action."

A Klansman brought Richmond's horse from the picket-line in the woods. From a bag swung from the saddle, Richmond took out six sticks of prepared wood. Each stick was about two feet long.

Taking two of the sticks, Richmond fastened them together in the form of a cross. Then with the other four sticks he made two more crosses. Carrying the three crosses to the fire, he turned and surveyed the circle of men.

"I want three messengers—three who can ride 'til dawn."

Instantly three robed men stepped forward.

"Get your horses!" Richmond commanded.

The men vanished into the woods and night. Presently they returned, each man leading a horse.

Richmond turned to Sheriff Logan.

"Which way do you think the fellow went with Martin's wife?"

Sheriff Logan glanced interrogatively at Martin.

"If he followed the road, he must have gone north," Bruce said. "I was on the road to the south, between the Lodge and the Colonel's place, and he didn't pass me."

Logan nodded.

"Then sho' he's gone no'th."

Richmond, holding the three crosses with both hands, dipped the ends of the prepared wood into the fire. The wood sputtered, then caught up some of the dancing flames and began to burn with a reddish light.

Extending the burning crosses before him, Richmond stepped toward the three waiting men. To the first he held out one cross.

"Ride north!" he said. "Call out the Klan! We gather at the Knoll!"

The fellow took the cross, vaulted into his saddle and holding the blazing symbol aloft in his right hand, he dug heels into his horse and eagerly dashed away.

Richmond held out another cross.

"East!" he said.

Another rider rushed away through the night.

"West!" Richmond commanded the remaining messenger, and in an instant the man was gone.

Richmond picked another man from the circle.

"To the Knoll—fire the beacon!" he cried.

The man ran to get his horse.

Richmond swung on the circle. He raised a hand.

"To horse!"

The circle broke. The white-robed men ran to the picket-line to secure their mounts. When they came back they were riding two abreast.

"Logan, have you a horse?" Richmond asked the sheriff.

"I sho' have," the sheriff informed him. "Up on the road. But Martin here—"

"He can ride Dave's," Richmond said. "Get in your saddle."

Logan lumbered off toward the road. A Klansman came up leading two riderless horses. Richmond jumped into the saddle of one and motioned Bruce to mount the other. Then the column turned toward the road and picked up Logan.

Once more Richmond swung up a hand, dug spurs in his mount and cried a ringing order:

"Forward!"

Forty spurs rowelled quivering horse-flanks, and up the road, past the wrecked-door, lighted cabin, the white column thundered, grim, voiceless, relentless trackers — riders in the night.

And as they galloped by the Lodge, Canute heard them. With the bellowed roaring bark that was in his hunting cry, the dog dived through a kitchen window and raced after the Klan. He ran to the head of the column and, with another cry flung to the night, he took up the lead.

And East and West and North—three couriers, mounted on spurred, flying steeds, and each man bearing in his right hand a flaming cross, raced against the coming of the dawn. The slumbering mountains of the Blue Ridge woke with a thrill, as in bygone days had waked old hills of Scotland, to the summons of the Fiery Cross.

In town and little villages, when the bearer of the cross had passed, farm-bells began to toll; and lights blinked from houses, from lone farms outlying in the hills; and men woke and donned white robes, took down their guns and saddled their swiftest horses and sallied forth into the night.

At Little a bare-footed man ran hatless to the general-store. He opened the door and without pausing to light a lamp, he sat down before the telephone-switchboard, spun the generator crank and rang every 'phone with four sharp rings.

At Blainville, the sleepy operator at the station, waiting up for the long delayed last local train, got the ring. When he answered and had hung up the receiver, he was grim-eyed. He jumped to his board of clicking instruments and both ways along the line he clattered out the call.

The Klan was roused. By telegraph, by telephone, by cross-bearing riders in the night, by bells with their solemn toll, the word went out. From every hill, from valleys, from the wooded mountain's ridges, armed, white-robed, mounted men rode out. They came singly, or by twos or threes, sometimes in groups of a dozen; and from every tongue the same words always rolled:

"The Knoll!"

And, as if in answer to the oft-repeated words, as if to speed the gathering Klan and guide them more surely on their way, the great, dead pine tree on Burton's Knoll, which looked so much like a cross, burst into flame.

The Klansmen saw it—a beacon that flung its light for miles around—and they dug deeper into their horses' flanks their sharp spurs.

With Canute in the lead, the column of thundering Klansmen turned at the cross-roads above the Lodge and left the upper road. They made for the Knoll. Waiting for them was another score of horsemen. Leaving three men behind to direct other coming Klansmen, the strengthened band spurred on to Morristown.

At Morristown no bells were tolling. The night was hushed, the houses dark wherein the fearful trembled behind tight-bolted doors. A silent, ghostly line of riders waited for the coming of the band—and then they rode on. Horses were beginning to lather now; some were blowing, and some sobbed as they ran.

An hour—two! Then—at a fork in the road north of Morristown a lone rider like a specter sat his steed and held up his hand. The night-riders reined in.

"What word?" Richmond demanded.

The lone rider told him briefly:

"Two hours ago a man in Klan robes mounted on a blanketed horse, and carrying a woman, turned here and went toward Singers. His horse was nearly blown."

Richmond flung up a hand and spurred forward. Again the Klan riders galloped on. They took the road toward Singers.

At Singers four riders stopped the flying column.

"We've spotted yo' man," one of them

told Richmond. "He's crossed the county line. Lem here saw him. His hoss is tuckered. We think he's holed up in that ol' shack on the cliff."

"We'll see," Richmond said grimly.

Once more the band went on.

About two miles beyond the village of Singers, the night-riders turned abruptly from the road. The ground was wooded and very broken. A mile or so back from the road, the woods gave way to a treeless clearing. Here the land rose sheer, a cliff some fifty or more feet in height.

Richmond halted his band.

"The shack's up on the edge of that cliff," one of the Klansmen spoke up. "But yo' can get at it from three sides."

Richmond nodded. He quickly separated the men into squads and picked leaders.

"Now—deploy—scatter," he ordered the men. "Surround the shack and wait for orders. Don't get reckless—*and don't shoot* until I do. Remember that fellow's got a woman with him and we don't want her hurt."

The squads wheeled and vanished in the night.

Galloping group after group of Klansmen continued to arrive. Within an hour, before dawn shot the first grey streak into the east, the little mountain shack was completely surrounded.

XIV

THEN came the dawn.

A shot rang out. Glass tinkled from a broken window in the cabin. It was the signal; and now it seemed, from every tree and stone, from every clump of brushes that surrounded the little cabin, crimson flame stabbed out, until the misty grey light of the early morning took on a ruddy tint.

The crash of the volley echoed and re-echoed down the valley. Then the firing settled down to a steady roll, grew intermittent and then died away.

