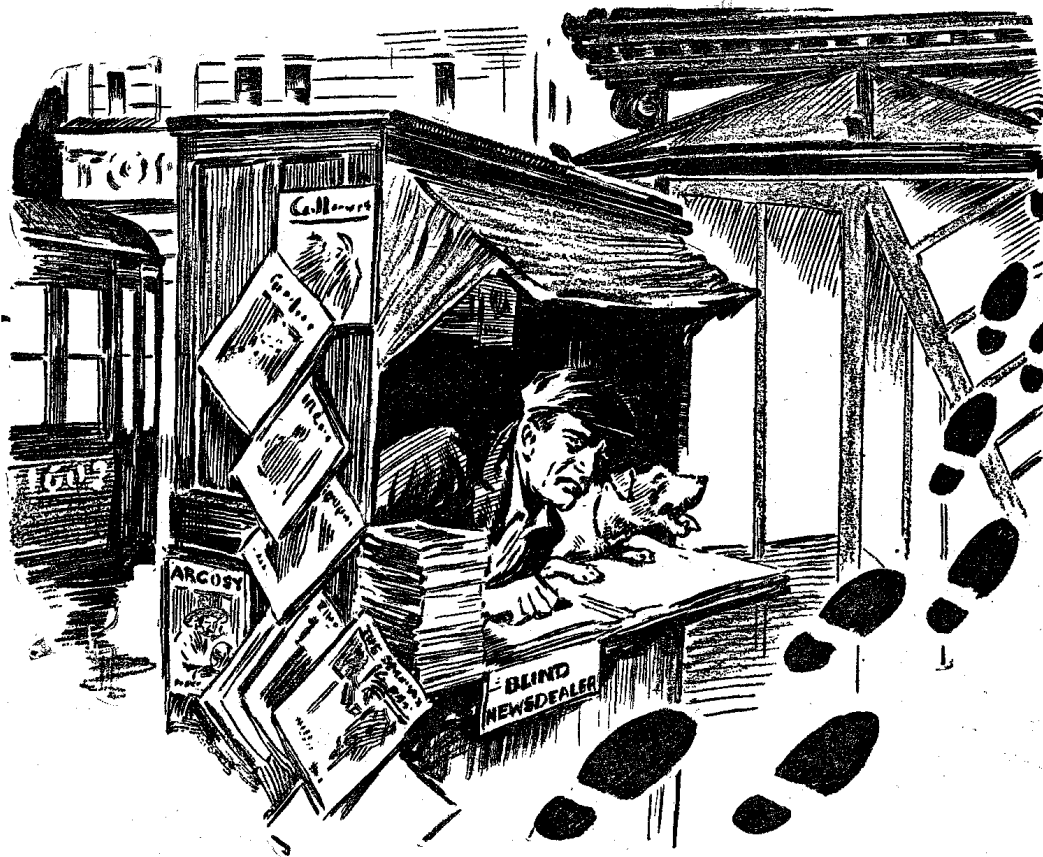


Footsteps Invisible



It was a weird kind of a sound he heard; a shuffle-shuffle, then a click. Foxfire was apprehensive, excited

You hear it now? That unceasing tread behind you, following through measureless time and distance: implacable, invincible, until you have paid your last farthing for the breach of a law not made by man

By ROBERT ARTHUR

Author of "Blaze of Glory"

THE night was dark, and violent with storm. Rain beat down as if from an angry heaven, and beneath its force all the noises of a metropolis blended oddly, so that to Jorman they sounded like the muted grumble of the city itself.

He himself was comfortable enough, however. The little piano-box sized newsstand beside the subway entrance was tight against the rain.

The window that he kept open to hear prospective customers, take in change, and pass out papers let in a wet chill, but a tiny oil heater in one corner gave out a glow of warmth that beat it back.

A midget radio shrilled sweetly—a woman's soprano voice; and Foxfire, his toy wirehaired terrier, snored at his feet.

Jorman reached up and switched the radio off. There were times when it gave him pleasure. But more often he preferred to listen to life itself, as it poured past his stand like a river.

Tonight, though, even Times Square was deserted to the storm gods, who romped up and down its length, sportively deluging streets and sidewalks and shop fronts with water. Jorman listened and could not hear a single footstep, though his inner time sense—reënforced by a radio announcement a moment before—told him it was barely half past twelve.

Then beneath him he felt the subterranean rumble of a monster mole scurrying through earth's dark bowels. The subway—but Jorman had an imagination. The Seventh Avenue local, having halted, lunged onward again.

Jorman heard a few passengers scurrying up the concrete stairs just behind his cubicle, heard the pause as they prepared to brave the blast of the elements, heard their feet take them scurrying out to vanish into the rain and the night.

