

*Page Colonel
Ballister*

Archie P. Mckishnie

Illustrated by

E. J. Dinsmore

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PAGE COLONEL BALLISTER

By ARCHIE P. McKISHNIE

ILLUSTRATED BY E. J. DINSMORE

I

The proprietor of the Southern Breeze Hotel, Mr. Byron Unicorn, stood behind the new mahogany counter closely scanning through his horn-rimmed glasses the names of guests that day registered. Two flourishing autographs caught his eye and riveted his attention. These were "Col. Ballister, D.C.M." and "Sgt. H. Hudson, Aide-de-Camp to same."

From whence the distinguished guests had come was not plainly designated. The name of the city or town given opposite the signatures was not decipherable. It may have been Cincinnati, Chicago or Central Africa. The letter "C" alone was legible.

Mr. Unicorn stood back and wiped the folds of his fat, black neck with a silk handkerchief. Then he turned to the clerk who was typing out the dinner-menu.

"Sam, whereabouts yo' put dis Colonel an' his man?"

"Sweet H." Sam answered without looking up. "Colonel done paid de fust day's pay down."

"What like a man was dis Colonel?" Mr. Unicorn enquired soberly.

"Tall, an' militonary, wif sort ob squint ter one eye. Well dressed, an' packin' a wad ob long-green dat would choke an ox," Sam answered with a praiseworthy glibness.

"An' his Aide? Whatso he look like? Tell me dat!"

"Man 'bout yo'r own size, Boss. Rough, sporty lookin' coon wif a gold tooth. Sorter retirin' he seemed. Colonel did mos' ob de talkin'."

Mr. Unicorn picked up a gold-headed stick and reached for his gloves and hat.

“Colonel say dat dey’ll dine in deir sweet,” Sam informed him, “had I bes’ make out extra bill-o-fare, Boss?”

The proprietor nodded. “Jes’ add Chicken a la Marylan’ to dat menu. Sam, an’ tack on dollar half ter each diner. I’s goin’ ter market now.”

He turned away but the clerk called after him.

“Misto Unicorn, dat Colonel was ’quirin’ after certain frien’s he’s got here in Detroit what he uster know back home. Sorter let drop dat he’s lately fell in fer money an’ is lookin’ up ol’ cronies. I couldn’ gib him much enlightenment, but I was able to tell him whar he could find Martin Amble.”

Mr. Unicorn frowned.

“It don’ speak none too well ob him ter hab dat thievin’ Martin fer a frien’,” he said. “Did yo’ tell him dat I done fired Amble fer pilferin’ grub frum my kitchen?”

“No, sah, t’ought better he should fin’ out dat Nigger’s short-comin’s fer his own se’f.”

“If so dat Martin Amble eber gets firm hold ob him, I kin see where dis Colonel Ballister fails ter check outer dis Southern Breeze Hotel wifout a money argument,” Mr. Unicorn stated. “Yo’ collec’ dat Colonel’s week stay here in advance: yo’ hear me?”

“Yessah, I’ll do so,” the clerk promised.

“See yo’ do. An’ Sam—”

“Yessah, Boss.”

“Here’s a letter, dated Chicago, dat jes’ come in from a lady same name as dis Colonel, requestin’ reservation. Reckon de fac’ ob de names bein’ de same am simply a coincidental: but dere’s no tellin’. Write her back an’ tell her dat de room hab been reserbed fer her.”

He laid the letter on the desk and went out.

Up in Suite H, Col. Lennox Ballister D.C.M. protem., and his Aide-de-Camp, Homer Hudson, ditto, coats off and shirts unbuttoned at the throat, lolled comfortably on plush cushions and strewed cigar ashes on the costly floor rugs. On the rosewood table ginger-beer bottles, cigar stubs and peanut shells bespoke a reckless debauchery being indulged in.

Homer, playing solitaire on the snowy coverlet of one of the twin beds, looked up from his game and fastened his eyes on Ballister's tranquil face.

"Len, sumfin tells me dat dis false impersonatin' stunt ain't goin' ter turn out nowise well. Couldn't us hab spent dat two hunderd jes' as well un'er our own truly names? S'posin' I meets up wif any ob dat bunch dat backed me time I licked de Black Panther down at Rowdeylee Club? What'll den happen?"

Len laid aside the blue and white bits of medal ribbon he had been sewing on his vest and gazed reprovingly at Homer.

"Howeber a man ob sech li'l courage eber come ter get decision ober a fighter like de Panther, is more'n' I kin figger out," he sighed. "Yo' ain' got no more nerve dan a dew-slug af'er a frost, Homer. Here I brings yo' 'long wif me ter help spen' two hunderd easy money, stipulation only dat we spen's it uncognition—which is ter say un'er resumed names, den yo' immediately gets col' feet an' wants ter blackslide."

