George Karnoffsky had done a beautiful job of printing.

"Claude," he said, "you like?"

"It's marvellous."

"It's the best I could do for you. It's like in the war when I would see soldiers going off perhaps to get killed and all the time I would want to be giving them things and doing things for them." He was beginning to laugh agai n, so I said, "We'd better be going now. Have you got large envelopes for the se cards?"

"Everything is here. And you can pay me when the money starts coming in. " That seemed to set him off worse than ever and he collapsed into his chair , giggling like a fool. George and I hurried out of the shop into the street , into the cold snow-falling afternoon.

We almost ran the distance back to our room and on the way up I borrow ed a Manhattan telephone directory from the public telephone in the hall. We found 'Womberg, William S,' without any trouble and while I read out th e address--somewhere up in the East Nineties--George wrote it on one of th e envelopes.

'Gimple, Mrs Ella H,' was also in the book and we addressed an envelope to her as well. "We'll just send to Womberg and Gimple today," I said. "We haven't really got started yet. Tomorrow we'll send a dozen."

"We'd better catch the next post," George said.

"We'll deliver them by hand," I said. "Now, at once. The sooner they ge t them the better. Tomorrow might be too late. They won't be half so angry tomorrow as they are today. People are apt to cool off through the night. S ee here," I said, "you go ahead and deliver those two cards right away. Whi le you're doing that I'm going to snoop around the town and try to find out something about the habits of Lionel Pantaloon. See you back here later in the evening... At about nine o'clock that evening I returned and found Geo rge lying on his bed smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee.

"I delivered them both; he said. "Just slipped them through the letter-b oxes and rang the bells and beat it up the street. Womberg had a huge house, a huge white house. How did you get on?"

"I went to see a man I know who works in the sports section of the Daily Mirror. He told me all."

"What did he tell you?"

"He said Pantaloon's movements are more or less routine. He operates at night, but wherever he goes earlier in the evening, he always--and this is t he important point--he always finishes up at the Penguin Club. He gets there round about midnight and stays until two or twothirty. That's when his legm en bring him all the dope."

"That's all we want to know," George said happily.

"It's too easy."

"Money for old rope."

There was a full bottle of blended whisky in the cupboard and George fe tched it out. For the next two hours we sat upon our beds drinking the whis ky and making wonderful and complicated plans for the development of our or ganization. By eleven o'clock we were employing a staff of fifty, including twelve famous pugilists, and our offices were in Rockefeller Center. Towar ds midnight we had obtained control over all columnists and were dictating their daily columns to them by telephone from our headquarters, taking care to insult and infuriate at least twenty rich persons in one part of the co untry or another every day. We were immensely wealthy and George had a Brit ish Bentley, I had five Cadillacs. George kept practising telephone talks w ith Lionel Pantaloon. "That you, Pantaloon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, listen here. I think your column stinks today. It's lousy."

"I'm very sorry, sir. I'll try to do better tomorrow."

"Damn right you'll do better, Pantaloon. Matter of fact we've been thinki ng about getting someone else to take over."

"But please, please sir, just give me another chance."

"OK, Pantaloon, but this is the last. And by the way, the boys are puttin g a rattlesnake in your car tonight, on behalf of Mr Hiram C. King, the soap manufacturer. Mr King will be watching from across the street so don't forget to act scared when you see it."

"Yes, sir, of course, sir. I won't forget, sir..

When we finally went to bed and the light was out, I could still hear Geo rge giving hell to Pantaloon on the telephone.

The next morning we were both woken up by the church clock on the corn er striking nine. George got up and went to the door to get the papers and when he came back he was holding a letter in his hand.

"Open it!" I said.

He opened it and carefully unfolded a single sheet of thin notepaper.

"Read it!" I shouted.

He began to read it aloud, his voice low and serious at first but rising gradually to a high, almost hysterical shout of triumph as the full meaning of the letter was revealed to him. It said: 'Your methods appear curiously unorthodox. At the same time anything you do to that scoundrel has my approv al. So go ahead. Start with Item 1, and if you are successful IT be only too glad to give you an order to work right on through the list. Send the bill to me. William S. Womberg.'

I recollect that in the excitement of the moment we did a kind of dance around the room in our pyjamas, praising Mr Womberg in loud voices and sho uting that we were rich. George turned somersaults on his bed and it is pos sible that I did the same.

"When shall we do it?" he said. "Tonight?"