"Oooh, my hat!"

It was a woman's squeal of dismay. Then he had the streets to himself again.

He lit a pipe—a pipe had more taste than a cigarette—and puffed contentedly.

After a moment he lifted his head. Footsteps were approaching: slow, measured, familiar footsteps. They paused in front of his stand, and he smiled.

"Hello, Clancy," he greeted the beat cop. "A nice night for ducks."

"If I only had web feet," the big officer grumbled, "'twould suit me fine. You're a funny one, now, staying out so late on a night like this, and not a customer in sight."

"I like it," Jorman grinned. "Like to listen to the storm. Makes my imagination work."

"Mine too," Clancy grunted. "But th' only thing it can imagine is my own apartment, with a hot tub and a hot toddy waitin'. Arrgh!"

He shook himself, and with a good-night trampled onward.

Jorman heard the officer's footsteps diminish. There was silence for a while, save for the rush of the rain and the occasional splashing whir of a cab sloshing past. Then he heard more steps.

This time they came toward him from the side street, and he listened intently to them, head cocked a little to one side.

THEY were he searched for the right descriptive—well, odd. *Shuffle-shuffle*, as if made by large feet encased in sneakers, and slid along the pavement for a few inches with each step. *Shuffle-shuffle—shuffle-shuffle* they came toward him slowly, hesitantly, as if the walker were pausing every few feet to look about him.

Jorman wondered whether the approaching man could be a cripple. A club-foot, perhaps, dragging one foot with each step. For a moment he had the absurd thought that the sounds were made by four feet, not two; but he dismissed it with a smile and listened more closely.

The footprints were passing him now, and though the rain made it hard to distinguish clearly, he had the impression that each shuffling step was accompanied by a slight clicking noise.

As he was trying to hear more distinctly, Foxfire woke from his slumbers.

Jorman felt the little dog move at his feet, then heard the animal growling deep in its chest. He reached down and found Foxfire huddled against his shoe, tail tucked under, hair bristling.

"Quiet, boy!" he whispered, "I'm trying to hear."

Foxfire quieted. Jorman held his muzzle and listened. The footsteps of the stranger had shuffled past him to the corner. There they paused, as if in irresolution. Then they turned south on Seventh Avenue, and after a moment were engulfed in the storm noise.

Jorman released his hold on his dog and rubbed his chin perplexedly, wondering what there could have been about the pedestrian's scent to arouse Foxfire so. Sometimes, when a poodle out for an airing passed, he would bristle and bark. But he had never before acted so—well, so abject.

Foxfire, whimpering as if ashamed of himself, got up and began trotting back and forth in the confined space. And then

Jorman almost dropped his pipe. He barely caught it as it slipped from his suddenly open mouth. As he ran back and forth, Foxfire was making little clicking sounds almost identical to those that had accompanied the footsteps of the passerby of a moment before.

Making them with his claws, as they scraped against the wooden floor.

For a moment Jorman sat very still, his pipe clenched in his hand. Then with a rush of relief he heard Clancy's returning tramp. The cop came up and stopped, and Jorman did not wait for him to speak. He leaned out his little window.

"Clancy," he asked, trying to keep the excitement out of his voice, "what does that fellow look like down the block there—the one heading south on Seventh? He ought to be about in the middle of the block."

"Huh?" Clancy said, "I don't see any guy. Somebody snitch a paper?"

"No." Jorman shook his head. "I was just curious. You say there isn't anyone—"

"Not in sight," the cop told him. "Must have turned in some place. You and me have this town to ourselves tonight. Well, be good. I got to try some more doors."

He sloshed away, the rain pattering audibly off his broad, rubber-coated back, and Jorman settled back into his chair chuckling to himself. For a moment his imagination had gotten the better of him. What he had heard was some old man padding by, wearing unbuckled overshoes too big for him, the buckles rattling at each step.

But it was funny what tricks sounds played on you, especially in the rain. The ears could be fooled easily, as the radio was witness.

HE RELIT his dead pipe and was thinking of shutting up for the night when his last customer of the evening approached. This time he recognized the steps. It was a source of pride to him—and of revenue as well—that he could call most of his regulars by name if they came up when the street wasn't too crowded.

This one, though he didn't come often and had never come before at night, was easy. The step was a firm, decisive one. *Click*—that was the heel coming down—*slap*—that was the sole being planted firmly. *Click-slap*—the other foot. Simple. He could have distinguished it in a crowd.

"Good morning, Sir Andrew," Jorman said pleasantly as the steps came up to his stand. "*Times*?"

"Thanks." It was a typically British voice that answered, "Know me, do you?"

"Oh, yes." Jorman grinned. It was usually a source of mystification to his customers that he knew their names. But names were not too hard to learn, if the owners of them lived or worked nearby. "A bellboy from your hotel was buying a paper last time you stopped. When you'd gone on, he told me who you were."

