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taken from Ray Cummings' thrilling story, "The Mark of the Meteor" we see the gigantic meteor just after it has plunged through the bow of the doomed space ship. Shooting vertically upward in a vain effort to change the course of the ship, the rocket exhausts flame furiously. Mars in the background gleams green and gold.

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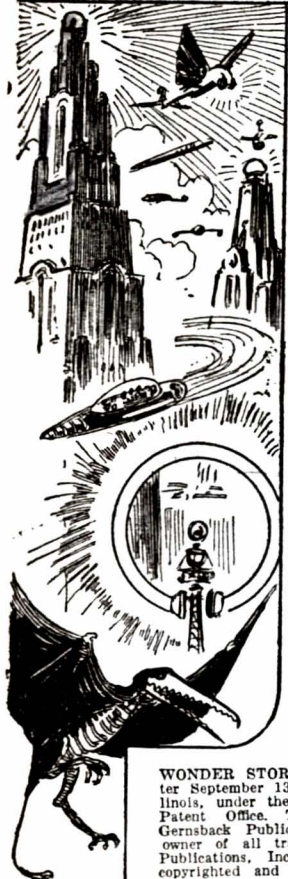
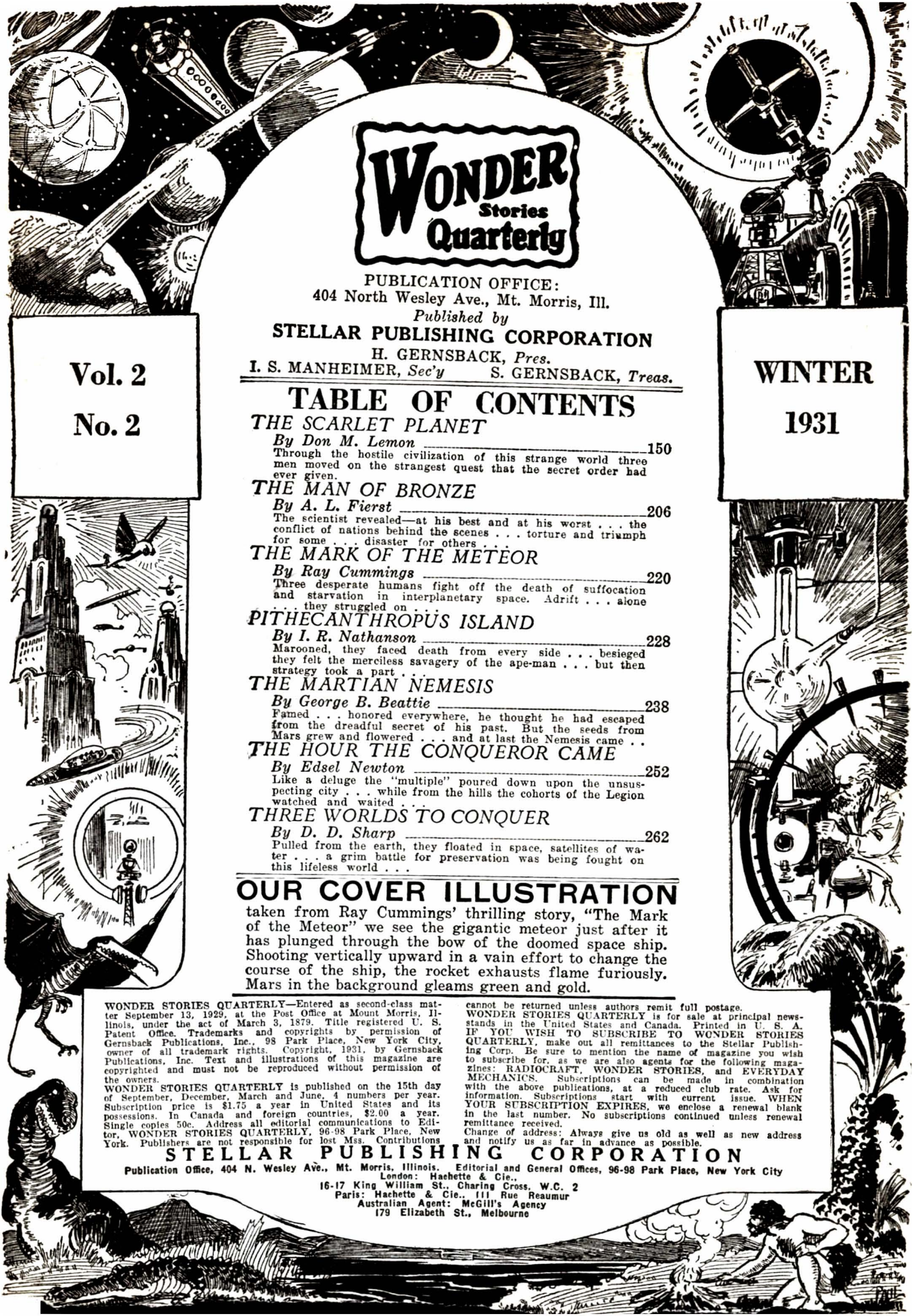
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The Man of Bronze

by A. L. Fierst

The ways of men are very devious, and their uses of the gifts of nature are a true index of their character. One type of scientist spends his life in an obscure laboratory suffering untold tortures to add just one little bit of knowledge to the world's store. Others penetrate disease-infested lands to study and die studying those afflictions that wipe out their fellow-men. But how about the scientist who under the guise of patriotism and duty will destroy just as ruthlessly as his fellow scientists try to create? Are these two types of scientists different breeds, or are they both doing their duty as they see it? The present story poses this interesting problem in pages filled with excitement and wonder.



NO one who knew young Frederick Vaux, scion of a wealthy family, speed boat enthusiast, polo player, glider expert, would ever imagine he was anything but a member of that class of society referred to as "gilded youth." There is a strange notion prevalent, even now, in 1945, that the inheritance of great wealth automatically makes a man mentally inferior to the young people who, like Saturday's children, have to work for a living. That may have been true in some cases a couple of decades ago, but at the present time there is no excuse for such unfounded notions. Grandfathers and fathers who amass millions by their own effort and ability usually have more than money to pass on to their grandsons and sons. Freddie Vaux, who, apparently, never did anything but enjoy himself, was an outstanding example of this new eugenics.

Indeed, his sporting companions would have been amazed at the suggestion that Freddie had ever done anything useful in his entire career. But they would have been astounded if they could have known that on a certain pleasant summer afternoon, not long ago, when he was supposed to be off grappling with the monsters

of the deep around Catalina Island, he was in reality standing before the chief of his country's secret service operatives—in a sweltering office thousands of miles from the blue waters of the Pacific.

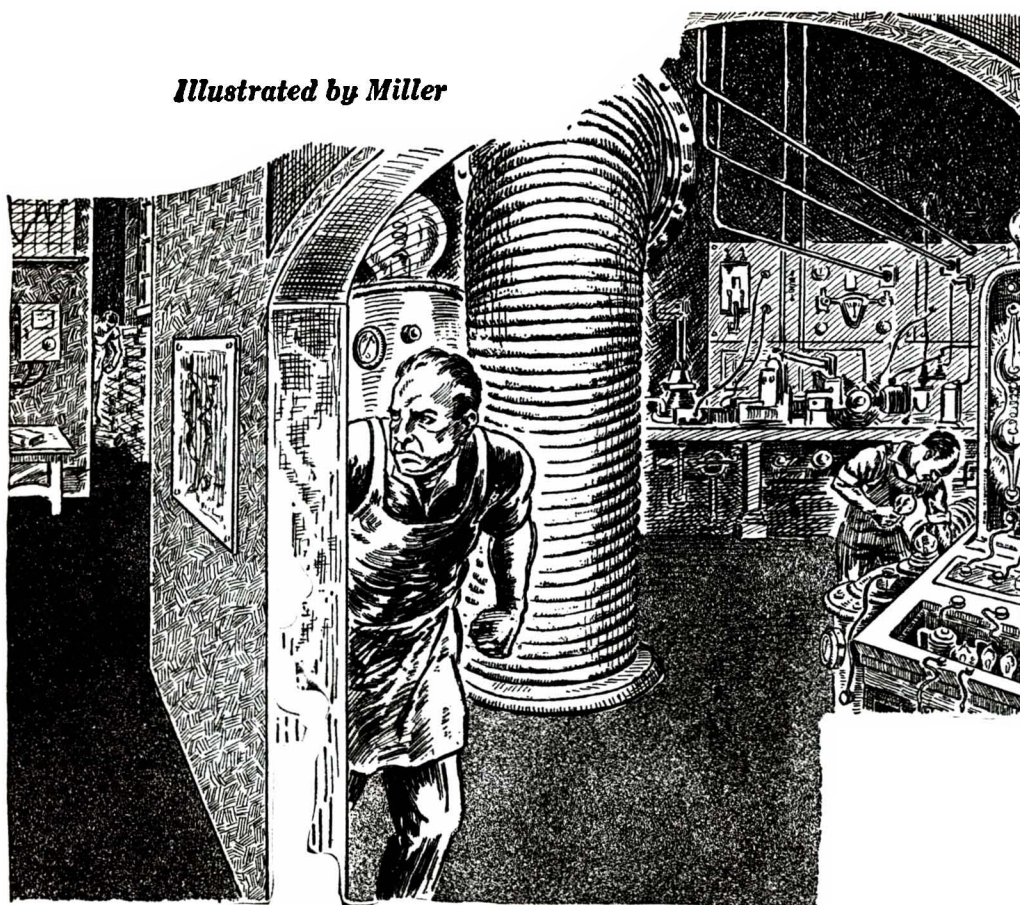
"Vaux," said the chief, "you're a society man. By all the laws of nature and social custom you should have sat for a portrait bust by Franz Helmer, who's making more money out of your friends in the upper crust than your grandfather ever did out of the exploited laboring man."

