

LIFE AND DEATH

By **THAYER WALDO**
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There were three in the little office. Its overhead fixture cast a flat white glare down upon them, sharply illumining faces that were sober and tense.

Garrison sat before the desk, a telephone receiver to his ear, waiting without speech.

Fiberg hovered close by, watching his face, similarly silent.

By the window stood Vilma, staccato, black-pompadoured, an evening wrap caught loosely about one shoulder. She stared through the smudged panes at a blank wall twenty feet beyond, eyes wide, unwinking.

The voice of the man at the instrument suddenly sounded:

"Hello—what? . . . No! Damn it, I don't want Berlin! This is Zenith Pictures, Hollywood, and we're trying to put through a call to Hotel Graz in Vienna, for— . . . what? . . . Oh! How soon? . . . H—! Well, keep the line open and call me the moment there's a chance."

He cracked the earpiece home.

Fiberg leaned forward to ask thinly:

"So what?"

"No good—couldn't make connection," the publicity man said.

It was little above a murmur.

"Service all tied up. Can't tell when we'll get a clear wire. She wanted to give me Berlin, but that's no use. Couldn't get any information there."

. . . .

A pause; his gaze went to the immobile figure across the room.

At last he queried:

"Vilma's positive he's in Vienna?"

"Sure," the producer muttered; "that's how we know where he'd be staying. She got from him a cable yesterday just before he's taking the train in Berlin."

Garrison mumbled something darkly unintelligible and slumped back in the chair.

After an instant he pulled out cigarettes, plucked one, and passed Fiberg the pack.

When both had lights, the publicity man growled:

"Damn strange quirk of fate, or something—Erich getting there just the day this revolution busts loose."

Fiberg's head bobbed in glum assent.

"Yes, and him an Austrian, too. Vilma thinks he's sure to be getting mixed up in it. Such a business! The best director we got—best in the business—phenagling around in civil wars and maybe getting all shot up. Oy!"

. . . .

Garrison rose abruptly and commenced to stride the floor.

"God Almighty, J. L.!" he grunted. "Is that all you can think of? What about him—the man we've known and worked with? Remember, there's bullets and blood and death over in those Vienna streets, and Erich's right in the middle of it. Erich's there, the woman who loves him is here—and we're helpless. Doesn't that mean anything to you?"

Savagely the producer ground his cigarette under a heel and blurted:

"Why don't you shut up! When I'm trying to forget things like that, you have to be throwing them in my face!"

The other man swung around, forcing a smile.

"I know," he said brusquely. "Sorry; it's just sort of got me. This waiting and not being able to do anything, I mean. Perhaps if Vilma weren't here, or if she'd only say something. . . ."

He halted, fixing an oblique, brooding look upon the woman.

Her posture was unchanged, save for a closer wind of the cloak about her shapely figure.

Garrison swore—a soft, guttural sound—and flicked his fag-end against the wall.

Before him, spread out on the desktop, lay a paper. From the buff rectangle a huge scare-head screamed:

VIENNA RIOTING GROWS TOURISTS IN JEOPARDY

. . . .

For a long moment he stood glowering down at it, scanning once again the columns of print below.

Suddenly he spoke, and for the first time his voice was raised, harsh with baffled anger.

"Listen! We gotta do something—anything! I'll go nuts just standing around here, reading stuff like that and thinking about him! Lord, if he'd only stayed in Berlin one more day!"

Fiberg waved a meaty hand protestingly.

"Hey, wait a minute! Remember, we ain't absolutely sure yet, but maybe he did!"

The publicity man snapped his fingers, crying:

"You're right—of course we aren't! Perhaps he's okay after all. Might have missed the train or something, and—"

"No!" With startling sharpness her voice rang out, and the two men swung around simultaneously.

She had turned a little and was facing them, her expression fixedly somber.

"That is futile talk," she said. "You are simply trying to create illusions." Starting toward her, Garrison urged: "Now, don't look at it that way, Vilma. You know we really haven't—"

Above his words sounded the phone bell's clamor.

Whirling, he dashed for the instrument, snatched it up.

No other slightest sound was in that room as he feverishly barked:

"Yes—hello! Operator? . . . What's that? . . . Clear wire? Yes—my God, yes! Let me have them, quick! . . . Hello, hello; Vienna—Hotel Graz? . . . You speak English? . . . Good! This is Hollywood, California, calling. Are you open and doing business? . . . Well, is a Mr. Erich Trautmann registered there? . . . T-R-A-U-T-M-A-N-N—Erich Franz Trautmann, the director. . . All right—but please hurry!"

