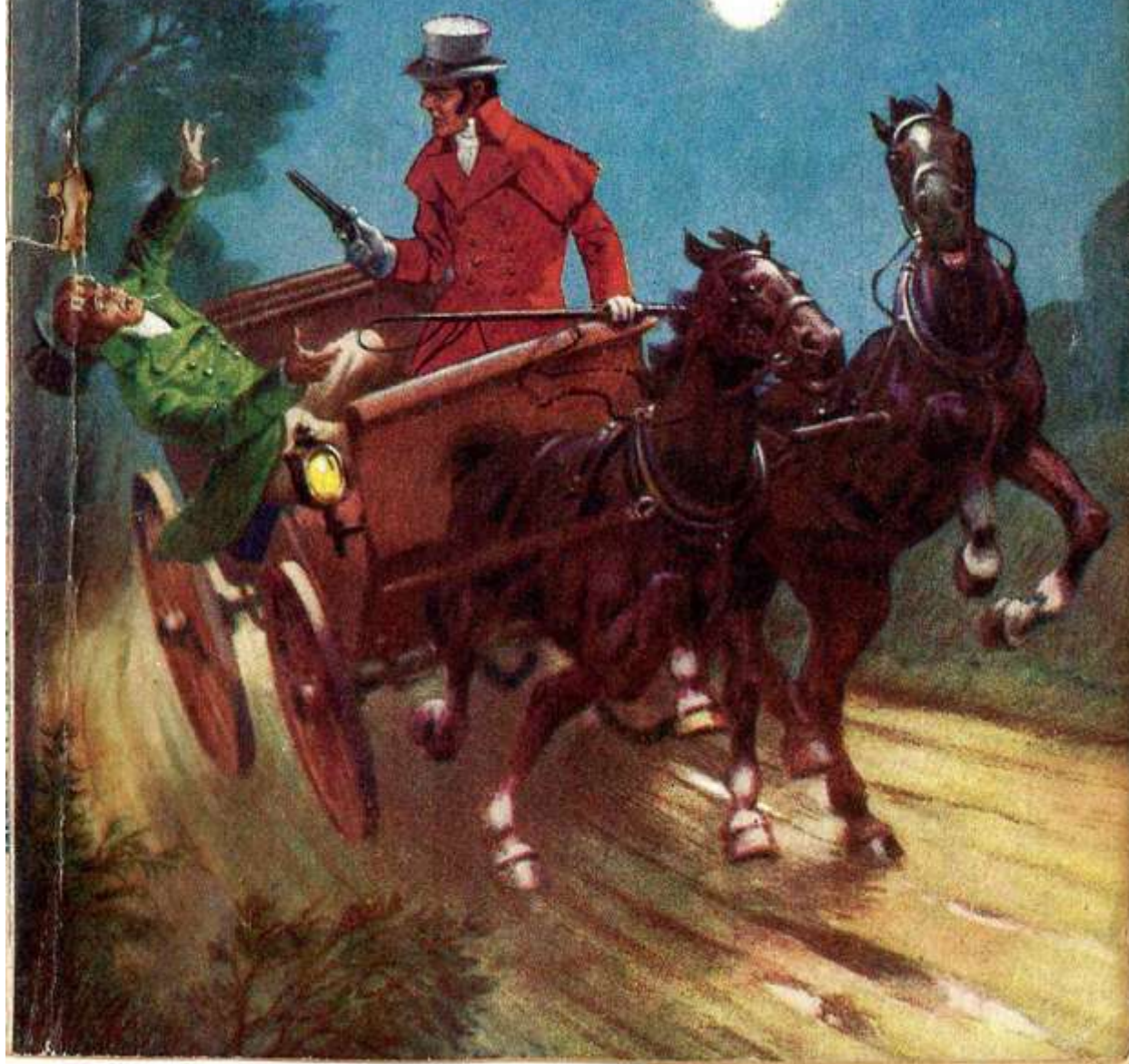


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JACK THURTELL GENTLEMAN THIEF





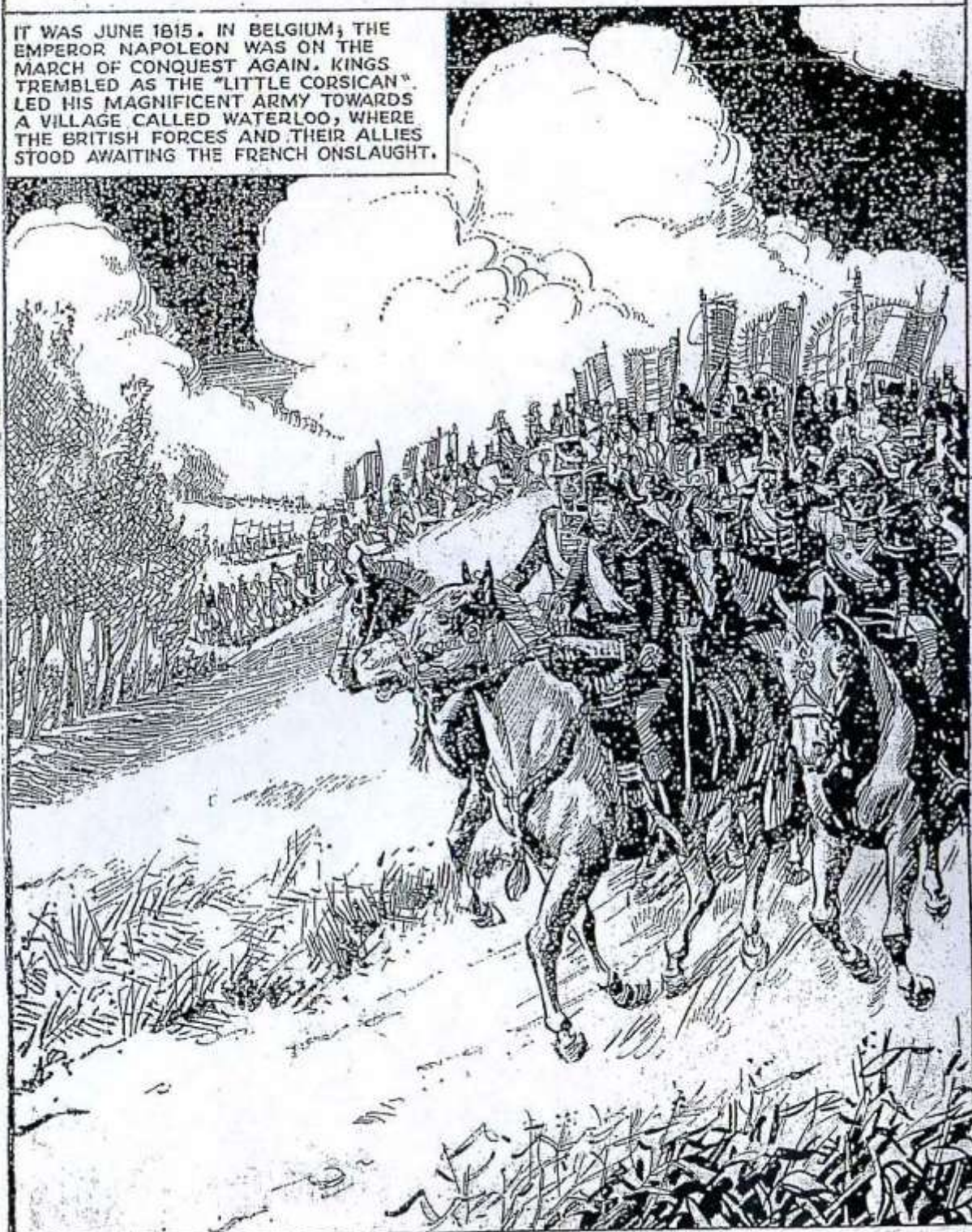
The True Story of **JACK THURTELL** **GENTLEMAN THIEF**

THIS IS THE TRUE STORY OF A DREADFUL CRIME OF THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY. BUT IT IS ALSO THE STORY OF JOHN THURTELL, A MAN GIFTED BY NATURE WITH GREAT INTELLIGENCE AND INCREDIBLE STRENGTH AND COURAGE. HE GAVE UP AN HONoured POSITION IN THE SERVICE OF HIS KING, WHERE HE HAD WON GLORY AND ACCLAIM TO FOLLOW A PATH OF DEGENERATION WHICH LED HIM TO THE GALLOWES, BRANDED A THIEF, CHEAT AND MURDERER!



Chapter 1. SWORD AND PLOUGH

IT WAS JUNE 1815. IN BELGIUM, THE EMPEROR NAPOLEON WAS ON THE MARCH OF CONQUEST AGAIN. KINGS TREMBLED AS THE "LITTLE CORSICAN" LED HIS MAGNIFICENT ARMY TOWARDS A VILLAGE CALLED WATERLOO, WHERE THE BRITISH FORCES AND THEIR ALLIES STOOD AWAITING THE FRENCH ONSLAUGHT.



AT SEA, BRITISH MEN-O'-WAR BROUGHT FRENCH SHIPS TO BAY. OUR STORY STARTS UPON A CERTAIN DAY WHEN THE GREAT GUNS OF TWO SHIPS OF THE LINE BELLOWED THEIR ROARING ENMITY AT EACH OTHER IN THE THUNDER OF BITTER CONFLICT. FOR THREE HOURS THE BOMBARDMENT LASTED AND BOTH SHIPS WERE BATTERED AND RENT BY THE CONTINUOUS GUNFIRE. BUT THE DECISIVE MOMENT OF THE BATTLE DREW NEAR AS A FITFUL BREEZE STIRRED THE HEAVY WREATHS OF ACRID POWDER SMOKE WHICH LAY ACROSS THE NARROWING WATER BETWEEN THEM.



SLOWLY THE DISTANCE LESSENED. SO CLOSE NOW WERE THE SHIPS THAT THE LONG TONGUES OF FLAME FROM THE MASSIVE GUNS LICKED INTO THE TINDER-DRY TIMBERS OF THE OPPOSING HULLS. DEVASTATION FROM THE DEADLY IRON SHOT MINGLED WITH COUNTLESS SMALL FIRES ...



WITH THE RENDING GROANS OF TORTURED WOOD, THE GREAT FLOATING FORTRESSES CAME TOGETHER ...



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FIGHTING LIKE A MADMAN, THE MARINE OFFICER LED THE BOARDING PARTY IN A SAVAGE, IRRESISTIBLE CHARGE THAT SWEEPED THE FRENCH DECK CLEAR OF OPPOSITION AND LEFT IT A SHAMBLES OF BLOOD AND VIOLENT DEATH.



SURRENDER YOUR SHIP, CAPTAIN, OR DIE AS WE TAKE IT BY FORCE OF ENGLISH STEEL!

I SURRENDER, M'SIEUR, TO SAVE MY MEN FROM SLAUGHTER!

THE BATTLE WAS OVER. WHEN, SOME HOURS LATER, "L'EMPEREUR" SET SAIL FOR THE ADMIRALTY PRIZE MASTER'S YARD IN PORTSMOUTH WITH AN ENGLISH CREW ABOARD, STREAMING IN THE WIND AT HER MASTHEAD WAS THE BATTLE ENSIGN OF H.M.S. "BELLONA", HER CONQUEROR.

MAGNIFICENT, MR. THURTELL! I'VE SELDOM SEEN THE EQUAL IN MANY YEARS! YOU ARE A CREDIT TO THE SERVICE, SIR.



THANK YOU, SIR. I MUST ADMIT IT WAS THE MOST ENJOYABLE MOMENT OF MY LIFE.

THE "BELLONA" HAD BEEN ON DETACHED PATROL DUTY FROM THE MAIN BRITISH NAVAL SQUADRON WITH THE EXPRESS INTENTION OF FINDING AND DEFEATING "L'EMPEREUR". NOW, HER DUTY DONE, SHE SAILED TO JOIN HER CONSORTS.



MR. WELLS, MAKE SIGNAL TO FLAGSHIP-- "PATROL SUCCESSFUL-- BELLONA REQUESTS PERMISSION TO REJOIN SQUADRON".

AYE AYE, SIR.

GREAT NEWS AWAITED THE "BELLONA'S" ARRIVAL. NAPOLEON BONAPARTE HAD BEEN DEFEATED OVERWHELMINGLY AT WATERLOO BY THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON. THUS, THIS YEAR OF GRACE 1815 SAW THE END OF THE SECOND NAPOLEONIC WAR. THE SQUADRON WAS TO RETURN TO PORTSMOUTH WITH ALL SPEED AND PAY OFF.

THESE THINGS AFFECTED LIEUTENANT JOHN THURTELL OF THE MARINES STRONGLY. THE WAR WAS OVER -- THERE WOULD BE NO MORE FIGHTING, NO MORE EXHILARATING HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT TO SET THE BLOOD RACING HOTLY THROUGH HIS VEINS.

AFTER MUCH THOUGHT AND DELIBERATION, HE HANDED IN HIS RESIGNATION AND IT WAS ACCEPTED REGRETFULLY BY THE COMMANDER OF THE SQUADRON, REAR ADMIRAL WALSH.

A WEEK LATER, AS THE MISTS OF EARLY MORNING LAY WREATHED OVER THE LAPPING GREY WATERS OF PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR, A SMALL BOAT PULLED AWAY FROM THE SIDE OF THE "BELLONA".

I UNDERSTAND THAT THURTELL'S FATHER IS MAYOR OF NORWICH; MR. WELLS -- HE SHOULD BE JUSTLY PROUD OF SUCH A COURAGEOUS SON. IT IS A GREAT PITY THAT HE IS LEAVING THE SERVICE.

AYE, SIR, BUT HE WOULD NOT FIND USE FOR THAT COURAGE AND INCREDIBLE STRENGTH IN THE NAVY NOW THERE'S PEACE. LET US BOTH WISH HIM GOOD FORTUNE FOR HIS NEW FUTURE!



JOHN THURTELL, GENTLEMAN OF LEISURE, BOARDED THE NORTH-BOUND COACH OUT OF PORTSMOUTH LATER THAT MORNING. THE HOME IN NORWICH WHICH HE HAD NOT SEEN IN EIGHT LONG YEARS OF WAR WAS NOW HIS GOAL.

MARINES, SIR! PSHAW -- WE OF THE HUSSARS CALL 'EM THE HALF AND HALFS! THEY CAN'T MAKE UP THEIR MINDS WHETHER THEY ARE SOLDIERS OR SAILORS!

THEY'RE BOTH, SIR! THE BEST SOLDIERS AND THE FINEST SAILORS, AS THE FRENCHIES FOUND OUT!



LONDON WAS REACHED ALL TOO SLOWLY FOR THURTELL'S PLEASURE. THROUGHOUT THE JOURNEY HIS GARRULOUS NEIGHBOUR HAD KEPT UP A FLOW OF INANE PRATTLING WHICH TRIED THE EX-MARINE'S NORMALLY SHORT PATIENCE TO THE FULL.

BY GEORGE! IF THAT'S THE MEASURE OF THE ARMY, 'TIS A MIRACLE BONEY WAS DEFEATED! I'LL WAGER THAT WITH ALL HIS BLUSTER, HIS MEN KNEW HIM AS A "GO-ON", NOT AS A "COME-ON"!



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IT WAS LATE THE FOLLOWING AFTERNOON THAT THURTELL ARRIVED IN NORWICH. THE RATTLING, BUMPING DISCOMFORT OF THE COACH FROM LONDON ACROSS THE BADLY KEPT ROADS OF ESSEX, SUFFOLK AND NORFOLK BROUGHT HIM HOME ILL-TEMPERED-- BUT THIS EVAPORATED WITH THE WARMTH OF THE WELCOME HE RECEIVED AT HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.



FATHER--
MOTHER!

MY BOY! HOME
AT LAST--AND
FOR GOOD, I TRUST?

JOHN--MY
DEAREST, HOW
I HAVE PRAYED
CONSTANTLY IN
MY HEART
FOR THIS.

ALDERMAN THURTELL, FARMER AND CLOTH-MERCHANT, PRESENT MAYOR OF NORWICH, WAS EXTREMELY PROUD OF HIS SON, WHILE HIS MOTHER DOTTED ON HIM. NOTHING WAS TOO GOOD FOR THIS HERO RETURNED FROM THE WARS. WHEN, A FEW DAYS LATER, JOHN AND HIS FATHER SAT IN THE STUDY...

FATHER, YOU HAVE BEEN MOST KIND SINCE I RETURNED, AND NOW I MUST ASK A FURTHER FAVOUR OF YOU. WAR IS THE ONLY TRADE THAT I KNOW--AND NOW THAT IS FINISHED, I MUST TURN MY HANDS AND MY HEART TO A NEW LIFE.

YES, YES
MY BOY,
GO ON.

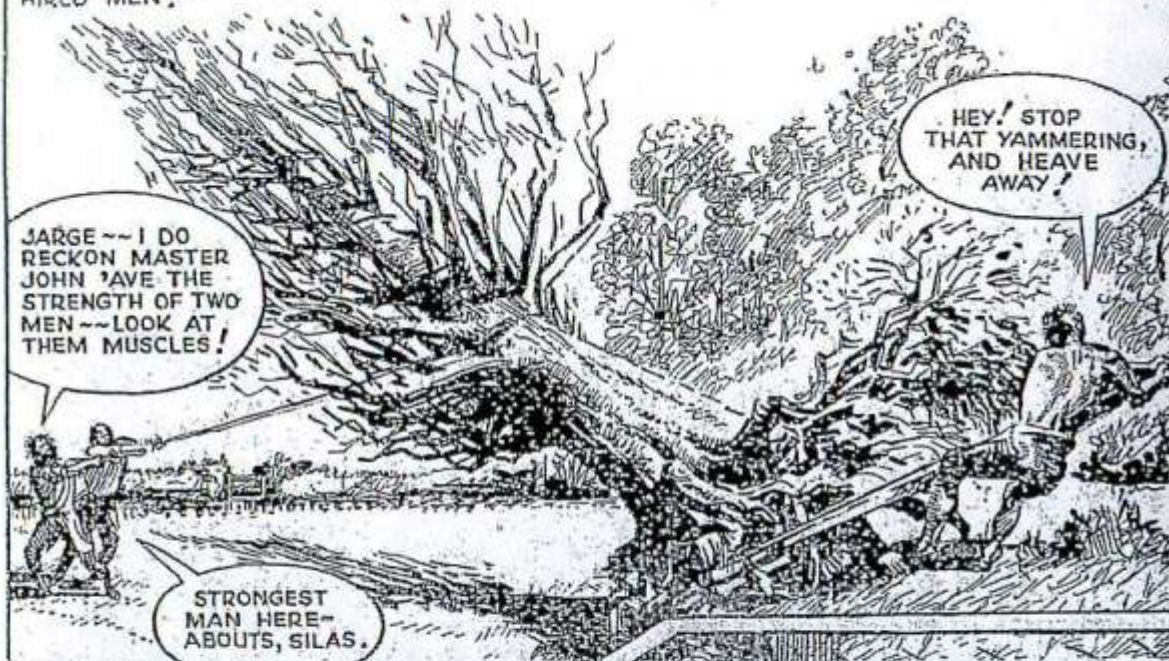


YOU HAVE A FARM AT HARFORD BRIDGE, FATHER--AND YET YOUR DUTIES AS MAYOR MUST LEAVE YOU LITTLE TIME. WILL YOU, THEREFORE, MAKE ME YOUR MANAGER THERE?