"Damme!" Sir Andrew Carraden exclaimed. "That easy, eh? Don't know as I like it so much, though, being kept track of. Prefer to lose myself these days. Had enough of notoriety in the past."

"Had plenty of it four years ago, I suppose," Jorman suggested. "I followed the newspaper accounts of your tomb-hunting expedition. Interesting work, archaeology. Always wished I could poke around in the past that way, some time."

"Don't!" The word was sharp. "Take my advice and stay snug and cosy in the present. The past is an uncomfortable place. Sometimes you peer into it and then spend the rest of your life trying to get away from it. And— But I mustn't stop here chatting. Not in this storm. Here's your money. No, here on the counter . . ."

And then, as Jorman fumbled for and found the pennies, Sir Andrew Carraden exclaimed again.

"I say!" he said. "I'm sorry."

"Perfectly all right," Jorman told him. "It pleases me when people don't notice. A lot don't, you know, in spite of the sign."

"Blind newsdealer," Sir Andrew Carraden read the little placard tacked to the stand. "I say—"

"Wounded in the war," Jorman told him. "Sight failed progressively. Went entirely a couple of years ago. So I took up this. But I don't mind Compensations, you know. Amazing what a lot a man can hear when he listens. But you're going to ask me how I knew you, aren't you? By your footsteps. They're very recognizable. Sort of a *click-slap, click-slap*."

His customer was silent for a moment. Jorman was about to ask whether anything was wrong when the Englishman spoke.

"Educated man, aren't you?" he asked.

Jorman nodded. "A.B. degree. Nothing more."

"But you're an intelligent man, which is more to the point," Sir Andrew Carraden said swiftly. "Look. I"—and his tone took on an almost hungry eagerness—"I've got to talk to somebody, or blow my top. I mean, go barmy. Completely mad. Maybe I am, already. I don't know. You—you might have a few minutes to spare? You might be willing to keep me company for an hour? With a pipe and a bottle? I—it might not be too dull."

JORMAN hesitated in answering. Not because he intended to refuse—the urgency in the man's voice was unmistakable—but because a queer thought had come to him. A man had once bought a paper from him, talked casually for a moment, then gone on. A hundred feet away he had been arrested. Later Jorman had learned from Clancy that the fellow had been a fugitive for weeks.

And there was something of the same tone of the hunted in Sir Andrew Carraden's voice now.

It was absurd—but Jorman's ears were seldom wrong. The Englishman, the archaeologist whose name had been so prominent a few years back, was a hunted man. Perhaps a desperate man. A fugitive—from what?

Jorman did not try to guess. He nodded.

"I have time," he agreed. "Don't believe blind men can't enjoy tobacco. And anybody can enjoy whisky."

He bent down and picked up Foxfire, attached the leash, threw an old ulster over his shoulders, and turned down his bright gasoline lantern. With Foxfire straining at the leash, he swung up his racks and padlocked the stand; was ready.

"This way," Sir Andrew Carraden said at his side. "Not half a block. Like to take my arm?"

"Thanks." Jorman touched the other's elbow. The touch told him what he remembered from photographs in the papers he had seen, years back. The Britisher was a big man. Not the kind to fear anything. Yet he was afraid.

"Foxfire isn't fully trained yet. His predecessor picked up distemper six months ago."

"Rotten luck."

They bowed their heads to the somewhat lessened rain. A woman passed them. her heels tap-tapping swiftly, the rain booming off the stretched silk of her umbrella.

"That woman," the man beside Jorman asked, "would you know her walk if you heard it again?"

"I might," Jorman told him. "I think I would. Everyone's footstep is distinctive, Sir Andrew."

"Don't!" The big man's voice was sharp. "Excuse me, I didn't mean to bark. But please don't call me by my name. Not out loud. It—well, it sets up vibrations."

Then he coughed, as a man who has said too much.

"I mean, I'm incog. Strict orders at the hotel to use my registry name of Malcolm Smith. Was rather upset when they recognized me. But they've kept it quiet. Threatened to leave if the papers learned."

Jorman made no comment. Sir Andrew Carraden's agitation was evident. It came like an electric wave from the other man through the slight contact of Jorman's fingers on his arm.

"If you can, try not even to think my name," the Englishman asked him in clipped tones. "An odd request. But—well, I can't explain it, I'm afraid. Here we are. Right turn."

They turned into a hotel lobby, their heels loud on marble. Jorman knew the place: the Hotel Russet. Respectable, but a bit run down. An odd place for Sir Andrew— He checked the thought. Nevertheless, an odd place for a prominent man to stay. But a good place, perhaps, to hide. . . .

