



# A BERBER RACKET

By Captain Leighton H. Blood

Five thousand miles to mete out Berber justice to a New World robber.

CAPTAIN PAUL TRICOT lay on his bed and chuckled loudly to himself. "Name of a sacred name, will not the good Bill Cole's eyes grow as large as Atlas pomegranates when he returns!" he spoke to the room at large, and then settled himself more comfortably so that he could continue his interrupted reading.

Tricot reached for a five-week-old copy of an American newspaper, the property of his comrade, Lieutenant Cole, and inside of a minute was intently engrossed in a two-column story of Chicago racketeers. Reading about

American gangsters was the favorite pastime of the giant Basque legionnaire.

Outside, in the cobbled courtyard, there was the clatter of horses' hoofs. A sharp, high-pitched voice in Berber called upon all to look at this unruly mount, and then the rider galloped away toward the Bab Douklah. Again only the hundreds of odd noises that make up a great native city like Marrakech, Morocco, disturbed the night. To the man in the bed, reading of rod-men and rackets, all was as calm and peaceful as a quiet countryside now that the horseman was gone from the court.

Perhaps a half hour had passed be-

fore Tricot laid the paper down in his lap and reached for a drink on the stand beside his bed, and lit a fresh cigarette.

It was summer and hot. In a corner a great electric fan stirred the air of the room. For comfort the captain was wearing only a singlet and pair of white-duck uniform trousers. The mass of black-and-gray hair on his chest looked like the stuffing of a mattress.

His ears caught the sound of some one wearing shoes and not native slippers, crossing the court below, and Tricot glanced down at his wrist watch. It would be Bill Cole returning from inspection of the patrol of legionnaires in the restricted district.

Footsteps sounded on the stairs, and then along the wide upper veranda that led to the quarters occupied by Tricot and Cole. The screen door was pushed open, and Bill Cole entered.

"Hello," he said, tossing his kepi, covered with the white duck of summer, onto the washstand, and wiping his hand across his forehead where the mark of the sweatband showed.

"All goes well to-night?" smiled Tricot from the bed.

"The patrol is on the job, if that's what you want to know," Cole told him, unbuttoning his white uniform blouse with its glittering gold rank markings and buttons. "Only saw a half dozen legionnaires the whole night save the patrol. Too hot for any one to be out. I signed the book and came home."

Tricot knew that Cole cared little for the routine assignment of officer in charge of the patrol in the district. It was one of those duties that every one had to share when the turn came. The patrol was in there to protect the enlisted men from robbery—and death. Yes, death stalked there for lone legionnaires, and it was up to the patrol to allow no men to go singly into those narrow streets. They were a provost guard save that they did not bar legion-

naires from entering the district if there were more than one or two together, and they kept together. In reality they were there to come to the help of any of the legion who might be set upon, which often happened.

"Have a drink?" suggested Tricot, waving his hand toward a bottle of Pernod at his bedside table.

"Yes, but not absinth to-night, thanks," Bill told him, stripping down to his waist, and taking off his shoes. "I'll make myself a good old Scotch high ball if there is any ice about."

"There is ice, my old friend, which I had my orderly bring for you." grunted the big captain. "For myself, I do not need ice. Too many years have I drunk my liquor as I have found it, hot or cold, and been grateful to *le bon Dieu* that I was able to swallow it."

"And you won't stop until you die, either," added Cole, tossing back the white netting over his own bed so that he might sit down when ready.

Then Cole crossed the room in his bare feet and threw back the lid of a tin trunk, on the top of which was stenciled:

PREMIER LIEUTENANT WILLIAM COLE.  
Fourth Regiment, *Légion Etrangère*.

He pulled out the top tray, on which lay an American .45-caliber automatic with a half dozen filled clips of steel-nosed cartridges by its side in a neat row. He reached for a bottle of amber liquid.

"This is the stuff to put hair on your chest, Tricot," he said, getting to his feet and pouring out three fingers into a tall glass, in which an ice cube rested.

"Name of a name of a name, and he speaks of hair on the chest in such a climate as Africa," rumbled Tricot from behind his great mustaches. "Have I not hair enough for a battalion let alone grow more from Scotch whisky?" he demanded, grasping the mass on his chest with great fingers.