Vaux bowed his acknowledgement of this delicate compliment to his esteemed ancestor. "I am a personal friend of Helmer," he answered. "I haven't sat for him as yet, but I hang around his studio a good deal when I haven't anything better to do. Very interesting genius, in his own way."

"Very," remarked the chief, with a grimace. "You may not know it, but we have been watching his actions ever since he came to this country. I'm not so sure that all this sculpturing of his isn't a mask for something else. He has entirely too many connections among suspected people."

"But Helmer is a great artist," objected Vaux,

Illustrated by Miller



Vaux decided to take a long chance. He leaped lightly to the pedestal and held the glass to the parted lips.

"Surely you don't think a man can turn out work like his just to fool people!"

"You're young yet," answered Henderson. "You'll learn. But I didn't call you here to argue about art. What I want to know is this: Can you gain access to his studio at any time without arousing any undue suspicion?"

"Oh, yes, easily. Who would suspect anybody with a reputation like mine? Champion playboy of the younger set, and all that?"

"That's fine. Now listen: I suppose you've heard of Manning—Montague Manning?"

"The inventor?"

"Right. Manning is particularly valuable to this country right now. I imagine you must have heard something of his new explosive. A pound of his *Mannite* compares with a pound of that old T. N. T. as a pound of T. N. T. compares with the paper cap in a toy pistol. Try and imagine what a half-ton bomb of *Mannite* could do to a city, an army, or a battleship."

"I'll try to," said Vaux, "but my imagination isn't very good. It doesn't run along those lines."

"Well, Manning realizing that his explosive wouldn't be of any use to private individuals—unless they wanted to blow up Pike's Peak, or something—has sold his patents to the government. At the present time the War Department owns all rights to its use, and Manning is en-

gaged in working out plans to make it effective in instruments of offense or defense. Particularly in bombs and projectiles. Later he'll concentrate on depth charges. Of course, I don't mean that there's any likelihood of a war," he added, with what was supposed to be a virtuous expression on his stony countenance, "but — you know, just in case anything like that *should* happen. . . Well, we'll feel a lot more comfortable if *we* have the *Mannite*, and the other fellow worries about it. Do you get the idea?"

"I begin to see the light," said Vaux. "You think that Helmer and his friends are trying to get the formula away from Manning, even if he has sold all his rights. Their own country—Hisalpina—will then be equal to any of the great powers."

"You're a credit to the service," said Henderson. "Now of course, you know what you have to do. We have maintained the utmost secrecy concerning *Mannite*. No announcement of it ever appeared in the papers. In fact, we made it plain that any talk concerning a new explosive was unfounded, and that there wasn't any such thing. But there's no such thing as a secret. Someone must have made a slip somewhere. Knowing the propensities of a lot of clever people on our list, we have put two and two together and made four—at least, we hope we have made four."

"But I don't see where Helmer fits into all this," said Vaux. "It's natural for him to associate with people from his own country."

"Oh—didn't I tell you?" asked Henderson. "*Helmer has been receiving regular visits from Manning!*"

Vaux whistled.

"When anyone is especially valuable to the welfare of the country, we have him watched and guarded. The president has a flock of our boys following him around wherever he goes. Ever since we decided that Manning was so useful to us, we've had a couple of good men trail him around. He doesn't know it—we didn't want to make him nervous. We don't mistrust him. We have absolute faith in his patriotism and his loyalty. But we have to take care of

him. So that's how we found out about his visits to Helmer. Whenever he's in New York, he spends a couple of hours a day there."

"Very simple," said Vaux. "He's having his face and figure cast in bronze by Helmer's new method. That's the latest fad. No more busts—full figures is the thing now. Helmer's genius lies in expressing something by the torso and limbs and hands, as well as by the face. That's where he's unique. He came over here to do some of our outstanding people, just as he did the rulers of Europe and the great statesmen and scientists and literary men. But, of course, our society people couldn't be left out, and insisted on being in with the really great, so they're paying him anything he asks. And, being a man with a sense of humor as well as a sense of business, he's making more in a week than Rodin ever made in his life."

"Yes? That may be true. But that's all the more reason why we have to watch him. In the intimate conversation between a sculptor and a subject, anything can slip out. And we always have to watch out for violence."

"Oh, I see. You think they'll kidnap him, or something?"

"Worse than that. I have reliable information that Helmer has a regular scientific laboratory in his cellar, or somewhere. They may torture him, and then kill him to keep him from talking."

"I can't believe that of Helmer!"

"Your orders," said the chief, ignoring him, "are to spend as much time as you can in the studio, to inform us of every appearance Manning makes there, to report anything unusual, and to look around as much as you can without exciting suspicion. Of course, they won't try anything while you're there, but they're very resourceful. You have orders to go armed whenever you visit Helmer, and to use your weapon whenever you see fit to do so."

"But if you keep Manning in Washington all the time, you won't have to worry about what he does in New York."

"Oh. Cold feet?"

Vaux flushed. "Listen," he said. "I've shot lions, and I've hunted tarpon in shark-infested waters. I've busted bronchos on a dude ranch. I've been in places where you wouldn't care to go. I've bluffed African cannibal chiefs and made them like it. But if you mention cold feet to me again I'll quit right here and now, and you can get somebody else to do your spying."

"Sorry, sorry, sorry," murmured Henderson, who valued this young man's ability to carry off a situation. "But the point is that he has to spend a lot of time in New York, where he has his laboratory. He's a great inventor, not a criminal, and we can't guard him. And besides, the work he's doing isn't half as important to him as it is to us. We're more interested in it than he is."

"Very well," said the mollified Vaux. "I never saw Manning, but I imagine we'll be introduced if we meet."

"You may meet when there isn't any time for introductions," said Henderson. He reached into a drawer of his desk and took out a handful of photographs. "Here," he said, selecting one and handing it to Vaux. "Get this face fixed in your memory, and if you ever see it in the flesh, don't let on that it means anything to you."

A few moments later the young man walked out of the office and into what he declared later was the most incredible adventure of his life.

The Man Kroll

THE next day Freddie Vaux, sportsman, man about town, delightful idler, was lounging comfortably in the cool studio of his distinguished friend, Franz Helmer. The sculptor, relaxing for an hour, amused himself with modeling a little clay figurine which reproduced exactly the finely cut features of the most eligible young bachelor in New York.

"I wonder you're here in this weather, Freddie," he observed. For a man who was counted a foreigner, his speech was remarkably Americanized. "I don't see any of your friends around in this heat."

"Well," said Vaux, "I'll tell you what it is. As a matter of fact I know that some excellent—ah—well, to give you another reason, there is a very pretty little girl I know who is simply working her heart out in the chorus during this infernal weather, and the least I can do is to make her leisure time as comfortable as I can. You know—long, cool, rides in my motor boat, spins in my roadster, and all that. Next week she promised me to go up with me in

my little plane. Of course," he added, seeing the smile on Helmer's face, "my interest is purely altruistic. It's just that I'm so good-natured."

"You should say your interest is academic," observed Helmer.

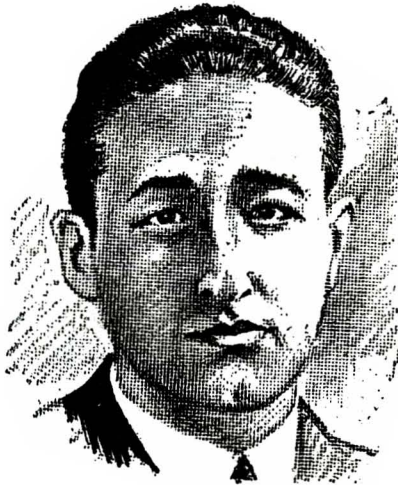
"Or scientific," added Vaux. "I have always wanted to add practical experiments in psychology to my other scientific attainments."

"Your other scientific attainments? Since when were you a scientist?"

"Oh, I'm not much of one," answered the young man. "But I was always interested in chemistry and physics, and I have a neat little laboratory at home. Of course, my friends don't know about it—if they did, I would probably become a social outcast."

"Indeed? My assistant—I don't know whether you've met him—is quite a scientist in his own right. And not an amateur scientist either. In our own country he is held in high esteem. He assists me in my particular kind of bronze casting. It's really scientific research with him."

"That's very interesting," said Vaux. "I'd like



A. L. FIERST

to meet him. As a matter of fact my own specialty is atomic disintegration, or disassociation—I mean, shooting streams of electrons from vacuum tubes at various targets. I get a lot of fun out of it."