As they passed the desk, a sleepy clerk called out.

"Oh, Mr. Smith. Pardon me. There's a message here for you. From the manager. Relative to some work we've been doing—"

"Thanks, thanks," Jorman's companion answered impatiently, and Jorman heard paper stuffed into a pocket. "Here's the elevator. Step up just a bit."

THEY had been seated in easy chairs for some minutes, pipes going, the first drink down and the second pouring, before Sir Andrew Carraden made any further reference to the thing that was obviously on his mind.

The room they were in was fairly spacious, judging from the reverberations of their voices, and since it seemed to be a sitting room, ~~probably was joined to a bedroom beyond.~~ Foxfire slumbering at Jorman's feet, they had been talking of inconsequential—the weather, politics, the manner in which certain senses sharpened when others were lost—when the Englishman interrupted himself abruptly.

"Jorman," he said, "I'm a desperate man. I'm being hunted."

Jorman heard liquor gurgle, heard the clink as an unsteady hand let bottleneck rap against tumbler rim. Heard the gulp as the whisky was downed in a swallow.

"I guessed so," he confessed. "It was in your voice. The police?"

Sir Andrew Carraden laughed, a harsh, explosive sound.

"Your ears *are* sharp," he said. "The police? I wish it were! No. By a—a personal enemy."

"Then couldn't the police—" Jorman began. The other cut him short.

"No! They can't help me. Nobody in

this world can help me. And God have mercy on me, nobody in the next!"

Jorman passed over the emphatic exclamation.

"But surely—"

"Take my word for it, I'm on my own," Sir Andrew Carraden told him, his voice grim. "This is a—a feud, you might say. And I'm the hunted one. I've done a lot of hunting in my day, and now I know the other side of it. It's not pleasant."

Jorman sipped at his drink.

"You—this enemy. He's been after you long?"

"Three years." The Englishman's voice was low, a bit unsteady. In his mind Jorman could see the big man leaning forward, arm braced against knee, face set in grim lines.

"It began one night in London. A rainy night like this. I was running over some clay tablets that were waiting deciphering. Part of the loot from the tomb of Tut-Ankh-Tothet. The one the stories in the papers you referred to were about.

"I'd been working pretty hard. I knocked off for a pipe and stood at the window looking out. Then I heard it."

"Heard it?"

"Heard him." Carraden corrected himself swiftly. "Heard *him* hunting for me. Heard his footsteps—"

"Footsteps?"

"Yes. In the pitch-black night. Heard him tramping back and forth as he tried to locate me. Then he picked up my trail and came up the garden path."

Sir Andrew paused, Jorman heard the bottle gurgle again.

"My dog, a great Dane, scented him. He was frightened, poor beast, and with reason. But he tried to attack. *He* tore the dog to pieces on my own doorstep. I couldn't see the fight, but I could hear. The beast held him up long enough for me to run for it. Out the back door, into the storm.

"There was a stream half a mile away. I made for that, plunged into it, floated two miles down, went ashore, picked up a ride to London. Next morning I left

London on a freighter for Australia before he could pick up my trail again."

Jorman heard the archaeologist draw a deep breath.

"It took him six months to get on to me again, up in the Australian gold country. Again I heard him in time. I was listening for him now. All the time. I got away on a horse as he was forcing into my cabin, caught a cargo plane for Melbourne, took a fast boat to Shanghai. But I didn't stay there long."

"Why not?" Jorman asked. He fancied that Carraden shuddered slightly.

"Too much like his own country. Conditions were—favorable for him in the Orient. Unfavorable for me. I had a hunch. I hurried on to Manila and took a plane for the States there. Got a letter later from an old Chinese servant that *he* arrived the next night."

JORMAN sipped slowly at his Scotch and soda, his brow knitted. He did not doubt the man's sincerity, but the story *was* a bit puzzling. Absently he reached down to pet Foxfire, and as the little dog turned in its sleep he realized that he had really wanted to touch something warm and familiar.

"This fellow, this enemy of yours," he commented slowly, "you said the Orient was too like his own country. I assume you mean Egypt."

"Yes. He comes from Egypt. I incurred his—well, his enmity there."

"He's a native then? An Egyptian native?"

Carraden hesitated, seeming to choose his words.

"Well, yes," he said finally. "In a way you might call him a native of Egypt. Though, strictly speaking, he comes from another—another country. One less well known."

"But," Jorman persisted, "I should think that you, a man of wealth, would have all kinds of recourse against a native, no matter where he might be from. After all, the man is bound to be conspicuous, and ought to be easy to pick up. I know

you said the police could not help you, but have you tried? And how in the world does the fellow follow you so persistently? From London to Australia to Shanghai—that's a thin trail to run down."