"You were there when they passed out the hair ration all right," Bill Cole laughed, and opened a bottle of soda water and filled his glass, and sat down on his own bed.

"Here's to a night's sleep," he said, raising his glass.

Tricot took a sip of his absinth and his eyes twinkled.

"If you were back in America you would not get such drinks as that, no?" he suggested. "You would have to pay tribute to the racketeers for a bottle of Scotch, is it not so?"

"Yes, something like that, and it would probably be cut booze at that," Cole told him, taking a long swallow. "Whisky costs enough out here as it is, but not anything compared to the tax after the grafters and racketeers have been paid off at home."

Tricot was lighting a fresh cigarette, and now he carefully extinguished the match, all the while looking at Cole.

"I like to read in the newspapers that come to you of these gangsters and racketeers," he smiled. "Ah, they are the tough ones, no?"

"Most of them haven't a bit of guts," Bill told him. "They depend upon numbers and fear of the little fellow and the honest business man. Alone they are harmless."

"*Mais oui*, it is as I thought," declared Tricot. "A brave man, say, like Mohammed Ben Moussa, the Moghrazny, for instance, would have no fear of one of the gangsters?"

**B**ILL COLE sat up and eyed Paul Tricot. He knew now that the big Basque had something up his sleeve and had adroitly been leading the conversation along to spring a surprise.

"What has the Moghrazny Mohammed Ben Moussa to do with racketeers?" he demanded.

The Moghrazny are Berbers who have accepted French rule and enlisted

in the mobile police force that polices the High Atlas with the Foreign Legion. They are paid seven francs a day, but furnish their own horses and found, and combine policing with scouting and patrol work for the legion.

They are the most picturesque force in the world to-day, with their blue capes over white burnouses, and the cavalry sabers and carbines of French mounted troops. Fearless riders of the High Atlas, they know that to be captured by their own compatriots means a terrible, lingering death for taking the gold of France.

"Come, my little truffle, you suddenly are excited," chuckled Tricot. "Is not Mohammed Ben Moussa a most brave member of the Moghrazny? Would he not be a match for those racketeers of your own country?"

"Mohammed is a brave young man," Cole said. "But what in the name of the devil are you driving at?"

Paul Tricot deliberately paused before he answered and shook the ash from his cigarette into a sawed-off shell base that served as an ash receiver on the table.

"Mohammed Ben Moussa came down from the M'Touga sector to-night, Bill, and dropped around here to see you," Tricot answered.

"What did he want of me?" Cole asked in puzzlement. He knew the Moghrazny, and liked him. Once, a year before, Mohammed Ben Moussa had distinguished himself in a scrap with the Berbers, and Cole had seen to it that Mohammed was awarded the Croix de Guerre.

"He wanted, my old friend, to have you explain to him what a racket was and what sort of men were racketeers," came the astonishing reply from Tricot.

"What?" Bill Cole asked incredulously.

"Mohammed Ben Moussa, my little cabbage, has been given leave from his command, and is on his way to New

York," Tricot said, and smiled at the astonished look on his friend's face. "He wants you to tell him what to expect when he arrives in your country—especially regarding these racketeers."

Bill Cole set down his high ball and lighted a cigarette. He knew that Tricot was baiting him along, enjoying the sensation he had caused by the news that a Berber fighting man from the High Atlas Mountains was about to descend upon Manhattan Island.

"Why is he going to New York and what has it to do with rackets?" Cole wanted to know.

"*Mais oui*, now that is a long story best related by our Berber friend," was the noncommittal reply.

"Where is Mohammed?" he asked the Basque.

"Mohammed, my ancient comrade, just now has gone on a little expedition, but he returns shortly," Tricot told him with a crafty smile.

"I'll gamble it is some errand that you put him up to," Cole commented. "I can tell by the way you act."

Tricot shrugged his massive shoulders.

"What would you?" he demanded. "This Berber, who is a good soldier, comes here and finds that you are away on duty, so he tells me his story. He goes to America and he wants information, so I tell him just a little—what I have read in the journals that you get—of the gangsters and the racketeers. Then, when he tells me of a plan, I suggest another. It would not do to have a good Moghrazny die on what you Americans so quaintly call the 'hot seat,' no? Ah, I knew you would agree."

