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Alleys of Darkness

Robert E. Howard

WHEN THE GONG ended my fight with Kid Leary in the Sweet Dreams Fight Club, Singapore, I was tired but contented. The first seven rounds had been close, but the last three I'd plastered the Kid all over the ring, though I hadn't knocked him out like I'd did in Shanghai some months before, when I flattened him in the twelfth round. The scrap in Singapore was just for ten; another round and I'd had him.

But anyway, I'd shaded him so thoroughly I knowed I'd justified the experts which had made me a three to one favorite. The crowd was applauding wildly, the referee was approaching, and I stepped forward and held out my glove hand—when to my utter dumfoundment, he brushed

past me and lifted the glove of the groggy and bloody Kid Leary!

A instant's silence reigned, shattered by a nerve-racking scream from the ringside. The referee, Jed Whithers, released Leary, who collapsed into the rosin, and Whithers ducked through the ropes like a rabbit. The crowd riz bellowing, and recovering my frozen wits, I gave vent to lurid langwidge and plunged outa the ring in pursuit of Whithers. The fans was screaming mad, smashing benches, tearing the ropes offa the ring and demanding the whereabouts of Whithers, so's they could hang him to the rafters. But he had disappeared, and the maddened crowd raged in vain.

I found my way dazedly to my dressing-room, where I set down on a table and tried to recover from the shock. Bill O'Brien and the rest of the crew was there, frothing at the mouth, each having sunk his entire wad on me. I considered going into Leary's dressing-room and beating him up again, but decided he'd had nothing to do with the crooked decision. He was just as surprised as me when Whithers declared him winner.

Whilst I was trying to pull on my clothes, hindered more'n helped

by my raging shipmates, whose langwidge was getting more appalling every instant, a stocky bewhiskered figger come busting through the mob, and done a fantastic dance in front of me. It was the Old Man, with lickor on his breath and tears in his eyes.

“I’m rooint!” he howled. “I’m a doomed man! Oh, to think as I’ve warmed a sarpint in my boozum! Dennis Dorgan, this here’s the last straw!”

“Aw, pipe down!” snarled Bill O’Brien. “It wasn’t Denny’s fault. It was that dashety triple-blank thief of a referee—”

“To think of goin’ on the beach at my age!” screamed the Old Man, wringing the salt water outa his whiskers. He fell down on a bench and wept at the top of his voice. “A thousand bucks I lost—every cent I could rake, scrape and borrar!” he bawled.

“Aw, well, you still got your ship,” somebody said impatiently.

“That’s just it!” the Old Man wailed. “That thousand bucks was dough owed them old pirates, McGregor, McClune & McKile. Part of what

I owe, I mean. They agreed to accept a thousand as part payment, and gimme more time to raise the rest. Now it's gone, and they'll take the ship! They'll take the *Python*! All I got in the world! Them old sharks ain't got no more heart than a Malay pirate. I'm rooint!"

The crew fell silent at that, and I said: "Why'd you bet all that dough?"

"I was lickered up," he wept. "I got no sense when I'm full. Old Cap'n Donnelly, and McVey and them got to raggin' me, and the first thing I knowed, I'd bet 'em the thousand, givin' heavy odds. Now I'm rooint!"

He throwed back his head and bellered like a walrus with the belly-ache.

I just give a dismal groan and sunk my head in my hands, too despondent to say nothing. The crew bust forth in curses against Whithers, and sallied forth to search further for him, hauling the Old Man along with them, still voicing his woes in a voice like a steamboat whistle.

PRESENTLY I RIZ with a sigh and hauled on my duds. They was no sound outside. Apparently I was alone in the building except for Spike, my white bulldog. All at once I noticed him smelling of a closed locker. He whined, scratched at it, and growled. With a sudden suspicion I strode over and jerked open the door. Inside I seen a huddled figger. I jerked it rudely forth and set it upright. It was Jed Whithers. He was pale and shaking, and he had cobwebs in his hair. He kind a cringed, evidently expecting me to bust into loud cusses. For once I was too mad for that. I was probably as pale as he was, and his eyes dilated like he seen murder in mine.

