



JUST inside the main entrance to the racetrack stood "Blandy" Meyers. It was some little time yet before the first race would be called, and only scattered groups of early arrivals were to be seen in the stands and enclosure.

On the far stretch of the mile course the brush-harrows plodded along slowly. Overhead the blue sky was tempered by a masking haze, and the soft, warm air was laden with the odors that suggested meadow farms and long grassy stretches.

A group of men came through the turnstiles, talking animatedly, their long coats open to the breeze and field-glasses slung about their shoulders.

Just behind sauntered a slim, meek-looking individual, in dress and movements so unostentatious that he would have passed unnoticed in the smallest crowd.

Meyers stirred and, as the noisy half-dozen went by, nodded to the man trailing behind.

"Nothing doing," said Meyers.

"Eh?" questioned the meek-looking man, stopping short. "What's that, Blandy?"

"Nothing doing," repeated Meyers. "Better step outside and tell the boys as they come along."

A sneer touched the face of the meek individual.

"So you have, have you?" he snarled.

"You know I have," replied Meyers steadily. "Didn't you hear it from New Orleans? You'd better pass the word along."

The speaker threw back his coat, disclosing a detective's badge.

For a second the scowling man stood irresolute, and then, as much like a whipped dog as anything else, turned and passed out as he had come.

He was muttering to himself smothered oaths and threats, all directed at Blandy Meyers and his change of heart. He took his stand some distance from the gates and, when three men came pushing along in the wake of a rushing crowd from the trolley, he made a quick sign.

They gathered about him inquiringly.

"Blandy Meyers is inside," said Jim with a jerk of his head toward the entrance. "He says nothing doing."

"Hades!" growled the biggest of the three.

"Blandy!" demanded another with an incredulous raise in his voice. "He was down to New Orleans, and got our goat for fair."

"Well, some one ought to get him." growled the big man with a furtive glance about. "He, the slickest dip on the circuit not a year ago, and now he turns in with the bulls. Say, what do you think of that?"

The expression on the face of the four pickpockets was answer enough. But the Twitter, the biggest of the four, was not going to lose a good afternoon, and he said so.

“Blandy won’t turn against an old pal,” he urged, and added: “If he does I’ll get him. He’s got a white streak—turning in with the cops as he has. I’ll get that streak going and fix him.”

He moved off, followed slowly by his companions.

They made their way to a side gate and were soon inside the park, where they at once separated.

Jim, the man who had been warned, ran into Meyers in the enclosure.

“I’m not working,” he whispered. “And that’s on the level.”

Meyers signed to one of his assistants.

“I’ll have to put some one on you, Jim,” he said. “Stay in, and stay straight. Any funny business and you go—you know where.”

Five minutes later Meyers ran into the Twitter in the betting ring.

“Hello!” said the Twitter, with a smile that hid his hatred.

“Did you see Jim?” inquired Meyers.

“You go to Hades!” whispered the Twitter. “You can’t turn against us after all these years.”

Meyers smiled.

“I did at New Orleans, and I’m going right on. You take my word for it.”

“What’s the price?” demanded the Twitter.

“Nothing doing,” smiled Meyers.

The Twitter shrugged and turned. Inwardly he was so mad he could have wheeled and floored Meyers with a blow. It was bad enough to have detectives to deal with without having one of their number an old partner who knew the game of lifting a roll as well as he did himself.

He edged toward the crowd, watched the first race through sullen eyes, and then turned

back toward the betting ring. Furtively his shifting glance studied the pressing throng. He had his victim marked, but he wanted to be certain that he had dropped Meyers.

Suddenly he moved forward quickly. The man he was watching had turned from the line in front of the bookmaker, and the expression on his face clearly indicated his satisfaction with his judgment.

The Twitter went pushing into the crowd, pressed close to his victim, and turned like a shot to make his getaway.

At that instant Blandy Meyers was by his side. As cleverly as the trick had been done, Meyers had not been fooled. The Twitter followed the detective submissively, but in his heart there was murder.

II

IN the underworld Blandy Meyers’s change of heart was common talk, and all doubt of his sincerity of purpose was dispelled with the Twitter’s arrest and conviction.

It was plain to be seen that the Twitter had been dead wrong in saying that Blandy had a white streak. If he had been a man to back down he certainly would have done so before the trial, for he had been warned that he would “get his” if he pushed the case against his old partner.