WILLINGLY, JOHN! YOU HAVE FORESTALLED ME IN THIS VERY MATTER BY ONLY A FEW HOURS, FOR I INTENDED TO OFFER YOU THAT VERY POSITION AFTER DINNER THIS EVENING!



THUS DID JOHN THURTELL COME TO HARFORD BRIDGE FARM. HE WAS A HARD MASTER, YET NO ONE DISLIKED HIM FOR IT--FOR DID HE NOT WORK HARDER THAN ANY OF HIS HIRED MEN?



BUT AS THE MONTHS PASSED, JOHN THURTELL BECAME MOROSE AND IMPATIENT WITH THE LACK OF EXCITEMENT IN THE LIFE HE LED. HIS MIND KEPT RETURNING TO THE DAYS OF THE WAR WITH ITS VIOLENT ACTION AND CONSTANT ELATION. FINALLY...



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THE FOLLOWING DAY WAS THAT OF THE ANNUAL NORWICH CATTLE FAIR. GLAD OF ANY EXCUSE TO QUIT THE FARM FOR A FEW HOURS, THURTELL ACCOMPANIED HIS FATHER, LITTLE KNOWING THAT THIS DAY WAS TO PROVE THE TURNING POINT OF HIS WHOLE LIFE.



HIS FATHER WAS SOON ENGAGED WITH TALK OF CATTLE, AND DRAWN BY THE SOUNDS OF LAUGHTER AND MERRIMENT, JOHN SLID AWAY TOWARDS IT UNNOTICED. SOON HE WAS PART OF THAT JOYOUS THROG WHICH BUSTLED BETWEEN THE MANY ATTRACTIONS.



AS THURTELL HEARD THESE WORDS, THEY ECHOED IN HIS EARS LIKE A PERSONAL CHALLENGE. ALL THE LATENT, PULSING DESIRE FOR PHYSICAL COMBAT WHICH HAD LAIN DORMANT THESE LAST MONTHS ROSE EXULTING IN HIS BLOOD LIKE AN OVERWHELMING TIDE. HE LUNGED FORWARD.

LOOK NO FURTHER, SIR. I'M YOUR MAN!

BY GOLES--IT'S YOUNG THURTELL FROM HARFORD BRIDGE!

ARRH! BY THE SIZE OF HIM HE'LL GIVE THE SAILOR A GOOD TUSSEL!

THE NEWS THAT SAILOR JAMES NOW HAD AN OPPONENT--NONE OTHER THAN THE SON OF THE MAYOR HIMSELF--QUICKLY SPREAD AND THE CROWD ABOUT THE RING GREW. THURTELL STRIPPED HIMSELF OF HIS COAT AND SHIRT AND CAME FORWARD TO THE CENTRE OF THE RING WITH EAGER GLOWING EYES.

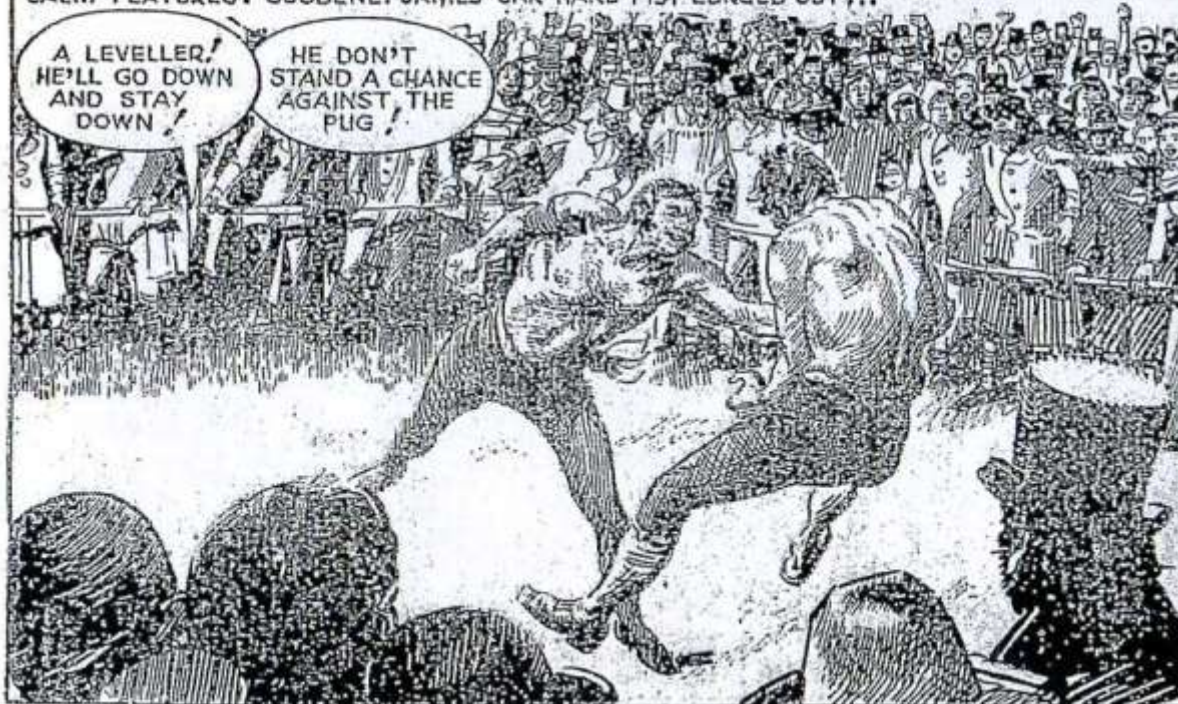
LUD, TREVERS! THOUGHT THIS WAS GOING TO BORE ME TO TEARS! AMATEUR FELLAH, SPLENDID LOOKING CHAP. I'LL WAGER A HUNDRED HE WINS!

DONE, BEVERLEY, AT EVENS!

THE FIGHTERS CIRCLED EACH OTHER WARILY, JAMES WITH HIS GREAT GNARLED FISTS POISED AND HIS LITTLE EYES GLINTING VICIOUSLY. THURTELL BALANCED EASILY ON HIS TOES, NO SIGN OF THE INNER RAGING THIRST FOR VIOLENT ACTION SHOWING ON HIS CALM FEATURES. SUDDENLY JAMES' OAK-HARD FIST LUNGED OUT...

A LEVELLER! HE'LL GO DOWN AND STAY DOWN!

HE DON'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THE PUG!



Gentleman Thief

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BUT THURTELL DID NOT GO DOWN. TRUE, THE FORCE OF THE BLOW CARRIED HIM BACK TO THE ROPES, BUT THOSE SUPERB MUSCLES, FORGED BY NATURE AND TEMPERED BY THE YEARS OF BROILING AFFRAY IN THE WAR, TOOK THE BLOW LIKE A SPONGE. HE CAME BACK FROM THE ROPES LIKE A TIGER AND THE PRIZEFIGHTER FOUND HIMSELF BESET BY A FIGHTING FURY...



... AND HIS HEART TREMBLED, FOR IN THE HOT BURNING EYES OF THURTELL HE SAW THE MALEVOLENT LUST TO KILL!

THE AMAZE-
MENT OF THE
SPECTATORS
HELD THEM
SPELLBOUND
AND NOT A
SOUND WAS
HEARD BUT
THE SOLID
CRUNCH OF
ROCK HARD
FISTS ON
FRIGHTENED
FLESH AS
THURTELL
POUNDED
JAMES ACROSS
THE RING.
AS THE PUG'S
HANDS DROPPED,
A DEVASTATING,
BONE-
CRUSHING BLOW
SHATTERED
HIS GAPI-
NG JAW....



AAARGH!

JAMES LANDED AMONGST THE STUNNED SPECTATORS, AND LAY BROKEN AND LIMP IN BODY AND, AS WAS FOUND LATER, WHEN HE CAME ROUND, IN SPIRIT ALSO, FOR HE BABBLER LIKE A CHILD AND NEVER ENTERED A PRIZE RING AGAIN.

THE SILENCE BROKE AND AS THE HYSTERICAL CROWD BURST THROUGH THE ROPES ABOUT HIM, THE MAD LIGHT WANED FROM THURTELL'S EYES. SMILING, HE ACCEPTED THE COMPLIMENTS SHOWERED UPON HIM.



AS THE CROWD THINNED, AND HE SHRUGGED HIS COAT OVER HIS MASSIVE SHOULDERS, THURTELL HEARD A LISPING, AFFECTED VOICE AND FELT A GENTLE TOUCH ON HIS SLEEVE.



THURTELL STOOD AS THOUGH HYPNOTISED BY THE TWIN VISIONS OF FASHIONABLE ELEGANCE WHICH STOOD BEFORE HIM. THE GLISTENING BETASSLED HESSIAN BOOTS, INCREDIBLY TIGHT BREECHES, THE SUPERBLY CUT COATS WHICH FITTED WITHOUT A WRINKLE AND ABOVE ALL, THE STIFF, CAREFULLY STARCHED CRAVATS OF FROTHY LACE, MADE HIM ACUTELY AWARE OF HIS OWN HOMESPUN CLOTHING.

STAP ME, M'DEAR OLD SOUL, UNDERSTAND YOU'RE A GENTLEMAN -- SON OF THE JOLLY OLD MAYOR OR SOMETHIN'. DO ME THE PLEASURE OF ACCEPTIN' ME CARD. IF YOU'RE EVER IN LONDON, YOU'D HONOUR ME BY CALLIN'. YOUR SERVANT, SIR.



THURTELL COULD ONLY MUMBLE DAZEDLY IN REPLY, AND HIS OVERAWED GAZE FOLLOWED THE BRILLIANT FIGURES UNTIL THEY WERE SWALLOWED UP IN THE CROWD. THEN HE GLANCED AT THE CARD HE STILL HELD.



"THE HONOURABLE GILBERT BEVERLEY, 93, PERIVALE SQUARE, LONDON. WHITES CLUB". JOVE -- A COUPLE OF CORINTHIAN DANDIES HERE IN NORWICH -- AND INVITING ME TO LONDON!

ALREADY HIS IMAGINATION WAS SUMMONING UP PICTURES OF LONDON LIFE AS HE HAD HEARD IT DESCRIBED; THE CARD PARTIES, CURRICLE RACES, SPARRING AT JEM BELCHER'S SCHOOL WITH THE GREAT CHAMPION HIMSELF. GAY MASQUERADES AT WHICH THE KING HIMSELF WAS OFTEN PRESENT. THEN, AS IF A SPARK HAD FLASHED IN A DARKENED ROOM...



AND WHY NOT? I'M AS GOOD A MAN AS BEVERLEY OR HIS FRIEND, PROBABLY BETTER! JACK THURTELL, GENTLEMAN -- AYE, IT SOUNDS WELL, AND SO IT'S GOING TO BE! I KNOW JUST HOW TO DO IT!

THURTELL'S EXCITEMENT SOARED. HAD HE AT LAST FOUND THE TRUE ANSWER TO HIS SEETHING DISCONTENT? LATER THAT DAY, HE FACED HIS FATHER IN THAT VERY SAME STUDY WHERE HE HAD ASKED FOR THE FARM, AND AGAIN HE WAS ASKING...

FATHER~~I UNDERSTAND THAT LONG HAVE YOU THOUGHT OF OPENING A BUSINESS HOUSE IN LONDON. THE FARM NEEDS ME NO LONGER~~SO WHY NOT SEND ME TO LONDON TO LOOK AFTER YOUR AFFAIRS THERE?

WELL SAID, MY BOY~~I'M INDEED GLAD THAT YOU HAVE MY INTERESTS IN YOUR HEART. YOU ARE RIGHT~~I DO NEED SOMEBODY IN LONDON~~AND IT SHALL BE YOU!

AND SO IT WAS THAT THE NEXT DAY, JOHN THURTELL LEFT NORWICH BOUND FOR LONDON, WITH HIS FATHER'S BLESSING~~AND FIVE THOUSAND OF HIS FATHER'S GOLDEN GUINEAS, WHICH WERE INTENDED FOR THE FOUNDATION OF THE NEW BUSINESS HOUSE.

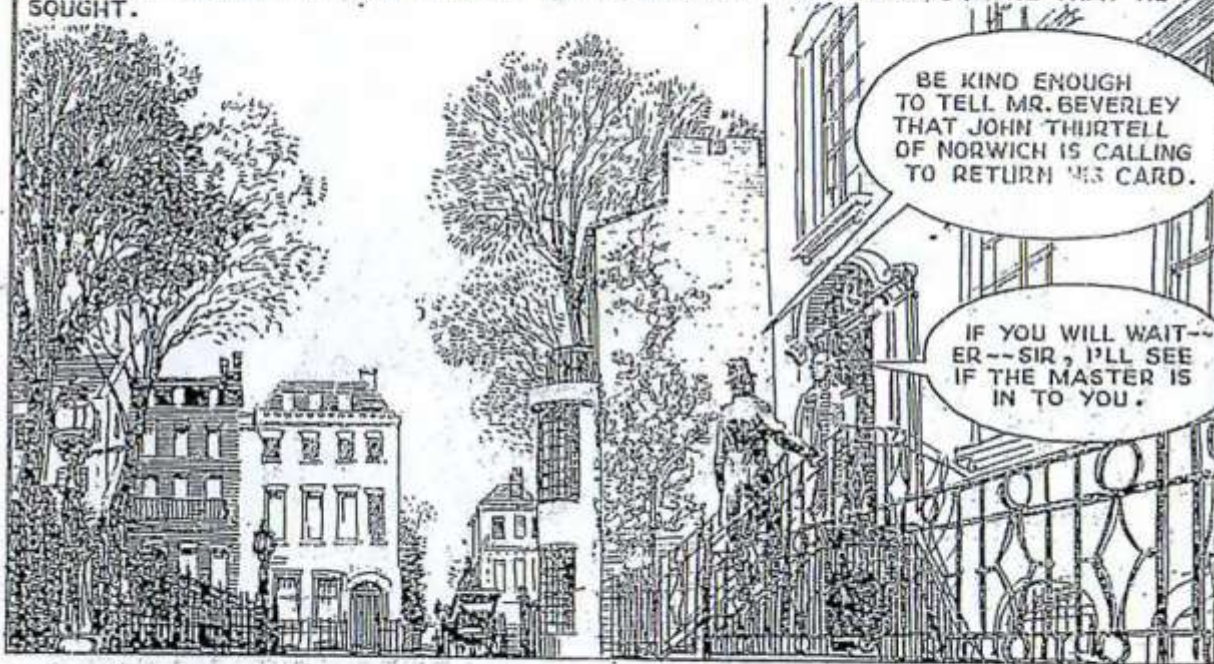
GOOD LUCK, JOHN, AND WRITE AS SOON AS YOU ARE SETTLED. IT'LL TAKE TIME FOR YOU TO BECOME KNOWN TO OTHER MERCHANTS, SO I'LL NOT EXPECT RESULTS AT ONCE.

REST ASSURED, FATHER. I WILL DO MY UTMOST TO JUSTIFY THE TRUST YOU HAVE GIVEN ME. YOU'LL HEAR OF ME SOON ENOUGH!

LITTLE DID THE MERCHANT REALISE HOW TRUE HIS SON'S WORDS WERE, FOR SOON ALL ENGLAND WAS TO KNOW OF JOHN THURTELL AND SPEAK THE NAME WITH BATED BREATH!

Chapter 2. THE SPIDER'S PARLOUR

ON HIS ARRIVAL IN THE GREAT CITY, THURTELL'S FIRST THOUGHT WAS TO SEEK OUT GILBERT BEVERLEY, THE CORINTHIAN BUCK HE HAD MET IN NORWICH. A CHAISE TOOK HIM THROUGH THE DINGY STREETS OF EAST LONDON TO THE ELEGANT TREE-LINED SQUARE THAT HE SOUGHT.



A FEW MOMENTS LATER THE FOOTMAN RETURNED AND WITH A CONDESCENDING SNIFF ORDERED THE NORWICH FARMER TO FOLLOW HIM. THURTELL WAS LED THROUGH A MAGNIFICENTLY DECORATED HALL AND USHERED INTO A LARGE DRAWING ROOM. BUT HIS WELCOME WAS FAR FROM WHAT HE HAD EXPECTED.



HURRIEDLY BEVERLEY DREW THURTELL BACK INTO THE HALL OUTSIDE THE DOOR. THERE WAS ALMOST A PLEA IN HIS LISPING TONES AS HE SPOKE.

MR. BEVERLEY--
YOU SAID I WAS
TO. COME ...

I KNOW, OLD THING--BUT ONE DOESN'T GO VISITING DRESSED LIKE A DASHED BAILIFF, DON'T YOU KNOW? IF YOU'RE GOING TO JOIN THE SET HERE IN TOWN, YOU MUST HAVE THE CLOTHES. GO ALONG TO MY TAILOR, HARRIERS IN JERMYN STREET. HE'LL FIX YOU UP IN A TRICE!

HUMILIATED AND FURIOUS AT FIRST, THURTELL SOON REALISED THAT BEVERLEY SPOKE THE TRUTH. HE HAD LOOKED AND FELT LIKE A COUNTRY YOKEL AMONGST THOSE ELEGANTLY DRESSED YOUNG BLADES. IT WAS UP TO JERMYN STREET TO PUT THAT RIGHT--AND IT DID...

THANK YOU, MR. HARRIER. I AM VASTLY INDEBTED TO YOU--AND OF COURSE TO MR. GILBERT BEVERLEY FOR GIVING ME YOUR NAME.

'TIS A PLEASURE, MR. THURTELL, TO DRESS SO SPLENDID A PHYSIQUE AS YOURS. CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN IN LONDON THESE DAYS--BUT INDEED YOU SHOW MY ART IN ITS BEST SETTING.