“Jed Whithers,” I said, shoving him up against the wall with one hand whilst I knotted the other’n into a mallet, “this is one time in my life when I’m in the mood for killin’.”

“For God’s sake, Dorgan,” he gurgled, “you can’t murder me!”

“Can you think of any reason why I shouldn’t put you in a wheel-chair for the rest of your life?” I demanded. “You’ve rooint my friends and all the fans which bet on me, lost my skipper his ship—”

“Don’t hit me, Dorgan!” he begged, grabbing my wrist with shaking fingers. “I had to do it; honest to God, Sailor, I *had* to do it! I know you won—won by a mile. But it was the only thing I *could* do!”

“What you mean?” I demanded suspiciously.

“Lemme sit down!” he gasped.

I reluctantly let go of him, and he slumped down onto a near-by bench. He sat there and shook, and mopped the sweat offa his face. He was trembling all over.

“Are the customers all gone?” he asked.

“Ain’t nobody here but me and my man-eatin’ bulldog,” I answered grimly, standing over him. “Go on—spill what you got to say before I start varnishin’ the floor with you.”

“I was forced to it, Sailor,” he said. “There’s a man who has a hold on me.”

“What you mean, a hold?” I asked suspiciously.

“I mean, he’s got me in a spot,” he said. “I have to do like he says. It ain’t myself I have to think of—Dorgan, I’m goin’ to trust you. You got the name of bein’ a square shooter. I’m goin’ to tell you the whole thing.

“Sailor, I got a sister named Constance, a beautiful girl, innocent as a newborn lamb. She trusted a man, Sailor, a dirty, slimy snake in human form. He tricked her into signin’ a document—Dorgan, that paper was a confession of a crime he’d committed himself!”

Whithers here broke down and sobbed with his face in his hands. I shuffled my feet uncertainly, beginning to realize they was always more’n one side to any question.

He raised up suddenly and said: “Since then, that man’s been holdin’ that faked confession over me and her like a club. He’s forced me to do his filthy biddin’ time and again. I’m a honest man by nature, Sailor, but to protect my little sister”—he kinda choked for

a instant—"I've stooped to low deeds. Like this tonight. This man was bettin' heavy on Leary, gettin' big odds—"

"Somebody sure was," I muttered. "Lots of Leary money in sight."

"Sure!" exclaimed Whithers eagerly. "That was it; he made me throw the fight to Leary, the dirty rat, to protect his bets."

I begun to feel new wrath rise in my gigantic breast.

"You mean this low-down polecat has been blackmailin' you on account of the hold he's got over your sister?" I demanded.

"Exactly," he said, dropping his face in his hands. "With that paper he can send Constance to prison, if he takes the notion."

"I never heered of such infermy," I growled. "Whyn't you bust him on the jaw and take that confession away from him?"

"I ain't no fightin' man," said Whithers. "He's too big for me. I wouldn't have a chance."

“Well, *I* would,” I said. “Listen, Whithers, buck up and quit cryin’. I’m goin’ to help you.”

His head jerked up and he stared at me kinda wild-eyed.

“You mean you’ll help me get that paper?”

“You bet!” I retorted. “I ain’t the man to stand by and let no innercent girl be persecuted. Besides, this mess tonight is his fault.”

Whithers just set there for a second, and I thought I seen a slow smile start to spread over his lips, but I mighta been mistook, because he wasn’t grinning when he held out his hand and said tremulously: “Dorgan, you’re all they say you are!”

A remark like that ain’t necessarily a compliment; some of the things said about me ain’t flattering; but I took it in the spirit in which it seemed to be give, and I said: “Now tell me, who is this rat?”

He glanced nervously around, then whispered: “Ace Bissett!”

I grunted in surprise. “The devil you say! I’d never of thought it.”

“He’s a fiend in human form,” said Whithers bitterly. “What’s your plan?”