"I ain't wantin' ter blackslide 'tall," Homer offered in defense. "I's scared de folks back in Chatville'll get wise ter us, an' kid us all de res' ob our natural libes. 'Sides," he added, "what'll happen ter yo', Len, s'posin' Jane-Ann arrives back home from Chicago unexpected an' fin's out yo' spent dat money?"

For a moment Len smothered in the choking whirlpool this possible contingency presented. He arose finally like a diver who has calculated depth and distance to a nicety.

"Jane-Ann won't be comin' home fer some time," he said. "An' if so her do, can't I tell her I was knocked down an' de two hunderd took from me? Use yo'r head, Homer, use yo'r head."

Homer threw down his cards.

"Lor' Gawd! Do yo' s'pose yo' could get *dat* wuman inter beliebin' anyfing yo' er me tol' her?" he cried. "Look yo, Len, I's gotter hunch which says 'git goin' back,' an' I's strong fer obeyin' dat li'l voice. Yo' come wif me now home ter Chatville, an' I's willin' ter reimbursonate yo' fer de money yo's spent on me'n' yo'se'f? What yo' say?"

"I says *no*," Len answered promptly. "An' I'll tell yo' fer why I says *no*. I got a reason—a good reason—fer masqueradin' here in Detroit in de incognition ob officer ob de Canadian a'my. I ain' no fool 'xactly, Homer. Did yo' eber know me ter spen' money what didn', in de spendin', make me twice as much, anyhow, as I spen'?"

"I neber knowed yo' ter spen' any befo'," Homer answered. "Dat's what scares me, Len. I got a idea yo'r not well. Sumfin's shorely wrong wif yo', when yo' un'ertake de financin' ob any jant yo' an' me go out on. Dat's allars been my privilege befo'."

"Well, who kin tell but it'll be yo'rs agin soon?" Len comforted. "Now, fer meantime yo' set tight, Homer. Law sakes! I gotter have Aide-de-Camp. I gotter make a impression, ain't I? Don' fergit dat yo's ter call me *sir* when enybudy's aroun', an' stan' up an' salute me ebery time I address yo'."

"No," Homer declared emphatically, "I won't nowise *sir* yo' ner *salute* yo' needer. But I shorely will place spacious bumps on yo'r pusson if so yo' try makin' a monkey outer me. Git dat."

Shucks!" Len replied. "Can't nowise make what's already made. Don' yo' get hysterical, Homer, an' start climbin' a tree afore ol' bear Risk comes shufflin' an' growlin' 'roun'. Dere ain't goin' ter be no risk fer yo' an' none fer me. I've carried off lots ob incognitions befo', an' I's full able ter carry off dis one to a sucessful culmination."

"What yo' mean, culmination?" Homer shivered. "Dat's anudder name fer penitentiary?"

Len shook his head patiently. "It means de *end* er *finish*, Homer."

"Well," Homer wailed, "I see *our'n*."

Just here, from a wicker trunk in the corner of the room, issued a long, dolorous howl.

"Lor'amighty!" Homer groaned. "Yo' would bring dat no-count dawg 'long an' now see what he'll do. He'll howl de plaster loose on dis ceilin' an' get us bofe arrested fer harborin' a nuisance."

Len laid aside his needle and stood up.

"Look here, Inferior," he addressed Homer witheringly, "dat dawg am a pal ob mine, a pal ob trench an' carnage, an' he tarries whar I tarries, eats what I eats an' sleeps whar I sleeps."

Another howl, longer, louder and more insistent, bespoke the fact that the hound Orinoco heard, and understood.

Outside the room hurried footsteps were heard approaching A knock fell on the door.

Sam, the clerk, stepped into the room and stood glancing about him searchingly.

“General,” he addressed Len, “did I hear a dawg howlin’ in here? Seemed dat soun’ come from dis sweet.”

Len stood with hips drawn in, shoulders squared, long toes at an angle of forty-five degrees and contemptuously surveyed the mere man from the hotel office.

“Yo’ heered a dawg,” he replied with dignity, “a dawg dat’s been froo free wars, fo’ rebellions an’ two rebolutions. In yonder crate am de far-famed Belgium Police dawg, Mistake.”



Len twisted around on Homer. “Aide!” he shouted, “bring fo’th de Police-animal, Mistake.”

He twisted around on Homer.

“Aide!” he shouted.

Homer’s heels clicked together in salute.

“Yessah, yo’ worship,” he gurgled. Force of habit and long association with police-courts cannot be thrown off quickly.

“Aide,” commanded the colonel, “bring fo’th de Police-animal Mistake, so’s dis pusson may behold de mos’ famous dawg in de worl’.”

“Is he—safe?” asked the clerk anxiously, backing away.

“Puffec’ly,” Len assured him, “so long’s he don’ smell blood er gun powder, dat noble life-saber’ll eat off yo’r han’.”

“Lor’!” shivered the clerk, “I don’ nowise wish my han’ et off. Why fer yo’ call him by dat name, Mistake, General?”

Len looked at Homer who was busy unfastening the cover of the wicker trunk. Homer was apparently enjoying himself hugely. His broad shoulders were shaking with godless mirth.