THE NEW DANDY'S WORDS CARRIED TO ANOTHER CUSTOMER IN THE SALON, A SMALL DARK MAN WHOSE SUITING, ALTHOUGH SOMBRE, SHOWED EXCELLENT TASTE AND CUT. HIS EYES FLICKERED MOMENTARILY TO THURTELL'S DISCARDED COUNTRY CLOTHES, AND NARROWED IN SPECULATION. THEN...

FORGIVE THE INTRUSION, SIR, BUT DID I NOT HEAR YOU SPEAK OF GILBERT BEVERLEY, A MOST DEAR FRIEND OF MINE? MY NAME IS WEARE ~~~ WILLIAM WEARE.

IN TRUTH, I KNOW BEVERLEY BUT SLIGHTLY. I AM AS YET A STRANGER IN TOWN AND MY CIRCLE OF FRIENDS IS, OF COURSE, SMALL. I AM MOST PLEASED TO MAKE YOUR ACQUAINTANCE, WEARE, I AM JOHN THURTELL OF NORWICH.

THURTELL'S HEART LIFTED WITH JOY. HE FELT THAT HE WAS NOW BEING ACCEPTED FOR WHAT HE WISHED TO BECOME. WEARE AND HE CHATTED EASILY FOR A FEW MOMENTS, AND THEN HIS NEW ACQUAINTANCE SET THE SEAL ON HIS NEW AMBITIONS AND HOPES.

MY DEAR THURTELL-- DO ME THE HONOUR OF SHARING MY LODGINGS UNTIL YOU CAN FIND OTHERS SUITABLE TO YOUR OWN TASTE. FOR LONDON IS CROWDED AND ROOMS COMMAND AN EXORBITANT PRICE.

YOU ARE KINDNESS ITSELF, WEARE, AND I ACCEPT GLADLY.

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED IN THE COMPANY OF WEARE, THURTELL'S DREAMS CAME TRUE. THE BRILLIANT SOCIAL WHIRL OF LONDON'S PLEASURE ENGULFED HIM. THERE WERE FIGHTS TO ATTEND, RACES TO WATCH AND HEAVILY WAGERED CARD GAMES TO BE PLAYED.



THURTELL HAD TAKEN TO GAMBLING LIKE A DUCK TO WATER. HIS LUCK HAD BEEN GOOD SO FAR-- THEN OF A SUDDEN IT SEEMED THE FICKLE GODDESS OF CHANCE DESERTED HIM...

FIVE HUNDRED GUINEAS, WAS IT NOT, THURTELL, YOU WAGERED ON BAILEY?

CURSE THE MAN! THAT BLOW WOULDN'T HAVE FELLED A BABE-- YET HE CRUMPLED LIKE A PAPER DOLL!



BUT WAS IT BAD LUCK OR SOMETHING MORE TANGIBLE....

FIFTY POUNDS FOR LYING DOWN, BAILEY, AS I PROMISED!

THANKEE, MR. WEARE. THERE'LL BE A RETURN MATCH SOON. D'YOU WANT THE SAME GAME PLAYED THEN?

WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT WHEN THE TIME COMES.



THURTELL WAS STILL FUMING OVER HIS FIGHTER'S POOR SHOWING AS THEY RETURNED TO LONDON. WEARE INWARDLY NURSED A SECRET SMILE, BUT OUTWARDLY APPEARED A TRUE SPORTSMAN.



HERE'S A CHANCE FOR YOUR REVENGE, JACK -- I'LL GIVE YOU 10 TO 1 AGAINST DICK OLIVER WHEN HE FIGHTS SAM CROOK NEXT MONTH AT ST. ALBANS!

DONE, WEARE -- AND THIS TIME IT'S A THOUSAND IN GOLD ON OLIVER!

LITTLE DID JOHN THURTELL THEN DREAM OF THE GHASTLY CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH HE WAS TO REMEMBER THE WAGER HE MADE THAT DAY ON THE FIGHT BETWEEN OLIVER AND CROOK.

THERE WAS A DRIVING RECKLESSNESS IN THURTELL NOW -- HIS FATHER'S MONEY WAS DIMINISHING FAST, AND HE HAD TO GET IT BACK.

JACK -- I TRUST YOU'LL NOT GAINSAY A LITTLE WAGER ON THE CURRICLE RACE TO BRIGHTON TOMORROW?

OF COURSE NOT, WEARE. SHALL WE SAY FIVE HUNDRED AGAINST EACH OTHER FOR GETTING THERE FIRST?

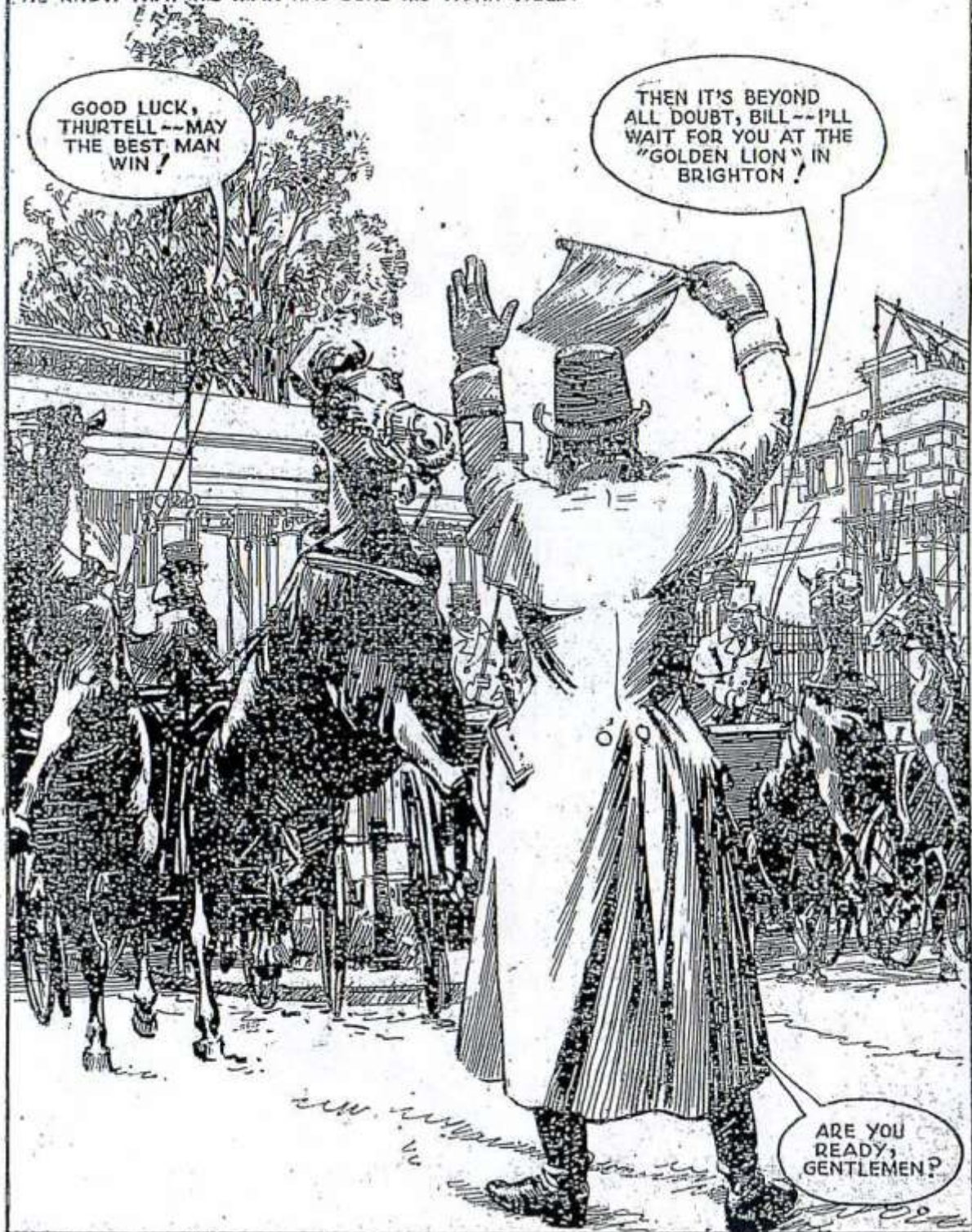


LATE THAT NIGHT, WITH THE BRIGHT STARS GLITTERING OVERHEAD LIKE SCATTERED DIAMONDS IN THE RICH VELVET PANOPLY OF SPACE, A SHADOWY FIGURE SKULKED FROM THE STABLES WHERE THURTELL KEPT HIS RACING CURRICLE.



FIVE HUNDRED FOR MR. WEARE MEANS AT LEAST TWENTY FOR ME -- AND PERHAPS A BROKEN HEAD FOR MR. THURTELL -- HEH, HEH!

THE NEXT MORNING, THE EARLY SUN CAST ITS GOLDEN FINGERS ACROSS THE ARRAY OF RACING COACHES DRAWN UP IN HYDE PARK. IT WAS A GLITTERING, SPLENDID SCENE, THE COACHES WITH THEIR RICH CHASINGS OF SILVERWORK, AND THEIR HIGH SPIRITED, METTLESOME STEEDS. BILL WEARE GRINNED MIRTHLESSLY ACROSS AT JACK THURTELL. HE KNEW THAT HIS MAN HAD DONE HIS WORK WELL.



THE STARTER'S FLAG FLASHED DOWN, LONG THONGED WHIPS SNAKED OUT AND CRACKLED ABOVE THE HORSES' EARS AND ALL BEDLAM SEEMED LET LOOSE AS THE ALMOST FRAGILE COACHES SPED OFF, JOSTLING AND BUMPING IN THAT FIRST MAD RUSH FOR THE OPEN ROAD.

OUT OF MY WAY, YOU IDIOT!

IDIOT YOURSELF, SIR, FOR HANDLING YOUR CART LIKE AN EXECUTIONER'S TUMBRIL!



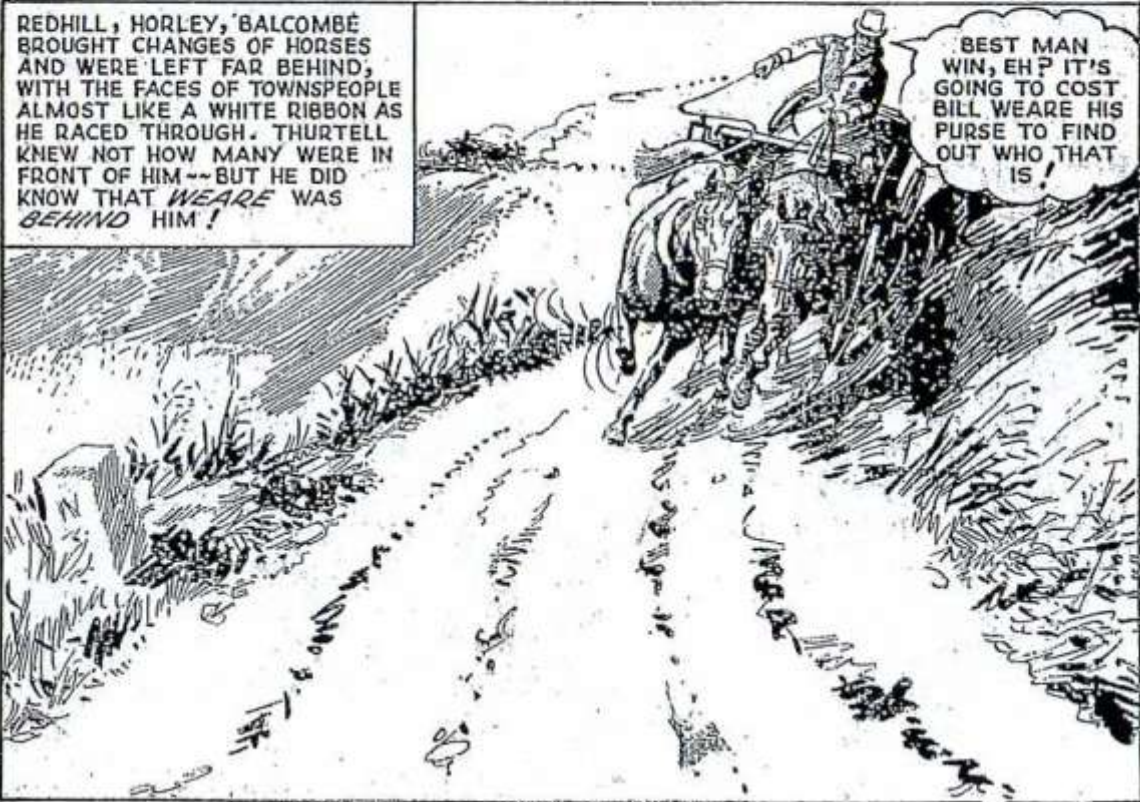
DRIVING SUPERBLY, JOHN THURTELL WAS CHALLENGING THE LEADERS CLOSELY AS THEY LEFT LONDON. WEARE WAS SOMEWHERE BEHIND AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF IT ADDED TO THURTELL'S NERVE TINGLING EXHILARATION IN THE WIND-WHIPPING SPEED HE WAS TRAVELLING.

FASTER--
FASTER, MY
BEAUTIES!



REDHILL, HORLEY, BALCOMBE BROUGHT CHANGES OF HORSES AND WERE LEFT FAR BEHIND, WITH THE FACES OF TOWNSPEOPLE ALMOST LIKE A WHITE RIBBON AS HE RACED THROUGH. THURTELL KNEW NOT HOW MANY WERE IN FRONT OF HIM--BUT HE DID KNOW THAT WEARE WAS BEHIND HIM!

BEST MAN WIN, EH? IT'S GOING TO COST BILL WEARE HIS PURSE TO FIND OUT WHO THAT IS!



CUCKFIELD LOOMED UP AHEAD ~ UNDER
TWENTY MILES TO GO ~ AND THEN IT
HAPPENED !



LUCKILY THE SPEED AT WHICH HE WAS
TRAVELLING THREW THURTELL CLEAR OF
THE WHEELS. HE LANDED LIKE A WHEATSACK
ON THE ROAD AND SAT UP DAZED, ONE HAND
TO HIS THROBBING HEAD.

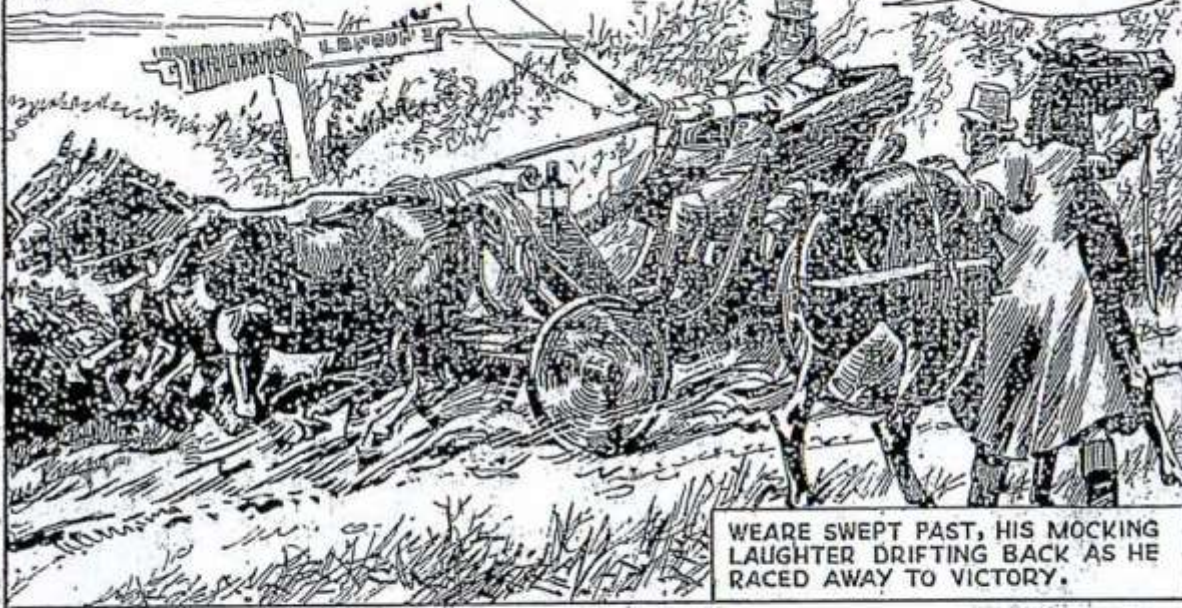


LIKE A DEMENTED ANIMAL, HE SPRANG TO THE LOOSE WHEEL. ITS WEIGHT WAS AS
NOTHING AS HE RAN TO THE OVERTURNED CURRICLE. IN A MOMENT HIS GREAT HANDS
GRASPED THE VEHICLE, HIS BACK STRAIGHTENED AND OVER IT WENT.



THURTELL STOOD THERE, A SCOWL OF ANGER DARK ON HIS FACE AND THE MUSCLES OF HIS WRISTS WERE LIKE CORDED STEEL AS HIS HANDS CLENCHED, AND WRITHED, IN USELESS RAGE AT HIS IMPOTENCE, AND AS IF TO GOAD HIS FURY FURTHER...

THE "GOLDEN LION" YOU SAID, THURTELL -- I'LL BE WAITING!



WE ARE SWEEPED PAST, HIS MOCKING LAUGHTER DRIFTING BACK AS HE RACED AWAY TO VICTORY.

THE BITTER TASTE OF DEFEAT LIKE GALL ON HIS TONGUE, THURTELL DREW THE HORSES FROM THE TRACES AND MOUNTING ONE, RODE OFF FOR BRIGHTON. HIS RANKLING ILL-HUMOUR HAD NOT ABATED A JOT WHEN HE ARRIVED THERE AND FACED THE SMILING WEARE.

MY DEAR THURTELL, WHAT DEUCED BAD LUCK -- BUT YOU WERE GOING IT A BIT DEVILISH, Y'KNOW!



DEVILISH, YOU SAY? HA -- IT MUST HAVE BEEN SATAN HIMSELF WHO PLUCKED OFF THAT WHEEL!

THE RETURN JOURNEY TO LONDON WAS MADE THE FOLLOWING DAY AND IN THE PRIVACY OF HIS OWN ROOM, THURTELL, TAUT AND GRIM FACED, LOOKED AT THE TABLE IN FRONT OF HIM.



TWENTY GUINEAS! ALL THAT IS LEFT OF THE FIVE THOUSAND MY FATHER ENTRUSTED TO ME! ALL GONE INTO THE POCKETS OF WEARE AND THOSE OTHER SNIGGERING FOPS! I MUST GET IT BACK -- BUT HOW?

