

IN THE CLUTCHES OF THE CHEESE ISSUE. A Tale.

THE sleepy fingers of Shell-hole Ike, the bomber, slowly relaxed. The slumber-inducing warmth of the brazier permeated the dug-out. The wick of the last half-inch of candle slowly bowed itself to fate and prepared itself for dissolution. The torn and crumpled volume of Nick Carter reluctantly fell to the floor.

Shell-hole Ike stood motionless against what had once been the wall of the corner drug store—as motionless as the broken timbers and uneven piles of brick that stood silhouetted against the starry horizon; as motionless as the corkscrew iron stakes with their tangled tendrils of barbed wire; as motionless as the wily Fritz, twenty-five yards away, with eyes glued to the phosphorescent sights. The gentle west wind, sweetly scented with the breath of unborn roses and empty jam tins, softly blew the darkening clouds over and soiled the starlit face of night.

Shell-hole Ike peered with his gimlet eyes, and by concentrating all his optical powers could clearly descry—nothing!

Suddenly he became conscious of someone behind him, but before he could decide what to do, a noiseless, steel-reinforced voice, with all trace of emotion carefully removed, silently remarked: "At present I have fourteen ways of causing your demise. If, however, you remain perfectly still, we may dispense with that little formality."



Conscript: "Why do you keep looking in the little glass?"
Blue Straps: "To keep my tin lizzie on straight, er course."

Shell-hole Ike slowly turned his head. The figure noiselessly approached with a cat-like panther tread. By the flickering light of a distant flare it proved to be a neatly tailored "civvy" with a strong, projecting, iron jaw. By a flash of intuition Ike realised that he was in the presence of Nick Carter—the famous New York detective.

"I have been commissioned by the Department of Investigation into the Investigations of Investigators to obtain certain important papers," said the great sleuth. "Come with me."

The swish of a flare and the rat-tat-tat of a machine-gun proved that the renowned detective had aroused the prejudiced curiosity of the crafty Teuton. A smile lighted his lean, hard

face. The two adjustable automatic .45's in his sleeves registered with inconceivable speed. The automatic bomb-thrower attached to his back and left leg delivered its ten Mills bombs in four and three-quarter seconds. The hypnotic light in his eyes literally burned holes in the dark robe of the night—one could even smell the cloth singeing. For some reason the machine-gun stopped firing, either because its crew had been wiped out, or possibly because it intended to stop anyway. The detective's jaws clicked: he carefully replaced the half-drawn tube containing the Battalion Elevator and the Brigade Remover—the deadly weapons of the great offensives of 2001-2. The work had been accomplished by the comparative toys of the present day.

With a bound the great detective cleared the wire, landed like a feather, and awaited the more cautious Ike as he crept through. Rapid changes now took place in the sleuth's appearance. A saucy German staff officer's cap was on his head, a military great-coat of Hunnish design changed him into the likeness of a member of the Prussian autocracy. Then over the ruins of buildings, past blown-in cellars, away from the British trenches drifted the two figures.

Through the night came subdued voices in a foreign tongue, and Ike realised that they were nearing some German headquarters. The immaculate figure before him changed his bearing. He started spluttering long words which Ike judged to be German, by the consonants, and profane, by the rising inflection. Suddenly a sentry sprang up and shouted a challenge. The immaculate figure reached out with his walking stick and struck the man across the face. The sentry spluttered. The detective, with infinite tact then threw his revolver at him. This proved to be a peculiarly effective countersign. The sentry sprang to attention, and allowed the two to proceed down the trench without further question.

The deep mouth of the dug-out yawned on their right, and without hesitation the curious pair descended the steps. Along an electric lighted passage they went until an important-looking individual appeared before a green baize door. He uplifted his hand. The detective simply glared at him, then seeing that the attendant did not seem impressed, picked up the stool and threw it at him. The man instantly sprang to attention. The detective's jaws clicked. With a quick movement he turned the handle of the door and led the way into a large room where six dignitaries in red and gold were seated round a table. Soft music stole from an unseen source, rosy tinted lights lit up the room. On the table were numerous maps, plans, glasses, official papers, cigars—all the aids of modern strategy. The detective approached the table and rapped fiercely on it with his cane.

"Gentlemen," he began in his highly sterilized German, "I have here my distinguished friend Herr Von Lotzoflagerbier, disguised in the horrible, ghastly, abominable costume of our wicked, crafty, deceitful, dod-gasted enemies. His disguise is complete—no expense has been spared from the pull-through in his left-hand pocket to the pay-book in his right. In his haversack you will find iron rations, which our unscrupulous enemies theoretically eat if they cannot obtain the more nourishing jam tins and powdered rum jars they prefer. My friend has discovered the plans of our enemies up to the year 2015, in which year, I believe, the final offensive will begin. I propose, gentlemen, the health of Herr Von Lotzoflagerbier."

The astonished officers gasped, looked at one another, and with a mutual impulse raised their glasses. As they did so the detective carelessly flicked his cigarette and the speechless Ike's well-trained eye saw six little pills slip silently into the glasses. A moment later the officers were snoring with true racial thoroughness.

"One hour and fourteen seconds," murmured the sleuth. His jaws clicked. In a few sweeps all the papers were in the sand bag. The detective then drew his remaining revolver remarking, "I will cover you with this until we reach our lines."

Up the trench they went, over the parapet, past the German machine-gun with its annihilated crew, and so back to their starting point.

The detective paused as they reached the shell-hole, where he had disguised himself before going over, and resumed his civilian attire. He drew a notebook from his pocket and murmured, "New York, 11.15." Then as he turned to leave the trench, remarked to Ike, "You might turn this sand-bag containing the papers into G.H.Q. about 9," and was gone.

And the moral of this is, never eat to-night the cheese you should eat to-morrow.

D. F. M.