"I know you're puzzled," the other told him. "But take my word for it, the police are no good. This chap—well, he just isn't conspicuous, that's all. He moves mostly by night. But even so he can go anywhere."

"He has—well, methods. And as for following me, he has his own ways of doing that, too. He's persistent. So awfully, awfully persistent. That's the horror of it: that blind, stubborn persistence with which he keeps on my trail."

Jorman was silent. Then he shook his head.

"I admit you've got me curious," he told Carraden. "I can see easily enough there are some things you don't want to tell me. I suppose the reason he's hunting you so doggedly is one of them."

"Right," the Englishman admitted. "It was while the expedition was digging out old Tut-Ankh-Tothet. It was something I did. A law I violated. A law I was aware of, but—well, I went ahead anyway."

"You see, there were some things we found buried with old Tothet the press didn't hear of. Some papyri, some clay tablets. And off the main tomb a smaller one holding the mummy of Tothet's daughter. She was—had been—a beauty. I—

"Well, I can't tell you more. I violated an ancient law, then got panicky and tried to escape the consequences. In doing so, I ran afoul of this—this fellow. And brought him down on my neck. If you don't mind—"

There was desperate note in his host's voice. Jorman nodded.

"Certainly," he agreed. "I'll drop the subject. After all, it's your business. You've never tried to ambush the fellow and have it out with him, I suppose?"

He imagined Carraden shaking his head.

"No use," the other said shortly. "My only safety is in flight. So I've kept run-

ning. When I got to 'Frisco, I thought I was safe for a while. But this time he was on my heels almost at once. I heard him coming up the street for me late one foggy night. I got out the back door and ran for it. Got away to the Canadian plains.

"I planted myself out in the middle of nowhere, on a great, rolling grassy plain with no neighbor for miles. Where no one would even think of me, much less speak to me or utter my name. I was safe there almost a year. But in the end it was—well, almost a mistake."

Carraden put down his glass with a clatter. Jorman imagined it was because the tumbler had almost slipped from shaking fingers.

"You see, out there on the prairie, there were no footsteps. This time he came at night, as usual, and he was almost on me before I was aware of it. And my horse was lame. I got away. But it was a near thing. Nearer than I like to remember. . . .

"So I came to New York. I've been here since, in the very heart of the city. It's the best place of all to hide. Among people. So many millions crossing and recrossing my path, muddy up the trail, confuse the scent—"

"Confuse the scent?" Jorman exclaimed.

CARRADEN coughed. "Said more than I meant to, that time," he admitted. "Yes, it's true. He scents me out. In part, at least. He—well, say that when he runs across my trail he can pick up my actual spoor and the—

"It's hard to explain. Call it the intangible evidences of my passage. That's why I don't use my own name, don't like it spoken, asked you not to even to think it. Those things set up vibrations that he can—can catch."

"I see." The man's voice pleaded so for belief that Jorman nodded, though he was far from seeing. He was decidedly perplexed. Either Sir Andrew Carraden, hiding there in a second-rate hotel in the heart of New York, was a bit mad, as he himself suggested; or—Well in Heav-

en's name, what kind of man could his enemy be?

"I've been here almost a year now," the Englishman told him. "Almost a twelve-month with no sign of him. I've been cautious; man, how cautious I've been! Lying in my burrow like a terrified rabbit.

"Most of that time I've been right here, close to Times Square, where a million people a day cut my trail. Where the emanations from a million individuals fill the air in a potpourri that makes almost hopeless the task of tracing down any one of them.

"I've huddled in my two rooms here—there's a bedroom beyond—nights, going out only by day. He is usually active most by night. In the day people confuse him. Massed humanity sets up currents inimical to him. It's the lonely reaches of the late night hours he likes best. And it's during them I huddle here, listening wakefully. . . .

"Except on storm nights like this. Storms make his job more difficult. The rain washes away my spoor, the confusion of the winds and the raging of the elements dissipates my more intangible trail. That's why I ventured out tonight, because the gale was blowing so."

He paused. Jorman was silent, waiting for him to continue. In the momentary quiet Foxfire woke up. Jorman felt him stir. Then, with a puppy's curiosity, he began to patter about the room, investigating. Somewhere he came across a mouse scent.

Jorman heard the little whimper of excitement, heard the dog pause to sniff, heard his claws scratch the floor as he moved forward a foot or so, heard him pause again.

"Some day, even here, he'll find me," Sir Andrew Carraden said at last, his voice tight with strain. "I'm prepared. I'll hear him coming—I hope—and as he forces this door, I'll get out through the other one, the one in the bedroom, and get away. I early learned the folly of holing up in a burrow with only one exit.

