Marius and Sulla, the heroes of the Jugurthine War, in later years led in greater wars, in which they gained much fame. They ended their careers in frightful massacres, in which they gained great infamy. Rome, which had made the world its slaughter-house, was itself turned into a slaughter-house by these cruel and revengeful rivals.

There was rarely any lack of work for the swords of Rome. While Marius was absent in Africa a frightful peril threatened the Roman state. A vast horde of barbarians was sweeping downward from the north. The Germans of Central Europe had ravaged Switzerland and invaded Gaul. Every army sent against them had been defeated with great slaughter. Italy was in immediate danger of invasion, Rome in imminent peril. Marius was sadly needed, and on his return from Africa was hailed as the only man who could save the state.

Instantly he gathered an army and set out for Gaul, Sulla going with him as a subordinate officer. Two years were spent in marches and counter-marches, and then (B.C. 102) he met the enemy and defeated them with immense slaughter. Reserving the richest of the spoils, he devoted the remainder to the gods, and, as he stood in a purple robe, torch in hand, about to apply the flame to the costly funeral pile, horsemen dashed at full speed through the open lines of the troops, and announced that for a fifth time he had been elected consul of Rome.

In this war Sulla also showed valor and won fame. But he had grown jealous of the glory of Marius, and left his army to join that of the consul Catulus, who was being driven backward by another great horde of barbarians. Marius, having beaten his own foes, hastened to the relief of his associate; the flight was stopped, and a battle ensued in which the invading army was swept from the face of the earth, and Rome freed for centuries from danger of barbarian invasion.

Sulla and Catulus had their share in this victory, but the people gave Marius the whole honor, called him the third founder of their city (as Camillus had been the second), and gathered in rejoicing multitudes to witness his triumph.

While this war was going on there was dreadful work at home. The slaves had, for the second time, broken into insurrection. This servile war was mainly in Sicily, where thousands of slaves were slain. Of the captives, many were taken to Rome to fight with wild beasts in the arena, but they disappointed the eager spectators by killing each other. This outbreak only made slavery at Rome harder and harsher than before.

Years passed on, and then another war broke out. The Italian allies, who had helped to make Rome great, claimed rights of citizenship and suffrage. These were denied, and what is known as the Social War began. Sulla and Marius took part in this conflict, which ended in favor of Rome, though the franchise fought for was in large measure gained. It was of little value, however, since all who held it were obliged to go to the city of Rome to vote.

During these various conflicts the rivalry between Marius and Sulla grew steadily more declared. The old plebeian, now seventy years of age, was jealous of the honors which his aristocratic rival had gained in the Social War, and a spirit of bitter hatred, which was to bear dire results, arose in his heart.

Events to come were to blow this spark of hatred into a glowing flame. A new war threatened Rome. Mithridates the
Great, king of Pontus, in Asia Minor, was pursuing a career of conquest, and the Roman provinces in Asia were in danger. War was determined on, and Sulla, who had already held successful command in the East, claimed the command of the new army. Marius, old as he was, wanted it, too, and by his influence with the new citizens of Rome succeeded in defeating Sulla and gaining the appointment of general in the war against Pontus.

This vote of the tribes precipitated a contest. The Social War was not yet fully ended, and Sulla hastened to the camp where his soldiers were besieging a Samnite town. It was his purpose to set sail for the East before he could be superseded. He was too late. Officials from Rome reached the camp almost as soon as he, bearing a commission from Marius to assume the command. It was a critical moment. Sulla must either yield or inaugurate a civil war.

He chose the latter. Calling the soldiers together, he told them that he had been insulted and injured, and that, unless they supported him, they would be left at home, and a new army raised by Marius would obtain the spoils of the Mithridatic war. Stirred by this appeal to their avarice, the legions stoned to death the officers sent by Marius, and loudly demanded to be led to Rome.

Their coming took Marius by surprise, and threw the city into consternation. No one had dreamed of such daring and audacity. To lead a Roman army against Rome was unprecedented. The senate sent an embassy asking Sulla to halt till the Fathers could come to some decision. He promised to do so, but as soon as the envoys had gone he sent a force that seized the Colline Gate and entered the city streets. Here their progress was stopped by the people, who hurled tiles and stones upon their heads from the house-tops.