I paused before replying. I refused to be rushed. The pages of history are filled with the names of great men who have come to grief by permitting themselves to make hasty decisions in the excitement of a moment. I put on my dressing-gown, lit a cigarette and began to pace up and down the room. "There is no hurry," I said. "Womberg's order can be dealt with in due course. But first of all we must send out today's cards."

I dressed quickly, we went out to the newsstand across the street, bought one copy of every daily paper there was and returned to our room. The next two hours was spent in reading the columnists' columns, and in the end we had a list of eleven people--eight men and three women--all of whom had been insulted in one way or another by one of the columnists that morning. Things were going well. We were working smoothly. It took us only another half hour to look up the addresses of the insulted ones--two we couldn't find --and to address the envelopes.

In the afternoon we delivered them, and at about six in the evening we got back to our room, tired but triumphant. We made coffee and we fried hamburgers and we had supper in bed. Then we re-read Womberg's letter aloud to each other many many times.

"What's he doing he's giving us an order for six thousand one hundred dollars," George said. "Items 1 to 5 inclusive."

"It's not a bad beginning. Not bad for the first day. Six thousand a day works out at... let me see... it's nearly two million dollars a year, not counting Sundays. A million each. It's more than Betty Grable."

"We are very wealthy people," George said. He smiled, a slow and wondrous smile of pure contentment.

"In a day or two we will move to a suite of rooms at the St Regis."

"I think the Waldorf," George said.

"All right, the Waldorf. And later on we might as well take a house."

"One like Womberg's?"

"All right. One like Womberg's. But first," I said, "we have work to do. Tomorrow we shall deal with Pantaloon. We will catch him as he comes out of the Penguin Club. At two-thirty a. m. we will be waiting for him, and when he comes out into the street you will step forward and punch him once, hard, right upon the point of the nose as per contract."

"It will be a pleasure," George said. "It will be a real pleasure. But how do we get away? Do we run?"

"We shall hire a car for an hour. We have just enough money left for that, and I shall be sitting at the wheel with the engine running, not ten yards away, and the door will be open and when you've punched him you'll just jump back into the car and we'll be gone."

"It is perfect. I shall punch him very hard." George paused. He clenched

his right fist and examined his knuckles. Then he smiled again and he said sl owly, "This nose of his, is it not possible that it will afterwards be so muc h blunted that it will no longer poke well into other people's business?"

"It is quite possible," I answered, and with that happy thought in our min ds we switched out the lights and went early to sleep.

The next morning I was woken by a shout and I sat up and saw George sta nding at the foot of my bed in his pyjamas, waving his arms. "Look!" he sho uted, "there are four! There are four!" I looked, and indeed there were fou r letters in his hand.

"Open them. Quickly, open them."

The first one he read aloud: "Dear Vengeance Is Mine Inc., That's the bes t proposition I've had in years. Go right ahead and give Mr Jacob Swinski the rattlesnake treatment (Item 4). But I'll be glad to pay double if you'll for get to extract the poison from its fangs. Yours Gertrude Porter Van dervelt. PS You'd better insure the snake. That guy's bite carries more poison than th e rattler's."

George read the second one aloud: "My cheque for $500 is made out and l ies before me on my desk. The moment I receive proof that you have punched Lionel Pantaloon hard on the nose, it will be posted to you, I should prefe r a fracture, if possible. Yours etc. Wilbur H. Gollogly."

George read the third one aloud: "In my present frame of mind and again st my better judgement, I am tempted to reply to your card and to request t hat you deposit that scoundrel Walter Kennedy upon Fifth Avenue dressed onl y in his underwear. I make the proviso that there shall be snow on the grou nd at the time and that the temperature shall be sub-zero. H. Gresham."

The fourth one he also read aloud: "A good hard sock on the nose for Pa ntaloon is worth five hundred of mine or anybody else's money. I should lik e to watch. Yours sincerely, Claudia Calthorpe Hines."

George laid the letters down gently, carefully upon the bed. For a while there was silence. We stared at each other, too astonished, too happy to spea k. I began to calculate the value of those four orders in terms of money.

"That's five thousand dollars worth," I said softly.

Upon George's face there was a huge bright grin. "Claude," he said, "s hould we not move now to the Waldorf?"

"Soon," I answered, "but at the moment we have no time for moving. We have not even time to send out fresh cards today. We must start to execu te the orders we have in hand. We are overwhelmed with work."

"Should we not engage extra staff and enlarge our organization?"

