

A LIFE FOR SALE

BY SYDNEY HORLER

This was a somewhat singular proceeding from Creighton's point of view. Why anyone should wish to pay him a visit, even in this strange household, at two o'clock in the morning was puzzling—so puzzling that that he decided to ascertain the cause straight away. Whoever it was had unlocked the door, which, when he had tried it a few minutes after going to this room, had been securely fastened from the outside. But what was the object of the visit?

If he pretended to be asleep he would have a better opportunity of discovering, he felt, and so he quietly snored. Evidently, from the stealthy manner of the caller's approach, he was expected to be asleep.

He emitted another gentle snore, but this ran a narrow risk of ending in a snort of astonishment. By this time Creighton was prepared for shock, but he certainly did not expect to perceive such an apparition as now sidled up to the bed.

The visitor, Martin was able to glimpse through his half-closed eyelids, was a dwarf, hideous to see. He stood only four feet six inches or so on his thick, stumpy legs, and the distorted body ended in a heavy face that might well belong to some evil, obscene monster. The man had thick, coarse lips, framing a mouthful of broken, discolored teeth! the fleshy jowls were unshaven and the hair on his huge head was matted. This was the Thing which, holding an electric torch, now approached.

To discipline his already over-taxed nerves was difficult; but, exerting all his self-control, he managed to keep still, and to give the impression of being sound asleep. He reserved the right however, to spring up and attack this monstrosity if the latter touched him.

Standing by the side of the bed, the dwarf flashed the torch in his face. He was obliged to close his eyes completely now or he would have been forced to blink. Although he could not see, he was able to hear the dwarf muttering.

"A very good subject; I must see about it." A sly, stealthy-sounding chuckle preceded the words. 'And now for the girl.'

Then the light was lowered and Creighton heard the man turn away.

Already intensely alert, the last few words he had heard the dwarf mutter galvanised him into instant action. Waiting only long enough for the freak to shuffle out of the door, he put on a dressing-gown and started to follow. He hoped that "the girl" the man had referred to was the one whose voice he had heard over the telephone; but in any case, this repulsive creature was no fit caller on any girl at two o'clock in the morning.

The dwarf was so engaged with his thoughts, apparently, that it did not occur to him that he might be followed. At any rate, he never looked round. After mounting a short, circular staircase at the end of the corridor, he fitted a key in a lock and entered a room. A second later, Creighton heard a stifled scream. He could visualize vividly the picture of a girl waking up to find this dreadful visitor in her room, and putting a hand up to her mouth to cut off the cry of

sheer terror which rose spontaneously to her lips.

Two steps, and Creighton himself was in the room.

Crouched in a chair in the far corner was a girl, whose face was frozen into an expression of horror. Regarding her was the dwarf, his coarse lips working spasmodically.

"You are very beautiful," Martin heard him remark.

The tension was unendurable; he sprang forward and caught the dwarf by the shoulder, swinging him round.

"I have come to help you—"

He had just time to tell the girl this when he was attacked by something that seemed more animal than man. The dwarf, with a bestial cry, had rushed at him. The strength of the creature was almost inhuman; his abnormally long arms gripped his body with a force that threatened to crush his ribs.

The dwarf's eyes were blazing; his breath was coming in quick, convulsive gasps. Martin had managed, however, to get his hands round the thick throat, when he was hurled to the ground. As he fell, he heard the girl give a sobbing sort of cry over him.

Then the room filled with people. He caught the voice of the Colossus rapping out decisive orders. These were evidently addressed to the dwarf, who released his hold and scrambled to his feet.

"What is the meaning of this, Creighton?"

He faced the searching eyes of the Colossus. The man's look was chilling. Martin replied hotly:

"You have a strange household. I woke up in the middle of the night to find this"—he looked at the dwarf—"bending over me. He seemed to find some considerable satisfaction from the sight—my rugged form of beauty apparently appealed to his aesthetic sense—and then I heard him mutter: 'And now for the girl!'"

A stream of words in a language that Creighton could not understand came from his interrogator. They were directed at the dwarf, who muttered fiercely to himself, as though in protest. When the flood of invective increased in power, however, he cringed, and after the speaker had pointed to the door he shambled away like a cuffed schoolboy.