Helmer stopped his work. "This is a coincidence," he said. "Kroll—my assistant—is also a specialist in that. Down in our laboratory in the cellar"—he motioned to the floor—"we have what I think is one of the most advanced types of Coolidge tube. It's a development of Kroll's, of which the world as yet knows nothing."

"I would like to see it," said Vaux, with well-simulated eagerness, "and I'd also like to see Kroll. I'm always interested in meeting men of science."

"You shall," said the sculptor, wiping his hands on a stained rag. "And I want to show you something else—which I consider my masterpiece. Oh, it's a wonderful piece of work! You'd swear it was alive! It's a development of my method, which I have just tried out."

Still talking, the sculptor led Vaux to the rear of the studio. Stepping behind a screen, he pressed a concealed button. A panel of the wall rose before them.

"Enter, my friend," said Helmer. Vaux, restraining the desire to ask why all this secrecy was used, walked boldly into the dim room beyond the panel, and down the steps which led from it. Helmer closed the panel and followed him.

"I have that panel," said the Hisalpinian, as if seeing into Vaux's mind, "because I don't want to spoil the looks of the studio. You know how it is, when you have a flight of stairs leading to a cellar. Spoils the whole effect."

FROM the long, low, cement-floored room they were entering came the unpleasant odor of acids. Against one wall, and directly beneath brilliant lights, were several work benches—some of them obviously for chemical experiments, and some for physical. Vaux paused before the most elaborate vacuum pump he had ever seen; an intricate device which made the ordinary Geryk vacuum pump seem childish by comparison. A little farther down the vast, dim chamber he started in astonishment at an enormous transformer, a tremendous helix of wire, wound in numberless coils around a great central drum.

"See the length of that spark-gap?" asked a deep voice at his side. Vaux turned. The man who stood next to him was undoubtedly Kroll, the scientist. The young man looked up at a magnificent brow surmounted by a mass of flowing, grayish-brown hair, from beneath which, as though from miniature caverns, two strangely glittering eyes seemed to pierce his very brain.

But the next moment Vaux observed, with a feeling of trepidation, that the man was a giant; not a white-skinned, hollow-chested man of abstractions, but one who had probably been a champion wrestler, and outdoor man, a mountain-climber, a blacksmith. Kroll towered almost a full head above the young man, who was every bit of six feet tall; and his acid-stained working robe, though it fell loosely around his extraordi-

inarily broad shoulders and massive limbs, could not hide the great chest that seemed about to burst through it with every deep breath of the wearer.

Helmer hastened to introduce the two men, who eyed each other with interest. Vaux realized that, in a physical encounter, he would be no match for the towering Hisalpinian, in spite of his athletic training, his arms of steel, and his unusual skill in boxing. Kroll belonged to that class of individuals gifted with physiques beyond those ordinary men could attain by the most assiduous training.

Beside this colossus, Helmer appeared shorter than he really was; and, though he was by no means deficient in physical strength, he seemed almost puny.

Kroll, looking at the young man with an eye that missed nothing, apparently found him worthy of his consideration. Helmer was surprised. Usually Kroll looked down upon strangers with contempt, regarding them as much beneath himself in intellectual stature as in physical stature.

The sculptor, as he showed Vaux around the laboratory, kept up a constant stream of chatter. Kroll, after a few words, had turned back to his electrical apparatus.

CHAPTER II.

His Great Triumph

AT the sides of the room, heavy bars of dull brown metal reflected dimly the light that fell upon them. At the very end of the laboratory—a veritable cavern—a solitary workman, wearing a leather apron, was sorting more bars of this same metal and making entries in an account book.

"Very interesting," observed the young American. "I envy you. But what were you going to show me?"

"Ah, yes," replied Helmer, with no great cordiality, "I had almost forgotten. But first we shall see the vacuum tube of which I told you—shall we? I know a little of science myself. We Hisalpinians, as you probably know, are known for our thoroughness."

Kroll was quite willing to demonstrate his work to Vaux, who showed, by his questions, that he was quite familiar with the operation of the Coolidge Tube.

"We use here an ordinary voltage of 220, alternating current," explained the scientists. "I step it up to 60,000. Then, with this transformer"—he pointed to the huge helix—"we realize no less than three million volts when the spark shoots across the spark gap."

"Three million volts!" exclaimed Vaux, "Why, that's twice as much as anyone has been able to get before! You ought to be world-famous!"

Kroll bowed, but did not reply. He pointed to a wall of solid lead which faced an enormous vacuum tube. "This lead," he informed Vaux, "is four feet thick, and resists the stream of electrons from my tube. There is, of course, no anti-cathode. These rays are not as powerful as the

cosmic rays, which I am studying with a view to approximating their force."

"He can destroy anything," Helmer interposed. "If he aims his tube at a piece of metal, an animal,—anything—except that wall of lead, he can make anything disappear—almost. He is a magician."

The young man stooped and picked up a chunk of discarded brass almost at his feet. "Will you destroy this for me?" he asked.

Kroll nodded. He placed the metal on a little stand against the wall of lead. Then he adjusted his cathode ray tube. The great glass bulb, in which a perfect vacuum had been produced by the pump Vaux had seen—or so Kroll referred to the vacuum he had created—gleamed like burnished metal in that dim atmosphere. The giant advanced to the switch.

Vaux and Helmer shrank behind him. Kroll, standing close to his apparatus with the supreme confidence of genius, pressed a rubber-handled lever down—down—until a warning spark leaped from the two parts of the contact apparatus. Then he suddenly bore down on it with all his weight.

The young man, for a moment, thought his ear-drums had been split by the crackle of gunfire. A vicious, brilliant spark snapped across the gap. The smell of ozone in the air was nothing short of nauseating. Involuntarily Vaux stepped back; then, as the three-million-volt charge shot through the tube, the interior of the bulb glowed with bluish light. As they watched, the lump of brass began to disintegrate before their eyes; it seemed to be writhing in torture; parts of it melted and ran down; then the metal vanished entirely. Kroll shut off the current.

"That piece of metal was twenty feet away," he said, trying to keep a note of triumph out of his voice. "How far the electrons will shoot I am not certain. I have not yet tried my rays at a greater distance. When I complete my work, I will be able to produce an electronic discharge equal in power to the cosmic rays discovered by Millikan decades ago."

"And now," said Helmer, "I want to show you the greatest piece of work I have done yet." He kissed the tips of his fingers with evident delight in what he was about to display. For some reason Vaux felt a sudden mistrust of the man. Something unaccountably sinister had entered into Helmer's attitude, with the simple gesture of delight.

It was not the gesture of an artist. It reminded the American of the gloating pleasure of an African native he had witnessed the year before. The cannibal had just returned with his enemy's head. But why, he asked himself, should he feel about this man of genius precisely as he had felt about a black savage?

Helmer walked quickly to the other side of the room and turned a corner into a little recess. Vaux, accustomed to the semi-darkness of the laboratory, was dazzled for a moment by the profusion of light in the niche. The radiance, from some source not discernible at once, played over the most marvelous piece of statuary he had ever seen.

FOR a moment he gazed in admiration. Then a vague, an inexpressible feeling of positive disgust began to creep over him. The human figure, naked from the waist up, and wearing conventional attire from the waist down—truly a curious combination—was entirely too realistic. Frozen on the gleaming metal face was an expression of intense suffering, and all the marks of great bodily fear were visible in the sharply drawn lines of the countenance. It was this face that made the statue different from any Vaux had ever seen. True, there is a great ideal of suffering depicted on the face of Laocoön, in that famous piece of statuary which shows him and his sons in the coils of serpents. But the masterpiece of Hellenistic art never touched the depths of fear and pain on the face of this statue of metal.

"What a horrible thing!" exclaimed Vaux.

"Horrible?" echoed Helmer. "My dear boy, on my word as an artist, I tell you this is a masterpiece. The horror you experience is proof of that. Note the twisted hands—observe the muscles standing out on the arms, as though in a struggle—against something—something dreadful—what can it be?"

"You must be the devil himself!" said Vaux. "What artist has ever been able to stamp on cold metal an expression so diabolically alive? I don't think any human hand can be responsible for this work! The face is too horribly human in its anguish. Who could have posed for a statue like that? It must have been a man condemned to die!"

"Oh, I had a model, all right," said Helmer, rubbing his hands with relish. "He was a man who had loved much—and also suffered much—in a short time."

"Why are the eyes closed?" asked Vaux.

"The closed eyes and the lips slightly open give just the expression I was seeking. It took me some time to get it right, I assure you."

Vaux continued to stare at the statue. He noticed that it did not have the color peculiar to bronze; it seemed to be composed of pure copper. Then, as he peered more closely at the face, a sudden shock went through his system. It couldn't be! He stared again. Helmer was watching him narrowly. Out of the twisted, tortured lines of pain that composed the face, Vaux was trying to imagine what the features would be like in repose. His eyes narrowed to blue slits. He had heard once that artists look at pieces through half-closed eyes, in order to get the full effect. That anguished face—detached from the body—fascinated him. Then, in something like a flash of inspiration, the whole incredible thing was exposed, as in a blinding light. The face was the face of Manning!