"Later," I said. "Even for that there is no time today. Just think what w e have to do. We have to put a rattlesnake in Jacob Swinski's car... we have to dump Walter Kennedy on Fifth Avenue in his underpants... we have to punch Pantaloon on the nose... let me see... yes, for three different people we hav

e to punch Pantaloon. ¥ I stopped. I closed my eyes. I sat still. Again I bec ame conscious of a small clear stream of inspiration flowing into the tissues of my brain. "I have it!" I shouted. "I have it! I have it! Three birds with one stone! Three customers with one punch!"

"How?"

"Don't you see? We only need to punch Pantaloon once and each of the th ree customers... Womberg, Gollogly and Claudia Hines... will think it's bei ng done specially for him or her."

"Say it again." I said it again.

"It's brilliant."

"It's common-sense. And the same principle will apply to the others. The rattlesnake treatment and the others can wait until we have more orders. Pe rhaps in a few days we will have ten orders for rattlesnakes in Swinski's ca r. Then we will do them all in one go."

"It's wonderful."

"This evening then," I said, "we will handle Pantaloon. But first we mu st hire a car. Also we must send telegrams, one to Womberg, one to Gollogly and one to Claudia Hines, telling them where and when the punching will ta ke place."

We dressed rapidly and went out.

In a dirty silent little garage down on East 9th Street we managed to hi re a car, a 1934 Chevrolet, eight dollars for the evening. We then sent thre e telegrams, each one identical and cunningly worded to conceal its true mea ning from inquisitive people: 'Hope to see you outside Penguin Club two-thir ty a.m. Regards V. I. Mine."

"There is one thing more," I said. "It is essential that you should be d isguised. Pantaloon, or the doorman, for example, must not be able to identi fy you afterwards. You must wear a false moustache."

"What about you?"

"Not necessary. I'll be sitting in the car. They won't see me."

We went to a children's toy-shop and we bought for George a magnificen t black moustache, a thing with long pointed ends, waxed and stiff and shi ning, and when he held it up against his face he looked exactly like the K aiser of Germany. The man in the shop also sold us a tube of glue and he s howed us how the moustache should be attached to the upper lip. "Going to have fun with the kids?" he asked, and George said, "Absolutely."

All was now ready, but there was a long time to wait. We had three dolla rs left between us and with this we bought a sandwich each and went to a mov ie. Then, at eleven o'clock that evening, we collected our car and in it we began to cruise slowly through the streets of New York waiting for the time to pass.

"You'd better put on your moustache so as you get used to it."

We pulled up under a street lamp and I squeezed some glue on to George's upper lip and fixed on the huge black hairy thing with its pointed ends. Then we drove on. It was cold in the car and outside it was beginning to snow again. I could see a few small snowflakes falling through the beams of the car-lights. George kept saying, "How hard shall I hit him?" and I kept answering, "Hit him as hard as you can, and on the nose. It must be on the nose because that is a part of the contract. Everything must be done right. Our clients may be watching."

At two in the morning we drove slowly past the entrance to the Penguin Club in order to survey the situation. "I will park there," I said, "just past the entrance in that patch of dark. But I will leave the door open for you."

We drove on. Then George said, "What does he look like? How do I know it's him?"

"Don't worry," I answered. "I've thought of that," and I took from my pocket a piece of paper and handed it to' him. "You take this and fold it up small and give it to the doorman and tell him to see it gets to Pantaloon quickly. Act as though you are scared to death and in an awful hurry. It's a hundred to one that Pantaloon will come out. No columnist could resist that message."

On the paper I had written: 'I am a worker in Soviet Consulate. Come to the door very quickly please I have something to tell but come quickly as I am in danger, I cannot come in to you.'

"You see," I said, "your moustache will make you look like a Russian. All Russians have big moustaches."

George took the paper and folded it up very small and held it in his fingers. It was nearly half past two in the morning now and we began to drive towards the Penguin Club.

"You all set?" I said.

"Yes."

"We're going in now. Here we come. I'll park just past the entrance... here. Hit him hard," I said, and George opened the door and got out of the car. I closed the door behind him but I leant over and kept my hand on the handle so I could open it again quick, and I let down the window so I could watch. I kept the engine ticking over.

I saw George walk swiftly up to the doorman who stood under the red and white canopy which stretched out over the sidewalk. I saw the doorman turn and look down at George and I didn't like the way he did it. He was a tall proud man dressed in a magenta-coloured uniform with gold buttons and gold shoulders and a broad white stripe down each magenta trouser-leg. Also he wore white gloves and he stood there looking proudly down at George, frowning, pressing his lips together hard. He was looking at George's moustache and I thought Oh my God we have overdone it. We have over-disguised him. He'

s going to know it's false and he's going to take one of the long pointed e nds in his fingers and he'll give it a tweak and it'll come off. But he did n't. He was distracted by George's acting, for George was acting well. I co uld see him hopping about, clasping and unclasping his hands, swaying his b ody and shaking his head, and I could hear him saying, "Plees plees plees y ou must hurry. It is life and teth. Plees plees take it kvick to Mr Pantalo on." His Russian accent was not like any accent I had heard before, but all the same there was a quality of real despair in his voice.