“I’ll ’splain dat,” said Len, turning to the clerk.

“Yo’ eber hear ob General Perishing?”

“Yessah, sure hab. I fit un’er him in de las’ wah.”

“Yo’ eber hear ob a man named de Kizer?”

“Lor’! Who hasn’ heered ob *dat* Kizer?”

“Well, den, lis’en here, dat Belgium Police dawg once made de mistake ob savin’ de Kizer frum Perishing. Dat’s how he come ter bear dat name.”

Len swung about on Homer.

“Aide!”

“Yessah, Colonel.” Homer struggled up and saluted.

“On secon’ er third thought I’ve decided not ter disturb Mistake until after dis porter-man brings him up his supper. Yo’ll please ter put no salt ner pepper on his *beefsteak* an’ fetch up his *cream* in a shaller glass bowl,” he adjured the dazed clerk. “Dat dawg’s pertail ter glass dishes.”

Sam, who had been despatched by the hotel proprietor to order the canine disturber of peace and quiet from suite H to the garage, backed from the room.

“Yessah, General,” he murmured, with a semaphoric wave of a black hand in salute. “I’ll tend ter his supper right off.”

“Homer,” spoke Len, as the door closed behind the bewildered clerk, “fust impressions count, an’ I reckon I made one on dat yaller coon when I pass off dat Orinoco fer a Police dawg. Won’t be nuffin in dis Southern Win’ House too good fer him now. Yo’ wait an’ see.”

“I ain’t nowise strong fer waitin’, an’ I’s nowise particular about seein’ what happens ter dat mongrel,” growled Homer. “An’ look yo’ here,” he added threateningly, “nex’ time yo’ *Aide* me like yo’ did jes’ now yo’r goin’ ter need some real stuff ob dat name mighty bad, kase I’l jes’ naturally lambaste yo’r jaw so hard yo’ll eat sideways all res’ ob yo’r life. An’ I’s fro salutin’ yo’, too, no matter if yo’ is a Colonel.”

“Homer, lis’en ter me.” Len put a quieting hand on the big fellow’s arm. “Can’t yo’ un’erstan’ dis am jes’ a prank ’tween yo’ an’ me? La sakes, I wouldn’t min’ yo’ aidin’ me—”

“I’ve aided yo’ plenty ob monetary ways,” broke in Homer, “an’ dis am how yo’ repays de favor.”

“I means ter say I wouldn’t min’ bein’ yo’r Aide-de-Camp, an’ doin’ yo’r biddin’,” Len explained. “Not when it was all jes’ a li’l prank anyways.”

“Well, I don’t like it nohow,” grumbled the partly mollified Homer. “It jes’ tickles yo’ ter def ter be able ter order me ’roun’.”

“No it don’t,” Len said. “I hates ter hab ter do it, Homer. But, y’see, us hab ter keep up appearances. Colonels all order deir Aides ’roun’, same as I does yo’.”

“How long dis orderin’ li’ble ter endure?” Homer questioned.

Not more’n a day er so. Look here, Homer, I’ll tell yo’ why I decided us would appear here incognition. S’pose us had registered down stairs at desk as jes’ plain Len Ballister an’ Homer Hudson frum Chatville East. What den would hab happen? Us would got a room six by six, wash in de eve-trough an’ wipe han’s an’ face on de bed-clothes. As Colonel Ballister, D.C.M., an’ his Aide, look what us gits! Two rooms, two beds, plenty towels an’ scented soap, an’ a hull bath-room.”

“Humph! Dat bath-room won’t be serbin’ no purpose ’tall,” grunted Homer.

“An’ look at de attention us gits frum de porters, de clerk an’ everybody,” Len reminded him. “Why, I venture ter say dere ain’t no udder guests in de house dat’ll be ’lowed ter hab deir meals serbed in deir room like us’ll hab.”

“I raver go down ter kitchen,” Homer said crossly, “an’ get ’quainted wif de colored gals dar. Dis maybe’s alright fer a old fossil like yo’, Len, but for me—*nit*. I craves fer company.”

“Yo’ ain’t fergettin’, I hope,” Len reminded him, “dat same likin’ fer company done got yo’ tangled up wif dat vamp wumin an’ would have cos’ yo’ yo’r all an’ liberty right in dis same city a year ago if it hadn’ been fer me. Yo’ ain’ fergittin’ dat, I hope, Homer?”

“Dat’s yo!” Homer wailed. “Allars frowin’ col’ water on eberyfing. All right den, Len. I’ll play my part an’ go ter jail if so I has ter. Nobody kin say Homer Hudson ain’t game; not eben yo’.”

“’Deed, nobody kin,” Len agreed heartily. “If so yo’ was only as brainy as yo’ is gamey, Homer, yo’ might play de part ob Colonel yo’s’e’f sumday. Now den lis’en an’ I tell yo’ what us am goin’ ter do now.”

Len lit a cheroot and consulted a small notebook he drew from his pocket.