Vaux hoped he exhibited no symptoms of surprise. He did not relish the scrutiny to which he was being subjected. Now that the first shock of recognition was over, he examined the features more closely, and with a definite purpose. Yes, there could be no mistake about it. The peculiarly high forehead, the extraordinarily fine nose, the cleft chin, the mole on the left cheek—it was Manning. He had never seen the man,

but the photograph Henderson had given him was enough for him to identify this monstrosity. But how had Manning ever posed for such a fiendish representation?

Slowly the full horror of it all dawned upon the young man. Manning had not posed—this was Manning himself!

"You like it?" asked Helmer.

"You must pardon my first feelings," answered Vaux, attempting to assume his usual air. "It is so unbelievably realistic that I thought for a moment it was a man, and not a statue."

"It almost breathes—eh?"

"This reminds me of a poem I once read," said Vaux. "It was about Donatello's statue of St. George. When Donatello asked one of the great artists of the day about it—I think it was Brunelleschi—the other fellow remarked that it was a great work, but that it had one fault—it didn't breathe. Helmer," he announced, looking the sculptor in the eye, "I think you've beaten Donatello—you have a statue that *does* breathe!"

Helmer seemed undecided as to how to take this compliment. Then he bowed. "I never did think much of Renaissance sculpture," he answered. "I think you ought to become a great critic of the arts!"

"Thank you," said Vaux. Then, seized with a sudden idea, he asked: "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Certainly not!"

He Doesn't Breathe

THE young man drew from his pocket a straight-stemmed briar pipe, and innocently tapped the bowl against the base of the statue to empty it of ashes. Then, as if thinking of something else, he tapped it strongly against one leg of the figure. Instead of a clear, ringing, sound, the metal gave forth a muffled noise. Undoubtedly it was not hollow!

"This is very interesting," he said to Helmer. "Shall we go back to the studio?"

The sculptor nodded and walked ahead. Instantly Vaux decided to take a long chance. Snatching a small round hand mirror from his pocket—he was extraordinarily vain of his personal appearance—he leaped lightly to the pedestal of the statue and held the glass to its parted lips. Impatiently he waited a moment. Then he glanced at the mirror and leaped to the floor. The glass had remained clear. Vaux breathed a sigh of relief.

"What are you doing with that mirror?" asked the deep voice of Kroll. Vaux turned. He had not realized that the giant had approached as softly as a cat, and was watching him with his piercing eyes.

"Oh, nothing," answered Vaux, edging away as the scientist advanced toward him. "I was trying to discover whether Helmer was a greater sculptor than Donatello."

"Really?" asked Kroll, with a mysterious smile. "And what have you discovered?"

"I'm disappointed," said Vaux, walking boldly past the giant and following Helmer. "Donatel-

lo's statue didn't breathe—and neither does this one. It was simply a whim of mine."

"For an educated young man like you," muttered Kroll, as Vaux walked up into the studio, "you have some very curious whims, I should say."

Then he casually picked up from the floor a square of white paper Vaux had dropped from his pocket in taking out the mirror, read the few words typed on it, and smiled.

CHAPTER III.

An Amazing Secret

FREDDIE Vaux left Helmer's studio and drove directly to Manning's residence. As he sat behind the wheel of his two hundred-and-forty horsepower, low-slung, racing car he knit his brows in perplexity; and as he abstractedly twisted his powerful machine through the heavy traffic he kept repeating, almost aloud: "It can't be. It can't be. But where is he?"

For a moment he had imagined a living man was inside that horrible statue; the muffled noise given forth as he tapped the leg strengthened the idea; and he had almost expected to find his mirror clouded with breath. "If it is a man," he repeated, "they must have copper-plated him. That vat of blue liquid—"

Manning's wife herself answered his ring at the front door. She looked worried; and Vaux imagined she had not slept the night before. His name on his engraved card, and his fine features—familiar to every reader of the Sunday society sections of the newspapers—gained him instant admission.

"Is your husband here?" he asked, after the formalities were over.

"No, he's not," answered Mrs. Manning. "He hasn't been home all night, and I'm worried sick. I know he went to Franz Helmer's studio late yesterday afternoon, and I haven't heard from him. I telephoned there, and Helmer himself said he had left."

"Oh," said Vaux. "That doesn't sound so good."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the woman in alarm.

"It's a long story," said Vaux, "and I can't bother you with it now; but as I know you can keep a secret—all inventors' wives can do that—I'm going to tell you that I was sent to that studio to find out what had become of him. I'm doing a little work for the Secret Service."

"You don't mean—you don't mean he's in danger?"

"I'm afraid I do. You see this morning I received this note."

Vaux searched his pockets unsuccessfully. "Good heavens," he said, "I must have dropped it in the studio! Well—this morning I received a message from my superior with the words typed on it: "MANNING WENT TO HELMER'S LATE YESTERDAY: DID NOT COME OUT: INVESTIGATE AT ONCE." So you see it looks serious. This morning I was in the studio and I saw a bronze cast of a man who looked like

your husband. He was having one made, wasn't he?"

"Yes—but it wasn't anywhere near completion."

Vaux whistled again and looked at the woman sympathetically. "Do you know about *Mannite*?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes—it's a new explosive."

"It's more than that—it means the peace of the world in the right hands, and bloody war in the wrong hands."

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Someone may try to get the formula from him. That's why we're watching him. And these Hisalpinians—"

"I'm one myself," she said, simply. "I know what you mean."

"You are one? I didn't know he had ever been there."

"Oh, yes—he met me there and brought me to this country."

"Do you know anything of the artists and scientists of that country? Do you know Helmer?"

"I've heard of him. But I know many others."

"Have you ever heard of a scientist—a man of genius—named Kröll?"

The woman's face went dead white, and into her eyes crept an expression of terror. "Kröll?" she repeated. "Have you seen him? Can you describe him to me?"

"I saw him this morning," said Vaux, "in Helmer's studio—or rather in a laboratory beneath the studio. He's a giant, with terrific power in his limbs—anyone can see that—and a magnificent head. His hair is brown, but it is gray."

"Yes," she said dully "it would—by this time."

"Then you know him?" asked Vaux, in surprise.

"Can you keep a secret?" she asked, in apparent desperation. "Because—I don't know why—I think I can trust you."

"Most women do," said Vaux, forgetting for an instant the seriousness of the situation.

"Then"—her hands twisted in her lap—"this Kröll—this giant—is the greatest brain in Hisalpinia, and a descendant of the first family of that proud country; and—and—*many years ago he was my husband!*"

"What!" exclaimed Vaux, leaping to his feet. "Oh, I begin to see it now! How did you come to marry an American?"

"I'm proud of it," she said defiantly. "Do you know anything about the marriage customs among the better families of a country like mine? You know that matches are arranged by parents. To me, a young and inexperienced girl, Kröll was a name—almost a legend. My family arranged this brilliant marriage for me. Kröll needed money for his experiments, and I brought him a large dowry. He gave me the most respected name in our own land. But that was all."

“A SIDE from that he treated me with the utmost contempt, looking upon me as upon an inferior specimen of humanity. The one true

love of his life was science. To me he had dedicated his life, and it made no difference to him whether he had a wife or not. He made my life a living hell. Then came his friend to study with him—the man who is now my husband. It was a case of love at first sight between us. He knew that I was suffering, and it nearly broke his heart.

"After almost a year of this torture I could stand it no longer. I told my lover that if he did not take me away from Kröll I would kill myself. I meant it. So we eloped. Kröll did not miss me, of course, but we had insulted the proudest name in Hisalpinia, and that he could never forget. We came to America; a divorce was arranged; we were married—and that's about all I have to tell you about Kröll."

"Wait a minute," said Vaux. "Did you say your husband and Kröll studied together?"

"Yes. They worked together, conducted experiments together, and perfected inventions together. Even at that time my husband was working on explosives."

"So Kröll worked with him on *Mannite*, too," said Vaux thoughtfully. "He knew something of it even then."

"But why has Kröll come to America—and why has he not avenged himself already?" asked the frightened woman. "Always I have been expecting this. Once in a while news came over the sea of some great discovery he had made, and I thought we were secure. But now, with Kröll in this country—"

"Don't worry," said Vaux, cheerfully. "Your husband will be back soon. I feel sure of it. You know he has many affairs, and he may have had to leave for somewhere suddenly. Perhaps he intended to notify you and forgot to do so."

"I hope you are right," quavered Manning's wife, "but now that Kröll is here I shall never feel safe again."

"One thing is certain," said Vaux, as he took his leave. "If your husband knew that Kröll was working for Helmer, he would never set foot inside that studio."

"But I'm sure he's *not* working for Helmer," she answered, as she opened the door. "Kröll would never work for anyone. I'm sure it is Helmer who takes orders from him."

Vaux drove away slowly. "I think she's right at that," he thought. "A man like Kröll would naturally be at the head of a ring of scientific spies. With his brain—and then, nobody knows who he is, and very few have ever seen him."

He debated with himself whether he should notify the government organization of what he had learned, or whether he should go back to the studio, pretend he had forgotten something there, and try to get the formula—somehow. The wisdom of the first course appealed to him immediately. He turned his car toward the wooded hills of upper New York City, where the Secret Service operatives had their warm-weather quarters.