Chapter 3. THE CHEAT

ALL THAT DAY THURTELL PACED HIS ROOM, HIS MIND ALTERNATING FRANTICALLY BETWEEN FEAR OF HIS FATHER'S WRATH AND A DESPERATE SEARCH FOR A WAY TO MAKE GOOD THE LOSS. A THOUGHT CAME, WAS THRUST ASIDE, YET RETURNED TO NAG AND NIBBLE AT HIS MIND.

IS THERE SUCH BASENESS IN MY HEART THAT I CAN FIND NO OTHER WAY? CAN THESE HANDS, WHICH HAVE NEVER BEEN FOULED BY THE STAIN OF DISHONESTY, NOW CHANGE AND WORK WILLINGLY TO OBEY THE WILL OF A CHEAT?



THAT EVENING, IN THE CHAMBERS WHICH THURTELL AND WEARE SHARED, THERE WAS THE USUAL LIGHT-HEARTED CROWD OF DANDIES GATHERED TO PLAY AT CARDS.

TWENTY GUINEAS, WEARE~~AND I WILL HAVE ONE MORE CARD!



IT SEEMED THAT THURTELL COULD NOT FAIL. EVERY WAGER HE MADE AND EVERY HAND HE PLAYED SEEMED UNBEATABLE.

PLAGUE ON IT~~NEVER SEEN SUCH AMAZIN' LUCK!

THURTELL, OLD FELLOW, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE US ALL WITH POCKETS TO LET IF THIS GOES ON!



THE GAME WENT ON THROUGH THE EVENING IN THE SAME INCREDIBLE WINNING PATTERN FOR THURTELL. WHEN IT BROKE UP IT WAS EARLIER THAN USUAL, BUT THERE COULD BE NO FURTHER PLAY~~THURTELL HAD CLEANED THEM OUT!



IT WAS SO EASY! AND IT'S JUST A START TO WHAT I CAN DO! FIVE THOUSAND? HA! TEN~~TWENTY THOUSAND, BEFORE I FINISH!

HIS THOUGHTS WERE BRUTALLY SHATTERED AS A VOICE COLD AS WINTER'S BREATH, AND DRIPPING WITH MENACE, BROKE IN.



BEFORE HE COULD MOVE, WEARE'S HAND FLASHED LIKE A STRIKING HAWK TO THURTELL'S LACED SLEEVE ...



WEARE'S WORDS CRASHED IN ON THURTELL'S NUMBED MIND LIKE A HAMMER. EVERY NERVE TREMBLING, HE STOOD, TURNED AND STUMBLERED TOWARDS THE DOOR. BUT HIS TORMENTOR WAS NOT FINISHED YET.



HOURS LATER, THE COOL EVENING AIR CARESSSED THE BURNING BROW OF THE MAN WHO WALKED WOODENLY ALONG A DARK AND DINGY STREET, AND BROUGHT SOME REASON TO THE TURMOIL OF HIS MIND.

CHEAT! CHEAT!
A PARIAH TO WANDER
EVER ALONE THROUGH LIFE'S
DARK STREETS, WITH MY
SHAME FOREVER HAUNTING ME.
AN HONEST GLANCE WILL
BURN INTO MY VERY HEART,
SEARCHING FOR THE NAME
WRITTEN LARGE THERE!
CHEAT!



ONLY WITH THE RETURN OF RATIONAL THOUGHT DID THURTELL REALISE HOW NEAR EXHAUSTION HE WAS. A TAVERN LIGHT GLEAMED FITFULLY, NEARBY, AND WITH DRAGGING STEPS HE ENTERED.

HEY, HUNT~~
LOOKEE! GOT THE
QUALITY CALLING
ON US NOW.

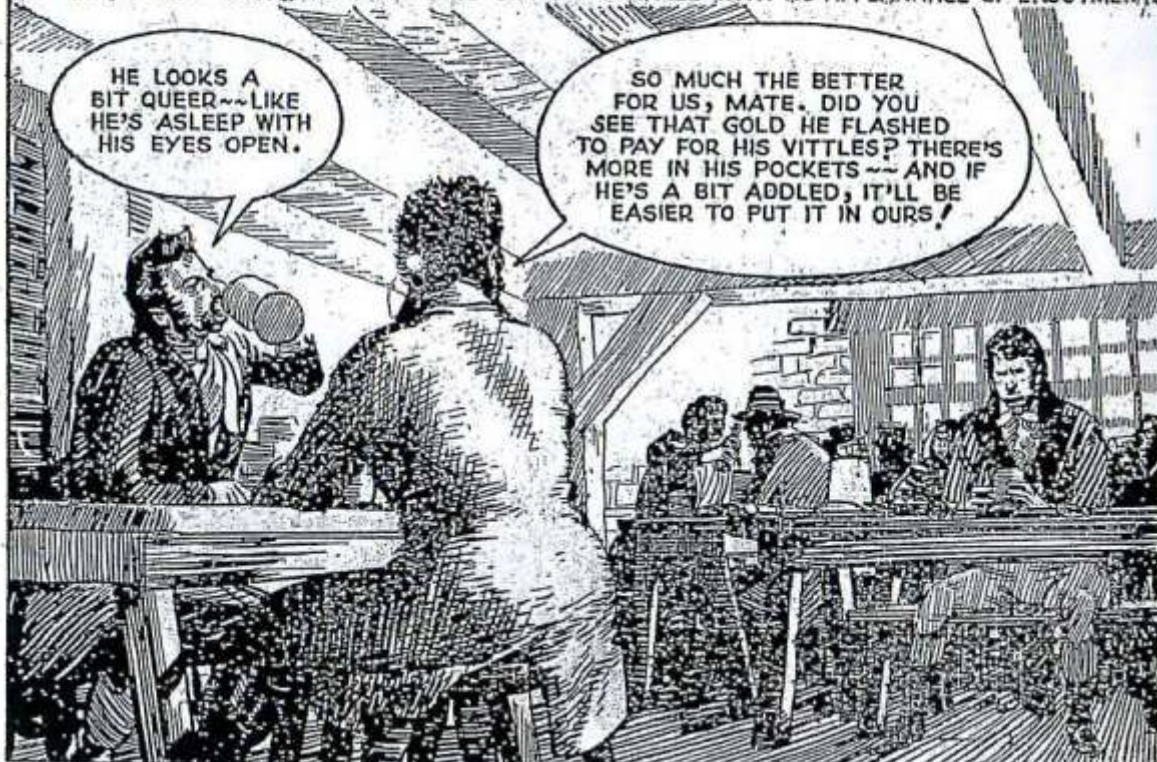


LOOKS A
BIT DONE UP.
DON'T HE,
PROBERT?

THURTELL SAT DOWN AT THE NEAREST TABLE, AND ONLY LIFTED HIS HEAD TO STARE WITH DAZED EYES AT THE DIRTY, UNKEMPT TAVERNER WHEN HE APPROACHED.



UNAWARE OF THE SPECULATIVE EYES WHICH WATCHED HIM, THURTELL SAT STARING IN FRONT OF HIM, TOYING WITH THE FOOD AND SIPPING THE ALE WITH NO APPEARANCE OF ENJOYMENT.



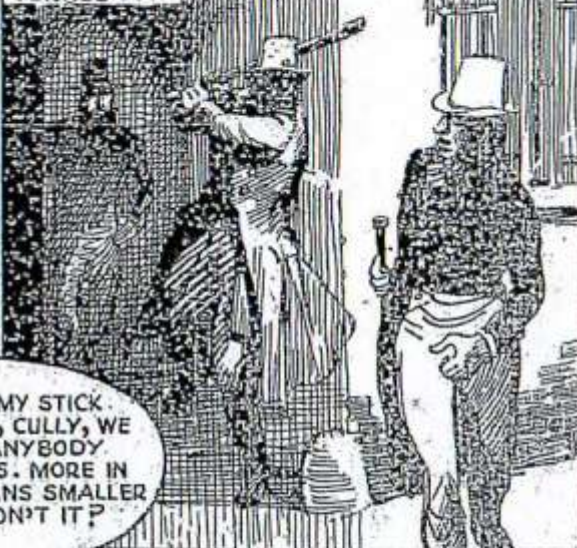
THURTELL HAD NO IDEA HOW LONG HE SAT THERE. BUT AT LAST HE ROSE AND LEFT THE TAVERN-- COMPLETELY UNAWARE THAT HIS EVERY MOVEMENT WAS SHADOWED.



LOOK AT THOSE SHOULDERS, PROBERT. DO YOU THINK WE CAN DEAL WITH HIM--JUST US TWO, I MEAN?

US TWO AND MY STICK. HERE, LISTEN, CULLY, WE DON'T WANT ANYBODY ELSE IN ON THIS. MORE IN THE GAME MEANS SMALLER SHARES, DON'T IT?

IT WAS ONLY AN INSTINCT SHARPENED BY THE CONSTANT VIGILANCE OF HIS WAR SERVICE WHICH WARNED THURTELL AS THERE WAS A PATTERN OF FOOTSTEPS BEHIND HIM. HE TURNED...



... IN A FLASH EVERY SENSE BECAME TINGLINGLY ALIVE, AND HE WAS ONCE AGAIN THURTELL THE FIGHTER!

THE HEAVY STICK WHISTLED DOWN IN SINISTER SAVAGERY-- ONLY TO MEET THIN AIR AS THURTELL DUCKED. THEN WITH A SOFT BUBBLING LAUGH, HE DROVE INTO HIS ASSAILANTS.



THE SOLID, CLUBBING CRUNCH OF THURTELL'S FIST ON PROBERT'S JAW TURNED THE CRAVEN HEART OF HUNT TO JELLY. HE SPUN ON HIS HEELS FOR FLIGHT--BUT THERE WAS NO ESCAPE ...

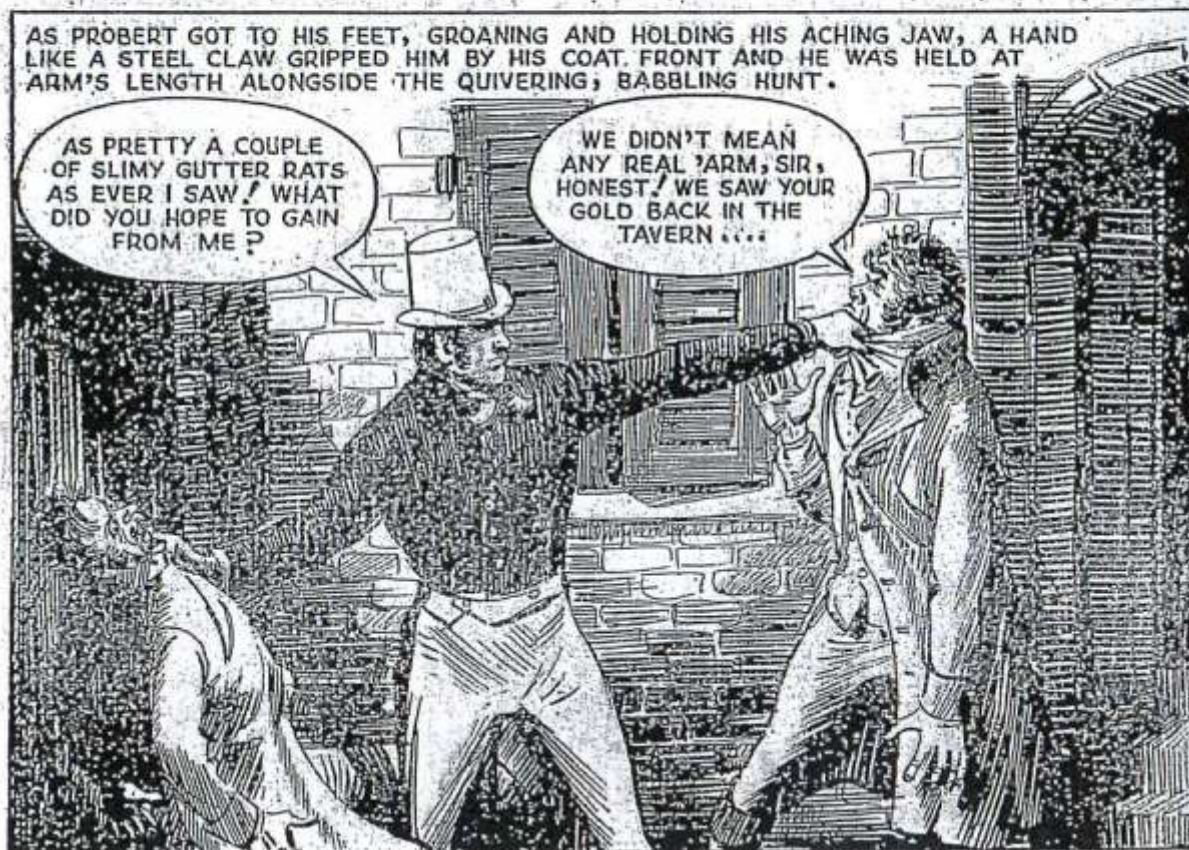
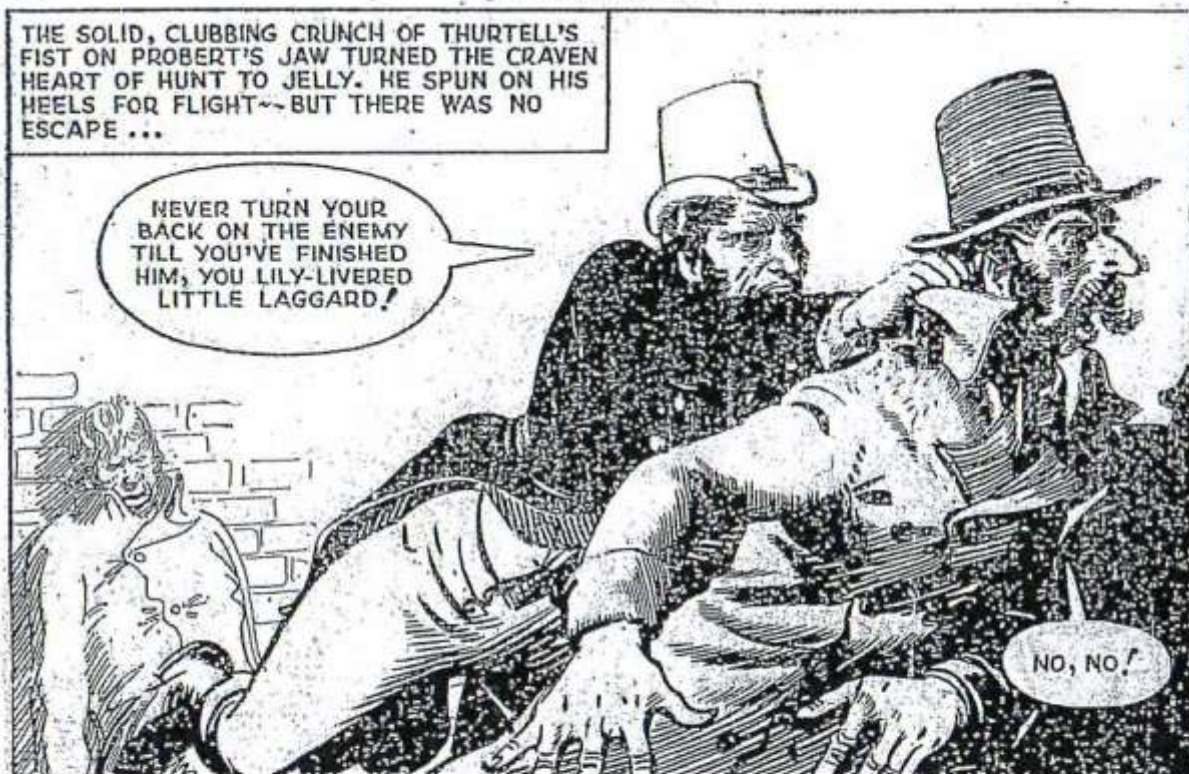
NEVER TURN YOUR BACK ON THE ENEMY TILL YOU'VE FINISHED HIM, YOU LILY-LIVERED LITTLE LAGGARD!

NO, NO!

AS PROBERT GOT TO HIS FEET, GROANING AND HOLDING HIS ACHING JAW, A HAND LIKE A STEEL CLAW GRIPPED HIM BY HIS COAT FRONT AND HE WAS HELD AT ARM'S LENGTH ALONGSIDE THE QUIVERING, BABBLING HUNT.

AS PRETTY A COUPLE OF SLIMY GUTTER RATS AS EVER I SAW! WHAT DID YOU HOPE TO GAIN FROM ME?

WE DIDN'T MEAN ANY REAL HARM, SIR, HONEST! WE SAW YOUR GOLD BACK IN THE TAVERN ...



PROBERT'S PITIFUL CROAKINGS WERE CUT SHORT AS THURTELL LIFTED HIS LEONINE HEAD AND LAUGHED. THERE WAS A SPINE CHILLING TIMBRE WHICH RANG THROUGH THE SOUND AND TURNED THEIR BLOOD COLD WITH HORROR.



THE GREAT HANDS RELAXED AND THEY WERE FREE. HUNT STOOD AS THOUGH MESMERISED BY THE GLEAMING GREEN EYES WHICH SEEMED TO SEAR INTO HIS VERY BRAIN. BUT PROBERT TOOK A HESITANT STEP FORWARD

WEARE? WE KNOW BILL WEARE, SIR. WHY, HE'S THE BIGGEST CARD SHARP AND CROOKED GAMBLER IN LONDON! WILL YOU COME BACK TO THE TAVERN WITH US AND HAVE A GLASS, AS I THINK I KNOW WHO YOU ARE!



THIS NEWS SHOOK THURTELL LIKE A DOUCHE OF ICE COLD WATER. TREMBLING WITH SUPPRESSED EXCITEMENT, HE FOLLOWED PROBERT AND HUNT BACK TO THE SQUALID TAVERN. INSIDE...



THIS 'ERES JOE HUNT' AND I'M WILL PROBERT. YOU'RE THURTELL--THE PIGEON FROM NORWICH THAT WEARE'S BEEN PLUCKING! WE TEAR THINGS DOWN 'ERE, WE DO! F'INSTANCE, THAT FIGHT OF BAILEY'S WAS FIXED, THE AXLE OF YOUR CURRICLE WAS DAMAGED BEFORE THE RACE, AND WEARE'S BEEN CHEATING YOU ALL ALONG AT CARDS!