With marked irritation Bill Cole ground out his cigarette and took a pull at his drink.

"Come, Tricot old boy, what's this all about?" he asked persuasively.

"Mohammed can explain it better than I," Tricot said, "but one of his family in America is a victim of these

racketeers. Mohammed, being a Berber first, and also a Moslem, plans to fix up this matter according to the laws of the Atlas. The knife!"

In pantomime Tricot raised his clenched fist and struck downward toward his left side at the heart.

"And, as you said, either get the electric chair in Sing Sing or stop some dope-crazed gangster's bullet," finished Bill Cole. "Does Mohammed have any idea what America—and New York—are like?"

"He has seen pictures in the cinema," laughed Tricot, "but, being a good Berber fighting man, and young, he has no fear of anything that walks on two feet."

"That's a great help!" snapped Cole sarcastically. "And I suppose you told him to go ahead?"

TRICOT sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the bed and smiled down at his caloused toes. "*Mais oui, mon vieux*, to that I plead guilty," said the Basque solemnly. "But, as I told you, little cabbage, I, Tricot, suggested a plan. The knife or a pistol is all right in its place, but I do not want Mohammed Ben Moussa to die in the electric chair, so he will settle this little blood debt in another and quite as effective a way. As the Germans said in the Great War when their submarines were busy—*without a trace!*"

Cole stared at his friend. Those last three words, "without a trace," had been spoken with deliberation.

"Wait!" snapped Tricot as Cole started to speak. "Hear the rest, and then Mohammed's story when he returns. For more than a score of years I have been of the *Légion Etrangère*. In that time I have met thousands of men, some good and some very bad. I know men. *Bien!* I have read of these gangsters and racketeers, and now comes a simple Berber who wishes to

help his brother. If he carried out his plan he would either be killed by gangsters or by the courts. When he told me what he intended to do I reminded him of an old Berber revenge that I first heard of when I was a *bleu* at Sidi Bel Abbes. If this racketeer should die it will not be Mohammed Ben Moussa who does the actual killing, but only the racketeer's lust for gold. It is all quite simple."

"I can't see it," grumbled Cole. "You talk in riddles."

"When Mohammed returns you will understand," Tricot said with a quiet laugh.

"Have it your own way," snapped Cole, finishing his drink and pouring another. "Trying to get anything out of you is a useless task. But if Mohammed is about to wish himself for the walk down the 'last mile,' I'll put a stop to it so quick he won't know what happened. I'll have his leave rescinded and see to it that he goes back to the High Atlas where he belongs. He wouldn't stand a chance in American courts if they had him up for murder—even the murder of a gangster!"

An amused smile played over Tricot's face and he pulled hard at his big, handlebar mustaches.

"But if a gangster should die quite suddenly from no apparent cause, what then?" he asked. "*Mais oui*, I read the answer in your face, my old friend. The gendarmes would say, 'Good! One the less pigs to watch.' Often have you sat here in this very room and told me how the racketeers and gangsters sometimes buy their freedom from punishment. You have told me that the only way to fight them was kill them off. *Bien!* The family of Mohammed Ben Moussa of the High Atlas now has an affair with racketeers, and Mohammed intends to play his little part in the racket. All I ask is that you listen to his story and what I have suggested that he do. If you fail to approve, then

forget what he plans to do in New York. It is simple."

Cole lighted a cigarette and looked at Tricot intently.

"I'll wait to pass judgment, but I won't make any promises," he said.

"*Très bien!*" laughed Tricot. "Always you can be depended upon to do what is right. When you hear the story just remember all the bad things you have told me of gangsters."

For perhaps five minutes they sat there quietly smoking. Then came the clatter of hoofs again in the courtyard, and the sound of slippers on the stairs. Tricot's eyes lighted with expectation and his lips quirked into a half smile.

Mohammed Ben Moussa, the Moghrazny, rapped on the screen door, entered and salaamed.

"*Salaam! Keef halek, sidi!*"

He touched forehead and heart with the finger tips of his right hand and bowed low. Bill Cole and Tricot returned the ancient Arabic greeting.