Finally, gravely, proudly, the doorman said, "Give me the note." George gave it to him and said, "Tank you, tank you, but say it is urgent," and t he doorman disappeared inside. In a few moments he returned and said, "It's being delivered now." George paced nervously up and down. I waited, watchi ng the door. Three or four minutes elapsed. George wrung his hands and said , "Vere is he? Vere is he? Plees to go and see if he is not coming!"

"What's the matter with you?" the doorman said. Now he was looking at George's moustache again.

"It is life and teth! Mr Pantaloon can help! He must come!"

"Why don't you shut up," the doorman said, but he opened the door agai n and he poked his head inside and I heard him saying something to someone .

To George he said, "They say he's coming now.', A moment later the doo r opened and Pantaloon himself, small and dapper, stepped out. He paused b y the door, looking quickly from side to side like an inquisitive ferret. The doorman touched his cap and pointed at George. I heard Pantaloon say, "Yes, what did you want?"

George said, "plees, dis vay a leetle so as novone can hear," and he le d Pantaloon along the pavement, away from the doorman and towards the car.

"Come on, now," Pantaloon said. "What is it you want?"

Suddenly George shouted "Look!" and he pointed up the street. Pantaloon turned his head and as he did so George swung his right arm and he hit pan taloon plumb on the point of the nose. I saw George leaning forward on the punch, all his weight behind it, and the whole of Pantaloon appeared someho w to lift slightly off the ground and to float backwards for two or three f eet until the fa•ade of the Penguin Club stopped him. All this happened ver y quickly, and then George was in the car beside me and we were off and I c ould hear the doorman blowing a whistle behind us.

"We've done it!" George gasped. He was excited and out of breath. "I hi t him good! Did you see how good I hit him!"

It was snowing hard now and I drove fast and made many sudden turning s and I knew no one would catch us in this snowstorm.

"Son of a bitch almost went through the wall I hit him so hard."

"Well done, George," I said. "Nice work, George."

"And did you see him lift? Did you see him lift right up off the ground?"

"Womberg will be pleased," I said.

"And Gollogly, and the Hines woman."

"They'll all be pleased," I said. "Watch the money coming in."

"There's a car behind us!" George shouted. "It's following us! It's right on our tail! Drive like mad!"

"Impossible," I said. "They couldn't have picked us up already. It's just another car going somewhere." I turned sharply to the right.

"He's still with us," George said. "Keep turning. We'll lose him soon."

"How the hell can we lose a police-car in a nineteen thirty-four Chev," I said. "I'm going to stop."

"Keep going!" George shouted. "You're doing fine."

"I'm going to stop," I said. "It'll only make them mad if we go on."

George protested fiercely but I knew it was no good and I pulled in to the side of the road. The other car swerved out and went past us and skidded to a standstill in front of us.

"Quick," George said. "Let's beat it." He had the door open and he was ready to run.

"Don't be a fool," I said. "Stay where you are. You can't get away now."

A voice from outside said, "All right boys, what's the hurry?"

"No hurry," I answered. "We're just going home."

"Yea?"

"Oh yes, we're just on our way home now."

The man poked his head in through the window on my side, and he looked at me, then at George, then at me again.

"It's a nasty night," George said. "We're just trying to reach home before the streets get all snowed up."

"Well," the man said, "you can take it easy. I just thought I'd like to give you this right away." He dropped a wad of banknotes on to my lap. "I'm Gollogly," he added, "Wilbur H. Gollogly," and he stood out there in the snow grinning at us, stamping his feet and rubbing his hands to keep them warm. "I got your wire and I watched the whole thing from across the street. You did a fine job. I'm paying you boys double. It was worth it. Funniest thing I ever seen. Goodbye boys. Watch your steps. They'll be after you now. Get out of town if I were you. Goodbye." And before we could say anything, he was gone.

When finally we got back to our room I started packing at once.

"You crazy?" George said. "We've only got to wait a few hours and we receive five hundred dollars each from Womberg and the Hines woman. Then we'll have two thousand altogether and we can go anywhere we want."

So we spent the next day waiting in our room and reading the papers, one of which had a whole column on the front page headed, 'Brutal assault on

famous columnist'. But sure enough the late afternoon post brought us two l
etters and there was five hundred dollars in each.