Vaux drove slowly, restraining his powerful motor as one holds back a spirited horse by pulling at the reins. He did not realize, as he turned into a little-traveled road, that a large closed

car was following him. And then several things happened almost simultaneously. A cheap little open car dashed in front of his expensive custom-bodied racer; so close, indeed, that it scraped his bumper. Vaux suddenly stepped on the brake, and as he left his seat to address strong words to the driver of the other car, which had also stopped, he found himself peering into the black muzzle of a pistol.

"A hold-up, eh?" he sneered. "Well, steal my car—you won't get very far with it. Every cop in the state knows this one."

The man with the gun did not deign to reply. He merely waited until the large closed car had drawn up close to them.

A door swung open. "Step inside," invited a cold voice, which issued from behind a revolver pointed carelessly in his general direction.

Vaux obeyed without a word. At the first opportunity he would have drawn his own pistol from his underarm holster; but, covered from two directions, it was out of the question.

The door of the limousine slammed shut. Through the window Vaux saw the driver of the little car leave his own vehicle, clamber behind the wheel of the best-known car in New York, and leisurely follow the machine which was bearing him away.

"This is a stupid way of stealing a car," began Vaux. "You should have picked any car in New York but that one."

Kroll's Story

"WE don't steal cars, my clever young friend," said the voice of Kroll. "We have more important things to think of. Your expensive toy will not be harmed, although I doubt very much whether you will ever need it again. You should not be so indiscreet as to drop notes from your pockets. It is always safer to memorize them and then burn them."

"You won't get very far with this, Kroll," said Vaux. "I'm too well known for *that*. You might get rid of Manning, but if anything should happen to me, the debutantes and chorus girls will tear you limb from limb."

"I like your spirit," said the scientist. "Fortunately, I am never swayed by humor and you seem to have more humor than sense. Instead of driving to your superiors, you should have telephoned. Such stupidity!"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Kroll."

"No? But I knew what you were talking about a little while ago—with the woman who used to be my wife. Really, you think very little of me. You should appreciate intellect when you meet it—you have so little of it yourself."

"What I say to Mrs. Manning is my own business," snapped Vaux. "I suppose you've bribed the servants, put dictaphones all over the house, and kept tab on every move."

"Better than that," chuckled Kroll. "See this?" He pointed to a black box in the tonneau, with a pair of earphones attached to it by an insulated wire. "You amateur detectives use dic-

taphones which lead into another room. You never think of applying the principle of radio broadcasting, do you? Of course not. But I am Kroll. I heard you call me a man of genius. You are right. I can sit outside in my car and hear every word that is spoken in that house. Did you think for a minute I would let you get away without following you? We suspected you all along, and that note settled it. If you were as wide awake as you think you are, you might have noticed us following you."

"Where are we going?" asked Vaux, knowing very well that he was on the way back to the laboratory.

"Guess," said Kroll. "I have an idea Helmer may want to make a cast of you—as a remembrance, perhaps."

"As you did of Manning," interposed Vaux.

"Exactly. I rather thought you guessed it. When I found you putting that mirror to the statue's mouth, I knew why you did it."

"This is monstrous," said Vaux. "I couldn't believe it then, and I can't believe it even now. I can believe it only of a lunatic."

"Patriotism and vengeance may make a man act like a lunatic," answered Kroll. "My main object was to get the formula for the *Mannite*—which I have. After that—"

"After that," sneered Vaux, "you broke your promise and copper-plated him. Oh, I can imagine it all—you needn't tell me. I suppose Helmer offered him a fabulous sum for the formula, which, naturally, he refused—out of patriotism, as you call it. Then your fat little accomplice became insistent, and threatened him. I can imagine Manning trying to get out. The exits were guarded. Then, at the precise dramatic moment, I suppose you walked in—knowing what effect it would have on him."

"Remarkable!" exclaimed Kroll. "You really have a brain after all. And what happened after that?"

"I can imagine. I can imagine you walking toward him like an avenging doom, thirsting for his blood. And why? Simply because your wife couldn't endure you any longer, and found a man she really cared for. Anyone so devoted as you are to science shouldn't bother about a mere wife."

"Don't preach to *me!*" roared Kroll. "I have waited twenty years to avenge my family honor. Of course, you *nouveaux riches* don't understand what that is."

"My family is as good as yours," said Vaux, "with this difference—it's a lot more civilized."

"That's what makes it so easy for you to be a sneaking spy, eh?"

"You aren't a spy, are you?" countered Vaux.

"I," said Kroll, "am a great scientist, and anything that I do for my country comes under the head of patriotism. What are you? A rich man's son, an idler, looking for a thrill. And you thought you could fool me—Kroll! Oh, you'll get your thrill, all right, my young friend."

"The biggest thrill I could get," said Vaux, between his teeth, "would be to feel that thick

neck of yours between my hands, you murderous maniac!"

"PRECISELY what Manning said," chuckled Kroll. "All you Americans talk like the heroes of melodrama. Bah!"

"If you didn't have that gun pointing at me, I'd kill you right now, strong as you are! Why didn't you murder me when you held me up, and settle it?"

"Ah, that would be crude—too much like your own trick of taking people for a ride. And then there would be too much evidence. Whereas, when you are cased in bronze, who would think of looking for you? Bodies buried in obscure places have a habit of coming to light; bodies cremated leave traces; but living men plated with copper never tell any tales!"

"So you did that to Manning after all!" exclaimed Vaux, with a shudder. "After you got the formula, too."

"Certainly. It was part of the method of getting the formula."

"I see it all," said Vaux. "You and Helmer overpowered him, I suppose, and dragged him to that horrible laboratory. Then—"

"I'll finish it for you," interrupted Kroll. "You may not appreciate the fine points of the situation. We didn't overpower him. He went there of his own accord—to give me the formula, he said, and I knew he was lying to gain time, or to think of a way out. And all the time he kept up a stream of talk, talking like a fool to get himself out with a whole skin."

"When I told him the United States was using his *Mannite* for weapons of offense, and that his invention would be put to ignoble uses, and that his name would do down as one accursed among men, he charged me with having the same designs for my own country—which, of course, I have, or I would not have gone to all this trouble."

"And then he even tried to say that he had forgotten the formula, because it was so involved, and that the only copy was in the vaults of the government. I replied that he could never forget it, because as a fellow scientist I knew it was burned into his brain, and that it was not as involved as he was trying to make me believe. As his wife told you, I used to work on it with him before he stole her."

"He must have realized his life was forfeit anyway," said Vaux. "Even if he gave you the correct formula you would never allow him to escape and warn the authorities. You were only playing with him, to prolong the agony."

"A pleasure," said Kroll, "after twenty years of seething, burning, hatred. I often wonder why I didn't kill him sooner and set my mind at rest. Anyway, he asked me what security he had. 'The word of Kroll' I told him, and he had to be satisfied with that. For centuries that word has been better than a bond."

"Then he sat down and scribbled off a formula for an explosive less powerful than *Mannite*—I could see the principal ingredient was missing. I flung it in his face, and then, in a mad attempt at freedom, he struck me in the temple with his fist. I was dazed, and he ran, but Helmer met

him with a pistol, and I leaped on him and choked him into unconsciousness.

"Helmer and I attended to everything alone—we didn't want any witnesses who might be bribed later. We dragged Manning to that large tank of blue liquid you saw—that's copper sulphate solution. I had it equipped with clamps for holding his head, arms, and ankles. I tore off his upper garments, and left him naked to the waist, so that the copper should plate his chest, instead of his shirt."

CAPTER IV

Back in the Trap

V AUX listened in growing horror. He found it impossible to believe than anything so inhuman, so positively primitive as the torture of an enemy, could take place in New York in his time. He had seen African savages torture other savages; but for a great scientist, and enlightened being, to do this to another scientist, was beyond the wildest flights of imagination. He pinched himself, thinking he was asleep and in the grip of a nightmare. Kroll noticed it.

"You're awake, never fear!" said the giant Hisalpinian. "This is only a beginning. When we got him in the tank, the cold liquid, as I expected it would, revived him. He looked around in terror, tried to free himself from the clamps, and then realized his situation. He began to struggle, and tug at the clamps, but they only bit deeper. Finally he desisted and looked at me with fear written all over his face. Ah, it was good—after twenty years!"

"What a monster you are!" exclaimed Vaux. "Compared to you, Nero was a saint. He, at least, had the excuse of insanity."

"So have I, in your opinion," observed Kroll. "Well, when I told him that he was the cathode of a copper solution, and that I could turn a switch and copper-plate him, his memory suddenly improved. He swore that if I let him out and let him get dry he'd work out the formula—I knew it had to be worked out, and he wasn't in any position to do it while he was up to his neck in sulphate solution."

"Helmer and I unfastened the bands and dragged him out, and he lay on the floor, shivering like a dog that has come out of the water. I threw him a towel, and he dried his clothes against an electric heater I allowed him to use, although it was a hot day. Then he asked for writing materials, sat down at a table, and in less than an hour he had the formula complete, and the various secret steps in the manufacture of the *Mannite* outlined."

"And where is the formula now?" asked Vaux.

"Perhaps you think you can destroy it? The formula is burned into my brain. I shall never forget it, and every step is as familiar to me as my own name. That, my dear young friend, is genius!"