A Klansman mounted on a nervous, prancing horse, rode to within a stone's throw of the shack. He hailed the place.

"Come out and surrender!" he yelled. "Or we'll shoot yo' off'n the map. Yo' got one-half minute to decide."

The decision was instantaneous. A shot sounded, muffled and heavy, from within the shack. The Klansman pitched forward and fell from his horse. The horse reared and galloped away.

Another volley crashed from the line drawn close about the cabin. A deadly hail of steel and lead drummed upon the trembling shack, riddled it, toppled down its chimney, smashed out every pane of glass left in the windows—and all the while the firing line, like a snake, crawled in, drew more tightly about the little hut.

Abruptly the firing stopped. A white rag was waved warily from one of the windows of the shack.

Wells Richmond rose from his place of concealment behind a large boulder a few rods from the house.

"Come out!" he commanded.

A fully robed Klansman, pistol in hand, walked from the shack.

"I've got a proposition," he yelled out at Richmond, his high-pitched voice carrying shrill. "You have got me cornered. But if yo' rush me, I'll kill the woman. Give me a chance to make a run fo' it an' I'll leave her behin'."

"I'll consult with my men," Richmond yelled back.

"Go to it!" the besieged man shouted. "But make it snappy!"

Richmond dropped back down behind the rock.

"What do you say, Logan?"

Logan shrugged his shoulders. "We ain't got much choice," he answered. "We want Martin's wife. We might 's

well let the skunk make his run. I reckon he won' get so very far."

"Let him go," Bruce said. "All I want is my wife. But, first, you'd better find out if she's still with him—and uninjured."

Richmond stood up again.

"We accept your proposition," he shouted to the white-robed man, "but only on condition—that first you prove to us that the woman is uninjured."

"She can speak fo' herself," the fellow said.

He turned his head toward the cabin and ordered Lois to come out. She stepped through the door.

"Are you all right, Mrs. Martin?" Richmond called to her.

"Yes," Lois answered clearly. "So far, I'm all right."

"That's enough!" Richmond said. "We're satisfied!"

Then to the man—"Now *you* raise dust!"

The ring of concealed Klansmen suddenly disclosed themselves. The lone man seemed startled by the number of men who had laid a siege to the little shack—almost two hundred. But as none of the men made any threatening move to oppose his going, he walked jauntily toward them along the edge of the cliff.

The ranks of Klansmen stood silent and watched him go. But not so with Canute. With a roar, the Great Dane sprang after the man. The fellow turned, and when he saw the dog, he cried out with fear. He raised his pistol and fired wildly at the dog.

Canute roared again. With a great spring he left the ground and flew straight for the Klansman's throat. He had gaged his leap; his aim was true; his great jaws crunched closed.

The man staggered beneath Canute's great weight and fell to his knees. He jammed his pistol against the dog's deep chest and fired twice. But the dog's grip held on; then he lunged, and man and maddened beast for just an instant poised on the cliff's broken edge. Then both toppled over.

It was fifty feet to the ground below. Richmond, Logan and some of the Klansmen hurried down. They found the dog and man, together broken. Canute's jaws were closed about the the white-masked throat. Both were dead.

Logan, his own jaws working furiously, pried open Canute's mouth. Then he threw back the man's hood.

"Jackson!" he exclaimed. "I reckoned that's who 'twould be."

He took the pistol from Jackson's hand. It was an automatic forty-five. Logan worked the mechanism and ejected the last cartridge from the gun. He looked at the marks stamped on the head of the shell.

"U. M. C. That settles it! Here's the Colonel's murderer an' the man which killed yo' brother Dave."

He tore aside Jackson's robes. Beneath the white sheeting was a bag held by a cord passed over the dead man's shoulder. From the bag Logan drew out a long, black, metal box. He opened the box and took out one of the big, white envelopes. The envelopes he tore open and from it took a number of Liberty Bonds.

"An' here's the motive," he said. "The Colonel's bonds."

"JACKSON come to these mountains about two years back," Logan said, when the Klan had disbanded and they were riding back toward the Lodge. "It took me mor'n a whole year to find out whar he come f'om an' who he wa'. His real name's Hogan an' he's an ex-con f'om No'th Ca'olina.

"Jackson stole some Liberty Bonds in Ca'olina an' he done time fo' it—an' he hid the bonds. He come here an' bought a farm f'om the Colonel. An'

when he paid fo' it with bonds which he stole he give hisself away. I lay pipe to git that man, but Jackson beats me to it.

"Somehow he finds out 'bout the bonds which the Colonel owns. He figures to get 'em. An' he figures big—he includes the Colonel's daughter. When the Klan took after Sammy Brett and Hinton an' de coon parson—Willows—it give Jackson a notion. He writ a note to the Colonel tellin' him to fetch the bonds to the cross-roads some night an' hand 'em ovah to the Kluxer which would be waitin' fo' 'em.

"The Colonel he don' fall fo' that note. Instead he show it to me an' he tol' Miss Lois 'bout it. Then Jackson he up an' shot the Colonel. He allowed, maybe, that Miss Lois bein' alone would be all upsot. Maybe he'd get her an' the bonds, too. He got fooled. That same night Martin come home. Then, I reckon, Jackson aimed to get Martin.

"He watched him. An' the day the Colonel wa' buried he ransack the house but he can't find the bonds. Then he sees Lois' stuff carried to the cabin. He naturally figures she's got the bonds. That's last night. When Martin ain't home, nor the dog, he raids the place an' gets the bonds. If he been satisfied with 'em he'd probably got away. But he took the gal. That's whar he pulls a bonah. He takes the gal an' he shoots Dave Richmond."

Bruce Martin nodded thoughtfully.

"I guess you've got it all figured out about right, sheriff. And all the while I've been trying to worry out why the Colonel had been killed. It's all clear now. And it's clear why Lois did not tell me what she knew. I suppose she was afraid Jackson would kill me, too."

He turned to Wells Richmond, who now unrobed, rode beside him.

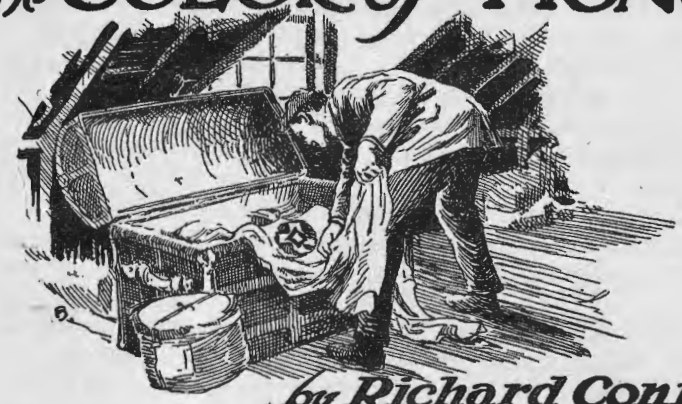
"I'm sorry about your brother, Richmond," he said earnestly. "And I'm sorry for the ill feeling I bore the Klan. Since last night I have come to view your organization in an entirely different light. Without your quick and willing assistance I am sure I never would have recovered my wife—at least, not alive and well."