“Why,” I said, “I’ll go to his Diamond Palace and demand the confession. If he don’t give it to me, I’ll maul him and take it away from him.”

“You’ll get shot up,” said Whithers. “Bissett is a bad man to fool with. Listen, I got a plan. If we can get him to a certain house I know about, we can search him for the paper. He carries it around with him, though I don’t know just where. Here’s my plan—”

I listened attentively, and as a result, perhaps a hour later I was heading through the narrer streets with Spike, driving a closed car which Whithers had produced kinda mysteriously. Whithers wasn’t

with me; he was gone to prepare the place where I was to bring Bissett to.

I driv up the alley behind Ace's big new saloon and gambling-hall, the Diamond Palace, and stopped the car near a back door. It was a very high-class joint. Bissett was friends with wealthy sportsmen, officials, and other swells. He was what they call a soldier of fortune, and he'd been everything, everywhere—aviator, explorer, big game hunter, officer in the armies of South America and China—and what have you.

A native employee stopped me at the door, and asked me what was my business, and I told him I wanted to see Ace. He showed me into the room which opened on the alley, and went after Bissett—which could not of suited my plan better.

Purty soon a door opened, and Bissett strode in—a tall, broad-shouldered young fellow, with steely eyes and wavy blond hair. He was in a dress suit, and altogether looked like he'd stepped right outa the social register. And as I looked at him, so calm and self-assured, and thought of poor Whithers being driv to crime by him, and the Old

Man losing his ship on account of his crookedness, I seen red.

“Well, Dorgan, what can I do for you?” he asked.

I said nothing. I stepped in and hooked my right to his jaw. It caught him flat-footed, with his hands down. He hit the floor full length, and he didn’t twitch.

I bent over him, run my hands through his clothes, found his six-shooter and throwed it aside. Music and the sounds of revelry reached me through the walls, but evidently nobody had seen or heard me slug Bissett. I lifted him and histed him onto my shoulders—no easy job, because he was as big as me, and limp as a rag.

But I done it, and started for the alley. I got through the door all right, which I was forced to leave open, account of having both hands full, and just as I was dumping Ace into the back part of the car, I heered a scream. Wheeling, I seen a girl had just come into the room I’d left, and was standing frozen, staring wildly at me. The light from the open door shone full on me and my captive. The girl was Glory O’Dale, Ace Bissett’s sweetheart. I hurriedly slammed the car

door shut and jumped to the wheel, and as I roared off down the alley, I was vaguely aware that Glory had rushed out of the building after me, screaming blue murder.

IT WAS PURTY late, and the route I took they wasn't many people abroad. Behind me I begun to hear Bissett stir and groan, and I pushed Spike over in the back seat to watch him. But he hadn't fully come to when I drewed up in the shadows beside the place Whithers had told me about—a ramshackle old building down by a old rotting, deserted wharf. Nobody seemed to live anywheres close around, or if they did, they was outa sight. As I clum outa the car, a door opened a crack, and I seen Whithers' white face staring at me.

“Did you get him, Sailor?” he whispered.

For answer I jerked open the back door, and Bissett tumbled out on his ear and laid there groaning dimly. Whithers started back with a cry.

“Is he dead?” he asked fearfully.

“Would he holler like that if he was?” I asked impatiently. “Help me carry him in, and we’ll search him.”

“Wait’ll I tie him up,” said Whithers, producing some cords, and to my disgust, he bound the unconscious critter hand and foot.

“It’s safer this way,” Whithers said. “He’s a devil, and we can’t afford to take chances.”

We then picked him up and carried him through the door, into a very dimly lighted room, across that ‘un, and into another’n which was better lit—the winders being covered so the light couldn’t be seen from the outside. And I got the surprise of my life. They was five men in that room. I wheeled on Whithers. “What’s the idee?” I demanded.

“Now, now, Sailor,” said Whithers, arranging Bissett on the bench where we’d laid him. “These are just friends of mine. They know about Bissett and my sister.”