McGuire, a power among the Twitter’s friends, knew just what had been said to Meyers. He got it from the Twitter himself just before the latter was sent up.

“I told Blandy my own self,” the Twitter told McGuire. “I sent for him, and he came. So help me, I told him if he didn’t back down and slip me by I’d get him when I’d done my bit. I’d have taken mine, and no kick, if it had been a bull that got me who wasn’t one of us before. But Blandy Meyers! Not on your life! He can; but if he does—well, he knows when I’ve done my bit I’ll get him.”

As the Twitter's personal warning failed to stop Meyers, the underworld took council among its numbers. Two more arrests settled the matter, and Meyers found his time rather heavy on his hands. He followed the horses from city to city, but few familiar faces bothered him; it was only the new ones that he was forced to watch out for.

Back in New Orleans with the meet he found a letter one night at his hotel. It was from McGuire in New York, and was very brief. It ran:

Sam Patter is just out. The Twitter sent word by him to me. I was to let you know that the Twitter hasn't forgotten. When he does his bit he'll get you,

McG.

Meyers laughed, and tearing up the dirty piece of paper upon which the threat was written, tossed it into the basket and forgot the matter.

The next day, as he stood watching the crowd flood in through the gates, he halted a man whose face was familiar.

"Oh, Lord!" growled the fellow. "You here, Blandy?" And then: "Say, I got a message for you. It's passed along. The Twitter will get you when he's done his bit."

That was the beginning.

Meyers came back to New York and took up quarters with his sister in Brooklyn.

The second night after his arrival he found a note on the hall table when he returned home. It had been left by a man who failed to give his name. Meyers opened it and read, scrawled across the single sheet, this message:

The Twitter says when he does his bit he'll get you.

Again Meyers laughed and tore up the warning, while he went to play with his two

nieces, awaiting dinner.

The Twitter was a poor fool to think he could scare him in any such a way. He wouldn't have thought of trying to "get" his old partner by such a trick; the Twitter should know it wouldn't work with him.

Did the man think to drive him back to his old life? Not much. It was far better to have a decent home to come to, and now and then an evening to play with his nieces. He could walk the streets now and look a man in the eyes, not study him furtively to find if he was worth jostling in a crowded car. The Twitter was a fool and 'way off his guess.

A week later a knock came at the door one evening, and Meyers answered it, for his sister was busy in the kitchen.

The man on the steps gave a quick nod.

"I'm just down," he said. "I saw the Twitter before I left. When he gets done his bit he says to tell you he'll get you."

Meyers slammed the door closed. He ate little supper that night, and the next morning he went out of his way to learn just when the Twitter's time would be up. He was astounded to find that, allowing for good behavior, there were only three months left.

He might have saved himself the trouble, for the next day at luncheon a man passed his table and laid a slip of paper beside his plate. Meyers hesitated. Then he turned the paper over and read:

Three months more and then the Twitter will have done his bit. Then he gets you.

When he reached home late that evening, after a long day's work, he found a note from his sister. He had been called on the telephone a number of times. She gave the number.

He went into the hall and took down the receiver. When he got the connection a voice demanded to know if it was Blandy.

A queer feeling came into his throat as he answered, for it was only his old pals who

knew him by his nickname.

"Well, the Twitter says—" began the speaker.

Meyers crashed the receiver onto the hook.

In the morning he hunted up the number, only to find it was a saloon. He could get no information concerning the man who had rung him up, and he harried away, angry at himself for having taken the trouble to follow the matter. As he crossed the street a boy passed him an envelope. He started to refuse it and then, certain he was being watched, he tore open the envelope, read the same message which he was coming to expect at every turn, and with a forced laugh tore up the sheet. He realized that he must by no sign allow his persecutors to think that their persistence was beginning to get on his nerves.

Before the day was over he had heard the warning a full dozen times. In the week that followed there was no let-up; the message reached him again and again, and the only variety in it was the statement of time before the Twitter would be done his bit. "In twenty-eight," or "twenty-seven," or "twenty-six"—came the warning.

Meyers got a week off and took a car to Chicago. On the train and for one day after he arrived he heard nothing from the Twitter. On the second day an unstamped envelope was in his box at the hotel, and when he opened it he read across the face of the single sheet:

When I've done my bit I'll get you.

He went to his room with the perspiration standing out upon his brow in huge drops. In ten minutes the telephone rang, and when he took down the receiver he heard what he knew he would hear.