"That part," said Richmond slowly, "was the *real* Klan. It aims ever to do good—even with violence, as was necessary this morning. The affair of last night was not the Klan. That was *me* and a few of my friends. Martin, don't ever blame that incident on the Klan."

"No, sah!" Sheriff Logan spat and drawled, and his eyes twinkled humorously. "No, sah, Martin—don' yo' nevah blame such doin's on the Klan. 'Cause if yo' do yo's sho' to offend me. I'm aimin' right now ter join. Sho' I'm goin' ter be a r'arin' member o' the Ku Klux Klan."

We regret exceedingly that, owing to lack of space, we were forced to omit two of our finest Klan stories from this issue—"Hoodwinked," by Newton A. Fuessle, and "Silent Sentinels," by William Rollins, Jr. These will appear in early numbers of Black Mask.

The COLOR of HONOR



by Richard Connell

This Southern Klan story—by one of America's best known writers—needs no comment from us, except this: a number of people have told us Courtnay would not have acted as he did in this story. What are your ideas about it?

WHEN Cater Courtnay was eleven years old his father whipped him with a black-snake whip until he could hardly stand because the boy, in some juvenile game with some lads from a nearby plantation, had cheated. Afterward the father talked to his son in the paneled library of the old house.

"You see your great-uncle, Carroll Courtnay, up there?" said the father, pointing to a picture, done in oil, of a darkly handsome man in a grey uniform.

The boy nodded; he was very white but not once through it all had he sobbed.

"General Lee trusted him," went on the father.

"He trusted him, son, because he knew the stuff the Courtnays are made of. At Shiloh your great-uncle could have saved himself from death by one little act of dishonor—most men wouldn't have thought it dishonorable at all—but, of course, he didn't. He remembered that he was a Courtnay, and Courtnays do not cheat, or lie, or do any dishonorable action. They stand by their word, and by their kind. You are a Courtnay, son—the last of the name, when I am gone—and while the breath of life is in you you must not forget the proud name you bear."

The boy nodded again.

"Now, shake hands with me, Cater," said the father. "I hope I didn't hurt you much."

The boy held out his hand to his father. His father never again had any occasion to whip him for cheating.

When Cater Courtnay was nearing thirty, and was still unmarried, his father died and from him Cater inherited many broad acres of rich cotton land, and the great pillared house in its grove of live oaks. He was a serious young man, tall, sun-bronzed, almost saturnine of aspect, and he took seriously his duties as overlord of the estate, with almost feudal powers over the men and women who lived on it and worked for him.

One night in the early autumn he sat in the library talking with a guest, a man from the North, whom he had known in college.

"But I tell you, Godwin, you can never understand," said Cater Courtnay, his voice low, intense.

Godwin puffed at his pipe before he answered.

"Men are men," he said finally.

Courtnay shook his head impatiently.

"There are white men," he said, "and there are black men."

"But," returned Godwin, "they are both men. Color doesn't count. Underneath there's no difference."

"You're wrong, Godwin. A Northerner just can't understand; but there are differences, real differences—"

"For example?"

"Did you ever see a nigger who was a gentleman?"

Godwin laughed.

"There are precious few white gentlemen," he said.

"Granted. But there are some—"

"Yes, of course—"

"Well, what are the marks of a gentleman?"

"Honor, first, I suppose—" said Godwin.

"Precisely. Honor. But a nigger with honor? That's ridiculous, Godwin.

"Is it?"

"It is. I know. I've handled niggers for years, thousands of them; I've over two hundred on my place right now. I know them as you could never know them, Godwin, and I tell you it's not only their skins that are black—they're black all through—

"But they've had no chance," Godwin replied, "down here. That's why I suggested to John Greel, that he start a school here."

Courtnay's tanned face showed that the subject of Greel had been discussed and that it was an unpleasant one.

"Godwin," said Courtnay, "you're an old friend of mine, and I'm going to take the liberty of speaking very frankly to you. Down here we feel capable of managing our own affairs. We don't want Greel and we don't want his school."

Godwin shrugged his shoulders.

"It's too late to prevent Greel coming," he said, "even if I agreed with you that the negro is invincibly ignorant and that schooling will do him no good. Greel's mind is made up and you know what a determined fellow he is."

"How should I?"

"He was in college in your time."

"What of it? I don't make a point of associating with niggers, Godwin."

"Well, you've seen the plucky way he played football," said Godwin, with a laugh.

"Let him stay up North. There's work enough for him up there." Courtnay's voice had a menace in it. "I tell you, Godwin, Greel's not wanted here and you would be doing him a service to tell him so. The men around here haven't much patience with these fancy, educated Northern niggers."

Godwin made no reply; for a time he smoked.

"You won't help the school then, Courtnay?"

"I will not."

Godwin stood up.

"It's getting near my train time," he said. "I'd better be starting."

"Sorry you have to go, Godwin. I don't get much civilized society these days. Lots of old families down here, but pretty well gone to seed. Mammy Stella, my housekeeper, would call them 'reeefine but oneducate.' "

"Really?"

"Yes; you've no idea how they resist any new methods in farming; and of course the niggers are impossible; they will do things the way their grandfathers did them—"

"You've tried to teach the negroes then?"

"Have I tried? Till my head nearly burst."

"They seem to work hard—I noticed that in the fields today—"

"Oh, I get a lot of work out of them. They're a little afraid of me. They know I'll stand no nonsense from them. Also, they know I'll treat them squarely. You've no idea, Godwin, what children they are: I have to feed them, clothe them, nurse them, and bury them. But it isn't gratitude that makes them work—it's fear."

"Fear?"

"Yes; even their motives are dark."

"They need education; now, Greel's school—"

Courtnay held up his hand; his face tightened into stern lines.

"Please! Let's not discuss that any more. I won't stand for Greel and his school; that's final. There's the car outside. I'll ride down to the station with you."

II

TEN white men sat around the long mahogany table in the library of Cater Courtnay's house, and from their faces and their manner it was clear that business of a most serious nature had brought them together. They were men whose faces had long known the sun, prosperous-appearing men, who among them owned most of the good farming land in the county.

Sam Hull, big-faced, untidy, in a wrinkled suit, was speaking.

"Yes, sirs," he was saying, an overtone of hate in his voice, "right now is the time to call a halt. Learn 'em a lesson they won't forget in a hurry; they got one coming to them. I reckon you all have noticed how they been getting out of hand of late."