"More than genius," said Vaux. "Stupidity."

"You think so? You think it poor policy to entrust one man with a secret so valuable? But that is because you do not, and cannot, know

me. By tomorrow, or perhaps tonight, the formula and every step in its deduction will be in the War Office of Hisalpina. Naturally I cannot cable it or radio it; I use my own wireless telephone, which can be heard at the War Office, and nowhere else; and to insure further safety, the entire formula and all its steps go *in code*—you understand?—in code, so that even if the message is tapped we will still be safe. Probably the Secret Service will seek for me soon; but by that time my work here will have been accomplished."

"So you haven't sent the message yet?" asked Vaux, with a gleam of hope in his eyes.

"I know what you think," said Kroll. "You imagine you can kill me in some way and prevent its transmission. Well, even if you could encompass that impossible feat, the secret will still be ours. I have yet that paper on which Manning worked it out; I am translating it into my own code, which took me years to devise, and which is like no other; and if anything should happen to me, Helmer and the others can take it from its hiding place—which, of course, you will never find—and transmit it, although they do not know the code, and they will have to use our ordinary code. In any event, we are secure."

The car was approaching Helmer's studio.

"You will alight before me," directed Kroll, "and walk directly into the studio. Remember I have my revolver pressed against your back, and I am not known for lack of nerve."

"You fool!" said Vaux. "Don't you know the house is watched by government operatives?"

"It *was*," corrected Kroll. "We knew that all along. But at the present time the men assigned to guard us are nowhere to be seen. In fact, they have lost all interest in external events, and I should not be at all surprised if they remained that way for several days to come, by which time the good work will have been accomplished. Go on, get out."

He pressed the hard muzzle of the weapon into Vaux's back, and silently they walked up the steps into the studio. The door closed behind them, and the young man found himself, for the first time in his life, a prisoner.

"**W**E are leaving your famous racing car outside," said Kroll, "so as to avert all suspicion. You see, we do things thoroughly in our country."

Vaux did not reply. He was casting about for a means of escape from this maniac, but the guarded door of the studio, the grilled windows, and the thirty-foot skylight offered no possible chance of flight. The skylight he might reach, he calculated, but only if he had the climbing abilities of a simian.

Except for a butler who was very obviously armed, the studio was empty. "To the laboratory," directed Kroll. "Helmer is waiting to immortalize you in bronze for you world of debutantes and chorus girls."

Vaux looked about him in despair, and slowly walked down the secret steps into the great, acrid-smelling underground chamber. As the

door closed upon him he bid good-bye to light and life and love and all the glorious things he had to live for. Too late he realized, he reflected bitterly, that to serve one's country in dangerous ways is not the royal road to romance.

"Got him, eh?" asked Helmer, as Kroll prodded the reluctant Vaux into the light. "I'm sorry, Freddie," he said, with mock sympathy in his voice, "but nice boys like you shouldn't play with dynamite—or rather *Mannite*, ha ha! Much as I hate to lose your friendship, there are other things I must consider—such as my own life and my duty to my country. However, I will always have you at my side, as a remembrance."

"No levity, Helmer," ordered Kroll, in imperious tones. It was quite evident that he was master in his own domain. Mrs. Manning had been right after all—Kroll would consent to take part in an enterprise only if he could be the leader.

"You will keep him tied for another two hours or so, while I complete the translation of the code," continued Kroll. "Then, before I telephone Hisalpina and complete this assignment, we will dispose of this spy. When I send the message there will be nothing that will remain." He turned and went off to a little room opening on the laboratory. Vaux saw him throw off his coat and don a tight leathern shirt, leaving his powerful arms and shoulders free.

Then he observed the giant strap an automatic pistol to his hip in an ordinary holster. Kroll drew a chair up to a desk, took a key from a drawer he unlocked, and with this key opened still another lock—one which remained invisible to Vaux because it was hidden somewhere in the very wall of the room, something like the safe deposit box at a bank.

"I am not to be disturbed," announced Kroll. Then he shut the door.

Helmer, keeping Vaux at bay with his pistol, summoned two workmen from a sub-cellar. Peasants, thought Vaux; animals without minds, endowed with nothing but animal strength. In the grip of two such specimens, even his own steel muscles were helpless. Without a struggle he permitted himself to be bound to a chair. The peasants departed the way they had come. The American and the Hisalpinian faced each other, Vaux contemptuous, Helmer wary.

"Please don't try anything," begged the sculptor. "I don't like to do this in the first place, and I loathe putting a bullet hole in that fine body of yours. You will be my masterpiece, a perfect athletic type, every muscle rigid, every vein swelling—not a slobbering wretch like Manning."

"You little rat," said Vaux. "With one arm free I'd break you in half, and then shatter you into little pieces, and throw you down the sewer! Do you think for one moment you can get away with two murders?"

"It is not my function to think," said the sculptor. "That is admirably attended to by my tall colleague, whose mental powers have already been demonstrated to you."

"Your master, you mean," sneered Vaux.

"Imagine making a tool of an artist—for what? To gratify the whims of a madman."

"Say what you want," responded Helmer. "Nothing you can utter will change my purpose one iota. Kroll is not a madman. As soon as we have sent the formula to our own country, Kroll will vanish, flying to Maine and then across the ocean to safety. He will be a rich invalid going to Europe for his health, and he will have a couple of attendants in his amphibian whose stupidity will disarm every inspector. I myself—I shall remain here, carrying on the good work of extracting thousands from your society people. Adding insult to injury, eh?"

Vaux flung him a look of contempt and remained silent.

"I do believe I forgot to search you," said Helmer suddenly. He stepped close to Vaux, pressed the muzzle of his weapon against his temple, and ran his delicate fingers over his pockets. "Ah, I thought so," he murmured, drawing the pistol from the young man's shoulder holster.

He held it to the light. "Gold-inlaid," he observed. "Very remarkable chasing. And—oh, yes—initials, too."

"I'll cut my initials on your heart, you scum!" shouted Vaux, tugging frantically at the heavy ropes that held him to a chair fastened in the floor.

"Not with this," said Helmer. He drew the loaded cartridge clip from the butt of the pistol, threw it into a waste receptacle, and replaced the initialed plates. "This will remain as a souvenir of a delightful friendship," he said. "Excuse me a moment."

Last Minutes

HE deliberately turned his back on Vaux and placed the expensive weapon in a little wall cabinet. "So I won't forget it," he explained, with a smile. "I don't get a gift like this every day. F. V.—F. V.—I must invent a name to fit those initials. Ah—Franz Vollmer! My own first name, and my *real* last name!"

Vaux opened his eyes wide. "Vollmer!" he exclaimed. "Wasn't there a Vollmer in the last war—"

"Your memory is excellent," said the sculptor. "There *was* a Vollmer in the last war. My eldest brother. His plane was shot down by one of your countrymen. I was very young then, but I swore at his grave I would devote my life to intense and active hatred of American and Americans. Do you think I could get anywhere with my real name? But Franz Helmer, the famous sculptor—who could imagine anything so worldly of him as international hatred? So you see," he continued, with an unpleasant inflection in his voice, "so you see there is really no use in your trying to escape, and as for your talking me into anything—offer me your entire fortune, plus the millions of the rest of your family, and see what happens."

"No," said Vaux. "It would be a waste of money. You would keep your promise just as well as Kroll kept his promise to Manning. But why don't you kidnap me to Europe, or Africa

or somewhere, and leave me penniless—but alive? I'd never be in a position to harm you."

"And I suppose you offer me a king's ransom for that?"

"No—but a clear conscience."

Helmer laughed aloud. "Enough!" he said impatiently. "We cannot afford to have you alive, even at the ends of the earth. A Vaux can get by anywhere. No, Kroll is right. As soon as he emerges from his sanctum—" He did not finish, but let his eyes wander to the tank of blue liquid.

"Anything but that!" exclaimed Vaux. "Why don't you shoot me like a man instead of torturing me like a fiend?"

"One thing I can promise you," said the sculptor. "You will not suffer as Manning did. Before you are fastened in that tank you will be unconscious. You will be stretched out so that when we stand you on your feet—later—you will have no unconscious look about you. And if your countrymen recognize you, as I show them my greatest works, I will boast of the time when the great Freddie Vaux amused himself by posing for a lowly artist!"

* * *

Freddie Vaux sat in numb silence as minute after minute ticked by and vanished, as far as he was concerned, into the ocean of eternity. For once in his adventurous life he owned himself beaten, and without hope or resource. There was one possibility of escape—if the government operatives suspected he was a prisoner and raided the place. But how on earth could they know? He did not believe in mental telepathy, and even if he did he realized that no hard-boiled man-hunter ever acts on a whim. "I wish a lion had finished me instead," he thought over and over again. "This way I won't even rest in peace—not a decent grave—no place where army airplanes can drop flowers on me Decoration Day."

Helmer walked up and down before him, abstractedly smoking a cigarette, but keeping his sharp eyes on the man in the chair. Vaux felt his hands and arms grow numb from the tight cords. He knew from past experience it was useless to try to free himself. He had read once of a man who carried a little saw concealed in a hollowed-out coin, and cut his bonds that way; but under Helmer's eyes, he reflected, not Houdini himself could have escaped without a bullet between the eyes or in the heart.