"I couldn't imagine our friend being a very pleasant visitor to a girl, especially in the middle of the night," continued Creighton, "and so I took the liberty of following him when he left my room. I arrived here just in time to prevent him molesting a girl whom he had already terrified. This lady—" He looked round and then stopped. The girl had gone.

The Colossus smiled.

"You must have dreamt all this, Mr. Creighton; as you can see, there is no girl here."

"But there was one. The scene was too real for me to have dreamt it. And, hang it! that scrap, short as it was, with our pal the dwarf was no dream; I'm afraid he's rather messed up this dressing gown—"

The other disregarded his remarks.

"You have had a rather trying day, Mr. Creighton," he replied, in a tone that might have been used to an imaginative child; "I strongly advise you to get back to bed now and forget all about it."

Creighton bit his lip. He would not say anything more; it would merely be a waste

of words. In the circumstances he judged it would be unwise for him to press the matter.

"Yes, I confess I do feel rather done up," he murmured with a yawn. "I trust that you will instruct that dwarf not to pay me any more early morning calls. If he does, he may get hurt—I don't like his face."

"He shall not trouble you again, Mr. Creighton—I promise you that."

"Right-o! Then I'll get back to bed."

He was not allowed to go alone, the Colossus accompanying him to the door of his room. After an exchange of good-nights, Martin heard a key turn in the lock. He did not bother to protest, however, for by this time drowsiness had come, and, tumbling into bed, he fell quickly asleep.

CHAPTER V

Who was that man? What did he want with me?"

Back in the attic bedroom, which had served for her prison, Margery asked the question of her captor.

The Colossus smiled. "What does it matter who he is?" he replied; "he will never trouble you again unless you are unreasonable. Then he may."

Her nerve, resolute as she had tried to make it, failed before the memory of that dreadful dwarf. To have to face him again would be unendurable.

"I do not wish to disturb you now, Miss Steers. You would be well advised to go to bed. You decline? Well, it is very foolish of you, believe me. There will be no more disturbances to-night, I give you my word—and rest is such a valuable factor in maintaining health, I have always understood."

With that he closed the door, locked it, and a moment later she heard him walk away.

Margery went to the wash-hand-stand and bathed her eyes. There was such a throbbing pain over her forehead that she would have given anything for an aspirin. As for undressing, the suggestion was impossible in that terrible house. She would keep her clothes on in case an opportunity occurred for her to get away. In the meantime, Lord Belshaven was certain to have had inquiries made.

If that second man would help her! He looked a clean, straight type, and he had shown his decency by tackling the dwarf; but his very presence in the house only went to prove that he must be a member of this kidnaping gang. He might save her from assault, but he would not help her to escape—he would not dare to do that.

Her head by this time was revolving like a whip-top, and to ease that bewildering feeling of vertigo she lay down on the bed. Shortly after she fell asleep. The first waking thought Martin Creighton had was to endeavor to find the girl he had been able to befriend the night before, and to have a few minutes' private conversation with her. The manner of the Colossus had convinced him that it must have been this girl who had made that dramatic appeal for help over the telephone. It was through her, principally, that he had embarked on this mad enterprise. . . . Yes, he must certainly see her. For one thing, she was in desperate need of help, he felt certain, while for another, he had to sustain his new-found sense of manhood.

A manservant entered with tea and the announcement that his bath was ready.

lally poor feeding. Hens will not lay unless they are fed well. Such birds are too often discarded, leaving the house half idle, while the overhead expenses go on. This man found, too, that he was devoting to marketing time he might better have spent in work about the poultry yard. He was trying to sell his broilers dressed, for example, which necessitated killing and picking them himself. In his case it would have been better for him to have sold them alive. He found, however, that he could dress fowl, light roasters and fryers profitably. He also declared that a common

When he returned from the bathroom, which, like everything else he had seen in this house, was most handsomely appointed, he found his suit brushed and the trousers pressed. It was with a pleasurable sense of excitement, quite unlike his feelings of the night before, that he went down to breakfast.

He found places laid for three, and his only companions at the meal were the Colossus and the exotic girl he had heard addressed as Xavia. Both greeted him pleasantly, and the unreality of his position appealed to him afresh.