The men about the table nodded and growled. Cater Courtnay at the head of the table said:

"Yes, yes, I guess we all have. Go on, Sam."

"But this last thing—that's the limit with me."

"You mean that voting business, Sam?" asked one of the men.

The big-faced planter nodded.

"What were the facts, Sam? I was down to Mobile when it happened."

"Well," said Hull, "last week on registration day over at Live Oak Corners, little Ned Harris, the election clerk, was dozing in the polling place, when in come two niggers, that big boy Ike, that works for Cassius Pryor, and Courtnay's boy, Matt. Ned Harris sings out, 'What in hell do you want here?' and do you know what Matt says?"

The narrator paused before he answered his own question.

"Matt says, 'Mr. Harris, please, sir, we all would like to vote, if you please.' At first Ned Harris thought they was fooling, and he says, 'You want to what?' 'We want to vote,' says Ike and Matt, together, like they had rehearsed. Well, you know what a hair-trigger temper Ned Harris has. 'You get out of here and get damn quick,' he says. And do you know what Ike says?"

The listeners did not know but ex-

pressed a keen interest in knowing.

"Ike says, 'Mr. Harris, sir, in the Constitution of the United States it says we all can vote and—and—we want our constitutional rights.' Well, with that Ned Harris jumps up to knock him down; but Ned ain't very strong and the blow only staggers Ike, and then do you know what Ike does?"

The speaker looked round the ring of attentive eyes before continuing:

"He pushes Ned Harris back into his seat, and says, 'Mr. Harris, sir, you don't respect the constitution,' and then he and Matt walks out."

"Where are those two niggers now?" demanded one of the men, sharply.

"Matt's lit out," Cater Courtnay informed him.

"What about the other one—Ike?"

"Oh, after what Cassius Pryor did to him I guess he won't be overanxious about his constitutional rights again."

They all laughed. The man who had been in Mobile threw out a question.

"How come these niggers are so glib about their constitutional rights. Those boys can't read, can they?"

Courtnay stood up.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Telfair, here, has put his finger on the sore spot of the whole business. Who put these niggers up to acting this way? Ike and Matt and the rest of them haven't the brains or the nerve; someone is behind them, telling them what to say. I reckon all of us know who I mean."

There were growls of "Greel. That skunk Greel."

"I always figure, gentlemen," went on Courtnay, "that the way to stop a thing is to stop it at its source—"

"In other words," interjected Sam Hull, "get Greel."

"Precisely."

They looked at each other; there was no dissension.

"I had Greel come to see me last week," said Courtnay. "He's a smart, educated nigger, not at all like the hands down here. He's full of a lot of wind about racial equality—"

He saw that his words were goading them; he went on:

"No. I didn't hit him. That's not the way to handle his kind. I just gave him a strong hint that if he valued his skin he'd better take his school up North where it would be appreciated."

"Getting mighty polite, ain't you, Courtnay?" one of the men suggested.

"Oh, I didn't mince words. I told him point blank that if he didn't shut up his damn school and get out of the county, some night something highly unpleasant would happen to him. That was a week ago—

"He's still here—" said one planter.

"And the school's still running," said another.

"And the niggers are having their heads pumped full of nonsense—" put in a third.

"Dangerous nonsense for us," said a fourth.

"That's why we're meeting here tonight, gentlemen," said Cater Courtnay. "We're the responsible white men of the community. What are we going to do? Greel has had his warning; he has ignored it; he told me a week ago he was going to stick—his duty to his people or some such rot—and he has stuck."

"We must teach him a lesson," Sam Hull declared, his voice was rasping. "We must teach them all a lesson—"

"You don't mean—" the man who interrupted did not finish his sentence; he was a small, bird-faced man who appeared, habitually, never to finish anything—his tie was not tied, his buttons not buttoned. . . .

"You know what we mean, Wood," said Courtnay. "Are you with us?"

"Yes, yes, of course. But, good God, Courtnay, is there no other way? You know how such things set the papers up North snarling at us. We can't af-

ford—" his voice trailed off, leaving the end of the sentence ragged, for Courtnay's austere eye was on him, and there was contempt in it.

"Duty is duty," said Courtnay, "no matter how unpleasant it is. None of us like to do what we're going to have to do. But if the whites are going to keep their place, the blacks have to be kept in theirs."

"I know, I know," the little unfinished man twisted out the words, "but this isn't right, it's—"

"It's—"

Courtnay cut in.

"We can't be soft, Wood. We'll try not to hurt the man."

"That is," put in Sam Hull, "if he listens to reason."

"But," Wood said, "you know Greel's not like the others—he's got guts—he'll fight back—he may—"

"Suppose he does fight back—" said Courtnay. "We can fight a bit ourselves, eh, gentlemen?"

Their laughter was hard.

"Well, when shall it be?" asked Sam Hull.

"Why not tonight?" Cater Courtnay said this.

"Tonight?"

"Yes; let's get it over with. It's got to be done."

"Good. Tonight."

"Yes, tonight."

"But I didn't come—prepared," said Sam Hull.

"Nor I."

"Mine's home, too."

"Gentlemen," said Courtnay, "it's only nine. You'll have time to go to your homes and get what you require. Remember, we want to do this thing in an orderly, business-like manner."

"Shall we wear hoods?" asked one.

Courtnay considered.

"Yes," he said, "that's a good idea. The niggers still have a superstitious dread of the old Klan; pillow cases with holes will do—"

"When we get Greel," suggested Sam Hull, "we can stage a little parade through the cabins. Might as well put the fear of God into them right, while we're about it."

"He'll fight, I warn you," the unfinished man, Wood, quavered. "He'll shoot—"

They did not wait for him to finish.

"Then there'll be one less fancy nigger in the world," said Sam Hull.

"We'll meet at eleven sharp," Courtnay said; he spoke as an accepted leader. "Under the oak at the cross-roads. Each man will bring a gun, a hood and a whip. No one is to speak a word till we order Greel to come out. He sleeps in that little shack about a half mile from the cross-roads near the old Claymore creek bridge. Let's set our watches now. Eleven sharp, remember. Any man who isn't there will be left behind."

"He'll put up a fight, I tell you," Wood's voice shaded off into a near-whimper.

"Take no chances with him," directed Courtnay. "If he doesn't give up at once, well—" he finished with a gesture of his tan hand.

They understood; into the darkness moved the men; their tread was determined.

III

WHEN they had gone, Cater Courtnay poured himself a leisurely drink from the carafe on the venerable sideboard. There was no hurry; his house was not far from the cross-roads where they were to meet. He sat down in an easy chair and examined his pistol minutely; it was loaded, oiled, ready. Idly his glance roved along the row of paintings on the walls, men in uniform, mostly, with the lean, serious faces of the Courtnay breed. A thought struck

him. He rang a bell, and presently an ancient negress, her eyebrows like tufts of cotton, her manner the respectfully familiar manner of the old and trusted retainer, came into the room.