The whole army soon followed, and Sulla entered the city with two legions at his back. The people again opposed their march, but Sulla seized a torch and threatened to burn the city if any hostility were shown. This ended all opposition, except that made by Marius, who retreated to the Capitol, where he proclaimed liberty to all slaves who would join his banner. This did him much more harm than good; his adherents dispersed; he and his chief supporters were forced to seek safety in flight.

And now we have a story of striking interest to tell. It would need the powers of invention of a romancer to devise a series of adventures as remarkable as those which befell old Marius in his flight. It is one of the strangest stories in all the annals of history, a marked illustration of the saying that fact is often stranger than fiction.

Marius fled to Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber, in company with Granius, his son-in-law, and five slaves. He proposed to take ship there for Africa, where his influence was great. His son followed him by a different route, and arrived at Ostia to find that his father had put to sea. There was another vessel about to sail, which the son took, and in which he succeeded in reaching Africa.

The older fugitive had no such good fortune. The elements pronounced against him, and a storm drove the vessel ashore near Circeii. Here the party wandered in distress along the desolate coast, in imminent danger of capture, for emissaries of Sulla were scouring the shores of Italy in his pursuit. Fortunately for the old general, he was recognized by some herdsmen, who warned him that a troop of cavalry was approaching. Not knowing who they were, and fearing their purpose, the fugitives hastily left the road and sought shelter in the forest that there came down near to the coast.

Here the night was miserably passed, the fugitives suffering for want of food and shelter. When the dawn of the next day broke, their forlorn walk was resumed, there being no enemy in sight. By this time the whole party, with the exception of Marius, was greatly depressed. He alone kept up his spirits, telling his followers that he had been six times consul of Rome, and that a seventh consulship would yet be his.

There seemed little hope of such a turn of fortune as the hungry fugitives dragged wearily onward. For two days they kept on, making about forty miles of distance. At the end of that time peril of capture came frightfully near. A body of horsemen was visible at a distance, coming rapidly on. No friendly forest here offered shelter. The only hope of escape lay in two merchant vessels, which were moving slowly close in shore.

Calling loudly for aid, Marius and those with him plunged into the water and swam for these vessels. Granius reached
one of them. Marius was so exhausted that he could not swim, and was supported with difficulty above the water by two slaves till the seamen of the other vessel drew him on board.

He had barely reached the deck when the troop of horsemen rode to the water's edge, and their leader called to the captain of the vessel, telling him that it was the proscribed Marius he had rescued, and bidding him at once to deliver him up.

What to do the captain did not know. The officer on shore threatened him with the vengeance of Sulla if he failed to yield the fugitive. Marius, with tears in his eyes, earnestly begged for protection from the captain and crew. The captain wavered in purpose, but finally yielded to Marius and sailed on. But he did so in doubt and fear, and on reaching the mouth of the river Liris he persuaded Marius to go ashore, saying that the vessel must lie till the land-wind rose. The instant the boat returned the faithless captain sailed away, leaving the aged fugitive absolutely alone on the beach.

Walking wearily to the sorry hut of an old peasant, which stood near, Marius told him who he was, and begged for shelter. The old man hid him in a hole near the river, and covered him with reeds. While he lay there the horsemen, who had followed the vessel along the shore, came up, and asked the tenant of the hut where Marius was.

The shivering fugitive, in fear of being betrayed, rose hastily from his hiding-place and dashed into the stream. Some of the horsemen saw him, he was pursued, and, covered with mud and nearly naked, the old conqueror was dragged from the river, placed on a horse, and carried as a captive to the neighboring town of Miturnae. Here he was confined in the house of a woman named Fannia till his fate could be determined.

A circular letter had been received by the magistrates from the consuls at Rome, ordering them to put Marius to death if he should fall into their hands. This was more than they cared to do on their own responsibility, and they called a meeting of the town council to decide the momentous question. The council decided that Marius should die, and sent a Gaulish slave to put him to death.

It was dark when the executioner entered the house of Fannia. The slave, little relishing the task committed to his hands, entered the room where Marius lay. All the trembling wretch could see in the darkness were the glaring eyes of the old man fixed fiercely on him, while a deep voice came from the couch, "Fellow, darest thou slay Caius Marius?"

Throwing down his sword, the Gaul fled in terror from those accusing eyes, crying out, loudly, "I cannot slay Caius Marius!"