Every time the door opened he hoped to see enter the girl he intended to help. The action did not pass unnoticed. "Are you looking for Professor Zoab, Mr. Creighton? My uncle has told me about your encounter last night."

Martin smiled across at the speaker.

"A professor, eh? He scarcely looks a university don to me," he said.

"Nevertheless, he is. He was a lecturer at Toledo University before we knew him. He has a wonderful reputation for—"

"My dear," sharply interrupted the Colossus, "can't you see that Mr. Creighton is ready for some more coffee?"

The girl flushed under the rebuke.

"I can't say that I am very anxious to meet the Professor again, whatever his distinguished qualities may be," remarked Creighton; "and I warn him, through you, if you like, that if he continues to make a habit of creeping into people's bedrooms in the middle of the night, he's asking for something worse than an ordinary thick ear."

The Colossus flashed him an interrogating glance.

"I hope you have swept from your mind the delusion you entertained last night, Mr. Creighton?" he asked sharply.

"Delusion! What delusion? By the way, it's rather awkward not knowing your name."

The other ignored the last sentence, and concentrated on the earlier part of the reply.

"The delusion that you saw a strange girl in this house last night."

"Didn't I? Hanged if I can remember exactly what did take place last night. All I know is that I was mad at finding your Professor friend bending over me, muttering some gibberish—the roll-call at Toledo University in the original Spanish, perhaps—that I followed him. What happened after that?"

"You came to grips with him in an upstairs attic bedroom, and you must have received a knock on the head, because when I pulled you apart you muttered something about having saved a girl from Zoab. A moment later you had to admit that there was no girl there. And the idea of poor Zoab, ugly as he is, willingly terrifying a girl is grotesque, isn't it, Xavia?"

"Ludicrous!" was the answer; "in spite of his deformity, Zoab is really the kindest of creatures."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Looked Like Her.

Frim Tit-Bits. A pretty girl, wearing the latest in bathing suits, was standing on the beach when a young man came up and spoke to her.

"How dare you speak to me!" said the girl, indignantly. "I don't know you from Adam."

"Well," returned the young man, unconcernedly, "I'd scarcely know you from Eve."

WHY WORRY?

A recent item says that we're bootleggers, one and all; Our tissues—think of it! produce The purest alcohol.

So whether wets or dries prevail Or lives the Volstead bill, Each one of us will operate His private little still.

—Sam Page.

mistake is to get off to a wrong start with the flock. That is, the owner does not know exactly what he is driving at. If he had made his plans carefully and built accordingly, instead of trying something and changing the buildings all around later, he would be better off. It pays to compare the home flock with some near-by successful flock.

THE NEIGHBORS

"Had a meal from our garden last Sunday."

"What, as early as this?"

"Yes, a chicken dinner."

Study New Bullet
Military experts of Europe are much interested in a new bullet, invented by a German engineer, which is said to attain a velocity of 5,900 feet a second, more than twice that of any other bullet, and to penetrate hardened armor plate one-half inch thick.

Some Previous Ones

"Jimmie proposed four times before I accepted him."

"Who were the other three girls?"

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From Now On

Chorus Girl—I hear Pauline is getting married next week.
Comedian—Yes, a speaking part at last.—Stray Stories.

● Little Miss ALICE ANN BUTTGEREIT of Verona, Penn.



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CHICKENS AS DUES

Birmingham, Ala.—Arthur Greenwood recently stated that no one in Alabama need stay out of the American Legion for lack of funds. He said that for four chickens he would see to it that the sender was taken into the Legion. He now has 26 hens, sent in by nine men, which will pay their way into the organization.

INCREASING PROFITS

If the poultry flock is not paying as well as it should, the reason may be found in one or more forms of poor management recently described

by an experienced poultryman. Due to heavy losses, it was costing him too much to raise his pullets. He remedied this by practicing strict sanitation for the first 12 weeks of the brooding period. He fed a good starting and growing ration and plenty of it. He fed milk products liberally, both wet and dry. Next, he discovered that he was culling his flock too rapidly and too closely. Birds often get out of production, not because they lack ability to produce, but because they are the victims of faulty management: poor housing and spec-