"Mammy Stella?"

"Yes, Mr. Cater—"

"Isn't there up in the attic somewhere an old trunk that belonged to my grandfather, Colonel Courtnay?"

He did not notice that her hands took a sudden grip on the edges of her apron.

"I disremember," she said.

"Oh, come now, Mammy Stella. You were up there only the other day. Wasn't there an old trunk of my grandfather's?"

"Mebbe so."

"You packed it, didn't you?"

"I reckon so."

"Do you remember what you put in it?"

"Not 'zactly. It was more than forty years ago."

"Well, what did you put in it?"

"Nothing but a lot of old clothes, Mr. Cater."

"Ah, that's what I'm after. Do you remember putting in a sort of white garment, like a big night-shirt, with a hood on it?"

He saw from her eyes and the look that came to her face that she remembered.

"Will you get it for me, Mammy Stella?"

The old woman had begun to tremble.

"Mr. Cater," she said, "ask me to do anything, but don't ask me to do that—I'm scared—it's up there in the dark."

"Scared? Nonsense."

"Before the Lord, I am, Mr. Cater. I know that robe, Mr. Cater. It's the old Klan robe. I—I'm scared of it."

"Just an old piece of cloth! Nonsense, Mammy Stella. Why should it scare you?"

"They come one night—to our cabin—I was a little girl then—and they took my brother—I'll never forget—"

"Oh, well, I suppose I can get it myself."

He rose.

"Mr. Cater—"

"What?"

"You ain't plannin'—to use it?"

"Never mind what I'm planning, Mammy Stella. Run along now."

"For God's sake, Mr. Cater, don't—don't—"

"Don't what?"

He regarded the old woman tolerantly; she had been his nurse.

"Don't be cruel—because he's a black man."

"I've no intention of being cruel," he said stiffly.

"But—" she ventured, "Greel—he's a good man—"

"He's poisoning the niggers' minds; we can't permit that."

Courtnay spoke partly to her, but mostly to himself.

"But must you go, Mr. Cater? Can't you leave it to the others—"

His voice was not unkind as he said:

"Mammy Stella, you know better than that, after sixty-five years in the Courtnay family. You know when Courtnays have a duty to perform they don't leave it to other folks. Now run along to bed. I'm going up in the attic."

He stepped toward the door, but the old woman held him back, her wrinkled hands on his arm.

"Don't go, Mr. Cater," she begged. "It's haunted—up there—I tell you—"

"Haunted? The old trunk?"

"It's locked," she cried. "You can't open it."

"I'll break it open."

"You musn't—oh, Mr. Cater, you mustn't."

"I mustn't? Why not?"

"It's haunted, I tell you," she was clinging to his arm.

He tried, quite gently, to free himself.

"White folks don't believe in haunts, Mammy Stella," he said, with a short laugh. "Let go my arm; let go, do you hear?"

"Oh, don't go up there—your father never let you—" her voice was desperate.

"I'm a man now," he said, smilingly. "I'm not afraid of the dark—"

"He'll get you, if you go up. He'll get you if you go up."

"Who'll get me?"

"The devil in the trunk," she cried.

"I eat devils," laughed Courtnay.

He took her by the wrists and made her loosen her grip. Then he bounded up the stairs, still laughing.

It was dark in the beamed, stoop-shouldered attic, and in the corners under the eaves was the dust of years. With lighted candle, Cater Courtnay peered about. He had not been up there since he was a boy; then he had gone up once, and had been strictly forbidden by his father to go again.

In the circle of light he saw piles of old trunks and boxes, discarded pieces of furniture, garments, wrapped in muslin, hanging from hooks like so many dead murderers, the odds and ends of a hundred years. Impatiently he pushed the boxes right and left, his eyes searching. He bent over a leathern chest—no, that was not the one. A sound made him start; it was only the creaking of a blind.

"Nerves a bit jumpy," he muttered. "The old fool and her talk of haunts! Funny it should affect me."

He started again, at another sound, but checked himself, with an oath; it was the sputtering of his candle. He continued a brisk search. Then, as he bent to examine a corner, he wheeled about, his hand plucking at his hip-pocket—he had sensed something moving in the attic. He laughed aloud. It was his own shadow, grotesque, misshapen in the candle's wavering flame. His laugh echoed; to his own ears it sounded unreal, smothered.

"A ghost's laugh," he said to himself, and he didn't like the way his voice cracked.

He pushed aside a pile of boxes; then he found what he was seeking—a very old, flat, brass-bound chest, marred by time, its lock rusty, and his grandfather's initials on it, in faded paint.

HE could not understand why his heart was beating with fast, irregular beats; why his brow felt damp; why the words of a superstitious old black woman should just then be dancing in his brain. He bent over the chest with a determined frown, and with a snatched-up poker pried at the rusty lock. A violent twist, and the lock shot open like a hound showing its fangs. He jumped back from it, cursed his nerves, bent over the chest again.

In the old chest there was nothing to alarm him; there was nothing in it but a pile of old clothes, the folded grey uniform of a colonel, the crushed wide felt hat, the black boots. He took them out, one by one, with careful pride. Then came his grandfather's frock coat with silk facings, his grey pantaloons with straps under the insteps, his white, frilled shirts.

At last, at the very bottom, Courtnay found it—a robe of some coarse cotton stuff, white once, but yellowed by time; to it was attached a hood, with eye holes, and on the breast was a cross, rusty red, like an old blood stain.

His fingers, unbidden, recoiled from it. He forced them to pick it up, and his hands, usually so steady, were trembling, and he shuddered as he laid it aside.

Courtnay glanced into the chest to see if he had entirely emptied it. The candle, as if to aid him, sent up a spurt of

flame, strange flame that seemed greenish in the silent gloom of the room, and Courtnay saw that in the bottom of the chest was a raised place, a swollen place, like the lump after a blow.

He examined it. He saw that the leather lining had been slit, and something flat thrust under it, and the lining stitched together again. His finger-nails tore at the stitching; he was breathing through his mouth, jerkily; he fumbled for the poker, grasped it.

The stout seams resisted at first, then gave up and the slit gaped open like a fresh wound. He pulled out what had been hidden there. It was an envelope, worn and smelling of the must of years. He ripped it open, and, by the candle's light, read the long communication in the handwriting of his grandfather.

Then he screamed, the cut-short scream of a man stabbed through the lungs. He staggered. The candle was overturned and utter blackness filled the attic.

"Lord God have pity on me! Oh, Lord, Oh Lord—"

He was sobbing, moaning in a delirium of fear.