“Homer, dere’s a man in dis Detroit city I longs ter meet up wif again. His name’s Martin Amble, an’ his heart am full ob guile as a fig is ob seeds. Uster be equalizer at de stave mill in Chatville, ten years ago. Dat Amble owes me two dollars fer showin’ him how ter get a day off from work now an’ den by over-feedin’ de equalizin’ saws, an’ I’m goin’ ter get dat—but main reason us wishes ter location him am dis.”

Len drew close to Homer, who, scenting something worth the hearing, inclined a willing ear.

“Homer,” Len said, a long hand impressively on his friend’s knees, “Homer, recomember de time yo’ los’ a heap ob money an’ yo’r game-cock, Alabaster, at dat chicken fight at Bridgetown?”

Homer groaned.

“Does a man recomember if so he has been burnt in two places at onct? Don’ ast fool questions, Len. Say what yo’r drivin’ at.”

“I’s drivin’ at dis,” said Len. “Dat rooster what crow victory ober ebery blue-game in Chatville East—who yo’ s’pose now owns dat bird?”

“I don’,” sighed Homer, “but I shore wishes I did own him.”

“Well, den, yo’s goin’ ter,” Len promised. “Lis’en. Martin Amble is de man what owns dat champion rooster now, an’ when us goes back to Chatville dat cock’s goin’ wif us.”

Homer’s gold tooth gleamed in a smile.

“Dat sure lis’ens good ter me,” he cried.

Len walked to the dresser and proceeded to adjust his collar.

“Come ’long, Homer.”

“Whar bouts? Where us goin’?”

“Out to buy a pair ob rabbits fust off, an’ den down ter Tattledore Hotel ter see dis meat-carvin’ Amble,” Len replied.

“Am us goin’ as Colonel an’ Aide de Camp, er jes’ plain man an’ man?” Homer wanted to know.

“Former ’till us gets clear ob dis hotel, den latter,” replied Len. “Hustle up, Homer, er dat Amble’ll be gone befo’ us gets dere.”

“But wha’fer yo’ want a pair ob rabbits?” Homer asked as he recovered collar and tie from underneath a colored supplement.

“Yo’ wait an’ see,” Len returned. “Dem rabbits am goin’ ter play a important part in what I plans doin’.”

II

Dr. Martin Amble, meat-carver in one of Detroit’s most exclusive hotels, better known among the colored sporting fraternity as “Cock’s-spur Mart,” threw aside his long knife and with a sigh of relief wiped the blackest of faces on the showiest of aprons.

“Shine,” he addressed his copper-hued underling busily engaged gathering up soiled “duds” for the laundry, “when yo’ does yo’r sortin’ ob dem fings dis night, see yo’ don’ make de mistake ag’in ob leabin’ soup-bones at my place an’ carryin’ de roas’beef home.”

“I’ll be right keerful, Misto Amble,” promised the boy. “Las’ time my mind was in a fuddle on ’count ob misery in a toof. Reckon I orter get dat toof drawed, but ebery time I sees a dentist’s sign my soul starts dancin’ hesitation-step an’ wafts me ’way from dar.”

“Shine,” Amble grabbed up the carving knife and made a significant scopping gesture with it, “Shine, young fella me lad, better ter hab dat toof drawed, dan hab yo’r carcass drawed an’ quartered. Are yo’ lis’enin’ in?”

“Yessah, I got yo’r message. Won’t be no mo’ mistakes.”

Amble proceeded to untie his apron.

“Bes’ carry dem baskets down stairs an’ slip out de basement do’,” he advised in a low voice. “I got a tip Manager Forbs done hired a detective ter snoop in hyar an’ check leakage. Comes he eber takes a squint in dem laundry baskets, us’ll lose our jobs an’ mebee liberty.”

Scarcely had the highly efficient Shine disappeared down the stairs when the door to the grill opened cautiously and a tall mulatto with freckled nose and reddish hair slid into the room, pivoted, and stood with a finger raised in warning.

Amble, who was drawing on a fawn overcoat adorned with pearl buttons the size of silver dollars, stared.

“Wha’s wrong, Peach-blossom?” he asked in a whisper.

“Cock’s-spur,” the eyes of the angular Negro stood out like a kewpie’s as he glanced back fearfully over his shoulder, “Cock’s-spur, us am shore in fer it *now*.”

“Fer which, Peach-blossom? Talk plain.”

“Fer ol’ man Trubble,” groaned the terrified chef. “Here’s whar us gets boad an’ bed fer all de res’ ob our natural libes.”

“How come dat?” Amble enquired. “What yo’ mean?”

“Cock’s-spur, dis hotel’s enter us carryin’ victuals home wif us. Dey’s got a detective gum-shoein’ on our tracks. Only jes’ a minute agone he stops me out dar an’ asks af’er yo’.”

Amble’s mouth fell open. “*Me*, yo’ says. Peach-blossom? Why *me*?”

