

a while the police or somebody will go to have a look and will find—nothing.”

Carmagan started and stared at the captain. “How’d you mean, Cap?” he ejaculated.

“See here, Sid, I’m not a superstitious man, but I hold that this William Henry Thorne isn’t a human man like you and me, but the original jinx of Harvest City. I’m not joshing. Is it right and humanlike for a man to go living like that when every other man is making good money and mighty easy, too, out in this western country? It is not. No, Sid, some day the wind that blew him in here will blow him out again, and then you’ll see Harvest City wake up pronto and begin to take notice.”

“And he comes in eight miles with that moke and eight miles back again?” Carmagan remarked. “I shouldn’t have thought he could make it.”

“One of these days he won’t,” McPhee answered. “He passes right across a bit of mean peat swamp on the edge of his place every time and if he misses the trail only a foot he’ll go right down into hell. You know what those swamps are like, look as dry and firm on top as a macadam road, but gulp you down as quick as winking if you rest a foot on them. I don’t reckon I’m a malicious man, but I surely shall not weep a tear when I hear he can’t be found. It ain’t right for a man to hold back a whole burg.”

As Captain McPhee finished speaking the hoarse cry of an approaching train tore the shimmering silence.

CARMAGAN moved off towards the depot.

“So long,” he said, “I’ll be round this part again in about a couple of months, or maybe sooner.”

It was some four weeks later while Carmagan was in Edwardstown, that he received a night lettergram from Captain McPhee.

“If you can put up a thousand,” it ran, “come back to this burg and get in on the ground floor of the greatest proposition ever. The Jinx has put fortune in our hands, come and help us cut the melon.”

“McPhee.”

The captain’s letter found Carmagan at a loose end. So far his trip had been exceptionally good, he had sold five pianos and got wise to ten probable sales as soon as the wheat was in. But from now on the spring was too far advanced for his business. Carmagan therefore decided to return and see what Captain McPhee had dug up.

As he walked up Main Street with the captain to the latter’s office, he shuddered.

“This burg is deadlier now than when I left, four weeks ago,” he said.

“Maybe,” Captain McPhee answered, “but our game will make the plank sidewalks wake up and sprout. It sure is some dandy graft.”

“It’ll have to be,” Carmagan replied, as they turned into the mean-looking little one-roomed shack that McPhee used as office.

“Now listen, Sid,” the captain began, when they had lighted their cigars, and despite the heat he had persisted in shutting the office door, “you remember old William Henry Thorne, that fellow with the donkey, the original jinx, I called him?”

“Will I ever forget him?” Carmagan replied.

“You remember me saying that I hoped he’d lose the trail one of these days and fall into a peat swamp that he crosses just inside his fence line?”

Carmagan nodded assent.

“Well,” the captain continued, leaning forward and holding out his cigar, impressively,

“it’s right there that our graft lies.”

Carmagan stared. “What do you mean?” he asked. “Are you forming a company to grow mushrooms or are you bugs?”

“Listen,” the captain said again, and continued:

“Martin Hillary, the young teller in the bank here’s courting old man Sullivan’s girl Louie. Martin drives out pretty near every evening. Sullivan’s place is a bit beyond Thorne’s. One night, about ten days ago, Martin didn’t hitch the horse up good, and when he goes to leave Louie he finds that the old plug has made tracks for Harvest City. He’d have borrowed a gee from Sullivan only every horse on the farm had been out in the fields all that day and was wanted on the morrow as well. So he doesn’t say a word but starts right off to walk back here. Eight miles looks mighty long to you or me, Sid, but you must remember that Martin’s a youngster and in love.

“It was about eleven when he started, and so he reckons to cut off more than a mile by going across Thorne’s land. It was awful dark, he says, and he pretty near lost his life right in that swamp. But he got back on to the trail that scared that he lights matches and stooping down looks to see that he is following the marks of the old man’s moke.