I heered what sounded like a snicker, and I turned to glare at the assembled “friends”. My gaze centered on a fat, flashy-dressed bird

smoking a big black cigar; diamonds shone all over his fingers, and in his stick-pin. The others was just muggs.

“A fine lot of friends you pick out!” I said irritably to Whithers. “Diamond Joe Galt is been mixed up in every shady deal that’s been pulled in the past three years. And if you’d raked the Seven Seas you couldn’t found four dirtier thugs than Limey Teak, Bill Reynolds, Dutch Steinmann, and Red Partland.”

“Hey, you—” Red Partland riz, clenching his fists, but Galt grabbed his arm.

“Stop it, Red,” he advised. “Easy does it. Sailor,” he addressed me with a broad smile which I liked less’n I’d liked a scowl, “they’s no use in abuse. We’re here to help our pal Whithers get justice. That’s all. You’ve done your part. You can go now, with our thanks.”

“Not so fast,” I growled, and just then Whithers hollered:

“Bissett’s come to!”

We all turned around and seen that Bissett’s eyes was open, and

blazing.

“Well, you dirty rats,” he greeted us all and sundry, “you’ve got me at last, have you?” He fixed his gaze on me, and said: “Dorgan, I thought you were a man. If I’d had any idea you were mixed up in this racket, you’d have never got a chance to slug me as you did.”

“Aw, shut up,” I snarled. “A fine nerve you’ve got, talkin’ about men, after what you’ve did!”

Galt pushed past me and stood looking down at Bissett, and I seen his fat hands clenched, and the veins swell in his temples.

“Bissett,” he said, “we’ve got you cold and you know it. Kick in—where’s that paper?”

“You cursed fools!” Bissett raved, struggling at his cords till the veins stood out on his temples too. “I tell you, the paper’s worthless.”

“Then why do you object to givin’ it to us?” demanded Whithers.

“Because I haven’t got it!” raged Bissett. “I destroyed it, just as I’ve told you before.”

“He’s lyin’,” snarled Red Partland. “He wouldn’t never destroy such a thing as that. It means millions. Here, I’ll make him talk—”

He shouldered forward and grabbed Bissett by the throat. I grabbed Red in turn, and tore him away.

“Belay!” I gritted. “He’s a rat, but just the same I ain’t goin’ to stand by and watch no helpless man be tortured.”

“Why, you—” Red bellered, and swung for my jaw.

I ducked and sunk my left to the wrist in his belly and he dropped like his legs had been cut out from under him. The others started forward, rumbling, and I wheeled towards ‘em, seething with fight. But Galt got between us and shoved his gorillas back.

“Here,” he snapped. “No fightin’ amongst ourselves! Get up, Red.

Now, Sailor,” he begun to pat my sleeves in his soothing way, which I always despises beyond words, “there ain’t no need for hard feelin’s. I know just how you feel. But we got to have that paper. You know that, Sailor—”

Suddenly a faint sound made itself evident. “What’s that?” gasped Limey, going pale.

“It’s Spike,” I said. “I left him in the car, and he’s got tired of settin’ out there, and is scratchin’ at the front door. I’m goin’ to go get him, but I’ll be right back, and if anybody lays a hand on Bissett whilst I’m gone, I’ll bust him into pieces. We’ll get that paper, but they ain’t goin’ to be no torturin’.”

I strode out, scornful of the black looks cast my way. As I shut the door behind me, a clamor of conversation bust out, so many talking at wunst I couldn’t understand much, but every now and then Ace Bissett’s voice riz above the din in accents of anger and not pain, so I knowed they wasn’t doing nothing to him. I crossed the dim outer room, opened the door and let Spike in, and then, forgetting to bolt it—I ain’t used to secrecy and such—I started back for the inner

room.

BEFORE I REACHED the other door, I heered a quick patter of feet outside. I wheeled—the outer door bust violently open, and into the room rushed Glory O’Dale. She was panting hard, her dress was tore, her black locks damp, and her dark eyes was wet and bright as black jewels after a rain. And she had Ace’s six-shooter in her hand.