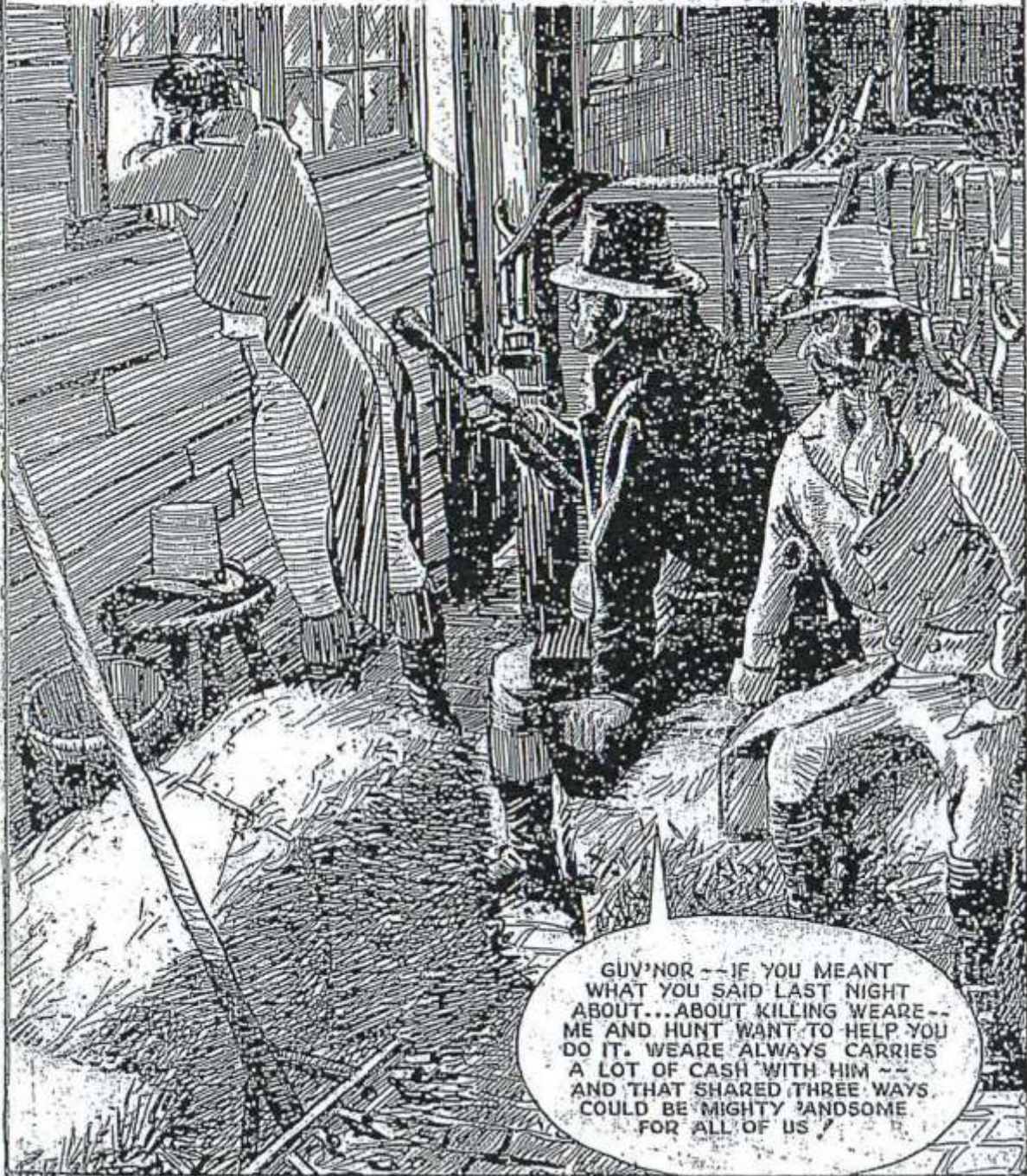
THE WORDS BURNED INTO THURTELL'S MIND LIKE A WHITE HOT IRON. A HALF CHOKED SCREAM ROSE IN HIS THROAT, AND THEN HE WAS ON HIS FEET. AND IN HIS EYES HIS COMPANIONS SAW THE BURNING, NAKED FLAME OF DEATH!



WEARE! HEAR THIS IN YOUR BLACK HEART! YOU'RE GOING TO DIE! WITH THESE HANDS I'M GOING TO SNUFF THE EVIL BREATH FROM YOUR MISERABLY VILE CARCASS AND LET YOUR MASTER SATAN WELCOME YOUR SOUL TO THE FURNACES OF HADES!

Chapter 4. THE RECKONING AT GILLS HILL

THAT NIGHT THURTELL SLEPT ON THE GRIMY FLOOR OF HUNT'S ROOM BEHIND THE TAVERN. BUT THERE WAS NO HEED IN HIS MIND TO THE SORDID SQUALOR ABOUT HIM. EVERY HEART PULSE HAMMERED "REVENGE ... REVENGE". THAT WAS THE DREAM THAT OBSESSED HIS SOUL NOW. THE NEXT MORNING IN A DISUSED STABLE NEARBY ...



GUY'NOR -- IF YOU MEANT
WHAT YOU SAID LAST NIGHT
ABOUT ... ABOUT KILLING WEARE --
ME AND HUNT WANT TO HELP YOU
DO IT. WEARE ALWAYS CARRIES
A LOT OF CASH WITH HIM --
AND THAT SHARED THREE WAYS
COULD BE MIGHTY 'ANDSOME
FOR ALL OF US

THURTELL HAD NO THOUGHT FOR MONEY, YET HE WELCOMED HIS NEW ALLIES. ALREADY A PLAN WAS FORMING IN HIS MIND -- BUT IT LACKED ONE LINK TO BE UNBREAKABLE.

AYE, I'LL NEED SOME HELP -- AND THE MONEY'S YOURS IF YOU WANT IT. I'LL HAVE NO PART OF IT EXCEPT WHAT HE STOLE FROM ME. WHAT I DO WANT IS A PLACE OUTSIDE LONDON WHERE WE CAN DO THE JOB QUIETLY.

I'VE GOT THE VERY PLACE, MR. THURTELL! I LIVE OUT AT GILLS HILL NEAR EDGWARE -- SO QUIET AS A GRAVEYARD IT IS, AND IF I ARRIVED HOME WITH FRIENDS, WHO'S THE WISER TO WHAT 'APPENED BEFORE WE GOT THERE?

THURTELL WAS EXULTANT. HIS PLAN WAS NOW COMPLETE. THAT AFTERNOON THEY TRAVELLED TO PROBERT'S COTTAGE AT GILLS HILL, AND FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS THEY SURVEYED THE LOCALITY -- THE EDGWARE ROAD TO RADLETT, THE TURNING OFF AT GILLS HILL LANE AND THENCE TO THE COTTAGE.

'TIS PERFECT! AYE, THIS IS WHERE WE WILL DO IT! IN SUCH A LONELY SPOT ALL BEDLAM WOULD GO UNHEARD.

DURING THOSE DAYS, THURTELL CAME TO KNOW PROBERT AND HUNT WELL AND HE FELT SURE HE COULD TRUST THEM. THEY RETURNED TO LONDON AND THE PLAN WAS SET IN MOTION. HUNT WAS SENT TO HIRE TWO GIGS, WHILE THURTELL AND PROBERT WENT SHOPPING WITH A DEADLIER PURPOSE.

VERY FINE
PISTOLS, SIR--
AND ONLY THIRTY
SHILLINGS THE
PAIR!



THEY'LL DO FOR
THE RAT SHOOTING
I HAVE IN MIND--
YES, I'LL TAKE THEM.

TUCKING THE PISTOLS INTO HIS POCKETS,
THURTELL RETURNED TO THE STABLES WITH
PROBERT WHERE HUNT WAS WAITING.

I'VE PAID FOR THE
HIRING OF THE GIGS
AND WE ARE TO
PICK THEM UP AT
SIX O'CLOCK TONIGHT,
MR. THURTELL.



GOOD! NOW HERE'S
THE PLAN. I'LL CALL
ON WEARE TODAY
AND GET HIM TO COME
OUT WITH ME TONIGHT.
I'LL TELL HIM SOMETHING
THAT WILL MAKE HIM
EAGER TO COME.

THURTELL'S VOICE BECAME HOARSE AS THE THOUGHT OF HIS COMING REVENGE THICKENED IN HIS THROAT.



YOU TWO FOLLOW US IN THE OTHER GIG. WHEN WE GET TO GILLS HILL LANE, I'LL STOP AND WAIT FOR YOU. THEN, MR. WEARE, YOU'RE GOING TO PAY THE RECKONING!

LATER THAT AFTERNOON WILLIAM WEARE WAS LOUNGING LAZILY IN HIS STUDY WHEN JOHN THURTELL WAS ANNOUNCED. A FLICKED FINGER DISMISSED THE SERVANT AND THEN HIS CONTEMPTUOUS GLANCE SETTLED ON HIS VISITOR.



IF YOU'RE BEGGING, THURTELL, I NEVER LEND MONEY TO CARD-CHEATING COUNTRY BUMPKINS.

NO, WEARE, I'M NOT BEGGING. BUT I DO NEED MONEY BADLY, AND I KNOW WHERE *WE* CAN HELP OURSELVES TO A GREAT DEAL OF IT. IF WE WORKED TOGETHER, IT'S AS GOOD AS OURS.

WEARE'S INDOLENCE SLIPPED OFF LIKE A DROPPED CLOAK, AND HIS EYES QUICKENED WITH GREEDY INTEREST AS THURTELL WENT ON...



THERE'S A RICH YOUNG FARMER'S SON STAYING AT RADLETT TONIGHT WITH FRIENDS OF MINE THERE. IF WE WERE TO ARRIVE AND PLAY A FEW GAMES OF CARDS-- THE RIGHT SORT OF CARDS, NOBODY COULD TAKE OFFENCE. AND HE'S A VERY RICH YOUNG MAN.

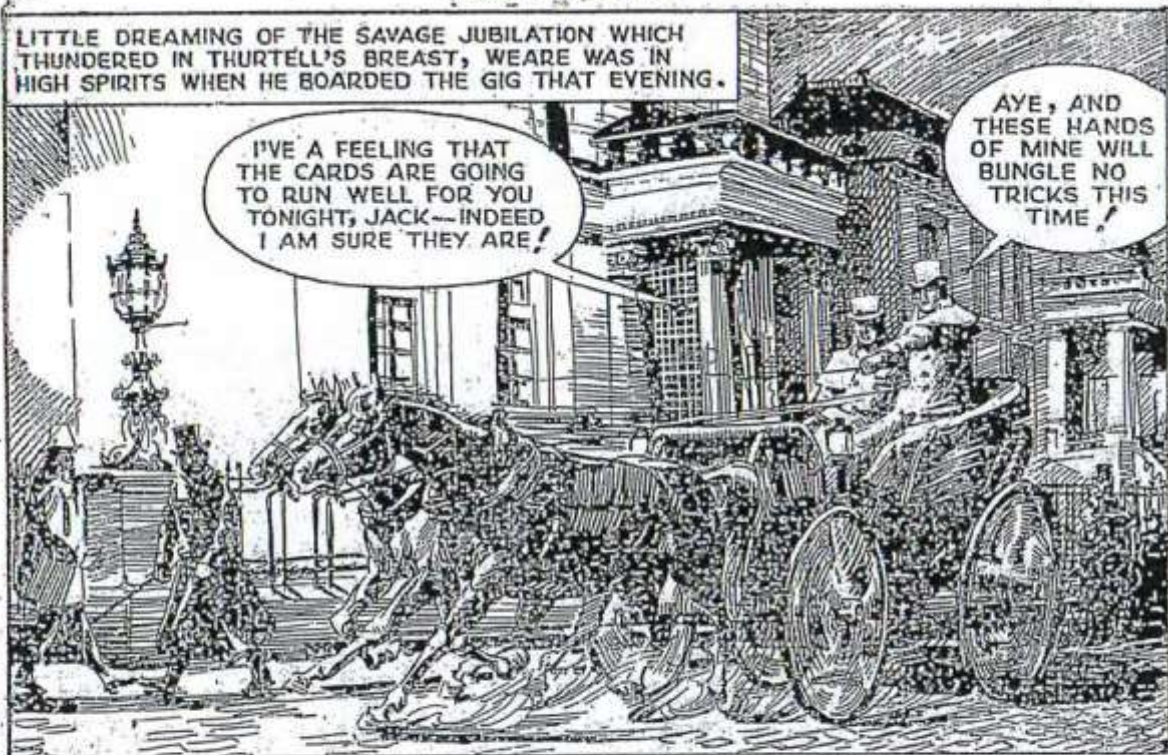
THIS WAS THE BAIT DANGLED BEFORE WILLIAM WEARE. THURTELL HAD JUDGED HIS MAN WELL, FOR WITH EYES ALREADY GLEAMING WITH GREED, HIS VICTIM SNAPPED AT THE BAIT LIKE A HUNGRY PIKE.



WHY, I'LL BE GLAD TO HELP YOU WIN A LITTLE MONEY, MY DEAR JACK -- TONIGHT YOU SAY, AT RADLETT?

THAT'S RIGHT, BILL. THEN IT'S AGREED, AND I'LL CALL ON YOU AT SIX O'CLOCK THIS EVENING IN MY GIG!

LITTLE DREAMING OF THE SAVAGE JUBILATION WHICH THUNDERED IN THURTELL'S BREAST, WEARE WAS IN HIGH SPIRITS WHEN HE BOARDED THE GIG THAT EVENING.



AS THEY DROVE THROUGH THE GATHERING DUSK, WEARE'S MIND DWELT LOVINGLY ON THE BRIGHT GOLD HE THOUGHT WOULD BE HIS WITHIN A FEW HOURS. IMMERSED IN THOUGHT, HE DID NOT NOTICE THE OTHER GIG WHICH FOLLOWED THEM.



THE BRUTAL PROBERT SAW AT ONCE THAT IT WAS FEAR THAT SHOOK HUNT'S LIMBS LIKE AN AGUE, NOT THE COLD. CURSING, HE PULLED IN AT THE NEXT INN ON THE ROAD ...

JUST ONE, MIND. YOU, HUNT--TO SHAKE THE COLD FROM VER VITALS--AND LET'S HOPE IT PUTS A BIT O' COURAGE IN ITS PLACE.

THANKEE -- THANKEE, WILL! ONE'S ALL I NEED. THEN WE'LL GO ON.



THE FULL FED MOON LAY LUSTROUS IN THE DARK SATIN SKY, BATHING THE NIGHT COUNTRYSIDE WITH A PALE RADIANCE OF SILVER SHEEN AND SOFT SHADOWS. THURTELL PAID LITTLE ATTENTION TO WEARE'S TALK--RATHER HE SEEMED TO BE LISTENING FOR OTHER SOUNDS ...

ROT THEIR EYES! WHERE ARE THEY? THEY WERE TO BE CLOSE UP BEHIND WHEN WE TURNED INTO THIS LANE-- GILLS HILL LANE!



FIRE FLAMED IN THURTELL'S HEART THEN, FOR HE KNEW THAT HE MUST DO WHAT HAD TO BE DONE. NOW -- ALONE!

STAP ME, JACK--HERE'S A PRETTY PLACE FOR MURDER!



AND A MOMENTARY SHAFT OF FEAR WHITENED THE KNUCKLES GRIPPING THE PISTOL AT THURTELL'S SIDE.

THURTELL'S IRON NERVE CLAMPED DOWN ON THAT TREMOR AND IT WAS GONE. IN ITS PLACE WAS BORN A SOFT INSISTENT VOICE INSIDE HIS HEAD, GROWING LOUDER, LOUDER, UNTIL IT BLOTTED OUT ALL ELSE IN AND ABOUT HIM. *NOW~~NOW~~NOW!* WITH A CURSE HE DROPPED THE REINS AND TURNED, THE PISTOL SWINGING UP...



A LOW GURGLING CHUCKLE WAS THURTELL'S ONLY ANSWER, ECHOING THE OMINOUS CLICK OF THE PISTOL'S HAMMER AS HE THUMBED IT BACK. WEARE LUNGED TO HIS FEET IN BLIND BABBLING PANIC...



DEAF TO ALL BUT THE ROARING THUNDER LOCKED WITHIN HIS OWN MIND, THURTELL SQUEEZED THE TRIGGER. A SECOND LATER REACTION STRUCK THURTELL WITH THE SHOCK OF A WHIP LASH. THE PISTOL TREMBLED IN HIS FEVER-HOT FINGERS AND, OF A SUDDEN, COLD SWEAT GLISTENED ON HIS BROW.

'TIS DONE! THE RECKONING'S PAID! JOHN THURTELL, FIGHTER, DANDY, CHEAT AND NOW... MURDERER!



ONCE AGAIN HIS STEEL WILL STRENGTHENED HIS LOW SPIRITS. HE JUMPED DOWN FROM THE GIG AND HIS FINGERS FUMBLING AND SEARCHED THROUGH HIS VICTIM'S CLOTHES. AT LAST HE FOUND WHAT HE WANTED...



BY GEORGE--NOTES AND GOLD! THERE MUST BE THOUSANDS HERE. GOOD PAY FOR SNUFFING OUT SUCH A WORTHLESS LIFE! AND IT'S ALL MINE. I DID THE TRICK, SO THERE'S NO SHARES FOR THOSE JOHNNIES--COMELATELY, PROBERT AND HUNT!

ECHOING ON HIS SPOKEN THOUGHTS, THERE CAME THE SOUND OF A VEHICLE COMING UP THE LANE. THURTELL STOOD UP AND THRUST THE WALLET IN THE FRONT OF HIS COAT--JUST IN TIME!

IS IT YOU, GUV'NOR--GAW, HAVE YOU CROAKED HIM ALREADY?



AYE--AND WITH NO HELP FROM YOU LAGGARDS! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN SKULKING?



AND CASTING HIS PISTOL IMPATIENTLY ASIDE, THURTELL TURNED TO THE GIG, TO CONCEAL HIS SMILE OF TRIUMPH... THE MONEY WAS HIS!

PROBERT AND HUNT GOT DOWN AND APPROACHED HESITANTLY, THEIR EYES DRAWN IN FATAL FASCINATION TO THE LIFELESS FORM CRUMPLED AT THURTELL'S FEET...

DID YOU FIND THE GOLD, GUVINOR?

HA, HE CHEATED US EVEN IN DEATH! HE HAD BUT A FEW GUINEAS--WE'LL SHARE THEM LATER. NOW THE JOB IS TO PUT HIM WHERE HE WON'T BE FOUND SO EASILY. HERE, WRAP HIM IN THIS SACK!

WE...WE ONLY STOPPED FOR A GLASS O' BRANDY, MR. THURTELL, FOR IT'S BITTER COLD!