The magistrates made no further effort to put their prisoner to death. They managed that he should escape, and he made his way to the island of Ischia, which Granius had already reached. Here a friendly ship took them on board, and they sailed for Africa.

But the perils of the fugitive were not yet at an end. The ship was forced to stop at Erycina, in Sicily, for water. Here a Roman official recognized Marius, fell upon the party with a company of soldiers, and slew sixteen of them. Marius was nearly taken, but managed to escape, the vessel hastily setting sail. He now reached Africa without further adventure.

His son and other friends had arrived earlier, and, encouraging news being told him, he landed near the site of ancient Carthage. The praetor, learning of his presence, and advised of the revolution at Rome, sent him word to quit the province without delay. As the messenger spoke Marius looked at him with silent indignation.

"What answer shall I take back to the praetor?" asked the man.

"Tell him," said the old general, with impressive dignity, "that you have seen Caius Marius sitting among the ruins of Carthage."

Meanwhile his son had reached Numidia, where he was outwardly well received by the king, yet held in captivity. He was at length enabled to escape by the aid of the king's daughter, and joined his father. Marius was not further
Yet it would have been well for the fame of Caius Marius had his life ended here. He would have escaped the infamy of his later years, and the flood of blood and vengeance in which his career reached its end. He had friends still in Rome. Sulla had made many foes by his capture of the city. Among the new consuls elected was Cornelius Cinna, who quickly made trouble for the ruler of Rome. Sulla, finding his power abating, and fearing assassination by friends of Marius, concluded to let the senate fight its own battles, and shipped his troops for Greece, leaving Rome to its own devices, while he occupied himself with fighting its enemy in the East.

No sooner had he gone than civil war began. Fighting took place in the streets of Rome. Cinna moved in the senate that Marius should be restored to his rights. Failing in this, he gathered an army and threatened his enemies in Rome.

News of all this soon reached old Marius in Africa. At the head of a thousand desperate men he took ship and landed in Etruria. Here he proclaimed liberty to all slaves who would join him, and soon had a large force. He also gained a small fleet. He and Cinna now joined forces and marched on Rome.

The senate, which stood for Sulla, had meanwhile been gathering an army for the defence of the city. But few of those ordered from afar reached the gates, and of the principal force the greater part deserted to Marius. The city was soon invested on all sides. The ships of Marius captured the corn-vessels from Sicily and Africa. A plague broke out in the city, which decimated the army of the senate. In the end beleaguered Rome was forced to open its gates to a new conqueror.

All the senate asked for was that Cinna would not permit a general massacre. This he promised. But behind his chair, in which he sat in state as consul, stood old Marius, whose face threatened disaster. He was dressed in mean attire; his hair and beard hung down rough and long, for neither had been cut since the day he fled from Rome; on his brow was a sullen frown that boded only evil to his foes.

Evil it was, evil without stint. Rome was treated as a conquered city. The slaves and desperadoes who followed Marius were let loose to plunder at their will. Octavius, the consul who had supported the senate, was slain in his consular chair. A series of horrible butcheries followed. Marius was bent on dire vengeance, and his enemies fell in multitudes. Followed by a band of ruffians known as the Bardiaei, the remorseless old man roamed in search of victims through the city streets, and any man of rank whom he passed without a salute was at once struck dead.

The senators who had opposed his recall from exile fell first. Others followed in multitudes. Those who had private wrongs to revenge followed the example of their chief. The slaves of the army killed at will all whom they wished to plunder. So great became the licentious outrages of these slaves that in the end Cinna, who had taken no part in the massacres, fell upon them with a body of troops and slew several thousands. This reprisal in some measure restored order in Rome.

Sulla, meanwhile, was winning victories in the East, and the news of them somewhat disturbed the ruthless conquerors. But for the present they were absolute, and the saturnalia of blood went on. It ended at length in the death of Marius.

Since his return he had given himself to wine and riotous living. This, after the privations and hardships he had recently suffered, sapped his iron constitution. He was elected to the seventh consulship, which he had predicted while wandering as a fugitive on the south Italian shores. But he fell now into an inflammatory fever, and in two weeks after his election he ceased to breathe. Great and successful soldier as he had been, his late conduct had won him widespread detestation, and he died hated by his enemies and feared even by his friends.

(The end)
Charles Morris's short story: Exile And Revenge Of Marius
By Charles Morris