"Lord have pity. Lord have pity. Lord have pity."

He was on his knees and the words came from him in the terror-spurred, yet rhythmic, chant of the revival meeting. He struggled to his feet, wildly, as a fallen horse does, and plunged through the darkness for the door; his head struck a beam and the shock steadied him for an instant. He made the door and half leaped, half fell down the stairs.

Mammy Stella was still in the library when Cater Courtnay stumbled in, the paper from the envelope still grasped in his hand. She was kneeling there, praying aloud as she swayed her body back and forth—

"Don't let him find the devil! Don't let him find the devil!"

He heard. He shook her, his fingers digging into her shoulders.

"It isn't true," he cried. "Tell me it isn't true."

The old woman moaned. A hot, blind wave of fury swept over him.

"You knew all the time. Why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me?"

She raised her eyes to his; she faltered at first; then she spoke clearly:

"Because, Mr. Cater, I know what it is to be a nigger," she said.

A spasm of pain twisted his face at the word. He sank into a chair; he sat staring dully at the paper in his hand, still held in a grip like the rigid grip of a corpse. He knew now why he had felt that nameless fear in the attic.

He did not see the old woman as, with a cat-like movement, she stole to his side; before he could stop her she had snatched the papers from his hand, and had cast them into the fire that blazed in the fireplace. He leaped up, bewildered. She thrust her body between him and the blazing papers.

"Now," she said, and her lips parted in a toothless smile, "no one need ever know."

He stared at her as if he did not understand. Then, thickly, he said:

"No—one?"

"No one but me—and you."

He leaned against the library table; he shook his head, then half muttered:

"But *I* know. But *I* know."

The old negress was about to speak, but he stopped her.

"Please go, Mammy Stella. I want to be left—alone."

She left him standing there, and he might have been dead so motionless was his body, so fixed his black eyes.

HOW long he stood there, his stunned brain trying to take hold of what had happened to him, Courtnay did not know. The knell-like stroke of a clock on the mantel broke in upon him,

and galvanized him into action, at first dulled and aimless, then, as he got a better grip on himself, into action more coherently directed. For the stroke of the clock pricked him into the consciousness that it was ten-thirty—and at eleven he had a duty to perform. He was due at the cross-roads; if he did not arrive they would start without him; later they would say he had weakened, had shirked. Time pressed.

Mechanically his hand felt at his hip-pocket to reassure him that his pistol was there; the hand that touched the cold metal leaped back as if it were glowing hot. The pistol was there, and ready. Ready? For what? To shoot a nigger. He drove his teeth into his lips.

The ticking of the clock seemed inordinately loud and insistent. Twenty-five minutes to eleven. They would be beginning to gather under the live oak at the cross-roads, relentless men, silent in their white hoods.

Even as they gathered, half a mile from the place of their assembling, Greel would be asleep in the little shack where he tried to teach the alphabet to men of his own color. He would be tired after his day's work, reflected Courtnay, worn out in mind and body, for it must be a heart-breaking job. The hooded men would steal upon the cabin, surround it, order him to come out, and then. . . .

Courtnay remembered Greel and the interview they had had. There was a deep gentleness and patience about the schoolmaster, but when Courtnay had ordered him, peremptorily, to close the school and go, there had been a light in Greel's eye and he had held his head high as he had refused. Greel would fight. . . .

Courtnay wished the clock would not tick so loudly. Twenty minutes to eleven. He had barely time to reach the cross-roads. But he did not start; he stood there in the library and his eyes were fastened on the paintings that hung there . . . his father, his great-uncle Carroll, his grandfather . . . honorable men. . . .

Tick, tick, tick. They would be starting on their grim errand soon. They looked to him—to a Courtnay—to lead them. And still he stood staring into the eyes of his great-uncle Carroll who had died at Shiloh. *Tick, tick, tick.* Cater Courtnay straightened; in the hearth's dying light he seemed very tall and erect. Then, all action now, he went from the library and the house, and with long, swift strides hurried through the heavy blackness of the night.

IV

IT was just eleven. In the village the drowsy church clock announced the hour. Breathless, Cater Courtnay darted up to the door of Greel's cabin. There was no light; he rapped with tense fists.

"Who's there?"

The voice of the colored schoolmaster was firm, alert.

"I—Cater Courtnay—a friend—"

The door opened an inch.

"What do you want?"

"Quick!" Courtnay whispered. "Let me in. They're coming to get you."

The door opened wide enough to admit a man. By the embers on the hearth Courtnay saw that Greel was fully dressed, and that he held a pistol in his hand.

"You knew they were coming then?"

"Every night," said Greel, "I wait like this."

Courtnay's words were swift, incisive.

"We must act quickly. They'll be here in five minutes. They'll murder you like a dog."

"I'll fight—"

"No use. They're nine to one."

Greel shrugged his shoulders; he

kept his pistol leveled at Courtnay's heart.

"You can't talk me into giving up, Mr. Courtnay," he said. "Go back and tell them they'll never take me alive."

"Don't be a fool, Greel. You'd be no good dead. You've work to do—I didn't come to betray you—I came to help you escape—"

"Too late," said Greel.

"No. You've got a chance. Go now. Run down the path by Claymore creek; cross the footbridge; you can catch the midnight train as it goes through Bayardville—"

"No use; I'm too tired to run fast; they'd find the cabin empty; they'd follow and catch me; I'll stay."

"They won't follow you—"

"Why?"

"Because they won't find the cabin empty."

Greel looked at Courtnay sharply.

"You mean—"

"Yes."

"But why?"

Courtnay drew himself up.

"My grandfather—damn him—had a mulatto slave—damn him—damn him to Hell—my father had her blood in him—we're black—damn him to Hell. But you've got to hurry."

Greel looked out of the cabin door; a faint moon, just come out, showed far down the ribbon of road something white moving toward them.

"Go, Greel," Courtnay whispered fiercely.

"But why should you do this?"

"Because I choose to. Now run."

Greel moved toward the door.

"I don't understand—" he said. "But I'm going to go. But before I go, there's one thing I want to do—"

"Quick. What?"

"Shake hands with you."

In the almost dark room the hand of Cater Courtnay and the negro schoolmaster met for an instant; then Greel slipped out into the night and disappeared in the tangle of weeds and underbrush through which the creek path ran.

Greel was across the footbridge when he heard through the night's silence a hard, high voice call out:

"Greel! Greel!"

Then he heard another voice, but not his own, call back:

"Yes? What do you want?"

The hard, high voice answered:

"We want you. Come out, Greel."

No reply. Greel sped on through the night.

"Come out, Greel, do you hear?"

No reply. Other voices took up the cry.

"Come out, Greel. Come out, you black skunk. Come out, or we'll come and get you out."