Mohammed Ben Moussa was young, tall, and handsome, as he stood there in the glare of the electric lights over their heads. His blue cape, with the Croix de Guerre ribbon at the upper edge, was pulled about him. Over his shoulder hung the ever-present carbine. The hilt of his saber showed out from the fold of the cape, and his dark, piercing eyes sparkled with pent-up emotion, for here was a Berber about to set out on a great journey.

"Pardon me for intruding upon your home, *sidi*," he said in excellent French.

Cole hastened to assure him that he was welcome, and waited.

"I go by air from Casablanca to Toulouse in France on the morrow," Mohammed told him, first glancing at Tricot and slightly nodding his head as if to say that some mission had been completed. "From Toulouse I go to Cherbourg and then to your own country, America. It is of America that I

wish to learn some things of vast importance."

"Yes?" Cole asked.

"My brother Abdul, by my father's first wife, is a merchant in New York," explained Mohammed. "I am a son by a third wife. Abdul is much older than myself and for many years he has lived in your country. Now he is beset by robbers who wish to take his money. For many months he has paid them much gold, but they are not satisfied, so he has appealed to me, for I am of the fighting men of my family, to come to his aid. I, Mohammed Ben Moussa, as head of my clan in the High Atlas, must answer his summons."

**T**HIS was a straightforward statement of fact, typical of the high-caste Berber. A call for aid by one of his blood must be answered, and at once. Mohammed was losing no time. He would fly by airplane to France and embark for the United States, this fighting man of the High Atlas.

The fact that his destination was thousands of miles away, meant nothing. An unknown land and people were secondary in importance to the honor of his family.

"Why do you come to me, Mohammed?" Cole asked.

"America is your home, and I wish to know the meaning of the word 'racketeer,' which Abdul mentions in his letter to me," the Berber answered. "I well understand a robber, for in our mountains men have lived through the ages from robbery, but this is a new expression to my ears. Abdul, no doubt, has lived among your people so long that this word is one to which he is accustomed, and he failed to explain to such an ignorant person as myself save that they wish his gold. For that I came to you, a brother fighting man, and learned in the ways of your country."

He paused a moment and glanced toward Tricot.

"The Captain Tricot, *sidi*, has told me that racketeers are like the robber Caids of the mountains who prey upon the caravans and make them pay great sums in order that they may do business without being molested. Is that true?"

"Yes, Mohammed, the racketeer is a modern version of the robber Caids," Cole told him. "But unlike the robbers of the High Atlas and of the desert, they do not fight in the open. They slay from ambush and by bomb and pistol, or capture their victims and shoot them in the back. They are not fighting men, as *you* know men of arms."

Mohammed Ben Moussa had squatted down on his heels, the blue cape ballooning out over the floor and the muzzle of the carbine protruding above his head blackly.

"The words of my brother, Abdul," he said, thrusting a hand inside the cape and withdrawing an envelope, which he held out toward Cole.

"You can read Arabic, *sidi*?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Cole, taking the letter.

The envelope was postmarked New York, and addressed to Mohammed in care of the Moghrazny headquarters at the native-affairs bureau in Marrakech. The letter itself caused Cole to sit up with a start when he drew it from the envelope. The paper was of the finest quality and the address was in one of the most expensive and exclusive sections of Park Avenue. He whistled aloud in surprise.

"There is something wrong?" asked the Berber, his eyes narrowing.

"No," Bill assured him, "only it surprised me to find that your brother Abdul has his establishment in the most expensive place in the United States. Abdul must have much gold."

He waited for Mohammed to reply, and the Moghrazny, his eyes lighting proudly, laughed slightly.

"Yes, *sidi*, we have much money. We send rugs from the Atlas, which even here in Morocco are most expensive, and leather goods of the finest to be sold in this store. Truly, our family is well placed. Perhaps we have not the money of the Grand Caids, but enough so that we must pay heavy taxes."

Cole understood. Abdul ran this exclusive oriental shop for the family, and must be making plenty of money to pay the rent that went with the address. Berbers are crafty traders and their workmanship, especially in rugs and the world-famous Moroccan leather, is the best obtainable, and also very expensive.

"Then why are you of the Moghrazny if your family is wealthy?" Cole asked.

Mohammed Ben Moussa sat back on his heels and squared his shoulders.