“You filthy dog!” she cried, throwing down on me.

I looked right into the muzzle of that .45 as she jerked the trigger. The hammer snapped on a faulty cartridge, and before she could try again, Spike launched hissself from the floor at her. I’d taught him never to bite a woman. He didn’t bite Glory. He throwed hissself bodily against her so hard he knocked her down and the gun flew outa her hand.

I picked it up and stuck it into my hip pocket. Then I started to help her up, but she hit my hand aside and jumped up, tears of fury running down her cheeks. Golly, she was a beauty!

“You beast!” she raged. “What have you done with Ace? I’ll kill you if you’ve harmed him! Is he in that room?”

“Yeah, and he ain’t harmed,” I said, “but he oughta be hung—”

She screamed like a siren. “Don’t you dare! Don’t you touch a hair of his head! Oh, Ace!”

She then slapped my face, jerked out a handful of hair, and kicked both my shins.

“What I can’t understand is,” I said, escaping her clutches, “is why a fine girl like you ties up with a low-down rat like Bissett. With your looks, Glory—”

“To the devil with my looks!” she wept, stamping on the door. “Let me past; I know Ace is in that room—I heard his voice as I came in.”

They wasn’t no noise in the inner room now. Evidently all of them was listening to what was going on out here, Ace included.

“You can’t go in there,” I said. “We got to search Ace for the incriminatin’ evidence he’s holdin’ against Jed Whithers’ sister—”

“You’re mad as a March hare,” she said. “Let me by!”

And without no warning she back-heeled me and pushed me with both hands. It was so unexpected I ignominiously crashed to the floor, and she darted past me and throwed open the inner door. Spike drove for her, and this time he was red-eyed, but I grabbed him as he went by.

Glory halted an instant on the threshold with a cry of mingled triumph, fear and rage. I riz, cussing beneath my breath and dusting off my britches. Glory ran across the room, eluding the grasping paws of Joe Galt, and throwed herself with passionate abandon on the prostrate form of Ace Bissett. I noticed that Ace, which hadn’t till then showed the slightest sign of fear, was suddenly pale and his jaw was grim set.

“It was madness for you to come, Glory,” he muttered.

“I saw Dorgan throw you into the car,” she whimpered, throwing her

arms around him, and tugging vainly at his cords. “I jumped in another and followed—blew out a tire a short distance from here—lost sight of the car I was following and wandered around in the dark alleys on foot for awhile, till I saw the car standing outside. I came on in—”

“Alone? My God!” groaned Ace.

“Alone?” echoed Galt, with a sigh of relief. He flicked some dust from his lapel, stuck his cigar back in his mouth at a cocky angle, and said: “Well, now, we’ll have a little talk. Come here, Glory.”

She clung closer to Ace, and Ace said in a low voice, almost a whisper: “Let her alone, Galt.” His eyes was like fires burning under the ice.

Galt’s mugs was grinning evilly and muttering to themselves.

Whithers was nervous and kept mopping perspiration. The air was tense.

I was nervous and impatient; something was wrong, and I didn’t know what. So when Galt started to say something, I took matters into my own hands.

“Bissett,” I said, striding across the room and glaring down at him, “if they’s a ounce of manhood in you, this here girl’s devotion oughta touch even your snakish soul. Why don’t you try to redeem yourself a little, anyway? Kick in with that paper! A man which is loved by a woman like Glory O’Dale loves you, oughta be above holdin’ a forged confession over a innocent girl’s head.”

Bissett’s mouth fell open. “What’s he talking about?” he demanded from the world at large.

“I don’t know,” said Glory uneasily, snuggling closer to him. “He talked that way out in the other room. I think he’s punch-drunk.”

“Dorgan,” said Bissett, “you don’t belong in this crowd. Are you suffering from some sort of an hallucination?”

“Don’t hand me no such guff, you snake!” I roared. “You know why I brung you here—to get the confession you gypped outa Whithers’ sister, and blackmailed him with—just like you made him throw my fight tonight.”