He took the night train for New York, and as soon as he arrived he hunted up McGuire.

"Mac," he said sullenly, "The Twitter isn't in on all this alone. You are helping him.

Now, cut it. It won't do you one bit of good, for I ain't afraid of the Twitter or you. If he does get out and tries—tries to—to get me, I'll shoot quick. I've got some of those notes you've been sending along, and there's evidence enough if I have to do him. Take that, Mac, and cut it."

McGuire, short, thick-necked, and red, thumbed his armpits and squinted at Meyers. He didn't trouble to lower his chair to its four legs.

"Got your goat, Blandy," he grinned.

"Got nothing!" thundered Meyers. "But you cut it out!"

McGuire's sandy brow lifted with a decidedly unpleasant expression to his face.

"Some of the boys come along and ask where you are. I ask what they wants to see a fellow for that gives us the double-cross and is a dirty, low-down quitter. Well"—with a shrug—"they all wants just to tell you that when the Twitter's done his bit he'll get you, and I can't stop 'em from doing it, can I?"

Meyers ground his teeth as he heard that same message from the thick lips of the red-faced crook before him. He was tempted to plant his fist between the little eyes and take some measure of revenge for the batting he was receiving. But he held steady, and with an attempt at indifference hurried away, only to meet with the same message again at luncheon.

On his arrival home a note lay on the hall table, as so many others had lain in the past days. He started to pass it by, but a fascination, a desire, a something stopped him. He tore it open to face the warning that had dogged him day and night,

In the morning he found himself wondering how many times during the day he would hear those words or read them upon some dirty bit of paper. At night he slunk home conjecturing how many times he would be called to the telephone or summoned to the

door. He had no rest in the daytime, his evenings were made hideous, and his nights were beginning to grow sleepless.

So the days passed, and he suddenly realized that each day he heard that warning five times oftener than the day before. And then came the message one morning: "Tomorrow the Twitter does his bit and then he gets you."

How soon it would come; but before it came he must hear that same warning time upon time—thirty times if he remembered the number that it had been given him the day just gone.

Thirty!

He or his tormentors had lost count. At his office lay a pile of letters, and he opened half a dozen, a third of the lot, before he realized that each, though addressed in a different hand, contained the same message.

On the street the words were whispered to him and the whisperer gone before he could turn in the crowd.

The clang of the street-cars, the rattle of the Elevated, the ramble of the subway, the shout of an angry driver, or the warning call of a chauffeur made him start and, with lifted head, like an animal scenting danger, harken to hear if it sounded that message. And as he caught his breath and laughed nervously, finding the noises, of the city but common sound, he caught a whisper:

"When the Twitter does his bit he'll get you—to-morrow."

It seemed to come from nowhere, for none about him appeared to have spoken.

He boarded a train at the bridge, and as he sank into his seat a man passed and was lost. But on Meyers's lap lay an envelope. No need to open it. No need?

Still, he tore the envelope apart, and there lay the message.

An Elevated on the other side would take him home, and once there he would be safe,

for he need not harken to the telephone's ring. He dropped into his seat—again a shadow of a man, no more, went by, and a letter lay under his hand.

With grinding wheels that hummed the insistent words the train rolled into the first station. It started on with creaks and groans that whispered: "Twitter! Twitter! Twitter!"

Once more from the crowd that blocked the aisles came a hand, a letter, and the warning had been passed again.

At the third, fourth, and fifth stop the same thing was repeated, and Meyers was on his feet, white and red by turns. At the sixth stop he pushed to the platform, and after him floated a jeering taunt:

"When the Twitter does his bit he'll get you—to-morrow!"

As he raced down the steps and sprang into a cab the message was shouted aloud.

Yet, was it called?

Perhaps it was that ever-repeating, beating, rhythmic run of words that his own brain was whispering over and over until he himself seemed to shout with a maddening; insistency:

"When the Twitter does his bit he'll get you—to-morrow!"

III.

TWO men meet in a low, ill-smelling room.

One, red-faced and narrow-eyed, tilted back in his chair, his thumbs in his vest-holes.

"Seen that, Twitter?" said McGuire, nodding toward the paper on the table.

The burly but sickly white man, nodded. Yet he picked up the sheet and read aloud the article, for it seemed to please him.

He read very slowly, from the heading to the last words which ended the account with the assertion that there was no apparent reason for the suicide.

"I guess," said McGuire, with a grin.

The Twitter nodded and called for a drink.