"I care nothing for trading," he said haughtily. "I am a soldier. The pay of a soldier is enough for my simple needs. At least one of our family always has been a man of arms. But, as you will see by this letter, our honor is at stake, and being the fighting man it is my duty to uphold that honor."

Bill Cole nodded his head and read the letter slowly, for Abdul's Arabic was mixed with colloquial phrases of the mountains that are not taught in the legion's school of native languages. When he had finished he replaced the letter and handed it back to Mohammed.

"I think I understand the situation," he said quietly. "It is a case of your brother paying twenty thousand dollars to one Bellerini on the first day of next month. Plain, everyday extortion. 'Racketeering' they call it now."

"That is what he has written, *sidi*," said Mohammed.

"But he says nothing about your coming to his assistance," Cole told him. "All he writes is that this Bellerini has

held him up for various sums from two thousand dollars to ten thousand dollars over the past year or so, on threat that if he did not pay, Bellerini would see that importations were made difficult, and that Abdul's stock on hand would be spoiled and his store wrecked. That is all he writes, Mohammed—nothing about your going to New York and using tactics that might go well in the High Atlas but not in Park Avenue."

While he spoke Cole noticed that Mohammed Ben Moussa's facial expression had changed from one of eager interest to that of pity.

"The *sidi* lieutenant has been among us much. But has he failed to remember that a Berber never tells his troubles unless he has need of help?" he asked sonorously. "Abdul would not have written me until he had need. Then only does he state the facts so that I will know the reason. He points out that the jackals are howling and that it is time a fighting man rode to the defense of the family."

Cole nodded, and from the bed Tricot snorted.

"Name of a name," said the Basque, "Mohammed gets a letter telling him that thieves are robbing the family treasure. It is all so simple. Being a man he goes to protect what belongs to him."

"I understand all that," Cole retorted. "But, Mohammed, you can't plunge a knife into a man in New York and get away with it the way you can in Morocco, or shoot him either. What can you do? That's what I want to know."

FOR perhaps half a minute Mohammed said nothing, but looked first at Cole and then at Tricot. "At first I had planned to use a knife," he confessed, "but the Captain Tricot suggested another way. He told me that in America they have a chair of electricity that kills, and that if I used a knife I would be placed in this chair."

"No doubt about that," Cole told him, "or else these gangsters would kill you or the police see that you went to prison for the rest of your life. You are a Berber and wouldn't have any show with a jury."

"That is what the Captain Tricot said," Mohammed smiled. "He told me of cases he had read in your newspapers."

"What do you expect to do, Mohammed?" Cole asked quietly.

"This man Bellerini will come to my brother on the first day of next month for twenty thousand dollars," said the Berber. "On that day I shall be in New York—Allah be willing. Bellerini shall be given a little present which I bring from Africa. If he has a great lust for gold he will examine, and then all will be well."

A crafty gleam was in the eyes of the Berber now as he looked up from the floor where he squatted.

"And what will the present be?" Cole wanted to know.

With a half glance toward Tricot, Mohammed reached his right hand under the blue cape. A moment later he withdrew a battered and dirty leather bag and set it on the floor before him. The bag settled down in a shapeless mass.

"Good God!"

The words came from Cole's lips of their own volition as he stared with wide eyes at the bag. *Suddenly he knew!*

"A most fitting payment to a robber," said Tricot from his bed.

"Terrible!" Cole said in a hoarse voice, not from fear but from his thoughts.

"They will be two of a kind," retorted the Basque. "It will not be the fault of Mohammed if this Bellerini accepts this payment. It will be justice. Listen to me, my old friend."

For ten minutes the Basque spoke, and at last Cole nodded his head.

"It's poetic justice if it works, and none of my business," he said at last. "If the law gets you, Mohammed, it will be your hard luck."

"If this one lusts for gold as Abdul writes, it will be his own Kismet," said the Berber, once again placing the leather bag under his cape.

"*Salaam, keef halek!*" he said, getting to his feet. "May Allah guard your footsteps, *sidi*, and bring you great wealth and happiness."

A moment later he was gone, and they could hear the slap of his goat-skin slippers as he strode along the veranda and down the stairs.

"If this man Bellerini is like the average gangster, God have mercy on his soul!" said Bill Cole fervently.

