

# The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

**SYNOPSIS:** Before he was shot in the apartment of Colin Hewitt, the writer, Reddy Turner had received a promise from Colin that the latter would deliver a letter hidden in Reddy's room. Reddy was on the trail of the Mask, underworld czar, but the Mask was first on the draw. The Mask later telephoned Colin that if he does not wobble he will be safe. Now Colin has let himself into Reddy's former rooming house, first determining that the present occupant of Reddy's room, Butch Connal, is not in New York.

## Chapter Eight THE CURTAIN POLE

HE was in the hall now, and here he stood still again, this time to listen. Faintly, from upstairs somewhere, he could hear men's voices, a snatch of laughter, and, unless he was far wide of the mark, the rattle of chips. There was no other sound. There was no light to be seen anywhere; but again the moonlight aided him, for the front doors were glass-paneled and a streak of it, filtering in lay along the hall.

He lay forward; but, as he tiptoed silently down the hall, he became all at once conscious of a sense of eeriness, coupled with a sort of panicky impulse to hurry and get it all over and done with as quickly as possible. No reason for it. Of course not!

But somehow he did not feel at all debonair, not nearly so nonchalant as he had felt in the cab. It was easier to write about this sort of thing!

There were two doors that opened off the righthand side of the hall. He passed the first, reached the second. This was the room that had once been Reddy's and was now occupied by Butch Connal.

A sudden disturbing suggestion occurred to him. Butch Connal was away, but any one of Butch's crowd might be bunking up in there for the night. Nonsense! His lips firmed. He tried the door. Locked, of course. His keys came into play again. The first one would not work—nor the second. He was not so good, after all! He made a third attempt with a third key, and this time, after persisting for a moment, he was successful. His face cleared as the lock bolt clicked back responsively.

He pushed the door open a few inches at a time, silently, and peered into the room. There was only one window—a bay window that looked out on the rear, and the curtains that hung across the bay window, forming a sort of little alcove, were not quite drawn. The moonlight flooding in enabled him to see plainly. The bed was unoccupied. The room was empty.

Colin slipped through the doorway, closed the door quietly, and stepped swiftly across the room to the window. Behind the portières in the window bay was a chair. He passed behind the curtains and, standing on the chair, reached up for the heavy brass curtain pole.

It came away readily enough from its supports as he lifted it, but its weight, even though the pole was of course hollow, combined with the weight of the heavy portières, was so much more than he had expected that it nearly caused him to lose his balance. He recovered himself with a muttered imprecation, stepped down from the chair, and laid the pole and portières on the floor.

"The righthand knob," Reddy had said. That would mean the righthand knob as one faced the window, of course. Well, here it was—the usual finishing touch to most curtain poles, a ball-like ornament. It required no effort to unscrew it. It came away readily.

He probed, with his fingers into the hollow of the pole. The envelope, twisted into a roll, was there. He pulled it out, flattened it into shape, and thrust it into his pocket.

He screwed the knob back into place, picked up the pole, and backing into the window bay, stood up again on the chair. He hoisted the pole above his head to replace it on its supports—and his hands, in mid-air, became suddenly motionless. The portières were slightly parted as they dangled in front of him, and in the track of the moonlight he could see the far end of the room. The door from the hall was being stealthily opened.

THE blood for an instant whipped through Colin's veins, pounding at his eardrums, and then a cold, unnatural calm settled upon him. The door was closed now, and a man was coming toward him across the room. He could see but little of the man's

face, for it was mostly hidden by the other's hat brim but he could see quite plainly enough the revolver in the outflung hand.

Colin's lips tightened into a straight line. It seemed as though there had endured an eternity of time since he had first seen that door begin to open, though in reality he knew it could have been but scarcely more than the passing of a second.

"Don't move!" snarled the man. "You've got your hands above your head—keep 'em there!" Colin's mind was delving, probing swiftly. What was he to do? Not a nice situation. Not likely, but there was always the possibility that one of Butch Connal's crowd, or one of the gangsters who lodged in the house had seen him come in here; if not, then the Mask, both by telephone and physical contact through proxy—for, disguised or not, it was a certainty that this was not the Mask in person—was becoming ubiquitous tonight. This man was too tall to be the Mask.

"All right, but this thing's heavy," Colin complained; then coolly: "And may I ask what you are doing here, and who you are?"

"You're kind of fresh, ain't you?" snarled the other. "Well, you won't be so fresh when I'm through with you! See? It don't matter who I am. What matters is that you are a guy named Colin Hewitt."

"I am," Colin admitted. "But how do you know?"

"You're some talker, ain't you?" sneered the man. "I don't need to see your map, I followed you here from your dump, that's how I know." "Oh, no, you didn't!" Colin retorted confidently. "I'm quite sure of that." "Sure, you're sure!" the man chuckled evilly. "Gummed up your trail and kept your eyes open, didn't you? You're a hot detective writer, you are! Maybe if you get out of this alive, which the chances are you won't, you'll be able to hand out some of the real goods for a change. You were a laugh with your head going around like it was on a swivel trying to make sure no one was tampering you."

Colin's ire rose. All doubt that he was dealing with one of the Mask's tools was gone now, and it was obviously true that he had been outwitted, but this arraignment was a bit stiff.

"I thank you!" he said curtly. "Talk me how."

"Aw," sniffed the man contemptuously. "There was nothing to it! I was waiting just around the corner with a car where I could watch that dinky little alleyway of yours in case you came out. I didn't know whether I'd need a car or not, but I had it there. Set."

"You got a taxi before you'd gone half a block. I passed your taxi and after that I kept you in sight behind. When you got up town a bit where there was more traffic, you passed me. Got it? And when your taxi stopped on Fifth Avenue, I was going by you at about sixty per."