“Can’t answer dat. He seemed mighty anxious ter meet up wif yo’ dough. I tell him yo’ was gone fer de day.”

“How yo’ knows he was detective, Peach-blossom?” Amble asked.

“I done knows one of de bull fambly when I lamps him. Dat how.”

“Was he white er black, Peach-blossom?”

“He was black. Reckon de management knowed what dey was a-doin’, all hunky. Ain’t no white ’tect’ cute enuf ter cotch any coon in de game ob snatch quick an’ hide close. Dat ’tect’ war all dressed up an’ steppin’ high like a hoss goin’ ter war.”

at'll be 'Go-Get-'Em' Foster ob de Pinkerenny's agency," conjectured Amble, "one ob de cleveres' leak-finders an' victual-uncoverers in de game. Usually passes hisse'f off as a boyhood frien' ob de simp he's af'er. Well, he's suttingly got his work cut out fer him here. Le's see him get anyfing on dis boy."

"I's plain scared," shivered Peach-blossom. "I's got water j'intns an' jack-knife tongue, Cock's-spur."

"Let yo' j'intns splash an' yo'r tongue clebe ter roof ob yo'r mouf den," snorted Amble. "Only fing I asts yo' ter do, Peach, is keep dat mouf tight shet an' do no talkin'. Le' me handle dis smooove 'go-find-out'. I knows a way."

The highly-nervous Peach-blossom looked only partly convinced.

"Mebbeso yo' knows a way, Cock's-spur; but dere ain't only one ob dem 'tects' ter handle. Dere's *two*."

"*Two*, yo' say?" Amble's black brow puckered in a frown.

"Dey's two," repeated Peach-blossom. "Dere's a big bulky man wif dis bird yo' says is Go-Git-'Em Foster. Looks ter me like a fird-degree giver. He's got a head like a mushroom bullet an' fists like hams."

Amble stood masticating this tough bit of intelligence.

"Jes' so," he mused. "Now I sure knows it am Foster. Dat beadle law-houn' allars hunts in company. I un'erstan'. Where dem detectives now?" he asked.

"Waitin' jes' outside de Grill fer me ter come back wif intelligence as to yo'r whereabouts," Peach-blossom answered. "What'll I tell dem?"

"Wait a minute," Amble felt in an inner pocket and drew out a small book. This he thumbed carefully until he came to a page marked in red ink.

"Look yo'. Peach. Yo' knows dat ol' boathouse 'way below Sandwich on de riber, where at dem two whiskey-runners was shot up?"

"Glory t'gawd," shivered the chef. "I orter know dat spot if enybody does. Didn' I get a hole drilled fro' my hat—"

"Shet yo'r trap an' open yo' ears," growled Amble. "I wanter tell how ter get' dem two tects put safe away."

"I don' take no hand in no murder, nohow," shuddered Peach-blossom. "I ain't lis'enin' ter no plot ter shuffle off life of human humanity, Cock's-spur. I got enuf nicks in my soul wifout dat."

“Ain’t goin’ ter be no murder,” Martin said. “All I aims ter do is teach dem two gum-shoein’ niggermen dat it don’ do to monkey wif my perticuler graft. I’s a rattlesnake, I is, an usually I give warnin’ bofo’ I strikes. But, Peach, here’s whar my rattle remain dumb. Go yo’ now an’ tell dem waitin’ tects dat Misto Martin Amble am gone fer de day but tells yo’ ober de ’phone he’ll be right pleased ter meet de gen’lemen at 54 Lardwinner Street ter night at eight o’clock.”

Peach-blossom gasped. “But, Cock’s-spur, ain’t dat a fool idee? S’posin’—”

“Neber min’ s’posin’ nuffin, Peach,” broke in Amble. “I knows what I’s doin’. Look yo’. Af’er yo’ve detibered dat message yo’ hump roun’ an’ see Lusty Higgs an’ his gang. Tell ’em ter be at de ol’ Hooch-tow boathouse long ’bout twelbe ter night, an’ ter bring plenty ob rope.”

Peach-blossom nodded and glided towards the door like a black shadow loath to pass outside.

III

The home in which Mr. Amble lived the free and unattached life of a bachelor, was a neat little bungalow in the city suburbs. Heart-shaped flower-pots adorned the lawn: the river on which lean, hungry freighters moved sedately up and down all day, swept like a blue vein at its back. All in all it looked a homey and comfortable place to the two men who alighted from a yellow taxi just as the shades of early summer dusk were falling.

“Mus’ ob cost dat Martin a heap ob coin ter fix up fings dis way, Homer.” Len commented as he and his companion went up the gravel walk to the house.

“Ugh!” grunted Homer, “some ob dat coin dat rooster he now owns win frum me, an’ as easy as takin’ honey from a drone bee too.”

“Neber min’,” comforted Len as he rang the bell, “it’s a dark lane dat has no silber turnin. Now, ’member, Homer, yo’ keep still an’ let me do de speelin’.”

The door opened and a deep bass voice bade them enter.