WITH a smirking grin on his fat and pudgy face, "Biff" Bellerini eased his bulky frame into the overstuffed chair behind the desk and lighted a cigarette. Maxie Daus, his muscle man and bodyguard, standing by the window, regarded him through narrow slits of eyes.

"You look like you connected," Daus said softly.

"Don't I always connect?" demanded Biff, with a show of irritation.

Maxie seemed to consider this for a moment, and took a deep drag from the cigarette he was smoking.

"Yeah," he admitted. "Yeah, you're goin' good, but I gotta hunch this here now A-rab is comin' across too easy. Them birds ain't like the others. He dont put up no squawk or make no squeals. That ain't natural."

Biff had reached into a lower draw of his desk and produced a bottle of Scotch and two glasses. Now he glared at his bodyguard.

"You afraid of a A-rab?" he demanded.

There was vicious menace in Bellerini's voice, and his pig eyes were glaring at Maxie.



"I ain't afraid of nobody," the other assured him, "but I'm just thinkin' that this bird agrees too quicklike to give us twenty grand, that's all."

After a moment or two Biff laughed, and swallowed his drink. The double chins that he had acquired since he climbed to the unsteady heights of a big shot, quivered as the liquid went down. The Scotch made him feel better.

"I'll make that damn A-rab come across or he goes for a ride with you, Maxie, and stays away until he pays up," he said with a harsh, anticipatory laugh. "I know how to handle these foreigners, see?"

Although he had been born in the Old Country and neither his parents or himself had been naturalized, Biff Bellerini considered any one with an alien name a "damn foreigner" if they were grist to his mill. Foreigners were his meat.

"Yeah, you're good," Maxie agreed heartily. "This is a better racket than chiselin' with beer or booze or any of the other regular stuff. Aliens can't squawk too much. You're a smart guy, Biff. We got 'em tied."

Biff's chest, under the gaudy but expensive suit, swelled at his henchman's praise.

"That's jus' what I told this A-rab," he boasted. "He knows we mean business."

"What held up his gettin' the money?" Maxie wanted to know.

Biff snorted and tossed away his cigarette.

"He's like the rest of these foreigners," he said disdainfully. "He don't trust our banks and sends his money to the Old Country, and he has to wait until a relative comes over here with it. He better have it to-day or he takes a little ride."

"I'm all set for him," Maxie said, with a cruel smile. "He better have twenty yards, that's all."

Biff looked at his ornate watch and then poured two more drinks.

"Here's to that A-rab!" he grinned, downing the contents of the glass. "It's suckers like him that keep us in limousines, Maxie."

"Yeah," agreed the bodyguard, setting down his glass.

Biff Bellerini got up and leisurely put on his hat and made his way to the door, Daus following close behind.

In the outer office a ratlike little man smirked at them and ostentatiously patted his left armpit: He was the outside guard—the sentinel at the door of the great racketeer, Biff Bellerini.

"S'long," Biff said casually, but waited for Maxie to precede him into the hall, then he followed.

OUTSIDE, Biff Bellerini hesitated for a moment and gazed back at the ground-glass door with pride. He was reading for the thousandth time the gilt letters that were painted there—the official name of his racket. They read:

GREATER NEW YORK IMPORTERS PROTECTIVE  
ASSOCIATION

It had been a long time gaining these heights and this suite of offices—from petty thievery, and an Elmira sentence, through the rolling of drunks for bank rolls that to-day were as small as Biff's tips to night-club check-room girls, and graduation from Sing Sing. Apprenticeship as a paid gunman and Tommy operator, and a reputation as a ruthless killer had followed his breaking into the booze racket, and then came the idea. The idea was a good one—extortion from the foreign shop keepers in exclusive lines of commercial endeavor.

Biff boasted, as a man will with plenty of notches on his gun, that he was the king of his racket. He had no partners. Maxie Daus was only his bodyguard—at a salary. Biff kept all the heavy sugar for himself. Salaries for

his sluggers, and bribes for his assistants, were his only expenses. The office was just as a front in case they got into any jam.

Out on the sidewalk a few minutes later, Bellerini, followed by Daus, climbed into an expensive limousine, whose glass was bullet proof, and gave the driver directions. As yet Biff had not needed the armored machine, but he took no chances. Dealing with foreigners like himself, he knew that underneath their apparent willingness to stand for extortion they were bitter and vindictive, and might hire some one to bump him off one of these days. That was the chance you took when you became a big shot.