Then as he ran, Greel heard a terrible voice that seemed to fill the whole night, cry:

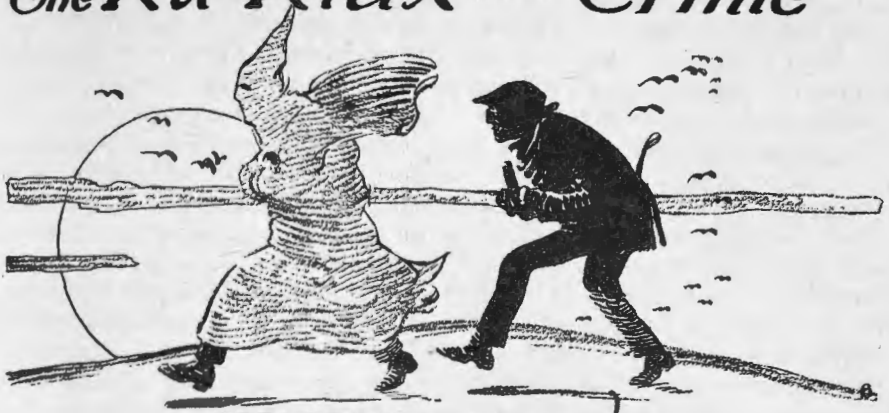
"Come get me, if you can, you white devils. I'll show you how a nigger can die!"

He heard the staccato bark of shots.

Greel had come to a bend in the path; he was panting, but he felt he was safe now; he could see the lights of Bayardville not far off; he stopped to catch his breath. He looked back toward where he had come from. Against the brooding sky he saw the bloody orange-red of flames.

Send the editor your comments on this Ku Klux number and on the Klan in general. Your ideas may make good meat for the Readers' Corner in coming issues.

The Ku Klux and Crime



by CHARLES SOMERVILLE

BLACK MASK'S *crime analyst takes a few minutes off to reveal his personal opinion of the Ku Klux Klan in a manner which shows he has strong convictions on the subject.*

HOWEVER such object or result may be disavowed by the small group of schemers who created the organization at Atlanta, Ga., and have fattened financially thereby, the Ku Klux Klan has been and must continue to be, so long as it shall exist or be permitted to exist, a fosterer and breeder of crimes. And these are the worst class of crime—the infamies of the mob, a disguised mob and the more insensate therefore, and the secret assassinations of life, reputation, individual rights and the humanity of man. These are of the most ghastly offenses of the earth.

Its Khieftans (or whatever the deuce it is they call themselves) will, of course, come to their hind legs to paw forth denials of any such intentions regarding what has happened—the whippings, lynchings, tortures by secret bands in the South—or what is to happen in the future. But if they are to be accounted sincere in such denials then they are to be rated as pitifully and even more dangerously ignorant than the poor fish floating to their net.

It is uncomfortable to contemplate a blank-eyed idiot toying with a lot of loose fire.

Yet the group of Ku Klux promoters at Atlanta appear to have been at all times a Kunning Krew. Just now they are taking full advantage of a wave of publicity directed against them and seeking to turn it into good advertising among the morons in whom religious prejudice and petty outlook with their concomitants of spitefulness, vengefulness, silly arrogance and childish love of mummery are ever — God

help us Who only knows why—existent.

Their supreme insolence is their attempt to wave the Flag over the Klan. Its regalia is funny, but its propaganda is vicious in its advocacy of religious persecution and its medieval assaults upon individual freedom and opportunity. While setting itself above the laws of communities and organizing against the fundamental and constitutional pledges of the nation to mankind, it has the effrontery to hoist the Stars and Stripes, whereas its obviously honest symbol is a red rag. And a very dirty one at that, with a big streak of yellow in it. For to anarchy in the designs of the Klan is added cowardice. Cowardice loves secrecy. It is also happiest when it is attacking something helpless—like one man opposed to a gang of twenty; the perfect condition being that the one man shall be unarmed and the others bristling with weapons.

This may, however, be in the way of taking the Klan too seriously and would be were it not for the percentage of pathologically emotional and gullible in all populations. The manner of the Klan's flag-waving has had and continues to have all the tawdry character that used to be but is less common than it was, thank heavens, the stunt of the theatre. There it was found always to be a fine tonic for the box office. The Klan, if its claims of increased membership are valid, is finding it a good thing for the business of the factory which turns out the male Mother Hubbards that constitute its chief article of regalia aside from the pumpkin-head masks so appropriate as caps for its members.

The law against the commercialization of the flag should be able to reach that attack against the spirit of the country of the Klan. But if not, the Klan's maneuvres in that style are not invulnerable to the contempt of the discerning. To the many thousands of young men who in this generation have actually served the symbol, to the families of those who have recently died for it, the sight of the emblem that should be cherished in a privacy of great dignity, bobbing at the head of a hobgoblin parade must be a pretty thing. If one of the objections of the Kheiftans to the Jew is that he is likely to be mercenary, they had best furl the Flag in a hurry or confess a mote as big as a lump of coal.

Coming to that, why the big kick of the Klan against the Catholics and the Jews? I hold no brief for either. Indeed, they seem very well able to take care of themselves. And that's just what's the matter. That is what is back of every signature that goes on the Klan rolls actuated by enmity to Jew and Catholic. It is the enmity of envy. The Irish Catholics, the Italian Catholics, the Slavic Catholics and all the others who came to this country have been intelligent enough and thrifty enough to take full advantage of the opportunities the nation so bounteously offered, while the Jew, with an inborn genius for trade and commerce, has, of course, waxed fat in a land which gave him the first equal opportunity he has ever enjoyed.

If it weren't for the constructive work done by the Irish Catholic immigrants and the Italian Catholic immigrants, the noble, flag-waving Klan would have no railroad at hand now on which to ship the Mother Hubbards and pumpkin-masks of the order to the North and Middle West, and if it were not for the financial acumen and courage of the money-handling Jew there would be many factories of the South songless of industry and many would not be there at all.

And I am a native son who says so.

Where was born and bred this pitiful and vile effort to stir anew, to rake up from the ashes of medieval infamy a possible ember with which to start new fires of hatred in the name of religion?

In Georgia—where it has not been an uncommon thing for white people to rent out their children to the Yankee mill owners of New England. Only a certain element of white people, of course—the same hill-billy, ground-scuffling, thriftless, moonshine-sopping element that would deem it a high festivity to don a hobgoblin robe and a pumpkin-head mask and go out—in a gang—to plague and torture some old negro into despair and flight, after which an affluent Hobgoblin, desiring the old man's poor patch of a plantation, might obtain it at a sacrifice price.

That's a fine type of Americanism to wave a flag over!

Or a deodorant!