"Now I have always at least one emer-

gency doorway. The bedroom opens onto another corridor, close to the fire stairs. As he comes in, I'll slip out and down, reach the street, rush by taxi to the airport, take off for South America. From Rio I'll fly to Europe, then back to London. There I'll hole up again until he unravels my trail and I have to take to my heels again.

"Believe me, man, it's a ghastly existence. The lying awake in the quiet hours of the night, listening, listening for him; the clutch at the heart, the sitting bolt upright, as a stray sound resembles his step; the constant and continuing terror—I tell you, there are times when I'm tempted to end it all. But I don't dare. Because I'm afraid—"

He did not complete the sentence. Instead he leaned forward and with a patently shaking hand refilled Jorman's glass. The siphon slipped, and a spray of charged water struck Jorman's hand. Carraden apologized hastily.

"Sorry," he said, his voice a bit thick now. "This time of the night, between two and daylight, I sometimes get the wind up. He usually comes about now, and . . ."

Jorman heard him set down the siphon and settle back into his chair; heard a match scratch ineffectually several times before it snapped into flame, and realized that his own pipe had burned out. He tamped in tobacco and lit it again.

Carraden had been silent for several minutes, fighting, Jorman imagined, for self-control. Then the springs of his easy chair squeaked as he leaned forward.

"Look," the Englishman said then, in such desperate earnestness that his voice trembled a bit. "You must wonder whether I just brought you up here to tell you this tale. I didn't. I had a purpose. I told you the story to see how you reacted. And I'm satisfied. Anyway, you didn't openly disbelieve me; and if you think I'm crazy, maybe you'll humor me anyway. I have a proposition to make."

Jorman sat up a bit straighter.

"Yes?" he asked, his face expressing uncertainty. "What—"

"What kind of proposition?" Carraden finished the sentence for him. "This. That you help me out by listening for him."

JORMAN jerked his head up involuntarily, so that if he had not been blind he would have been staring into the other's face.

"Listen for your enemy?"

"Yes," the Englishman told him, voice hoarse. "Listen for his approach. Like a sentinel, an outpost. Look, man. You're down there in your little stand every evening from six on, I've noticed. You stay until late at night. You're posted there not fifty yards from this hotel, night after night.

"When he comes, he'll go by you. He's bound to have cast about a bit, to unravel the trail—double back and forth like a hunting dog, you know, until he gets it straightened out.

"He may go by three or four times before he's sure. You have a keen ear. Furthermore, you've trained yourself to listen to footsteps. Among a number you can pick out one familiar to you. If he goes by while you're on the job, you're bound to hear him."

Carraden's voice quickened, became desperately persuasive.

"And if you do, you can let me know. I'll instruct the doorman to come over if you signal. Or you can leave your stand and come up here; you can make it easily enough, only fifty paces. But somehow you must warn me. Say you will, man! I'll pay you, of course: a pound a day. Two if you insist. But you must take it on. Even if you don't believe me, you must agree. I'll feel safer, that way. From him. And from madness, too."

Jorman hesitated in his answer. Sir Andrew mistook his silence.

"If you're frightened," he said, "there's no need to be. He won't attack you. Only me. He attacked my dog, because the beast was mine, and went for him. But he'll be oblivious of you."

"That part's all right," Jorman told him honestly. "What you've told me isn't

altogether clear, and—I'll be frank—I'm not absolutely sure whether you're sane or not. But I wouldn't mind listening for you. Only, don't you see, I wouldn't have any way of recognizing your enemy's step."

Carraden gave a little whistling sigh that he checked at once.

"Good man!" The exclamation was quiet, but his voice showed relief. "Just so you'll do it. That last bit is easy enough. I've heard him several times. I can imitate his step for you, I think. There's only one thing worrying me.

"He—not everyone can hear him. But I'm counting on your blindness to give your ears the extra sensitivity—No matter. We have to have a go at it. Give me a moment."

Jorman sat in silence and waited. The rain, beating against the panes of two windows, was distinctly lessening. Somewhere distant a fire siren wailed, a banshee sound.

Carraden was making a few tentative scrapings, with his hands or his feet, on the floor.

"Got it!" he announced. "I've put a bedroom slipper on each hand. It's a noise like this."

With the soft-soled slippers, he made a noise like the shuffle of a large bare foot—a double sound, *shuffle-shuffle*, followed by a pause, then repeated.

"If you're extra keen," he announced, "you can hear a faint click or scratch at each step. But—"

Then Jorman heard him sit up straight, knew Carraden was staring at his face.

"What is it, man?" the Englishman cried in alarm. "What's wrong?"

Jorman sat very tense, his fingers gripping the arms of his chair. He could hear his Scotch-and-soda dripping noisily onto the rug, where the glass had overturned with his start. And his heart was pounding with a queer, uneven, constricted beat.