The big machine purred through the traffic around the Grand Central viaduct and out into Park Avenue above. At last it pulled to the curb before an exclusive shop. In two small windows on either side of the entrance were draped single rugs of exquisite hand workmanship. A small plate in imitation Arabic letters announced that this was the "Souk Arab," the word "souk" meaning market or trading place.

"Want me to come, chief?" Maxie asked, as Biff opened the door of the car.

"Naw," Biff told him. "I can handle this A-rab all right. He ain't the kind that would put up no fight, and if he has the cops there I can fix things. He ain't got no vote!"

He laughed heartily at the last, and Maxie joined.

"Guess you're right," said Maxie. "He don't pay no district leader."

Biff walked to the door and entered the Souk Arab. Once inside he paused and lighted a cigarette, at the same time his pig eyes quickly taking in everything about him.

A dapper clerk in morning clothes approached, but from the rear of the store Biff saw hurrying toward him Abdul Moussa, the proprietor. Abdul said

something to the clerk, who turned away.

"Good morning, Mr. Bellerini," said Abdul, but he made no move to shake hands.

"Hello, A-rab," grunted Biff with a leer. "I'm here to collect that fine the association laid on you for bein' late with your dues last time. You got the money?"

"My brother, Mohammed, has come from Morocco, and awaits you in my office," the shopkeeper answered, with a nod of his head toward the rear of the store, and turned, without another word, and walked back.

Biff Bellerini followed, for he felt that no one would try any funny business with him on Park Avenue—and, besides, Maxie was standing there in the doorway.

The office was rather large, with a big desk standing before a window, which was protected on the outside by iron bars. Soft rugs lay on the floor, and there were expensive hangings on the wall. Biff paid no attention to these, for he had been in the office of the Souk Arab before.

Standing in the center of the room was a tall young man in European clothes.

"My brother, Mohammed," said Abdul.

Mohammed nodded his head slightly, as the racketeer looked his way.

"Another A-rab," chuckled Biff.

"We are not Arabs, Mr. Bellerini," remonstrated Abdul softly. "We are Berbers of the High Atlas mountains. Arabs are beneath contempt to a Berber. We are white men!"

Bellerini snorted. He cared nothing about that. What he wanted was twenty thousand dollars.

"Did this brother of yours bring the money?" he demanded.

"Sit down," suggested Abdul, motioning Biff to a seat beside the desk, and the other complied.

**A**BDUL turned and spoke several sentences in high-pitched Berber to Mohammed, who walked to a corner where a rug had been carelessly dropped.

"My brother Mohammed, who has come here from our home, wishes me to tell you that a Berber always meets his just payments," Abdul told Bellerini. "You have asked me to pay you twenty thousand dollars that I may continue to do business, although I comply with all the laws of this country. Is that not so? What we call here a 'racket'?"

"Cut that talk or it will cost you five grand more," growled Biff, and his little eyes narrowed. "You'll pay and like it, get me? Come on with twenty thousand, or you'll go for a ride."

There was no mistaking the venom of this threat. Abdul shrugged his shoulders and spoke to Mohammed.

The tall young man left the corner of the room where he had produced a leather bag from under the carelessly thrown rug, and advanced toward the desk. Biff Bellerini's eyes lighted avariciously. This was something he could understand. The hoarded cash was of Europe and Africa, where banks are not often trusted by the simple peasant. This one would contain gold and cash, he felt, for it looked heavy.

Mohammed said a few words to his brother, although he was watching Bellerini intently.

"My brother wishes to tell you that he now makes proper Berber payment for your demand," said Abdul quietly. "It is in this bag of leather."

Biff Bellerini set forward and leaned on the desk. Mohammed laid down the bag and stepped back and stood motionless.

"You will take it with you or first examine?" suggested Abdul.

"I'll take a look," growled Biff, and untied the string that closed the sack.

With a sharp pull the neck of the bag fell loose. Biff Bellerini, gunman, with

a score of murders to his credit, let out an ear-piercing shriek! He could only stare with horror as he shrank back into the chair by the desk!