“Dat’s him.” Len took occasion to whisper in Homer’s ear. “I’d know dat bellow in a burnin’ stock-yard.”

He stepped inside and Homer followed.

Mr. Amble who was fully prepared to diplomatically handle the callers whom he supposed were detectives, and therefore his enemies—stared as his eyes fell upon the urbane face of the taller of the twain.

“Well I’ll be dawgonned!” he exclaimed. “If it ain’t ol’ Len Ballister.”

There was no mistaking the heartiness conveyed in his tones and the grip of his hand. Len smiled and expressed himself mightily pleased with having met his old friend of the home town again. He introduced Homer.

“Dis gen’leman,” he explained to Amble, “am de President and General Manager ob de Canadian branch ob de ‘Houn an’ Hare Club,’ an’ worl’-wide organizer ob same.”

“Which am dat?” Mr. Amble asked with interest as he placed chairs for his visitors.

“Dis Houn’ an’ Hare Club,” Len enlightened the sporting Amble, as he drew up his trouser legs and seated himself, “has been fo’med fer purpose ob takin’ de place ob more unlegal spo’t sech as cock-fightin’.”

“Gollie be!” exploded Amble, “dere ain’t no udder fing could take place ob cock-fightin’. None whatsoever.”

“Jes’ one momen’ ob time, till I fully explain de intents and pu’poses ob dis club,” Len said loftily, “den I fink yo’ll change yo’r mind, Martin.”

“Half a secon’, den.” Mr. Amble arose and went into another room. He returned almost immediately carrying a long, slender bottle and a syphon.

“Talkin’s firsty work,” he chuckled. “Drink up befo’ yo’ elucidate, Len.”

“Now den,” said Amble after the glasses had been filled and emptied, filled and emptied again. “Perceed, my frien’. Jes’ what am dis Houn’ and’ Hare Club? What does it do, how’s it got chicken-fightin’ beat, an’ how much it cost ter j’in?”

Dis club,” resumed Len, glancing at Homer who sat hunched in his chair in the attitude of one who was menaced by unguessable peril and braced to meet any contingency, “dis Houn’ an’ Hare Club am composed only ob sech as have foun’ hoss-racin’, prize-fightin’ an’ udder kindred spo’ts not quite fas’ ennuf fer ’em. De harrier Houn’s am imported from Begoria, an’ de Hares from de Egyptian mountings. De Hares are trained ter turn somersaults an’ de houn’s ter run back’ards.



Len doubled up in wicked mirth. . . . "Boy," he cried, "dat sounds mighty fascinatin' to dis coon."

"Dis, den, am de spo't. Each member owns his own hare an' houn'. A big fiel' er common, is selected; houn' and hare members congregate dere on a sot day. I bets my hare kin turn more somersaults befo' him's caught dan yo'r hare kin, an' my houn' cotch more hares wifout muffin den yourn. Say!" Len doubled up in wicked mirth and pounded his thin knees gleefully. "Talk about yo'r fun! Lor' Harry, Mart, dis am de king ob all spo't. Ebery time Chatville Harrier-Houn' Club meets I fink ob yo' an' say: 'Wish Mart Amble was here. Gollies, but wouldn' he enj'y dis exhilaratin' pastime'!"

Amble filled the glasses once again. "Boy," he cried, "dat sounds mighty fascinatin' ter dis coon. Great Man! But it mus' be side-bustin' ter see dem hares twistin' fro de air like furry footballs an' de dawgs crawfishin' af'er 'em."

He turned to Homer.

"Yo're goin' ter open a club here, Misto Hudson, I hopes?"

Len answered for the bewildered Homer.

"My frien's jurisdictionary function extends no furder dan Canada an' part of Quebec, Misto Amble," he explained suavely. "Consequence, him's anxious ter app'int a Gran' Michigan State Houn' an' Hare Organizer in dis state ob de unionville."

“But,” said Amble doubtfully, “dat would mean a lot ob work fer dat organizer, wouldn’t it?”

“Not by no means,” Len hastened to say. “All he hab ter do is get hol’ ob one er two Egyptian tumbler Hares an’ a Begoria houn’.”

Then, as though a sudden inspiration had struck him, Len sat up so suddenly that the liquor slopped from his glass.

“Mart!” he cried slapping Amble’s fat knee, “yo’s de very man ter take dat organizin’ job. Misto Hudson, yo’ hears dat?”

“So much I was jes’ dat momen’ finkin’,” Homer backed. “I’d shore be obligated ter Misto Amble if so he felt declined ter accept de hono’.”

“Why now,” said Amble, modestly, “jes’ maybeso yo’ gen’lemens are magnifyin’ my powers an’ not takin’ my sho’tcomin’s inter account. I mus’ confess I’d like ter see dat club inagurated here, an’ I believe I’m de one man ter line up de spo’ts dat’ll be interested; only y’see I’m sorter tied up, as it was. I got some game chickens I’d hab ter get rid ob afo’ my han’s an’ brain ud be free ter work at de organizin’. Besides, I haben’t no Houn’ er Hare eeder.”