SURPRISINGLY, IT WAS THE TIMID AND TREMBLING HUNT WHO SUGGESTED A WATERY GRAVE FOR WEARE IN THE POND OF PROBERT'S NEARBY COTTAGE. PROBERT'S PROTESTS WERE CUT SHORT BY A SNARL FROM THURTELL.

LISTEN, PROBERT--WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER -- AND WE'LL HANG TOGETHER IF WE'RE CAUGHT. SHUT YOUR YAP--THE LATE LAMENTED WILLIAM IS GOING INTO YOUR POND!

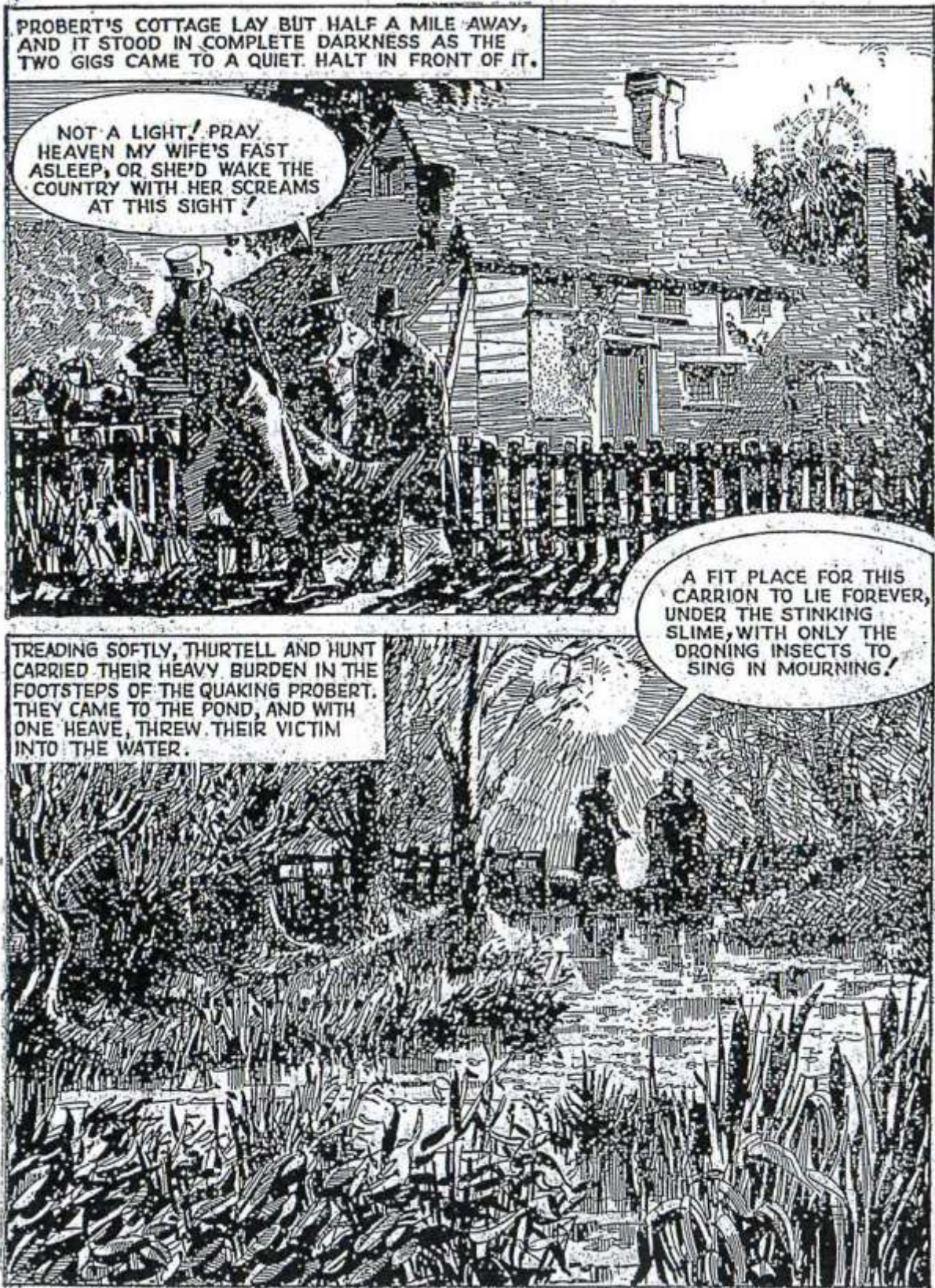
Jack Thurtell

PROBERT'S COTTAGE LAY BUT HALF A MILE AWAY,
AND IT STOOD IN COMPLETE DARKNESS AS THE
TWO GIGS CAME TO A QUIET HALT IN FRONT OF IT.

NOT A LIGHT! PRAY
HEAVEN MY WIFE'S FAST
ASLEEP, OR SHE'D WAKE THE
COUNTRY WITH HER SCREAMS
AT THIS SIGHT!

A FIT PLACE FOR THIS
CARRION TO LIE FOREVER,
UNDER THE STINKING
SLIME, WITH ONLY THE
DRONING INSECTS TO
SING IN MOURNING!

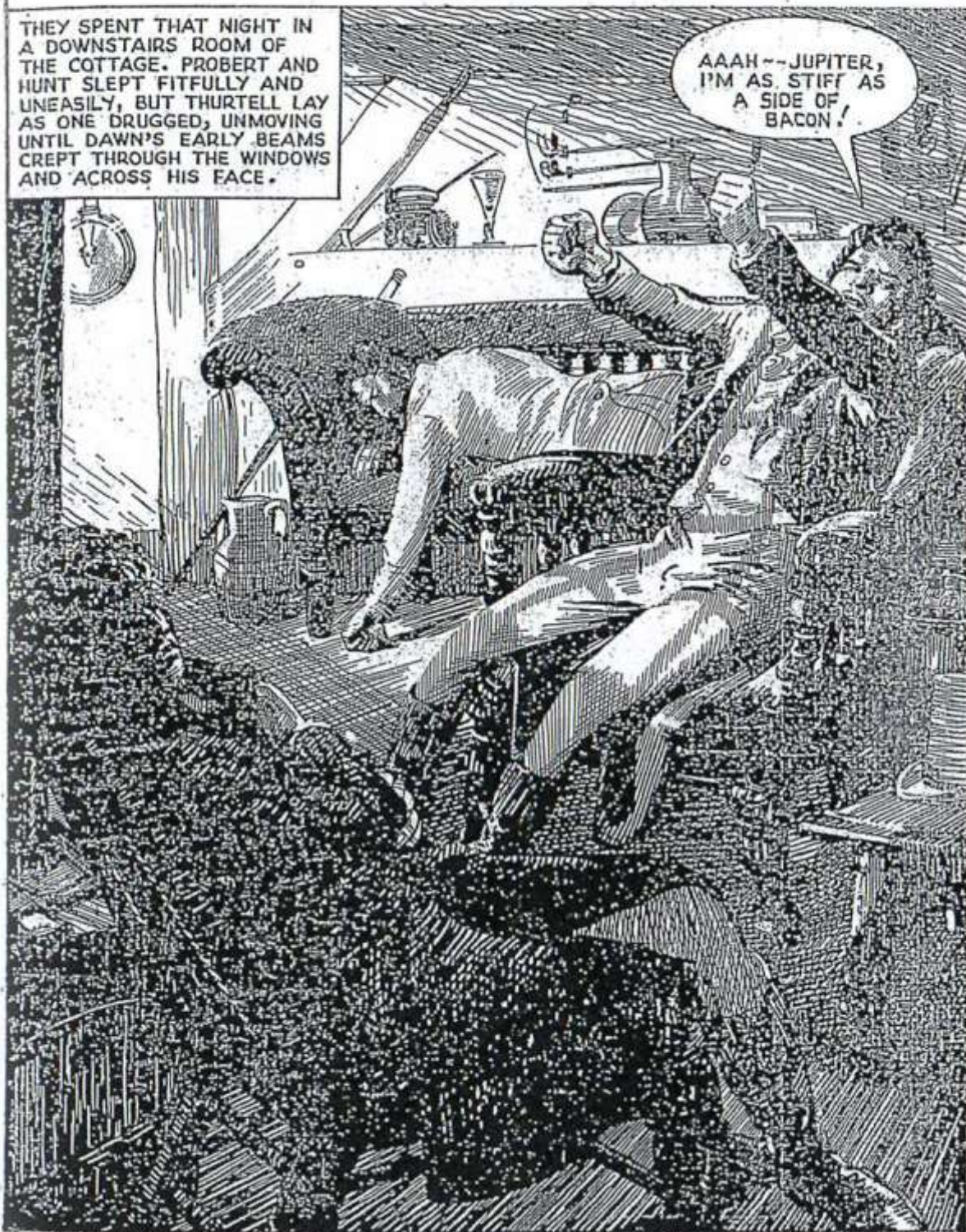
TREADING SOFTLY, THURTELL AND HUNT
CARRIED THEIR HEAVY BURDEN IN THE
FOOTSTEPS OF THE QUAKING PROBERT.
THEY CAME TO THE POND, AND WITH
ONE HEAVE, THREW THEIR VICTIM
INTO THE WATER.



Chapter 5. HUE AND CRY

THEY SPENT THAT NIGHT IN A DOWNSTAIRS ROOM OF THE COTTAGE. PROBERT AND HUNT SLEPT FITFULLY AND UNEASILY, BUT THURTELL LAY AS ONE DRUGGED, UNMOVING UNTIL DAWN'S EARLY BEAMS CREPT THROUGH THE WINDOWS AND ACROSS HIS FACE.

AAAH--JUPITER,
I'M AS STIFF AS
A SIDE OF
BACON!



HIS OWN WORDS TORE THE LAST THIN VEIL OF SLEEP FROM HIS SENSES. *WEARE!* HE SAT UP, HIS MIND RELIVING THE VIOLENCE OF SO FEW HOURS AGO. BUT SOMETHING IN THE VISIONS HE SAW NAGGED HIS BRAIN. SUDDENLY...

THE PISTOL!
I DROPPED THE
ACCURSED THING
IN THE ROAD
LAST NIGHT!
WE'VE GOT TO
FIND IT--NOW!



WITHIN SECONDS, THURTELL WAS HURRYING FROM THE COTTAGE DRAGGING THE WHITE FACED PROBERT WITH HIM. HUNT WAS LEFT BEHIND, TERROR STRICKEN AND SICK WITH FEAR.

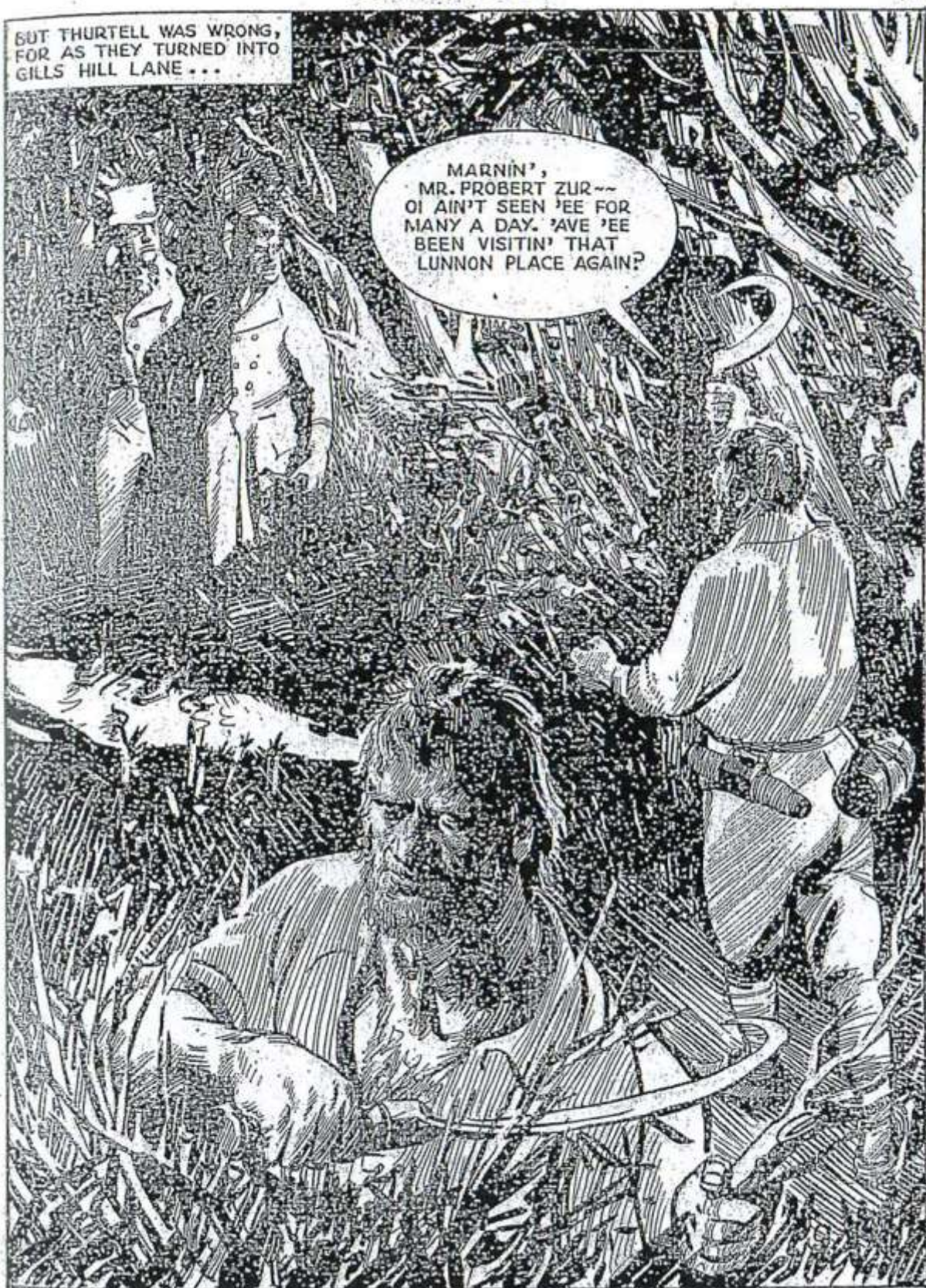
GAW! IF IT'S
BEEN FOUND,
WE'RE DONE
FOR!

YOU CLOD! WHO
WOULD BE STIRRING
AT THIS EARLY HOUR?
COME, WE'LL SOON
FIND IT!



BUT THURTELL WAS WRONG,
FOR AS THEY TURNED INTO
GILLS HILL LANE...

MARNIN',
MR. PROBERT ZUR--
OI AIN'T SEEN 'EE FOR
MANY A DAY. 'AVE 'EE
BEEN VISITIN' THAT
LUNNON PLACE AGAIN?



PROBERT'S FEAR-DRY TONGUE SEEMED TO FILL HIS MOUTH AND HE COULD ONLY CROAK IN REPLY. BUT THURTELL, HIS OWN MOMENTARY PANIC STRANGLING BY HIS IRON WILL, STEPPED FORWARD...

G--GOOD MORNING, SILAS!

GOOD DAY TO YOU, FRIEND. IT SEEMS THAT WORK STARTS EARLY HERE!

AR! MASTER NICHOLLS DO WANT THESE 'EDGES CUT BACK URGENT LOIKE, FOR THE LANE BAIN'T WOIDE 'NUFF FOR 'IS 'AY CARTS, 'E SAYS!



MASKING HIS SULLEN FURY AT THIS SETBACK, THURTELL TURNED TO PROBERT AND SMILED GENTLY.

COME, WILL--WE'VE WALKED FAR ENOUGH--AND I FEAR YOUR GOOD LADY WILL BE WAITING BREAKFAST FOR US. JOVE, THIS COUNTRY AIR FAIR WHETS THE APPETITE!



THEY RETURNED TO THE COTTAGE, TO BE MET BY HUNT, NOW REDUCED TO A PATHETIC FIGURE OF ASHEN FACED FEAR.

O--DID YOU FIND THE PISTOL?

CURSE IT, NO! THERE ARE MEN WORKING IN THE LANE RIGHT WHERE IT IS!

AYE, BUT IT'S WELL HIDDEN IN THOSE LEAVES, AND I DOUBT THOSE OAFS WILL SEE IT. WE'LL GO AGAIN TONIGHT.



BUT UNKNOWN TO THEM, FATE WAS TURNING AGAINST THEM. FOR LATER THAT MORNING, IN THE MAGISTRATE'S OFFICE IN NEARBY ELSTREE...



THAT'S RIGHT, MR. PHILLIPS, LAST NIGHT AT ABOUT TEN O'CLOCK I WAS WALKING HOME WITH MY WIFE NEAR GILLS HILL LANE. IT WAS BRIGHT MOONLIGHT AND I SAW A GIG TURN INTO THE LANE. THERE WERE TWO PASSENGERS, ONE OF THEM WEARING A WHITE BEAVER HAT.



MAGISTRATE PHILLIPS SAT SILENT FOR A LONG MOMENT, HIS SHARP LITTLE EYES NARROWED IN THOUGHT.



MEANWHILE, IN THE COTTAGE THE HOURS DRAGGED TORTURINGLY ON. PROBERT MADE SOME PRETENCE OF BUSINESS—HELPING HIS WIFE—ANYTHING TO KEEP HIS MIND FROM DWELLING ON HIS FEARS. THURTELL LAZED ABOUT, SEEMINGLY CALM AND UNTROUBLED. BUT HUNT, HOWEVER, WAS IN POOR STRAITS. HIS RAW NERVES JANGLED AT EVERY TINY SOUND, AND HIS TREMBLING HANDS FLUTTERED USELESSLY ABOUT HIS LOOSE, WET LIPS. FINALLY HE COULD STAND IT NO LONGER. HE SLIPPED FROM THE COTTAGE, AND RAN WITH STUMBLING, WAVERING STEPS TO THE "FALLOW BUCK" TAVERN IN NEARBY RADLETT. THERE HE SOUGHT THE COURAGE HE SO DESPERATELY NEEDED.

WITH SHAKING HANDS, HUNT LIFTED THE TANKARD TO HIS TWITCHING LIPS—BUT BEFORE IT TOUCHED THEM HE FROZE IN HORROR...



SO IT WERE, ADAM. FARMER NICHOLL'S 'EARD A PISTOL FIRING LAST NOIGHT IN GILLS HILL LANE, AND NOW THEM MAGISTRATE'S CONSTABLES BE SEARCHIN' HIGH AND LOW THERE!