Coiled there, with its head two feet above the desk top and waving the hood from side to side gently, was a cobra! Not the great hamadryad of the Far East but the blue-black, vicious cobra of Africa, which is quite as deadly.

"One reptile meets another," Abdul said in a cooing voice. "I pay you in kind. A snake to a snake!"

Biff Bellerini's facial muscles were working desperately but words did not come. Deadly fear was in his eyes.

The cobra, its hood extended, swayed there, waiting for a movement from the man before him. African cobras do not always strike instantly, once their victims are within range of their fangs, but seem to await a hostile move, which differentiates them from their cousins of the Far East. The cobra knows when it is within striking distance and seems to aim for an effective strike.

Although speechless, the racketeer seemed to realize that fate had stalked him. For a few seconds he was rigid and then, as if to shut out the sight of that gently swaying head, he raised his right hand and with his left tried to shove himself away from the table.

The cobra struck! To those watching, the blow seemed to travel slowly, but in reality it was as swift as lightning. The fangs sank into Biff Bellerini's right wrist—held there for seconds while the poison sacs were drained. Not until the poison was leaping through the gangster's blood stream, did the cobra let go and drop to the table again.

Mohammed walked a few steps, grabbed the snake, no longer coiled in striking position, and thrust it back in the bag. Unconcernedly he walked to the corner and dropped the leather bag underneath the rug again.

Bellerini sat gazing at the tiny, pin-like pricks on his wrist, and at the little

drops of blood. He tried to speak, but he seemed to have lost his voice.

Abdul said quietly:

"I will call a doctor now, and tell him that you have suffered a heart attack. By the time he arrives you will be dead. Doctors in America know nothing of cobra bites. They will think nothing of those little marks on your wrist, and of course there will be no poison in your stomach in case of an autopsy, for this death came not from swallowing but from your grabbing for what you thought was gold."

Bellerini started to get up from the chair, but Mohammed leaped forward and pushed him back.

"You will sit there until I call the doctor," smiled Abdul. "And while you wait for certain death, remember that you brought it upon yourself."

THE deputy medical examiner shrugged his shoulders at the half-hearted questions of the two men from the homicide squad. "He may have been bumped off but there isn't anything to show it," he told the detectives. "You know how these racketeers live. His heart stopped on him. Too much high life. I found it was pretty fat around the old ticker. Something hit it a blow that halted him. I don't mean a physical blow, but something in the old human engine. This rug dealer Abdul Moussa and his brother seem O. K. Abdul Moussa has a pretty high financial rating and plenty of money, and he frankly admits that Bellerini was there to shake him down and showed us the twenty thousand in cash he had ready to pay the thug."

"Sure," said one of the detectives. "I guess you're right, doc. Anyway, I'm not goin' to waste any sleep over Biff Bellerini. It only means one the less to look out for. This brother of

Abdul's is a cop, too. We took him down to headquarters and examined his passports. He belongs to some French native police in Africa. The consul told us they were real cops, like the Canadian Mounties, and you don't catch cops leaving any trails behind if they do a job. If he pulled one here it was a beauty, but I don't think he did. He has only been in New York four days."

"Just mark it off to heart failure," suggested the deputy medical examiner, who didn't like messing with gangsters' bodies. "No one will kick."

"Sure," said the homicide squad man. "I'm off to the Polo Grounds for the game. See you some more."

An orderly in summer khaki rapped on the door, and then entered and held out a telegram to Tricot.

"*Merci, mon enfant,*" said the Basque, taking the wire, and running a big finger under the pasted-down flap and spreading it open. After a moment he glanced up at Cole, who lay under his netting, reading.

"A cable from Mohanmed Ben Moussa, in New York," he said simply.

"What does he say?" Cole asked.

"It reads:

"Berber payment in full. Returning.  
MOHAMMED."

Bill Cole let his book fall and reached for a cigarette.

"There may be some justice in this world after all, Tricot," he said quietly. "even if it takes a slimy cobra and a Berber to administer it instead of the blindfolded goddess with the scales."

"The ancient ways may not be so nice, but they are effective, and you cannot buy a cobra off, or appeal his decision." Tricot said grimly. "And apparently he did not recognize a brother in Bellerini."

These superb stories by Captain Leighton H. Blood appear regularly in this magazine.