Bissett just looked dizzy, but Glory leaped up and faced me.

“You mean you think Ace made Whithers turn in that rotten decision?” she jerked out.

“I don’t think,” I answered sullenly. “I know. Whithers said so.”

She jumped like she was galvanized.

“Why, you idiot!” she hollered, “they’ve made a fool of you! Jed Whithers hasn’t any sister! He lied! Ace had nothing to do with it! Whithers was hired to throw the fight to Leary! Look at him!” Her voice rose to a shriek of triumph, as she pointed a accusing finger at Jed Whithers. “Look at him! Look how pale he is! He’s scared witless!”

“It’s a lie!” gulped Whithers, sweating and tearing at his crumpled collar like it was choking him.

“It’s not a lie!” Glory was nearly hysterical by this time. “He was paid to throw the fight! And there’s the man who paid him!” And she dramatically pointed her finger at Diamond Joe Galt!

GALT WAS ON HIS feet, his small eyes glinting savagely, his jaws grinding his cigar to a pulp.

“What about it, Galt?” I demanded, all at sea and bewildered.

He dashed down his cigar with a oath. His face was dark and convulsed.

“What of it?” he snarled. “What you goin’ to do about it? I’ve stood all the guff out of you I’m goin’ to!”

His hand snaked inside his coat and out, and I was looking into the black muzzle of a wicked stumpy automatic.

“You can’t slug this like you did Red, you dumb gorilla,” he smirked viciously. “Sure, the dame’s tellin’ the truth. Whithers took you in like a sucklin’ lamb.

“When you caught him in your dressin’-room, he told you the first lie that come to him, knowin’ you for a soft sap where women’s

concerned. Then when you fell for it, and offered to help him, he thought fast and roped you into this deal. We been tryin' to get hold of Bissett for a long time. He's got somethin' we want. But he was too smart and too tough for us. Now, thanks to you, we got him, *and* the girl. Now we're goin' to sweat what we want out of him, and you're goin' to keep your trap shut, see?"

"You mean they ain't no Constance Whithers, and no confession?" I said slowly, trying to get things straight. A raucous roar of mirth greeted the remark.

"No, sucker," taunted Galt; "you just been took in, you sap."

A wave of red swept across my line of vision. With a maddened roar, I plunged recklessly at Galt, gun and all. Everything happened at once. Galt closed his finger on the trigger just as Spike, standing beside him all this time, closed his jaws on Galt's leg. Galt screamed and leaped convulsively; the gun exploded in the air, missing me so close the powder singed my hair, and my right mauler crunched into Galt's face, flattening his nose, knocking out all his front teeth, and fracturing his jaw-bone. As he hit the floor Spike was right on

top of him.

The next instant Galt's thugs was on top of me. We rolled across the room in a wild tangle of arms and legs, casually shattering tables and chairs on the way. Spike, finding Galt was out cold, abandoned him and charged to my aid. I heered Red Partland howl as Spike's iron fangs locked in his britches. But I had my hands full. Fists and hobnails was glancing off my carcass, and a thumb was feeling for my eye. I set my teeth in this thumb and was rewarded by a squeal of anguish, but the action didn't slow up any.

It was while strangling Limey Teak beneath me, whilst the other three was trying to stomp my ribs in and kick my head off, that I realized that another element had entered into the fray. There was the impact of a chair-leg on a human skull, and Jed Whithers give up the ghost with a whistling sigh. Glory O'Dale was taking a hand.

Dutch Steinmann next gave a ear-piercing howl, and Bill Reynolds abandoned me to settle her. Feeling Limey go limp beneath me, I riz, shaking Steinmann offa my shoulders, just in time to see Reynolds duck Glory's chair-leg and smack her down. Bissett give a most awful yell

of rage, but he wasn't no madder than me. I left the floor in a flying tackle that carried Reynolds off his feet with a violence which nearly busted his skull against the floor. Too crazy-mad for reason, I set to work to hammer him to death, and though he was already senseless, I would probably of continued indefinite, had not Dutch Steinmann distracted my attention by smashing a chair over my head.