. . . .

Then a wordless, waiting moment.

Vilma had slowly crossed the room and stood now just before the desk; restlessly, her eyes wandered over the news sheet. . . .

The publicity man was speaking again:

"Yes! . . . Not there? . . . And hasn't been at all? You're absolutely certain about this? . . . Wonderful! Thanks—thanks a million!"

The receiver clattered from his nerveless fingers as Garrison leapt up, shouting:

"He's safe—he must be! He didn't go! Now we can—"

With a low moan of anguish, Vilma closed her eyes, swayed a little, and sank down upon the floor.

Stunned, the men stood rooted for a split second, then sprang forward together.

Fiberg went down on one knee by the still form, half-raised her in his arms.

"What's the matter? What's happening here?" he babbled querulously.

"Why should she be passing out just when everything's okay?"

Garrison, erect, gazed down at the pale and tragic mask framed by jet hair. At last he turned away, seeking uncertainly for something. He saw only a tan paper, black with type. . . . Vigorously the producer was massaging Vilma's temples. She stirred.

"Ah—she's coming out of it now!" he exclaimed. "Still I can't figure what—"

"Good God!" Garrison's voice was low, surcharged.

The man behind him looked up swiftly.

For an instant there was nothing further. Then slowly the publicity man pivoted.

In one hand was the paper; a finger of the other pointed to a heading in the middle columns.

Puzzledly, Fiberg bent nearer, squinted for focus, and made out:

GERMAN TRAFFIC VICTIM IDENTIFIED
Man Killed by Taxi Before Berlin Depot Is Hollywood Director

DOGS FIRST IN NORTH AMERICA

Proof Animal Is Native of This Continent.

From the Literary Digest.

The dog has frequently been called man's best friend. At least since the Azilian phase of the Old Stone age he has been devoted to humanity. This famous partnership was probably cemented in Europe, but the partners came from widely divergent regions of the earth. Man possibly originated in Africa. The dog is a native American.

The oldest fossil members of the dog family are found in the Lower Oligocene of western North America; they lived here about thirty-eight million years ago. In that time, says Prof. William K. Gregory, in the Bulletin of the New York Zoological society, the dog family was already represented by two genera, Cynodictis, the common ancestor of all the modern dogs, wolves, foxes, chloes, etc., as well as of the raccoon family, and Daploenus, ancestor of the giant dogs and the bears.

Cynodictis was not yet either a dog, a wolf or a fox. It had somewhat of the long-bodied, slinking habit of the civet. Its feet were less compressed than in later dogs, the claws were slightly retractile. Its predecessors, fossils of which are found in Wyoming, were still less dog-like. They were tree-living animals, somewhat like raccoons, with spreading hands and feet.

Daploenus had a more massive skull than Cynodictis, with upper molars of the crushing type. Bears, in fact, are only gigantic short-tailed dogs that have learned to walk on the whole soles of their feet and in which the crushing molars have become greatly increased in size, says Professor Gregory. In the rocks laid down in late Tertiary time, before the onset of the great Ice age, are found fossil skeletons of a creature, Hyaenarctos, regarded by many authorities as the connecting link between dogs and bears.

From North America, dogs spread rapidly all over the world, probably reaching Asia over a land bridge at Behring strait and thence to Europe and Africa, and South America over the present land connection when it

was established about twenty million years ago. At that time there were already many species—swift-running forms with narrow, compressed feet. These ancestral dogs in successive ages gave rise to the numerous types of modern wolves, dogs, foxes, and fox-like animals.

Among the most curious of modern dogs are those of South America, which resemble true dogs on one hand, and foxes on the other. Their lines of descent have been hard to trace, says Doctor Gregory, but it is now evident that they are really "living fossils"—surviving relics of the old dogs of the Miocene and Pliocene ages of western North America which crossed the land bridge to the southern continent.

Probably the strangest of these South American dogs is the bush

dog, distinguished by his short muzzle and the loss of his second upper and lower molars, his short legs and other features which give him a most undoglike appearance.

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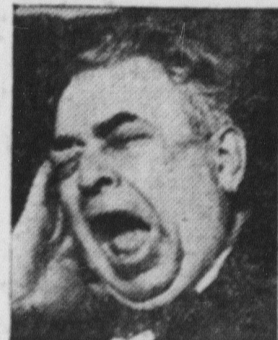
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