Len finished his drink and, rising, paced slowly up and down the room. “Look yo’ here, Mart!” he said at last, pausing before Amble, “tell yo’ what I’s willin’ ter do. I got two Egyptian somersault hares ober at de hotel dat I was goin ter sell ter a Win’sor Club member fer sixty dollars. Also I got one Begoria male Houn’ dar, what I bringed down ter match ag’in dat same coon’s dawg. On ’count ob us bein ol’ cronies, Mart, I’s willin’ ter swap dem Hares fer yo’r game cocks. Can’t let yo’ hab de Houn’, but I’ll git yo’ one soon’s I get back home.”

“Yo means a *even* swap, Len?” Amble asked excitedly.

“Well,” considered Len, “jes, almost’, but not quite, Mart. I’d hab ter ask ’bout two dollars boot jes’ ter make it a good-luck trade fer bofe ob us.”

Amble jumped to his feet.

“Yo’re on, Len. Us’ll gadder up dem games, an’ den yo’ kin take me ober ter de hotel an’ gib me de hares an’ le’me see de houn’.”

Homer arose with such alacrity that he upset his chair. Len gave him a warning look and reached for the bottle.

“Dat’s mighty nice stuff, Mart,” he remarked. “I own up I hesitates ’bout leabin’ dat bottle.”

“Don’ need leab it,” cried the highly pleased Amble. “Take it ’long, Len. I got mo’. Only, come quick. I’s sure anxious to consumate dis arrangement an’ swap.”

“Jes’ a minute,” Len stood frowning. It had just occurred to him that at the hotel he was known as Colonel Ballister, D.C.M. It wouldn’t do to have Amble go there. No, it wouldn’t do. That spelt peril and other things. Amble with the natural suspicion of his race would be sure to cancel all arrangements if so he happened to learn that he, Len, was masquerading under another name. The dilemma called for quick decision. Len rose to the emergency promptly.

“Mart, an’ yo’, Misto Hudson, wait yo’ here, an’ I’ll slip over an’ fotch dem rab—dem hares an’ houn’ back wif me.”

“Jes’ as yo’ like ’bout dat,” agreed Amble, “but fer lawd’s sake, git goin’. Git goin’.”

Len got. In exactly three quarters of an hour he was back at Amble’s cottage, a struggling sack beneath his arm and Orinoco on a leash.

Martin Amble looked a little disappointed as his gaze fell on the dog. But his heart was won as soon as Orinoco’s wistful eyes looked into his.

“Hot dam!” he whispered exultingly, “dat Belonia back-runner am almos’ human. Look at dat face.”

“Dese Egyptian Somersaultin’ Hares am jes’ as human,” Len said, as he untied the sack. “Dat’s what makes ’em sech high-jumpers. I don’ fink I’ll eber git hold ob anudder pair like dese two,” he added almost regretfully.

Amble anticipated any danger of a back down on Len’s part by promptly passing over to that gentleman a two dollar bill. He pointed to a crate in the corner of the room in which, each in its little stall, blinked six slender, closely trimmed fighting-cocks.

“Dat’s de bunch, Len. Ol’ Tam Burydeep’s dar among ’em. Bes’ cock in America, dat bird.”

Len nodded and glanced at his watch.

“Mart, I’s mighty sorry ter hab ter break ’way so soon, but I foun’ a phonogram at my hotel summonin’ me home right away. My wife’s been

took down wif a paralyzin' stroke, an' I gotter go."

Amble showed almost too much eagerness in expressing his assurance that it was quite all right. During Len's absence he had attempted to pump Homer, and that gentleman had been so sullen and taciturn that in his soul had been born a dread that the Manager of the Hounds and Hares Club was relenting his decision to make him the State Organizer. He was, therefore, quite as anxious to see his visitors depart as they were—had he but known it—to go.

"Yo' get me a pup like dis feller, Len," he said, as he shook hands with his visitors beside the yellow taxi. "I'll be willin' ter pay a fair price fer him."

"I'll do dat," Len promised as he placed the crate of game-roosters in the cab. "Jes' as soon as I see one like King Orinoco here, I'll sen' yo' a wire."

The taxi moved away. At the gate stood Mr. Amble, a happy smile on his face, waving adieu.

IV

Destiny is a whimsical dame. He whom she leads to fame and fortune to-day, she may swoop on to-morrow and destroy. Why she had counselled a ponderous colored woman named Jane-Ann Ballister to select as her abiding place in the break in her journey from a city in a western state to Chatville, Ontario, the Southern Breeze Hotel, she alone knows. There were half a dozen hotels in Detroit quite as good and no better than the Southern Breeze, which catered to the trade of colored folk; but Destiny must needs guide Jane-Ann to the one spot on earth in which two colored gentlemen, masquerading under assumed names, desired her not to be.

The rotunda clock was wheezing the hour of eleven when Jane-Ann alighted from the flivver bus at the Southern Breeze and made her way to the office desk.