“You take me, Sid? Martin just goes along as slow as you like striking matches and holding them till they burn right down to his fingers. Now that swamp don’t ever show any water on the surface. I know that and Martin knew it. Yet one match he drops falls right

close together and right near where he had dropped his match, and although we went pretty near all over that swamp wriggling along on our bellies, you daresent try and walk, not another drop of liquid could we find. But just as soon as we’d scoop the oil from those little pools they’d fill up again, slowly, you understand, Sid, but fill up all right. We filled a couple of bottles and I left that same evening with them for Winnipeg. The next morning I handed them over to the best analytical chemist I could get hold of and asked him to tell me what was in them. When I called again that same afternoon he told me that it was coal-oil and practically pure, just as good, Sid, as John D. sells us.

“I guess he thought I was having a game with him or somebody was putting one over on me. But I wasn’t saying a word and skipped right back here.

“THEN I went out and saw old Thorne. I reckoned to buy the whole of his land at five dollars an acre, and that would have been giving him four-fifty an acre too much considered as farm land, but he wouldn’t part under five thousand.

“I left him alone for a couple of days and then, getting cold feet and thinking that any moment some other mut might fall right onto the oil or it might begin to spout, I went after the old jinx again. Not a cent less than five thousand and all cash, too, would he take, so I got a fifteen days’ option out of him at that figure and got it drawn up good and tight by lawyer Halsted.”

“Five thousand’s an awful lot of money,” Carmagan remarked.

“It would be batty to give five cents if it weren’t for the oil, but when you remember that, why five thousand looks like a dime, don’t it?”

“And Sid, just think. This oil is pure, and that means we haven’t got to monkey with refineries and all that kind of truck, and that’s where the money goes. All we’ll have to do is to hold the cans to the spout and let them fill. Say, but such a thing’s never been heard of before. I’ve been reading up every darned book and pamphlet I could lay my paws onto and I tell you pure oil has never gushed up from the earth till now.”

“But this oil isn’t spouting, either, is it?”

“Not yet, Sid, not yet. But then the books say oil always begins like that, kind of leaks through at first and then sud-

denly spouts right up into the air and all you have to do is to hold your cans underneath it as it falls. It may begin to spout any old time, and we’ve sure got to have our hands on to the land good and hard before that happens.”

“Where do I come in with my thou?” Carmagan asked.

“Right here, Sid, right here. We’ve got to pay five thousand cold cash for the land and then as soon as we’ve got title we’ll stake off every foot of it for oil, using dummies. Halsted’s arranging all that part of it. He’s one of us. As soon as we’ve fixed that we begin our publicity campaign, quietly, Sid, and unofficially. There’s no money out here in the West until the fall, and then as soon as the Rubes begin bringing in their Number One Hard we’ll float our Pure Oil Company, Limited, right on to them capitalized, Sid, at fifty thousand dollars. Don’t that look good to you, me old warrior?”

“Well, to get down to the filthy lucre again. We’ll want seven thousand to start things (Continued on page 23.)



“Just as soon as we’d scoop the oil from those little pools, they’d fill up again, slowly, you understand, but fill up all right.”

into a little pool on the edge of the trail.

“He reckons to see the match go out with a splutter. But his hair pretty near stands right up on end when he sees that little pool catch alight and begin to burn.”

CARMAGAN’S eyes opened wide and round.

“My God,” he whispered, “oil, Cap!”

“Yes, Sid, oil. Martin’s got a good brain pan and so doesn’t lose his head, but pronto off comes his hat and he scoops that burning oil up and out. Gee, it makes me sweat even now to think what might have happened if he had lost his head and left it burning.

“He says he ran all the way back through the night. Anyway, he came right into me and pulling me out of my beauty sleep, puts the whole proposition up to me. He asked for equal shares with me and I agreed seeing that without him we wouldn’t have had a hand in the game at all.

“We went out as soon as it was dark the next evening and did a bit of prospecting on that swamp. We found two little pools of oil