Any claim that you may hear that Ku Klux Klan has in it, of it or for it the culture of the South is false propaganda. The broad, tolerant minds of the educated South, the bearers of the names of those Huguenots and Catholics alike who came here centuries ago seeking the religious freedom the Klan would attack, whose statesmen put the guarantees of it in the Constitution of the country, would as soon go back ten million years, climb trees and start throwing cocoanuts as they would don a harlequin costume in a religious war of these times. There are no white Mother Hubbards, no pumpkin-head masks hanging in the closets of their ancestral homes.

The modern Ku Klux in the South was bred of the small tradesmen envious of the progressive Jew and his department store, of the small banker robbed of his usury by the plentifulness of the money that the prosperous foreign born has turned Southward; by the socially degenerate and religiously fanatical; of the illiterate, obscure hamlets, by the white trash who never owned a negro and, by the same token, therefore, never had any use for him and have ever been hateful and oppressive toward him, as if it were the negro and not the white man responsible for his presence in the land.

If they froth at the mouth because the Catholic and the Jew saw a good country athwart their horizon and flocked to it, there is no logic in turning on the Negro and kicking him around. He, the poor devil, came here in chains.

Shocking as were the murders in Louisiana, their high touches of atrocity—shocking as is the news that the secret assassins bid fair to "get away with it"—for the time being at least—the evidence adduced at the investigations contained one chapter more wretched than all. The cowardice of the thing was so nasty, so unmanly.

There was a girl in the town who had morally offended. Her history was that she had offended in ignorance and went on with it because of poverty. A coterie of chivalrous, hooded Southern "gentlemen" wait upon her in her squalid parlor and question the trembling creature at length, meanwhile mercifully withholding from her the information as to whether she is to be whipped, lashed naked through the streets, tarred and feathered, hanged or boiled in oil or lashed hand and foot and crushed to death by a ten-ton tractor. All of these pleasantries she knows to be quite within their ideas of fitting punishment toward any whose offense may be a public one or privately against any of the "gentlemen" personally.

By the time these brave men have reduced a girl of the streets to hysteria and produced a death pallor under her rouge, they are kind enough to vouchsafe that all they mean against her is exile. That she has no money even for railroad fare and no roof for shelter when she gets to wherever she may take herself is no business of theirs. She must get out. And go she does on her silly paper high heels and red cotton stockings—takes the road for it.

And the gallant gentlemen grin

behind their masks in satisfaction.

Memory of the Divine Man and Magdalen, is this the brand of Christianity with which the Klan would spread the country?

It's a sweet sample.

And I'm still speculating on just why they picked on her. There were other girls like her in the town. They were not molested. I am wondering if some Konscientious Klansman was not being simply Kareful in the exile of a rouged girl who might have run into him sometime when he was Kareless.

Or did she know too much anyway and all around? Had there been loose talk of murders and whippings by gentlemen with their hoods off?

There is one phase of the Ku Klux propaganda that is worthy of your close scrutiny as a piece of cunning.

It takes the form of a sort of slogan which is always a favorite method of herding human sheep.

You will hear in most discussions of the Klan and the problem of its infestiture of the country some articulate boob with raised eyebrows pronounce:

"They say a great many prominent men secretly belong to it."

"Who are 'they' who say it?"

"Well—folks generally."

Now that is a subtle force to set at work among the unthinking. By degress it will get worked up to where President Harding will soon be in it, along with Geraldine Farrar and Jack Barrymore and General Pershing, and by and by the word will go out that down in his heart the Pope himself is for the Ku Klux only he doesn't dare speak his mind to the College of Cardinals.

Nevertheless, that is insidious stuff.

It is a cunning effort to work up a belief in the importance and influence of the membership of the Klan. You will be told that Judges and Congressmen and lawyers and clergymen and literary men of the first water are in it. But, of course, their names can't be given. It is a secret organization, you see.

It is well for any such that it is secret.

It is to be guaranteed that any prominent man in this country who came out openly preaching a campaign of religious prejudice would become most amazingly prominent shortly thereafter.

Let the Ku Klux print its roll of prominent men. If it shows up anything more prominent than the Hon. Flubdud of Hanging Dog or Burnt Meeting House, we'll congratulate it.

Its secrecy is its cowardly sin.

It may not seek to align itself with the Masons, the Elks, etc., or the Knights of Columbus against which it feels so bitter. These are organizations whose purposes are philanthropy, humanity, sociability and patriotism. They seek to hound none. They uphold every tenet of the Government of the United States. They would interfere with no man's religion. They would attack no man's prospérity. They have no use for the whispered word of malice and calumny. Their membership rolls are to be freely inspected by any duly qualified officer of the land in case of need. They help each other. But they do not seek to destroy others.

The United States long since made the gesture of welcome to the Catholics and Jews and by and large they, in making the country their home, have been faithful to it. A handful of blatherskites here and there, a soap box orator frothing anarchy once in awhile, form small entries against their credit accounts.

And the soap box orator, spitting his enmity at the flag, is a more courageous figure than a Ku Klux hobgoblin hiding his envy and bitterness beneath a pumpkin-head mask.

So when "they" tell you that many prominent men are enrolled with the Ku

Klux, you ask "them" to tell you who the prominent ones are.

I think they took a leaf in this from a certain religious sect of recent broad growth. Of this group, nine out of any ten persons with whom you talked of the new sect would say, "And a funny thing is you never saw one of them broke. They are all prosperous." This may or may not have been true of those who joined this special organization of religious faith, but it worked wonders in getting them converts. At least, it did in my small circle of personal observation.

But to any who may have "viewed with alarm" reports of the growing membership of the Klan in the Middle West and North, I would say there is not much necessity for perturbation, except in small, rural communities, where lack of police protection may give gangs opportunities to wreak spite and vengeance against the unprotected. For the fact is, that the Klan and all the hideous emotions it arouses soon wears itself out. It has only to become known in its harmful influences to be cast forth. Its breeding place was the South, and it has lost ground there to such a degree that it has been driven to a campaign of the North to keep the revenue up to the standard of those Khieftans to whom it means new mansions and automobiles.

In the South the possibilities of any such secret order to commit appalling mob violences, to wreak glaring injustices, to be used as a tool for vengeful and mercenary ends has proved itself. The extent of the lawlessness it had caused and might still engender became appalling to those who had first been emotionally and by religious prejudice attracted to it. Down there the Klan may not have lost its vindictiveness and anarchy, but its secrecy has been so largely penetrated that it is losing its terrors—and its members. Ku Kluxers hate the open.

In the North and Middle West it is a matter for the police. In large centers it can do no more than pop up at a funeral or a church ceremony in its clownish make-up. It is in the obscure places, the little communities where there is no agent of the law or a scarcity of them or where such agents may be intimidated that the creed of persecution, personal and religious, by a secret body may lead to evil and vicious things.