"Sir Andrew," he whispered, his lips stiff, "Sir Andrew! I've already heard those footsteps. An hour ago in the rain he went by my stand."

IN THE silence that followed, Jorman could guess how the blood was draining from the other man's ruddy face, how the knuckles of his clenched hands were showing white.

"Tonight?" Carraden asked then, his voice harsh and so low that Jorman could scarcely hear him. "Tonight, man?"

"Just a few minutes before you came by," Jorman blurted. "I heard footsteps—*his* steps—shuffling by. The dog woke up and whimpered. They approached me slowly, pausing, then going on, like—Sir Andrew! Like Foxfire just now, when he was sniffing out a mouse trail!"

"I know," the Englishman breathed. "Go on, man! What then?"

"They turned. He went down Seventh Avenue, going south."

Sir Andrew Carraden leaped to his feet, paced across the room, wheeled, came back.

"He's tracked me down at last!" he said in a tight voice, from which a note of hysteria was not far absent. "I've got to go. Tonight. Now. You say he turned south?"

Jorman nodded.

"But that means nothing." Carraden spoke swiftly, as if thinking out loud. "He'll find he's lost the track. He'll turn back. And since he passed, I've made a fresh trail. The rain may not have washed it quite away. He may have picked it up. He may be coming up those stairs now. Damme, where's my bag? My passport? My money? All in my bureau. Excuse me. Sit tight."

Jorman heard a door flung open, heard the man rush into the adjoining bedroom, heard a tight bureau drawer squeal.

Then Carraden's footsteps again. A moment after, a bolt on a door pulled back. Then the door itself rattled. A pause, and it rattled again, urgently. Once again, this time violently. Jorman could hear Carraden's loud breathing in the silence that followed.

"The door won't open!" There was an edge of fear in the Englishman's voice as he called out. "There's a key or something in the lock. From the outside."

He came back into the sitting room with a rush, paused beside Jorman.

"That message!" The words came through Carraden's teeth. "The one the bloody clerk handed me. I wonder if—"

Paper ripped, rattled. Sir Andrew Carraden began to curse.

"The fool!" he almost sobbed. "Oh, the bloody, bloody fool. 'Dear sir'— Carraden's voice was shaking now—"redcoration of the corridor on the north side of your suite necessitated our opening your door this afternoon to facilitate the painting of it. In closing and locking it, a key inadvertently jammed in the lock, and we could not at once extricate it. Our locksmith will repair your lock promptly in the morning. Trusting you will not be inconvenienced—"

"God deliver us from fools!" Sir Andrew gasped. "Luckily there's still time to get out this way. Come on, man, don't sit there. I'll show you down. But we must hurry, hurry."

Jorman heard the other man's teeth chattering faintly together in the excess of emotion that was shaking him, felt the muscular quivering of near-panic in the big man as he put out his hand and took Sir Andrew's arm to help himself rise. And then, as he was about to lift himself, his fingers clamped tight about the Englishman's wrist.

"Carraden!" he whispered. "Carraden! Listen!"

The other asked no question. Jorman felt the quivering muscles beneath his fingers tense. And a silence that was like a hand squeezing them breathless seemed to envelop the room. There was not even the faint, distant sound of traffic to break it. Nor the rain, which had stopped.

Then they both heard it. In the hallway, coming toward the door. The faint padding sound of shuffling footsteps.

IT WAS Foxfire, whimpering piteously at their feet, that broke the spell momentarily holding them.

"He!" Carraden's word was a gasp. "He's out there!"

He left Jorman's side. Jorman heard

him shoving with deperate strength at something heavy. Castors squeaked. Some piece of furniture tipped over and fell with a crash against the inside of the door.

"There!" Carraden groaned. "The desk. And the door's bolted. That'll hold him a moment. Sit tight, man. Hold the pup. He'll ignore you. It's me he wants. I've got to get that other door open before he can come through."

His footsteps raced away into the bedroom. Jorman sat where he was, Foxfire under his arm, so tense that his muscles ached. But he could not change position. Outside the door, so close to him, an eager little shuffling noise was audible. Then the bolted door squeaked, as if a heavy body had leaned against it.

In the bedroom there was a crash, as of a man plunging against a closed door that stubbornly would not give. Then sounds to indicate that Carraden was kicking at the unyielding portal, scratching at it, swinging a chair against its panels.

But above all the noise from the bedroom, Jorman could hear the barricaded door—the door beyond which *he* was—start to give.

Nails screamed as they came forth from wood. Hinges groaned. And the whole mass—door, lintels, desk—moved inward an inch or so. A pause, and then the terrible, inexorable pressure from the other side came again. With a vast rending the door gave way and crashed inward over the barricading furniture.