I riz through the splinters and caught him with a left hook that tore his ear nearly off and stood him on his neck in a corner. I then looked for Red Partland and seen him crawling out a winder which he'd tore the shutters off of. He was a rooin; his clothes was nearly all tore offa him, and he was bleeding like a stuck hawg and bawling like one, and Spike didn't show no intentions of abandoning the fray. His jaws was locked in what was left of Red's britches, and he had his feet braced against the wall below the sill. As I looked, Red gave a desperate wrench and tumbled through the winder, and I heered his lamentations fading into the night.

SHAKING THE BLOOD and sweat outa my eyes, I glared about at the battlefield, strewn with the dead and dying—at least with the unconscious, some of which was groaning loudly, whilst others

slumbered in silence.

Glory was just getting up, dizzy and wobbly. Spike was smelling each of the victims in turn, and Ace was begging somebody to let him loose. Glory wobbled over to where he'd rolled offa the bench, and I followed her, kinda stiffly. At least one of my ribs had been broke by a boot-heel. My scalp was cut open, and blood was trickling down my side, where Limey Teak had made a ill-advised effort to knife me. I also thought one of them rats had hit me from behind with a club, till I discovered that sometime in the fray I'd fell on something hard in my hip pocket. This, I found, was Ace Bissett's pistol, which I'd clean forgot all about. I throwed it aside with disgust; them things is a trap and a snare.

I blinked at Ace with my one good eye, whilst Glory worked his cords offa him.

"I see I misjudged you," I said, lending her a hand. "I apolergize, and if you want satisfaction, right here and now is good enough for me."

“Good Lord, man,” he said, with his arms full of Glory. “I don’t want to fight you. I still don’t know just what it was all about, but I’m beginning to understand.”

I set down somewhat groggily on a bench which wasn’t clean busted.

“What I want to know is,” I said, “what that paper was they was talkin’ about.”

“Well,” he said, “about a year ago I befriended a half-cracked Russian scientist, and he tried in his crazy way to repay me. He told me, in Galt’s presence, that he was going to give me a formula that would make me the richest man on earth. He got blown up in an explosion in his laboratory shortly afterward, and an envelope was found in his room addressed to me, and containing a formula. Galt found out about it, and he’s been hounding me ever since, trying to get it. He thought it was all the Russian claimed. In reality it was merely the disconnected scribblings of a disordered mind—good Lord, it claimed to be a process for the manufacture of diamonds! Utter insanity—but Galt never would believe it.”

“And he thought I was dumb,” I cogitated. “But hey, Glory, how’d you know it was Galt hired Whithers to throw my fight to Leary?”

“I didn’t,” she admitted. “I just accused Galt of it to start you fellows fighting among yourselves.”

“Well, I’ll be derved,” I said, and just then one of the victims which had evidently come to while we was talking, riz stealthily to his all fours and started crawling towards the winder. It was Jed Whithers. I strode after him and hauled him to his feet.

“How much did Galt pay you for throwin’ the bout to Leary?” I demanded.

“A thousand dollars,” he stuttered.

“Gimme it,” I ordered, and with shaking hands he hauled out a fold of bills. I fluttered ‘em and saw they was intact.

“Turn around and look out the winder at the stars,” I commanded.

“I don’t see no stars,” he muttered.

“You will,” I promised, as I swung my foot and histed him clean over the sill.

As his wails faded up the alley, I turned to Ace and Glory, and said: “Galt must of cleaned up plenty on this deal, payin’ so high for his dirty work. This here dough, though, is goin’ to be put to a good cause. The Old Man lost all his money account of Whithers’ crooked decision. This thousand bucks will save his ship. Now let’s go. I wanta get hold of the promoter of the Sweet Dreams, and get another match tomorrer night with Kid Leary—this time with a honest referee.”

THE END