"I didn't have to worry any more. I knew where you were going then and I didn't mind giving you a few minutes to get your work in. So I could get the goods on you—like I have."

The curtain pole was heavy. But it was only in a sort of subconscious way that Colin was aware his arms were beginning to ache with the strain. He was trapped. He had meddled—and been caught in the act. And Reddy's letter was in his pocket.

"Thanks," he said again curtly. "You have refused to introduce yourself, but I suppose, after all, that would be superfluous. As I take it, you are representing a certain personage known to both of us as the Mask, and—"

"Cut it out!" interrupted the man savagely. "You're gassed plenty. We'll get down to cases." A sudden inspiration dawned in Colin's mind. Grim, swift humor, an ironic laugh at himself was in his soul. It was what he would have had his "daring and resourceful" hero do, of course, if he had been writing the scene. Well, if it was plausible, there was a chance, an even chance—if he could bat the trap. This thing weighed a ton. How much longer could he stand here balanced on the chair like some trick performer on a stage? (Copyright, 1933, Frank L. Packard.)

Colin takes a wild chance, tomorrow.

## CANNERY MINIMUM WAGE PACT HOLDS

SALEM, Ore., Aug. 5.—(AP)—The 27½ cents an hour minimum wage

adopted for Oregon, Washington and California women cannery workers has not been superseded by President Roosevelt's blanket code. Chas. H. Gram, Oregon state labor commissioner, said yesterday. The wage agreement, adopted by cannery and welfare commissions of the three states, also provided for 27½ cents an hour for at least 35 per cent of all piece workers, with

time and a quarter for all work over eight hours. Subsequently women workers were replaced by men at a lower wage on some of the jobs in Salem canneries. Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins answered a query by Gram, stating that as far as women workers are concerned the tri-state agreement stands for the entire 1933 cannery season.

## BETTER TIMES AHEAD FOR DAIRYMEN-DANA

BEND, Ore., Aug. 5.—(AP)—Making no reference to his duties as

public works administrator for the northwest district, Marshall Dana of Portland last night addressed more than 1000 persons in Redmond at the annual picnic of the Central Oregon Co-operative Creamery. Dana confined his remarks to a discussion of the dairying industry in Oregon. He predicted better times are ahead. Dairymen, Dana said, stand a much better chance to emerge from the

depression in a position to move ahead with the times than do many men in other lines of business. PENDLETON, Ore., Aug. 5.—(AP)—Newspaper publishers and printers of eastern Oregon met yesterday discussing a code proposed by the American Newspaper Publishers' association to meet provisions of the National Recovery Act.

## S'MATTER POP—

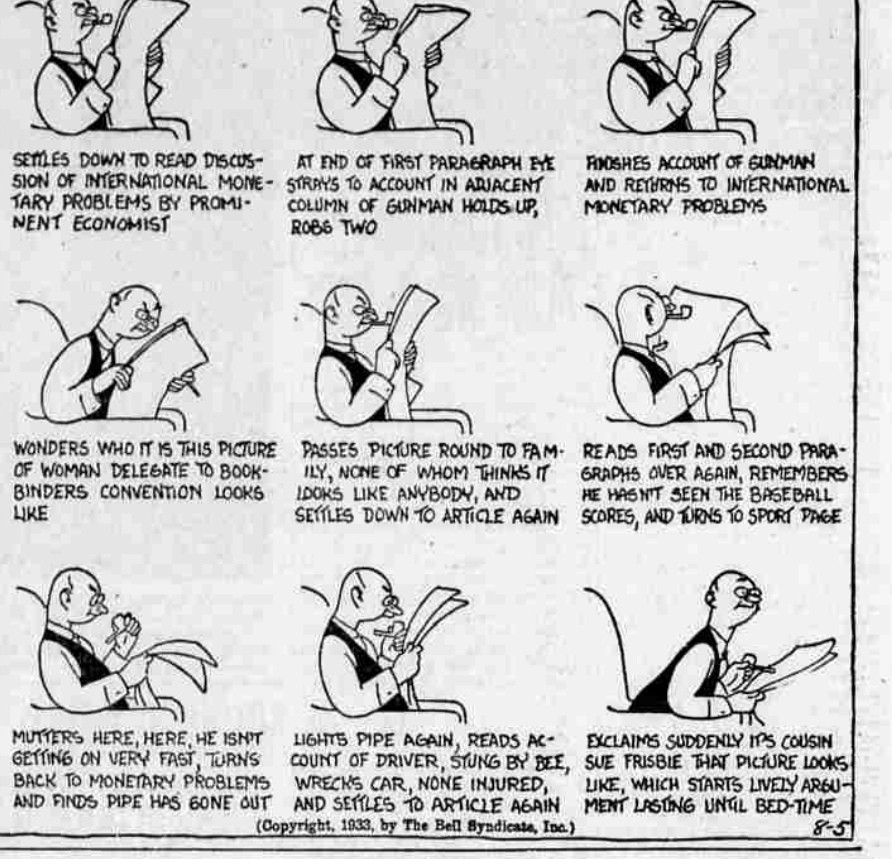
By C. M. PAYNE



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## SERIOUS READING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



## TAILSPIN TOMMY—An Aerial Picnic Party—Or Else?



## BOUND TO WIN—Ben's Peril

By EDWIN ALGER



## THE NEBBS—Let's Hope There's Some Mistake

By SOL HESS



## BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



# There's No Guesswork in Tribune A. B. C. Circulation

## BUSINESS TRENDS SHARPLY UPWARD

NEW YORK, Aug. 5.—(AP)—Trade and business continued on the up trend last week with gains distributed in more directions, the Dun & Bradstreet Review said yesterday. The improvement was emphatic despite