And in the echoes of the crash he heard the almost soundless *shuffle-shuffle* of feet crossing the room toward the bedroom.

In the bedroom Sir Andrew Carraden's efforts to force the jammed door ceased suddenly. Then the Englishman screamed, an animal cry of pure terror from which all intelligence was gone. Something threshed about mightily for a moment. Shod feet pounded. The window in the bedroom crashed up with a violence that shattered the glass. Leather scraped on the sills.

After that there was silence for a mo-

ment, until Jorman's acute hearing caught, from the street outside and five floors down, the sound of an object striking the pavement.

Sir Andrew Carraden had jumped. . . .

SOMEHOW Jorman found the strength to stumble to his feet. He dashed straight forward toward the door, and fell over the wreckage of it. Hurt, but not feeling it, he scrambled up again, Foxfire still clutched under his arm, and felt his way around the obstacle into the hall.

Then he stumbled down the corridor.

Somehow his questing hands found a door that was sheathed in metal, and he thrust it open. Beyond were bannisters. Stairs. By the sense of feel he rushed down recklessly.

How many minutes it took to reach the lobby, to feel his way blindly past the startled desk clerk out to the street, he did not know. Or whether he had gotten down before *he* had.

Once outside on the wet pavement, cool night air on his cheek, he paused, his breath coming in sobbing gasps. And as he stood there, footsteps, shuffling footsteps, passed close by him from behind and turned westward.

Then Jorman heard an astounding thing. He heard Sir Andrew Carraden's footsteps also, a dozen yards distant, hurrying away from him.

Sir Andrew Carraden had leaped five floors. And still could walk . . .

No, run. For the tempo of the man's steps was increasing. He was trotting now. Now running. And behind the running footsteps of Carraden were *his* steps, moving more swiftly too, something scratching loudly on the concrete each time he brought a foot down.

"Sir Andrew!" Jorman called loudly, senselessly. "Sir An—"

Then he stumbled and almost fell, trying to follow. Behind him the desk clerk came hurrying up. He exclaimed something in shocked tones, but Jorman did not even hear him. He was bending down, his hand exploring the object over which he had stumbled.

"Listen!" Jorman gasped with a dry mouth to the desk clerk, jittering above him. "Tell me quick! I've got to know. What did the man look like who followed me out of the hotel just now?"

"F-followed you?" the clerk stuttered. "Nobody f-followed you. Nobody but you has gone in or out in the last hu-half hour. Listen, why did he do it? Why did he jump?"

Jorman did not answer him.

"Dear God," he was whispering, and in a way it was a prayer. "Oh, dear God!"

His hand was touching the dead body of Andrew Carraden, lying broken and bloody on the pavement.

But his ears still heard those footsteps of pursued and pursuer, far down the block, racing away until not even he could make them out any longer.

QUESTION

**Which are the
only cough drops
containing
Vitamin A?
(CAROTENE)**

ANSWER





Mark's eyes glared defiance, even while the smoke curled up from his chest

Minions of Mars

By WILLIAM GRAY BEYER

Start now this sparkling and exciting fantastic by the author of "Minions of the Moon"

MARK NEVIN, a young twentieth century American sportsman and engineer, is given an overdose of a new and powerful anaesthetic, and wakes to find that centuries have passed while he slept. He meets Omega, a disembodied intelligence, given to prankishness but genuinely interested in the fate of man. Approving Mark's intelligence, character, and physical fitness, Omega decides to make Mark the father of a new and finer race. The anaesthetic had endowed Mark's blood with radioactive elements that made him impervious to hunger and fatigue and assure him a reasonably long life. Mark chooses the lovely Nona as his mate and Omega treats her blood to a shot of the radioactive element, too.

On their way home from a successful war against twin malevolent intelligences, Mark and Nona are separated. Mark falls overboard and a blow on the head causes him to lose his memory.

He swims to shore and makes his way to Scarbor, where he is captured by the native Brish. Mark's memory returns in fits and starts; he recalls Nona and his own name and becomes gradually aware of his remarkable strength and endurance. Most of the rest eludes him.

Believing that perhaps association with people will bring back more knowledge about himself and his past, Mark joins forces with Murf, a clever, red-headed rebel whom he meets in prison.

Using his prodigious strength, Mark engineers an escape for both of them. When they save the life of Duke Jon and his wife, they obtain complete pardons. Murf persuades Mark to become the figurehead of the rebellion, describing the misery of the people, the cruelty of the nobles, and the helplessness of the kindly and intelligent Duke Jon to aid them.

Mark is a little uneasy at the idea; but his quick sympathies are won. Due to Mark's popularity, new members are won to the cause, and still more are added when Mark carries out a wholesale jailbreak, delivering all those imprisoned for political treason.

This story began in last week's Argosy