More than once his fascinated gaze roved to that fatal tank of innocent blue solution. On one side he saw rows of heavy copper plates, ready to be placed in solution to send their atoms to the cathode. He imagined what had happened to Manning. An idea struck him. Perhaps, at the last minute, he could disconnect the current, spill something into the solution—anything—

"Tell me what really became of Manning," he suddenly asked Helmer.

"It is better for your peace of mind not to know," answered the sculptor. "I'll tell you nothing. Ask Kroll. I'm sure he will take the greatest delight in recounting the details of that clever sculpturing. Personally, I would have

killed him and cremated him, but Kroll knows best."

"Helmer," began Vaux in desperation, "I'll strike one last bargain with you."

"Since when does the mouse bargain with the cat?"

"LISTEN to me, Helmer, or I'll haunt you to hell! Take my check book from my breast pocket, draw a check for as large as amount as you please—you can see the balance runs to seven figures—and I'll sign it—IF you promise you'll try to persuade Kroll—no, you can't persuade a lunatic. If you give me your word, for whatever it's worth, that you'll shoot me through the heart, take my body out to some lonely road and leave it there. No one will ever suspect you; it will look the work of gangsters; and I'll have a decent burial, and my family—my family will know where I am. I'm not asking this for my sake, but simply for the old people who think so much of me."

"Yes," said Helmer with a smile. "For the first time your family will know just where you are at night. They won't have to look for you at the night clubs. But you must think I'm an awful fool. I'm afraid your fright has deranged you."

"What's the matter?" asked Vaux.

"Why, you must be mad! In the first place, I couldn't cash that check without being suspected of murder; in the second place I would have to reckon with Kroll, and I'd sooner face a tiger; and in the third place,—did you really think I would loosen one hand to allow you to sign that check? You're not so clever, Freddie Vaux. I wouldn't trust you with one arm free any more than I'd trust a bound lion with one paw free."

"A compliment," said Vaux. "But I meant it. You have a gun. As soon as I sign it, shoot, and be damned! Is it a bargain?"

"Not while I am in my senses," said Helmer. "Even with a gun I wouldn't be safe. I know your reputation. You're only an amateur boxer, but you once knocked out the middleweight champion—in a private affair. You know jiu-jitsu like a Japanese. I've heard that there are one-armed death holds. And in addition, you're desperate, while I'm calm. That will make you ten times as resourceful and ten times as fast as I am. No, sir! Once and for all, no. Not one finger!"

"Then shoot now," pleaded Vaux, "and do one decent act in your whole rotten life. Even you can't be so low—"

"I don't want to hear any more," said Helmer, impatiently. "Talk to Kroll."

Vaux relapsed into silence, and gave himself up for lost. He closed his eyes and tried to compose himself. He would face death bravely, as he had in the jungles of Africa, in the air, under the sea. But such a death!

Presently a door opened and Kroll appeared, his face flushed from intense mental concentration, his eyes red from strain. "At once, Helmer!" he commanded. "Prepare the tank."

Helmer slunk away, and Kroll advanced to the prisoner. "Well," he asked, "and have you re-

signed yourself to becoming immortalized in bronze?"

"Copper," answered Vaux. "Even you couldn't make bronze flow in a solution."

"Trying to gain time, eh? Perhaps you think I'll experiment on it now? So did Manning."

"And that is really Manning I saw—I mean, is Manning inside that horrible statue?"

"He is. Didn't I tell you?"

"No," said Vaux, talking for time. "You left off with the formula. Perhaps you were only trying to tantalize me. Even Helmer won't tell me what has happened."

"He didn't like it," said Kroll, with a grimace. "But I—ah, well, you wouldn't understand."

"Just to gain time," said Vaux, with desperate humor, "I'm going to ask you to tell me about it. Perhaps if you allow me to see that figure again, I'll control myself so as not to appear so ridiculous."

Kroll considered a moment. Then he drew his pistol, pointed it at Vaux, and called to Helmer. "Untie him!"

Helmer started to protest. "Untie him," repeated Kroll. "I'll watch him. You go prepare the plates."

CHAPTER V

The Fiend's Torture

THE sculptor, against his will, did as he was told. He stepped back and Vaux rubbed his paralyzed forearms to restore circulation. Kroll motioned the young man to precede him, and they walked slowly in the direction of the tortured figure of Manning.

"As Helmer may have told you," rumbled Kroll, "you will suffer nothing. We will do you the supreme favor of allowing you to inhale a container of hydrocyanic gas, which smells pleasantly like almonds, and brings instant unconsciousness."

"And death soon after," amended Vaux. "You aren't fooling me, but I suppose I am to be grateful for that, also. You didn't allow Manning to experience that supreme mercy, did you?"

"No! After he delivered the formula, I verified it, locked it up, and then, as he stood shivering with fear, I struck him a terrific blow on the jaw. He fell like a log. Helmer and I rubbed him all over with graphite and clamped him in the tank again, where, to my supreme satisfaction, he again revived, and this time he realized there was no escape. Observe the fear on his face," said Kroll, waving his pistol toward the distorted features of the bronzed figure. "We switched on the current, the solution began to bubble, and he wailed. He knew what was taking place."

"Simple, isn't it," continued the scientist. "A mere matter of anodes and cathodes, and the perfect crime is committed. Two perfect crimes, I should say, Vaux," he repeated, with unpleasant emphasis on the last word.

"Imagine! Here was Manning, the cathode of a large copper voltmeter. At the anode were

plates of copper, such as you saw a few minutes ago. I started the current. It was so low-pressured that I am sure he couldn't feel it. It didn't electrocute him—it let him live.

"Of course, you know how it works. Take two copper plates of the same weight and connect them to the opposite poles of a current generator. Immerse them in copper sulphate solution, and the current flows through the solution from one plate to the other. The negative plate gains weight as the other loses it—the positive copper ions are attracted to the negative plate, and they coat it. For every copper atom taken away at the anode, one atom is deposited at the cathode. And so on."

Vaux shuddered at this coldly inhuman exposition.

"It was curious to watch how Manning's blackened body became metallic as it took on its copper coating. His struggles grew weaker and weaker as the weight of the metal increased, and he fought to the last—like any cornered rat. See how tense the muscles are. He was caught and held that way—it prolonged the agony, or rather it made the agony worse."

"Impossible. Impossible," repeated Vaux. "You can't be real. No one as fiendish as that could exist."

"We won't discuss that. You'll soon find out," said Kroll, malignantly. "As his body became coated he sank lower and lower, until only his head remained above the solution. Then I suddenly passed my hand before his eyes—to make him close them. Then I rubbed graphite on the eyelids. You know—sometimes a carbon rod is used instead of a copper cathode, and the carbon takes on the copper. Reverse the current, and the carbon reappears."

"As soon as his eyes were closed—and I hope the graphite gave him some pleasant sensations—I rubbed more graphite over his lips, to give him a little thirst. I really believe he gulped the solution, and this, of course, plated his mouth and lips. Look inside—perfect job, isn't it?"

Kroll had lashed himself into a manical fury with his talk. His eyes glowed, and he almost licked his lips as he continued.

"Suddenly I pushed his head under the surface of the solution.—Once—twice—three—four times, until every inch of him had taken on that perfect metal coating. He was, indeed, a masterpiece!"

V AUX continued to watch the excited giant. In the back of his brain a forlorn hope had suddenly assumed larger proportions.

"And when he was plated from head to foot, when every inch of his body had been cased and coated in metal, so that he could not move, I shut off the current. I am sure he still breathed,—or he lived. It was all I could have desired. Helmer had almost collapsed from nausea. I brushed him aside. I, myself, I, Kroll, avenging the honor of my family, I alone would affix that statute to its niche." He pointed with his gun at the figure on the pedestal. "Soon you will join him. You will stand in another niche, a

place of honor, representing youth! Youth and age! The perfect combination!"

Vaux placed both hands carelessly against the wall, as if to steady himself. Then he laid one on the hip-high base of the statue and rested the other on a low moulding along the wall.

"And then," said Kroll, appearing to swell to twice his huge size, "then I lifted him—I, myself—all that mass of metal, weighing hundreds of pounds—in these arms—"

He stretched his powerful arms above his head, in a mighty gesture of strength, like a lion stretching himself. In his huge right hand the pistol looked like a toy.

And then the victim acted. Caught in the little recess, his hands in a position to support his body, Freddie Vaux called to his assistance those powers he had developed on the polo field, the track, the gridiron, in the ring, and in the racing shell. As the giant spread wide his arms in that magnificent gesture, Vaux moved toward him as though on steel springs. With lightning speed he heaved himself up on his sinewy brown hands. And then, as Kroll still flexed his biceps, he brought up his brogue-shod right foot in the wicked, stiff-kneed kick of the Foreign Legion. His heavy shoe, driven by his powerful leg muscles, caught Kroll squarely in the groin.

The scientist groaned and crumpled. Even in his intense, his indescribable, physical agony—agony which makes a strong man as weak as an infant, paralyzes his brain, renders helpless all his other muscles,—Kroll tried to aim his pistol at Vaux as he writhed on the ground. Vaux leaped and landed heavily with his right foot on Kroll's right wrist. The heavy fingers opened. Snatching up the weapon, the prospective victim leaped over his prostrate foe and into the larger room.