And right now, at this moment, we are sitting in a Pullman car, drinki
ng Scotch whisky and heading south for a place where there is always sunsh
ine and where the horses are running every day. We are immensely wealthy a
nd George keeps saying that if we put the whole of our two thousand dollar
s on a horse at ten to one we shall make another twenty thousand and we wi
ll be able to retire. 'We will have a house at Palm Beach,' he says, 'and
we will entertain upon a lavish scale. Beautiful socialites will loll arou
nd the edge of our swimming pool sipping cool drinks, and after a while we
will perhaps put another large sum of money upon another horse and we sha
ll become wealthier still. Possibly we will become tired of Palm Beach and
then we will move around in a leisurely manner among the playgrounds of t
he rich. Monte Carlo and places like that. Like the Au Khan and the Duke o
f Windsor. We will become prominent members of the international set and f
ilm stars will smile at us and head-waiters will bow to us and perhaps, in
time to come, perhaps we might even get ourselves mentioned in Lionel Pan
taloon's column.'

"That would be something," I said.

"Wouldn't it just," he answered happily. "Wouldn't that just be something.
"

The Butler

As soon as George Cleaver had made his first million, he and Mrs Cleaver mo
ved out of their small suburban villa into an elegant London house. They ac
quired a French chef called Monsieur Estragon and an English butler called
Tibbs, both wildly expensive. With the help of these two experts, the Cleav
ers set out to climb the social ladder and began to give dinner parties sev
eral times a week on a lavish scale.

But these dinners never seemed quite to come off. There was no animation,
no spark to set the conversation alight, no style at all. Yet the food was s
uperb and the service faultless.

"What the heck's wrong with our parties, Tibbs?" Mr Cleaver said to the
butler. "Why don't nobody never loosen up and let themselves go?"

Tibbs inclined his head to one side and looked at the ceiling. "I hope, sir,
you will not be offended if I offer a small suggestion."

"What is it?"

"It's the wine, sir."

"What about the wine?"

"Well, sir, Monsieur Estragon serves superb food. Superb food should be accompanied by superb wine. But you serve them a cheap and very odious Spanish red."

"Then why in heaven's name didn't you say so before, you twit?" cried Mr Cleaver. "I'm not short of money. I'll give them the best flipping wine in the world if that's what they want! What is the best wine in the world?"

"Claret, sir," the butler replied, "from the greatest ch‰teaux in Bordeaux--Lafite, Latour, Haut-Brion, Margaux, Mouton-Rothschild and Cheval Blanc. And from only the very greatest vintage years, which are, in my opinion, 1906, 1914, 1929 and 1945. Cheval Blanc was also magnificent in 1895 and 1921, and Haut-Brion in 1906."

"Buy them all!" said Mr Cleaver. "Fill the flipping cellar from top to bottom!"

"I can try, sir," the butler said. "But wines like these are extremely rare and cost a fortune."

"I don't give a hoot what they cost!" said Mr Cleaver. "Just go out and get them!"

That was easier said than done. Nowhere in England or in France could Tibbs find any wine from 1895, 1906, 1914 or 1921. But he did manage to get hold of some twenty-nines and forty-fives. The bills for these wines were astronomical. They were in fact so huge that even Mr Cleaver began to sit up and take notice. And his interest quickly turned into outright enthusiasm when the butler suggested to him that a knowledge of wine was a very considerable social asset. Mr Cleaver bought books on the subject and read them from cover to cover. He also learned a great deal from Tibbs himself, who taught him, among other things, just how wine should be properly tasted. "First, sir, you sniff it long and deep, with your nose right inside the top of the glass, like this. Then you take a mouthful and you open your lips a tiny bit and suck in air, letting the air bubble through the wine. Watch me do it. Then you roll it vigorously around your mouth. And finally you swallow it."

In due course, Mr Cleaver came to regard himself as an expert on wine, and inevitably he turned into a colossal bore. 'Ladies and gentlemen,' he would announce at dinner, holding up his glass, 'this is a Margaux '29! The greatest year of the century! Fantastic bouquet! Smells of cowslips! And notice especially the after taste and how the tiny trace of tannin gives it that glorious astringent quality! Terrific, ain't it?'

The guests would nod and sip and mumble a few praises, but that was all.

"What's the matter with the silly twerps?" Mr Cleaver said to Tibbs after this had gone on for some time. "Don't none of them appreciate a great wine?"

The butler laid his head to one side and gazed upward. "I think they would a