Proprietor Unicorn was behind the mahogany counter. He bowed to Jane-Ann and dipped a pen in ink that she might register.

"I done write here fer a room," Jane-Ann informed him as she signed her name.

"Jes' so, Madam."

Mr. Unicorn struck a gong to summon the bell-boy. Jane-Ann set down her bag and ran her eye down the names in the register. Suddenly she stiffened.



“Dis gen’leman here,” she spoke to Mr. Unicorn, “an’ his frien’? Dey’s stoppin’ at dis place?”

Mr. Unicorn bowed again. “De Colonel am a relative ob yourn, Madam, perhaps so?” he ventured.

Jane-Ann nodded grimly.

“Yo’ wish ter see him, no doubt, Madam?”

Again Jane-Ann nodded.

Mr. Unicorn turned back into the office and called Suite H.

“Colonel Ballister ain’t in his sweet, Madam,” he informed Jane-Ann. “Nobody answers the ’phone.”

He turned to the bell-hop.

“Boy, page Colonel Ballister.”

Jane-Ann stood brooding moodily while the bell-boy made the round of the corridors.

“Where so de Colonel’s room at?” she demanded of the proprietor. “I’ll go up dar, an’ look ’roun’.”

“Certainly, Madam.” Mr. Unicorn summoned the boy. “Take dis lady up to sweet H,” he ordered.

The boy led the way upstairs. Down a long softly carpeted hall he led Jane-Ann and on to a door bearing in brass letters the information that inside was Suite H.

“Yo’ kin run back now, sonny,” Jane-Ann told the boy. “I reckon I kin do what I’ve gotter do now, by my own se’f.”

She tried the door. It opened noiselessly beneath her hand. Then she stood staring inside.

On one of the twin beds lolled Len, his long bare legs cocked high on its brass foot and Orinoco sleeping beside him. On the other bed Homer Hudson sat with coat and vest off, a battered and bescarred game-cock on his knees. The room was blue with smoke. The receiver dangled loose from the room ’phone.

Jane-Ann stepped inside and closed the door.

“Yo’, Len!”

There was a noticeable tremor in Len’s bare toes which gradually extended downward to his thighs, his body and gradually to his arms. Slowly he raised himself on his elbows and stared like a sleep-walker at Jane-Ann.

“Colonel Ballister, D.C.M., an’ Homer Hudson, Aide-de-Camp, liars an’ knaves, what yo’ gotter say fer yo’rselves?”

Jane-Ann stood, feet planted firm, arms akimbo. Orinoco, at sound of the voice, stirred, sat up. Then with a glad whine of welcome, he bounded

from the bed and straight into Jane-Ann's arms.

"Oh, Orinoco," wailed Jane-Ann, "Oh, puppy, yo's de only one cares wherer I come back home er not. Oh my—Oh my!"

Len slid off the bed and approached his wife like one who knows not where he walks or what his end may be.

"Jane-Ann," he said timidly, "why, Jane-Ann, I's awful glad ter see yo' only I didn' 'spect ter see yo' afo' tomorrie. I writ yo' frum hum ter say I'd meet yo' here. Yo' shorely got dat letter, Jane-Ann?"

Jane-Ann dried her eyes. "Yo' send me a letter, Len?" she asked incredulously.

"Shorely I send yo' a letter dat I'd wait fer yo' here at dis hotel. Jane-Ann. Homer saw me write an' post it."

"Yes, ma'am," murmured Homer hoarsely.

Jane-Ann sank into a chair.

"Den why yo' an' Homer playin' de part ob soljer ossifers, Len?" she demanded.

Len shuffled guiltily. "Jes' li'l prank, Jane-Ann. Dat's all. I done writ yo' what us intended ter do an' tell yo' ter say yo' was Colonel's wife when yo' arrive. Shorely yo' get dat letter?"

"I get no letter." Jane-Ann said. "None whatsoever. Pretty pickle I might a got myself an' yo' two in, if so I hadn' had sharp wits."

"Dat's all too so," Len admitted. "Yo' shore am sma't, Jane-Ann—an' I'm awful glad ter hab yo' back ag'in."

Jane-Ann sobbed brokenly and Len bent and raised her from the chair. He patted her greying hair and kissed her on the tired eyes.

"Bes' wuman eber libed," he murmured.

"Hell!" sneered Homer from the farthest corner of the room.

Len wheeled on him.

"Aide!" he shouted.

Homer's heels clicked in salute.

"Yessah, Colonel."

“Git dem trunks packed fer mawnin’ trabellin’. Den take dem fowl an’ dat dawg outer here. Don’ yo’ realize dis sweet belongs ter me an’ my wife?”

“Yo’ go ter—” Homer commenced, then checked himself at a slow wink from his superior officer.

“Yessah, Colonel,” he said humbly. “I’ll ’tend ter it right off, sah.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Page Colonel Ballister* by Archie P. McKishnie]