Kroll tried to shout. From across the work benches came a spurt of flame, and Vaux flinched. The lobe of his left ear, clipped by Helmer's bullet, spattered his neck and shoulder with dripping blood. Vaux's first shot took the sculptor in the forearm. As the Hisalpinian groaned and stooped for his weapon the American fired again, and his bullet smashed a bottle of sulphuric acid behind Helmer. The liquid poured to the floor in a little torrent, drenching the sculptor's marvellous hands. He screamed in agony as the corroding stream ate away his well-kept flesh and laid bare to the bone. Still fighting, he lifted his pistol in his unwounded hand, rested it on the edge of the table, and fired again. But his aim was poor, and Vaux's third shot tore through the fleshy part of his hand, just below the thumb. Helmer, with both hands disabled, staggered to his feet and attempted to run to the panel in the wall.

"Stay where you are!" shouted Vaux, "or my next shot lands in your head!"

Helmer knew better than to continue. He turned round and faced Vaux, his hands dangling helplessly at his sides.

"Helmer," said Vaux, advancing to the sculptor and standing directly before him, "I never realized before what murderers you two could

be. You would murder me as you killed those two Secret Service men—"

"I didn't—I swear I didn't!"

"Don't swear. Helmer—or Vollmer—you're a great sculptor. You deserve to be with the immortals. I'd put you with them right now, if I weren't saving you for something else. You're too smart to remain among us mortals. Now what I want to know is—where is that formula?"

Helmer remained silent.

"Come on!" ordered Vaux, prodding him in the stomach. "Speak up. I'll count three. One—"

He did not finish. A pair of great brown hands encircled his throat, like contracting iron rings. Helmer, seeing Kroll coming behind Vaux with his inaudible step, had played for time.

A Killer Amuck!

THE American, caught between two fires, put all his strength into one last effort. He swung his pistol over and behind his own head. He heard the heavy metal crash against Kroll's forehead. The giant grip relaxed, and Vaux reeled round in time to fire over the shoulder of the sinking scientist. His bullet caught one of the ox-like workmen, who had run out at the noise of the shooting, squarely between the eyes.

Behind him he heard Helmer running for the door. With one leap he was beside him. He slipped his right arm under Helmer's left, between the sculptor's elbow and shoulder, and suddenly caught the hand with his own left hand and drew it down like lightning. There was a sharp crack. Helmer screamed and collapsed, his arm broken above the elbow in one of the simplest of all the tricks in the deadly category of Japanese wrestling.

Vaux stood still a moment, marvelling at the tremendous powers of Kroll, which had enabled him to rise to his feet after a kick which would have killed a lesser man. He had one thought in mind; to get out, summon the police, and capture the spies alive.

He dashed for the panel. As he reached the top step it opened. A tall figure—the butler—stood framed in the rectangle of light; and before Vaux could discern who it was, friend or foe, the newcomer's fist caught him squarely on the jaw, sending him reeling backward down the stairs. Vaux pulled the trigger of his weapon. The fifth shot brought the latest enemy crashing to the concrete floor with a bullet through the thigh. As the butler reached for his pistol, Vaux fired again, and this time the man lay still and did not move.

Weakened by the loss of the blood which dripped in a steady stream from his wounded ear, Vaux felt his senses leaving him. He leaned against the wall for a moment, so dazed he did not see Kroll stir and roll over. His only thought was to gain the street, to leap into his car, and dash away from all this at a hundred miles an hour. The reaction was setting in. He began to imagine he was breasting the clean salt waves

of his beloved Pacific. The pain in his head became greater. His blood dripped steadily.

Then he came to himself with a start. He had reckoned without the marvellous, the superhuman recuperative powers of Kroll. The huge figure was flying at him, a raging giant; and behind him rushed four more men of his own race, bull-necked brutes marshalled behind their leader, who was shouting to them in his own tongue. Some hidden sub-cellar had discharged its full complement of iron-muscled stupidity, subservient to the will of the man with the better brain.

His retreat cut off, Vaux dashed for the center of the room. His throbbing brain gave him the mad hope of picking off his attackers, one by one. He wondered why Kroll did not have a pistol. Then he crouched behind the immense helix which supplied the terrific voltage to the incredible vacuum tube he had witnessed in operation, took careful aim at the advancing Kroll, and fired.

It was his last shot. It went wild. Vaux pulled the trigger again and again. Then he hurled his weapon at the men before the lead wall. And then, as he reeled backwards, in a daze, almost exhausted, he fell with the weight of his body on his elbow; and the elbow rested on the switch controlling the current for the vacuum tube!

There was an ear-splitting crash as a blinding spark leaped across the spark gap. The huge bulb filled with a bluish radiance. At the same moment the sickening odor of burning flesh came to his nostrils, mixed with the pungent aroma of ozone. Before his astonished eyes a reeking black hole appeared in the scientist's imposing forehead. Without a sound, Kroll sank to the floor. Vaux swung the tube to right and left, steeling himself against the tortured cries of the giant's comrades, who writhed to the floor and lay still.

Vaux brushed his hair back from his eyes and looked around for another enemy. In his hands he held the most terrible weapon yet devised by man. But he saw only Helmer, who had come to himself in intense pain, and who was groaning feebly on the floor. Vaux shut off the current and rested a moment. If anyone else appeared, he would be prepared.

Helmer tried to rise, but sank back. Paying no attention to him, the elegant Freddie Vaux, now a bloody, raging, disheveled, madman, ran to Kroll's little room and attempted to open the door. With the cackling laugh of the lunatic he dashed back to the tube, trained it on the door, and pressed the switch. There was a blinding flash, the strong odor of burning wood, and the door vanished, first buckling and warping off its hinges. In the wall beyond the door appeared a black orifice.

ONCE more he shut off the current. Then he heard a noise in the studio above him. There was the sound of a crashing door, and the tramping of heavy feet. "Come on, curse you!" he shrieked, settling himself behind the tube.

Then he thought better of it, and, feeling suddenly weak, he sank to the floor, shaking his

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The Man of Bronze

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head like a punch-drunk prizefighter. He started up and ran for the secret panel, burst it open, and came face to face with a squad of operatives, headed by his own superior.

"Where the hell have you been all this time?" snarled Vaux, as they stared in amazement.

"Manning's wife just called up and said she was sure something dreadful had happened to him, as his worst enemy was hiding right here. She said you told her. We didn't wait to hear any more, but came right over, and when they didn't answer, we busted in the door."

"Did she just call you?" asked Vaux, panting with exertion.

"About ten minutes ago. But what's happened to you?"

"If that isn't just like a woman!" said Vaux, almost to himself. "She had to wait all this time! Oh,—me? Never mind about me. Just call an ambulance. Walk down those steps, and you'll find something interesting—and don't stumble over the corpses."

* * *

Two days later Freddie Vaux, once more the most eligible young bachelor in New York, sat in an easy chair, talking to Henderson, who had come all the way from Washington. Aside from a patch of plaster on his left ear, the darling of society was as irreproachable a fashion-plate as ever; his smile was just as quick, his wit as keen, and his eyes, if possible, a trifle more alert.

"We did what you told us," Henderson was saying. "That big fellow with the hole in his dome was the leader, all right. We searched him for his keys, and when we opened that vault in the wall we found plenty. Manning's formula was there all right, and the same formula in the most marvellous code I've ever seen—and I've seen enough."

"And he didn't telephone across the ocean, after all," said Vaux, with a sigh. "Ah, well—the least we can do is to copy his inventions. I

want that big vacuum tube and all its apparatus for myself. And did you see the dictaphone in his car?"

"No."

"Go look at it," said Vaux. "It's as good as a wireless telephone. What did you do to Manning?"

"Oh, that was easy. We put the statue in the bath of blue liquid, tried a reverse current, and the metal came off, little by little. Underneath he was as black as coal."

"Graphite," murmured Vaux. "I almost got a coating of it myself."

"Well, we got off all the metal, washed off this soot, and laid him out for a decent burial. We never told his wife how he died. That would have been a little too much."

"What about Helmer?" asked Vaux.

"Prisoner in the hospital. He's confessed enough to implicate half the Hisalpinians in New York."

Vaux smiled faintly. "Do you know what his real name is?" he asked. And receiving a negative sign, he announced, "Vollmer."

Henderson's mouth dropped open. "Vollmer! Oho! He gets another questionnaire!"

The chief rose to go. Vaux strolled with him to the door.

"Whether you like it or not, Chief, I'm through for this summer. I wanted a little harmless adventure, not an improvement on the Spanish Inquisition. I'm going to Catalina Island to relax with the swordfish, the sawfish, the tarpon, the sailfish, the sharks, and the pretty little devil-fish, who don't come up to Kroll. I never appreciated the charms of these harmless denizens of the briny deep as much as I do now. And if I land a killer whale, known as a cannibal whale, I'm going to name him Kroll, and send you his picture."

"Go to it, kid," said Henderson. "I'll reserve the place of honor in the family album for a photo of the greatest scientist in Hisalpina."

THE END