WITH A CHOKING CRY, HUNT DROPPED THE MUG, AND IN INESCAPABLE PANIC, FLED FROM THE INN. FEAR LENT HIM SPEED AND HIS FEET SEEMED HARDLY TO TOUCH THE GROUND. WHEN HE REACHED THE COTTAGE, HE BURST IN ON THURTELL AND PROBERT, PANTING AND BABBLING.



WE'RE RUMBLLED! SOMEBODY HEARD THE SHOT LAST NIGHT AND NOW THE FLATS ARE SEARCHING THE LANE!

THURTELL LUNGED TO HIS FEET, EVERY MUSCLE TAUT, HIS EYES GLITTERING. BUT WHEN HE SPOKE HIS VOICE WAS CALM.

WHAT IF THEY *DO* FIND THE PISTOL? IT MEANS NO THREAT TO US. *TO PROVE MURDER, THERE HAS TO BE A BODY!* AND THEY'LL NOT FIND WEARE! TONIGHT WE'LL FIND HIM ANOTHER RESTING PLACE, SAFER AND FURTHER AWAY!



SO THAT NIGHT THE BODY OF WILLIAM WEARE WAS DREDGED FROM PROBERT'S POND. ONCE AGAIN IT WAS PLACED IN THE GIG AND CARRIED THROUGH THE CONCEALING DARKNESS TO ITS NEW PLACE OF BURIAL.

THE SLOUGH D'YOU CALL IT, PROBERT? WELL, WHATEVER THE NAME 'TIS FITTING BLACK ENOUGH FOR THE HEART OF ITS NEW RESIDENT!



THE NEXT MORNING THE SEARCH, UNSUCCESSFUL THE PREVIOUS DAY, CONTINUED WITH PAINSTAKING THOROUGHNESS. SUDDENLY...



THE MYSTERIOUS HAND OF PROVIDENCE MADE THE NEXT MOVE IN THIS STRANGE GAME OF FATE WITH MEN'S LIVES AND DEATHS AS THE STAKES. THE MAGISTRATE'S WORDS CARRIED TO THE WATCHING HEDGE CUTTER. SILAS STOOD FOR A MOMENT, AS IF IN DOUBT--THEN SHUFFLED FORWARD.



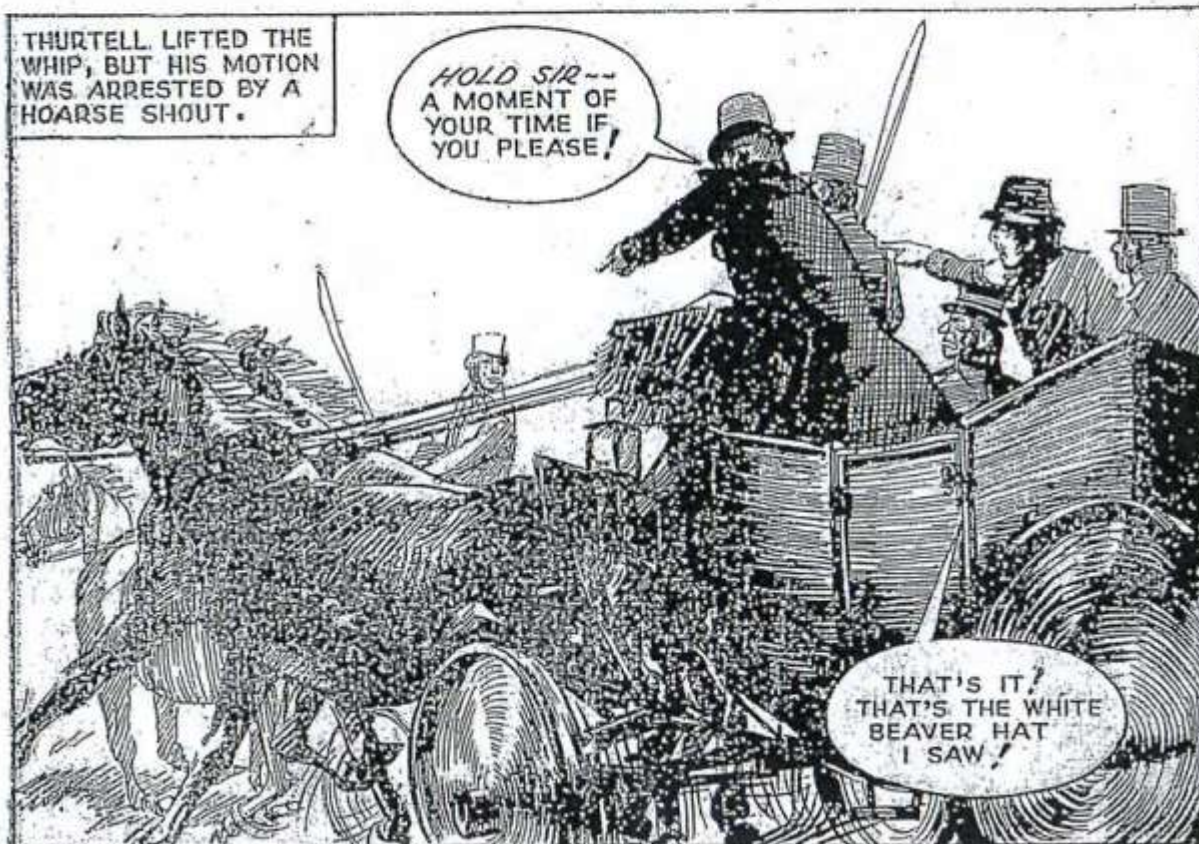
SURE NOW THAT HIS CRIME WOULD NEVER COME TO LIGHT, THURTELL PREPARED TO LEAVE PROBERT'S COTTAGE.



I'LL MEET YOU AT THE "UNICORN" IN LONDON TOMORROW AT TEN O'CLOCK-- UNTIL THEN, STAY IN THE COTTAGE AND NOT A WORD TO ANYONE ABOUT *ANYTHING*!

AYE, MR. THURTELL, WE'LL COME UP IN THE OTHER GIG AND MEET YOU PROMPT AT TEN.

THURTELL LIFTED THE WHIP, BUT HIS MOTION WAS ARRESTED BY A HOARSE SHOUT.



HOLD SIR-- A MOMENT OF YOUR TIME IF YOU PLEASE!

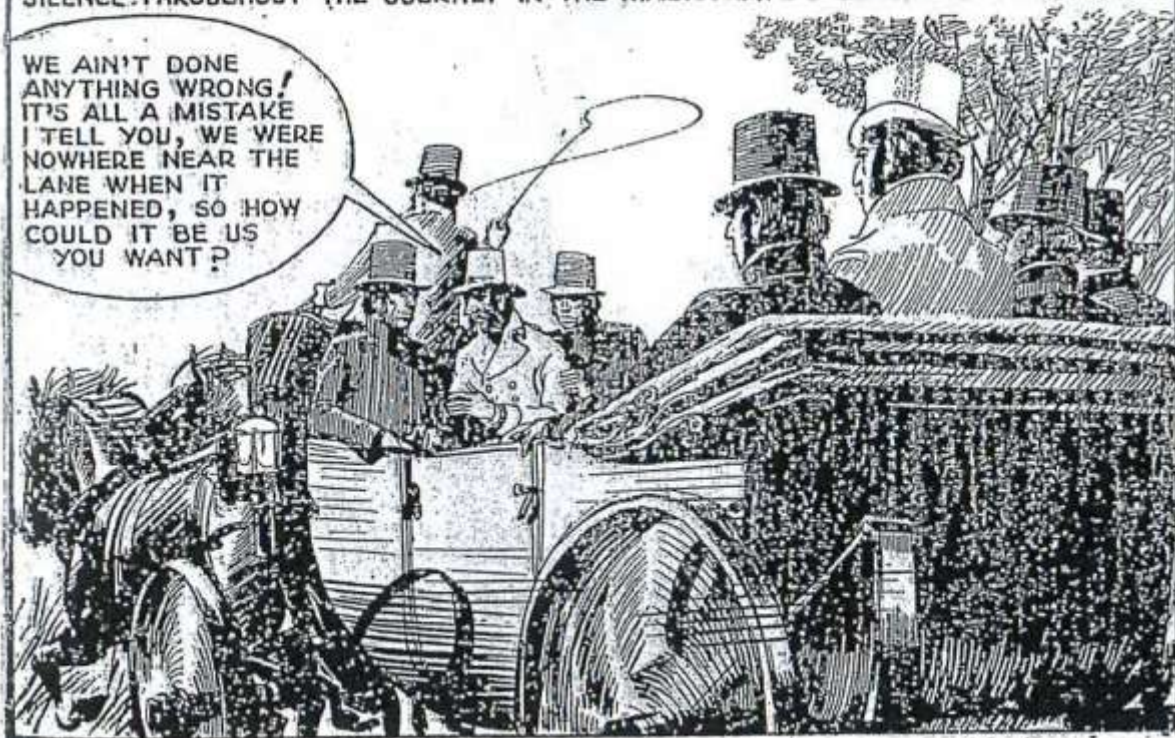
THAT'S IT! THAT'S THE WHITE BEAVER HAT I SAW!

CLIMBING DOWN FROM HIS COACH, THE HEAVILY BUILT MAGISTRATE APPROACHED THE GIG AND LOOKED UP AT THURTELL WITH VEILED EYES. HIS VOICE WAS CALM, YET COMPELLING...

I AM MAGISTRATE PHILLIPS, SIR. THERE IS SUSPICION OF FOUL PLAY IN GILLS HILL LANE TWO NIGHTS SINCE. WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT YOU AND THESE OTHER GENTLEMEN MAY BE ABLE TO HELP OUR ENQUIRIES. *I MUST ASK YOU TO COME TO MY OFFICE IN ELSTREE!*

THERE WAS NOTHING THEY COULD DO BUT COMPLY. THURTELL WAS PALE OF FACE, YET NO FLICKER OF FEAR BETRAYED HIS RACING HEART. HE AND PROBERT, WHO SEEMED TO DRAW STRENGTH FROM HIS COMPANION, MAINTAINED AN UNBROKEN SILENCE THROUGHOUT THE JOURNEY IN THE MAGISTRATE'S COACH. BUT HUNT...

WE AIN'T DONE ANYTHING WRONG! IT'S ALL A MISTAKE I TELL YOU, WE WERE NOWHERE NEAR THE LANE WHEN IT HAPPENED, SO HOW COULD IT BE US YOU WANT?



TWO HOURS LATER, IN HIS CHAMBERS AT ELSTREE, MR. PHILLIPS DREW A WEARY HAND ACROSS HIS TIRED EYES. UNDER SEARCHING AND STRENUOUS QUESTIONING, THURTELL AND PROBERT HAD HOTLY DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE WHATSOEVER OF THE AFFAIR. NOW...

YOU'LL GET NOTHING OUT OF THOSE TWO IF YOU QUESTION THEM FOR A YEAR, SIR. BUT THIS MAN HUNT NOW -- I'VE SEEN OTHERS LIKE HIM. KEEP AT HIM LONG ENOUGH AND HE'LL BLAB ALL RIGHT!

ONLY IF HE HAS SOMETHING TO -- ER -- BLAB ABOUT, MR. SIMONDS. BRING HIM IN.

HUNT SAT FACING THE MAGISTRATE, HIS WATERY EYES FLICKERING ABOUT THE ROOM LIKE THOSE OF A CORNERED MOUSE. HIS REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONS RAPIDLY BECAME ALMOST MEANINGLESS BABBLINGS. FINALLY, PHILLIPS STOOD UP...

ALL RIGHT, MR. HUNT, ALL RIGHT. LET US APPROACH THE PROBLEM DIFFERENTLY NOW. I AM CONVINCED OF FOUL PLAY -- YET I LACK THE FINAL AND CONCLUSIVE PROOF -- A BODY! NOW IF I WERE TOLD WHERE TO FIND IT, MY INFORMANT COULD BE ASSURED OF A COMPLETE PARDON IF HE DID NOT COMMIT THE CRIME HIMSELF!

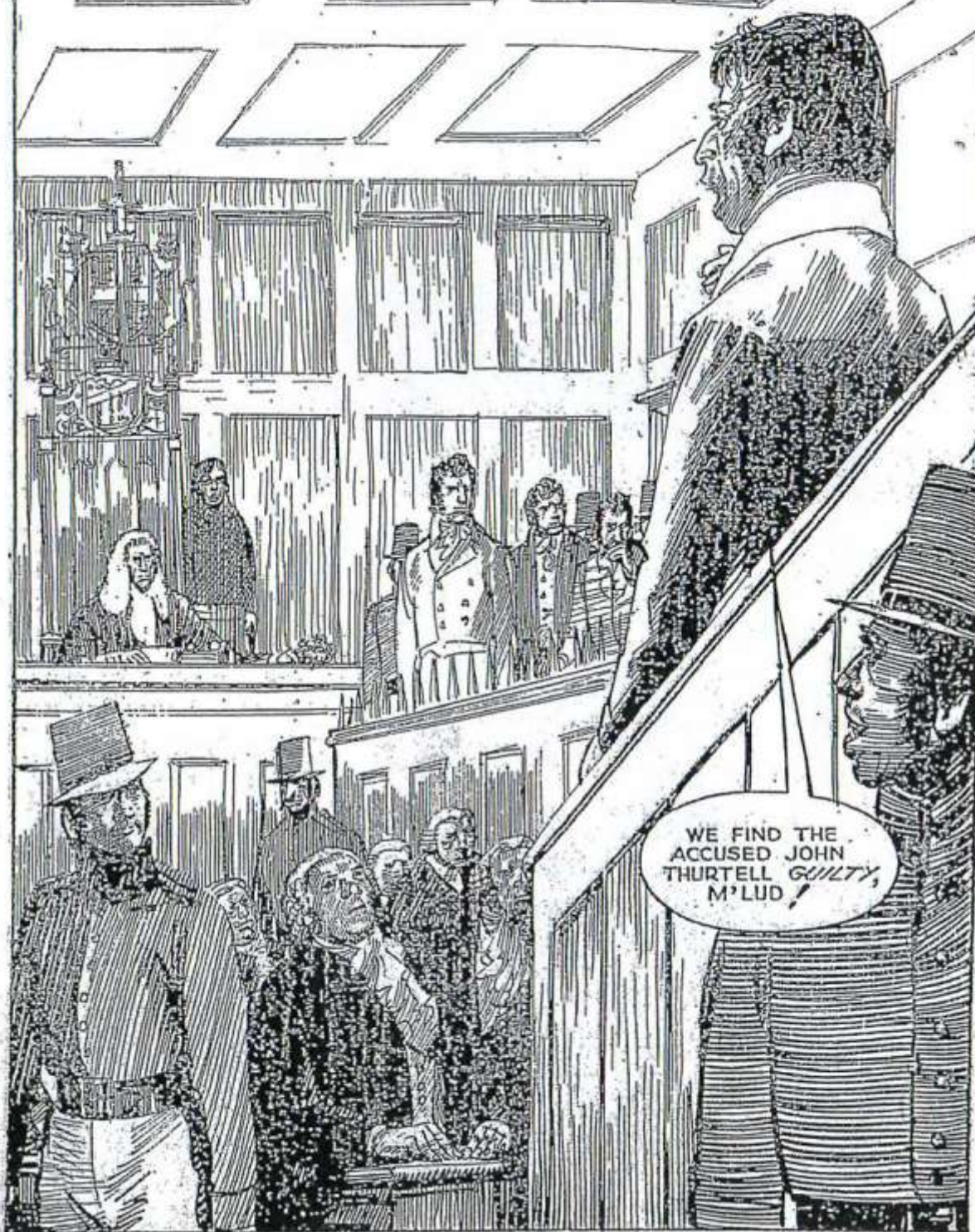
HUNT'S FEAR FEVERED BRAIN SEIZED ON THE WORDS LIKE A LIMPET. YES -- YES -- THAT WAS IT -- A PARDON! HE HAD ONLY TO OPEN HIS MOUTH AND THIS TERRIFYING TORTURE WOULD BE OVER. HE HESITATED, THEN SUDDENLY HIS LAST SPARK OF COURAGE FAILED....



THURTELL, HUNT AND PROBERT WERE PLACED IN IMMEDIATE ARREST WHILE SEARCH WAS MADE OF THE DARK, SLIMY SLOUGH. WHEN IT YIELDED UP ITS GRUESOME CONTENT, RICHARD WEARE-FROM LONDON IDENTIFIED IT.



IT IS NOT PROPOSED HERE TO DELVE INTO THE WORKINGS OF THAT HISTORIC TRIAL WHICH TOOK PLACE SOME TWO WEEKS LATER AT HERTFORD ASSIZES. SUFFICIENT TO SAY, THAT THE MASS OF EVIDENCE PRODUCED BY THE CROWN COUNCIL FOR THE PROSECUTION WAS CONCLUSIVE AGAINST JOHN THURTELL.



THURTELL HEARD THE FINDINGS OF THE JURY IMPASSIVELY AND WITH NO TRACE OF EMOTION ON HIS HARD, STERN FEATURES. THEN THE FOREMAN OF THE JURY WAS ASKED AGAIN TO SPEAK.

WE FIND JOSEPH HUNT *GUILTY* AND WILLIAM PROBERT *NOT GUILTY* M'LUD.



BY SOME ODD QUIRK OF FATE, DOUBT LINGERED IN THE MINDS OF THE JURYMEN CONCERNING PROBERT'S GUILT. THEREFORE, BY ENGLISH JUSTICE HE WAS NOT GUILTY. HE WAS LED FROM THE DOCK SOBBING WITH RELIEF, LEAVING HIS COMPANIONS TO *THE BLACK CAP!*



TWO DAYS OF LIFE WERE LEFT TO THURTELL AND HUNT NOW. HUNT GAVE NOTICE OF APPEAL AGAINST THE SENTENCE AND WAS GRANTED A STAY OF EXECUTION, BUT THURTELL ...

COME, MR. THURTELL, WE CAN AT LEAST TRY TO GET YOU A RETRIAL!



NO, MR. ANDREWS, MY TRIAL WAS FAIR, AND I FEAR THAT I HAVE CAUSED MY DEAR PARENTS AND GOOD FRIENDS PAIN AND MISERY ENOUGH. I AM RESIGNED TO WHAT MUST BE.

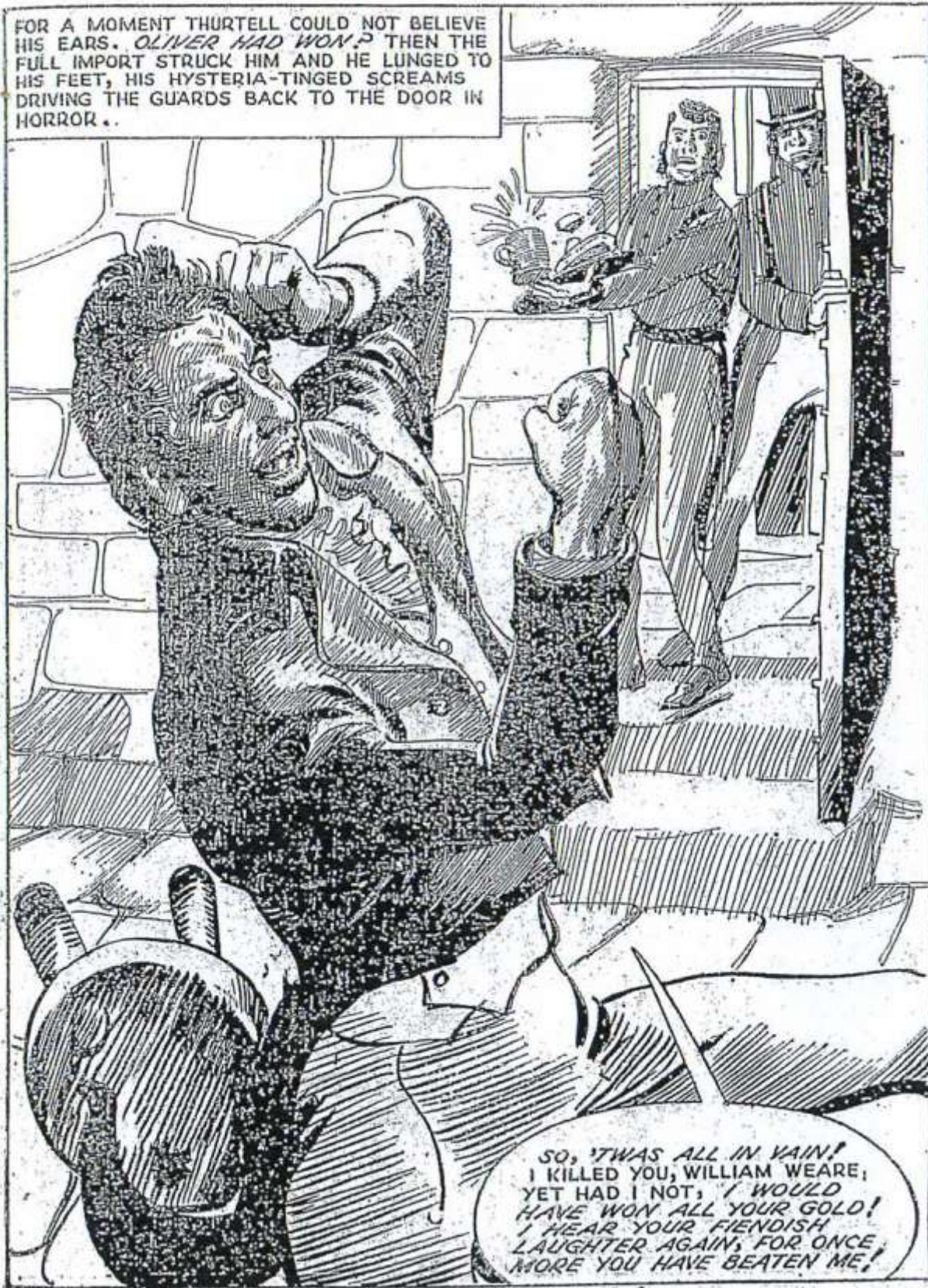
IN THOSE LAST LONG HOURS, JOHN THURTELL PROVED HIMSELF A MODEL PRISONER. HE WAS COURTEOUS AND FRIENDLY TO HIS GUARDS ...

TELL ME, DAN, DID NOT THE FIGHT 'TWINX DICK OLIVER AND SAM CROOK TAKE PLACE YESTERDAY AT ST. ALBANS? HOW DID THE BATTLE GO? I HAD A WAGER ON THE FIGHT WITH BILL WEARE.



AH, MR. THURTELL, I HEARD IT WAS A GOOD FIGHT. OLIVER WON IN THE 44TH ROUND!

FOR A MOMENT THURTELL COULD NOT BELIEVE HIS EARS. *OLIVER HAD WON!* THEN THE FULL IMPORT STRUCK HIM AND HE LUNGED TO HIS FEET, HIS HYSTERIA-TINGED SCREAMS DRIVING THE GUARDS BACK TO THE DOOR IN HORROR..



Jack Thurtell

WHEN THE DAWN OF THURTELL'S LAST DAY CAME, HE WAS ONCE AGAIN THE MAGNIFICENT FIGURE OF COURAGE THAT THE OUTSIDE WORLD KNEW. WHEN THE GOVERNOR OF THE PRISON CAME...



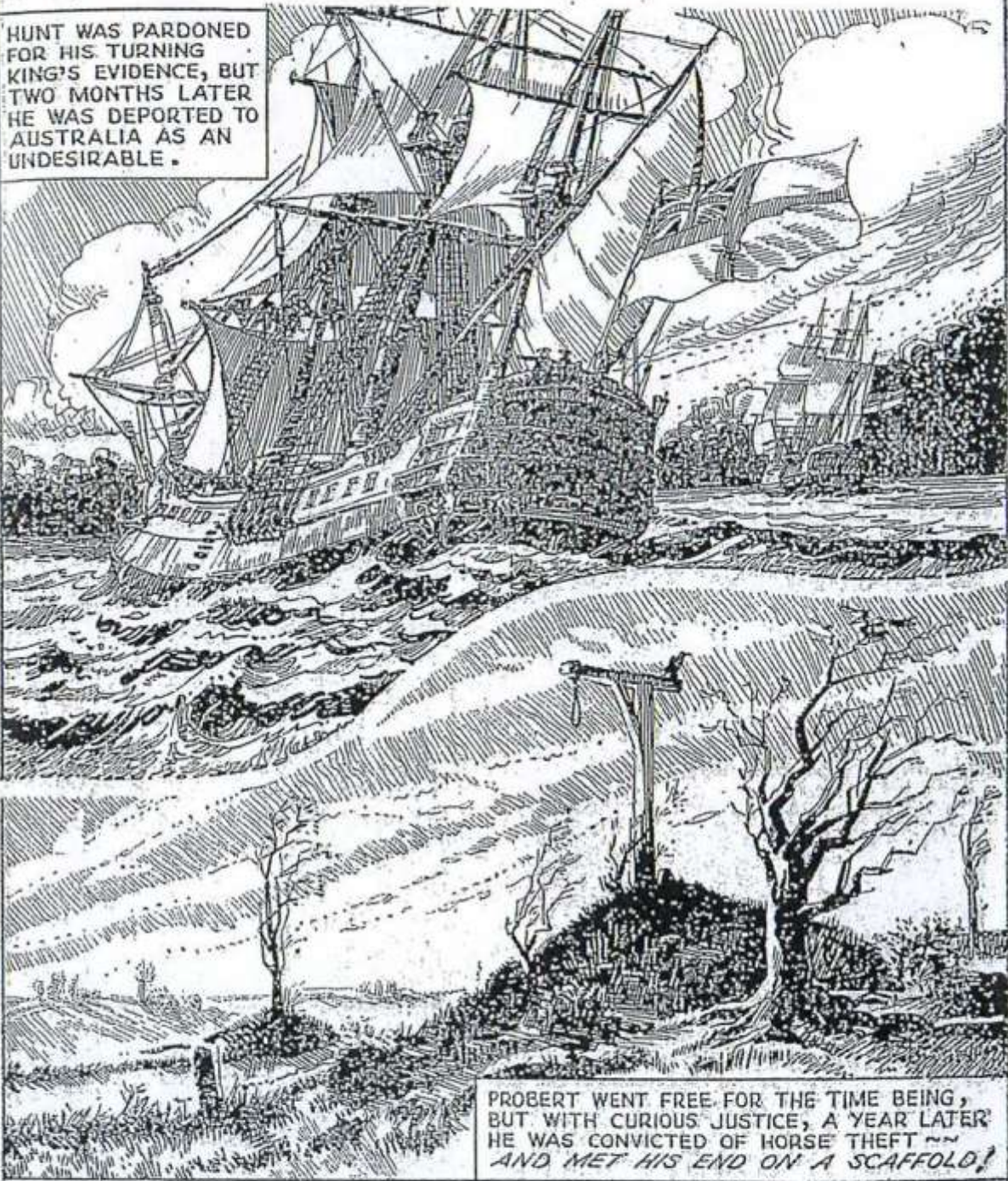
IT IS TIME,
THURTELL!

I AM
READY,
SIR!

... AND HE STRODE FROM THE CELL,
HEAD HELD HIGH, HIS EYES STEADFAST,
ON THAT LONG, FINAL, FATAL WALK!

AND SO ENDED THE TRAGIC STORY OF JOHN THURTELL. HE DIED AS HE HAD LIVED, FEARLESS AND UNFLINCHING. BUT WHAT OF PROBERT AND HUNT?

HUNT WAS PARDONED FOR HIS TURNING KING'S EVIDENCE, BUT TWO MONTHS LATER HE WAS DEPORTED TO AUSTRALIA AS AN UNDESIRABLE.

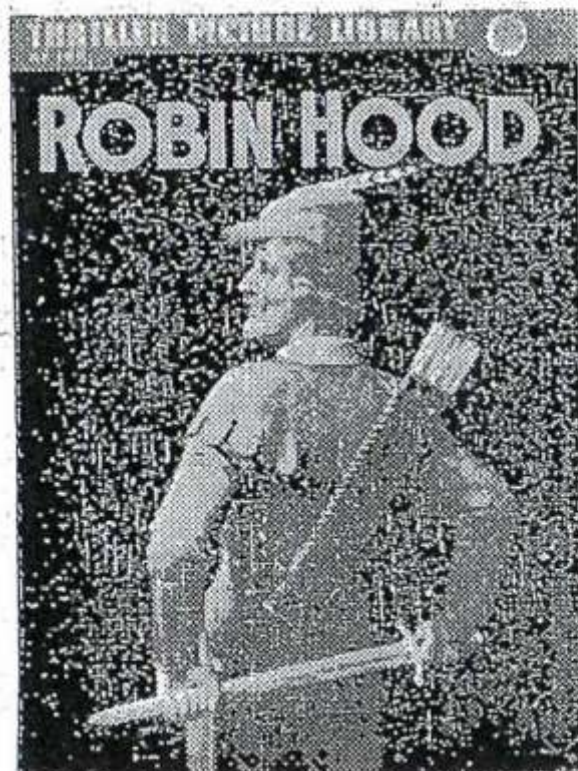
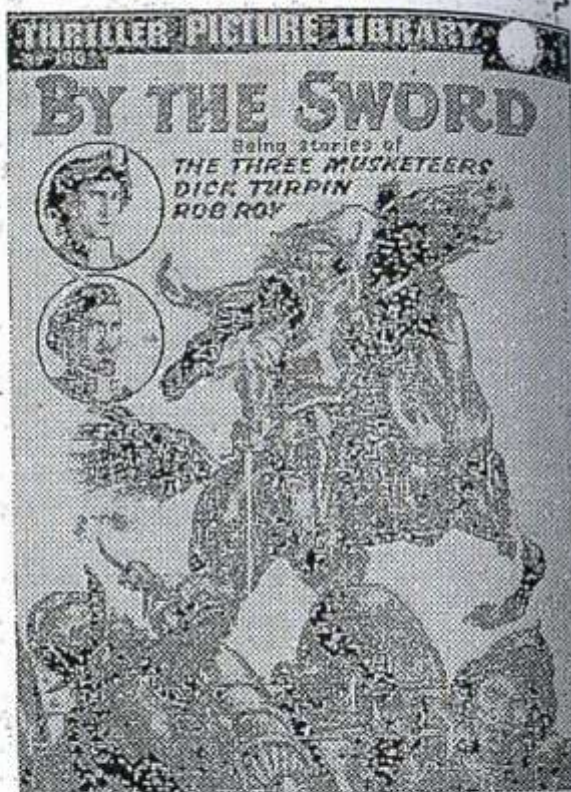
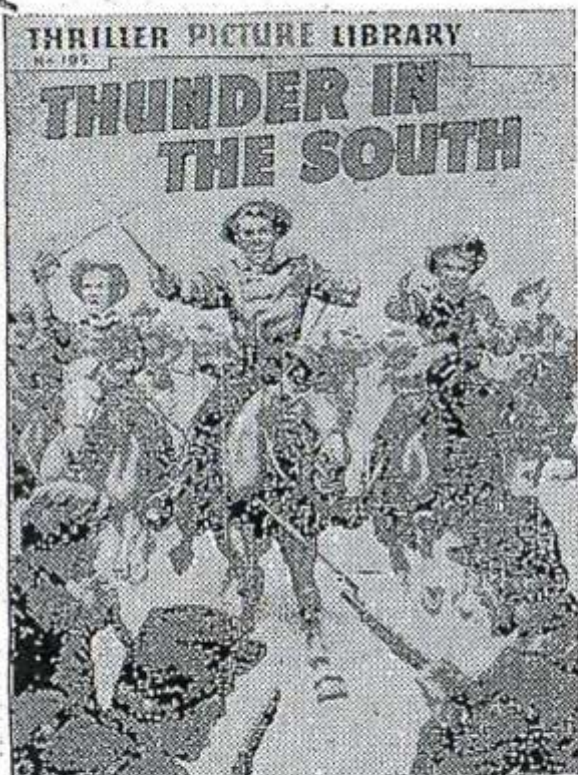


PROBERT WENT FREE FOR THE TIME BEING, BUT WITH CURIOUS JUSTICE, A YEAR LATER HE WAS CONVICTED OF HORSE THEFT AND MET HIS END ON A SCAFFOLD!

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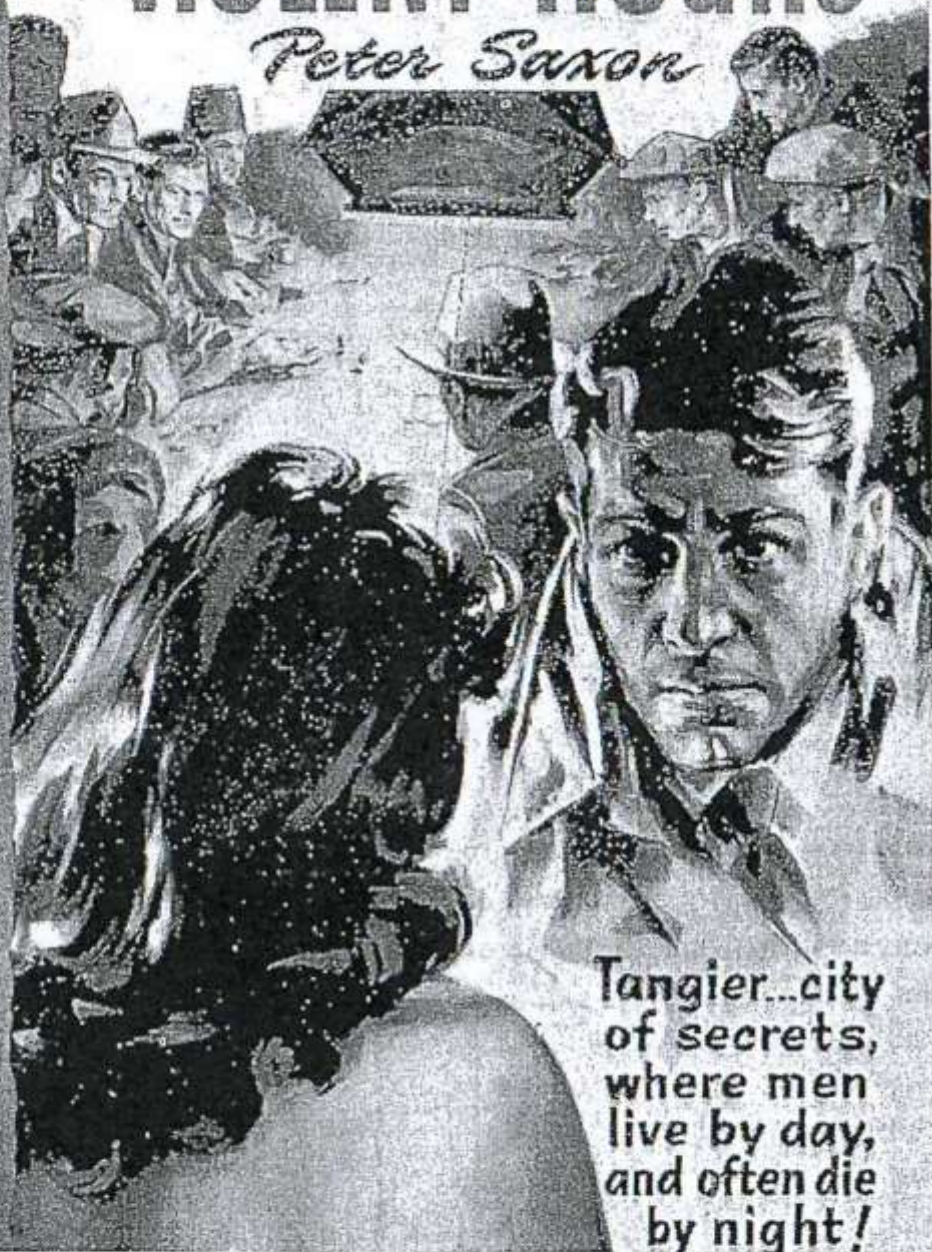
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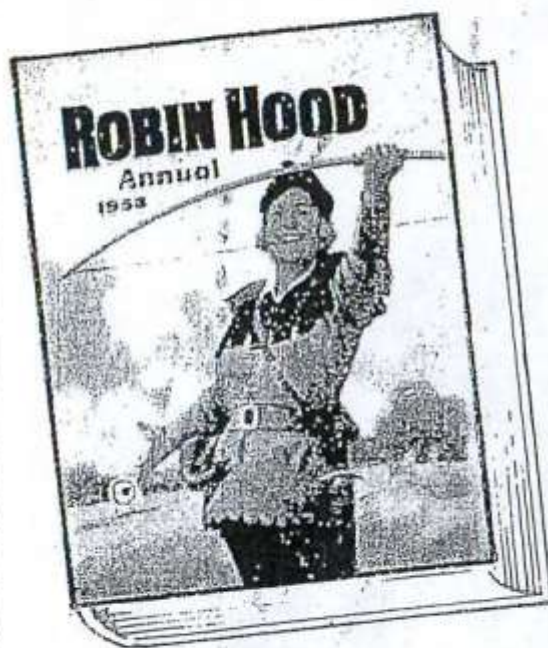
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