

The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

SYNOPSIS: A fog drives Colin Hewitt and Germaine Tremblay ashore where she is telling him to try to deliver a mysterious letter to an equally mysterious man named Joe Lazarre, who may be at a still more mysterious fishing club near Cap & Orange, Germaine's home. They hear too men talking in the fog and learn that the "club" is a den of thieves and that Lazarre is one of them. Colin is in terror of the Mask, Lazarre's employer, and has used an alias. Now he decides to tell Germaine the truth about himself.

Chapter 17 GERMAINE'S PROMISE

"No?" Germaine inquired slyly. "And do you always go armed? It is rather obvious that this club here is very far removed from the innocent paradise of sportsmen that it pretends to be! What are you? A detective?"

"Oh, Lord, no!" He forced a laugh. "But I've created a lot of them—rather moldy ones, I'm afraid. I'm Colin Hewitt. I write books."

"What's the name," she said, "and I suppose, to be really true to form, I ought to say that I have read and loved every book you have ever written, and—"

"Don't!" he groaned. "I won't," she assured him calmly. "I admit I have never read even one of them."

"You wouldn't," he stated confidently. "I don't write the sort of stuff that would appeal to you. Just thrillers—as bloodthirsty and as horribly creepy as possible, of course. I've never written a love story, for instance, in my life."

"Oh! And why not?"

"Because I can't," he confessed. "There has to be a girl because the dear publishers insist on it, but the best I can do is most awfully unconvincing—I just have to drag her in by the hair of the head."

He heard her laugh ripple under her breath.

"Just like I've been dragged in tonight?"

"Well—yes, in a way," he stammered. "But this isn't a story. Nevertheless, I rather like it—being dragged in by the hair of the head—so far," she confessed. "But why this sudden shedding of your cloak, Mr. Hewitt—or should I say, Mr. Howard?"

"I see you haven't judged me harshly—offhand," he said, gratefully.

"Judgment reserved," she answered. "I asked you a question."

"Because," he said earnestly, "I want to exact a promise from you that, for the time being at least, you won't say anything about what has happened tonight."

"Isn't that a very strange request?" Her voice was suddenly serious. "I don't understand."

"I want to tell you a little story," he said quietly. "Do you mind? I will be just as brief as I can."

"I am listening," she invited.

The minutes passed—many of them. The story did not lend itself to brevity. There was too much to tell, so many sidelights, if she was to understand. And so he told her of Annie, and French Pete and the Mask, and Reddy Turner's murder. Everything—except his promise to Reddy, and the actual purpose of his visit to Butch Connal's room.

"And so you see," he ended, "why at present I am a man without a home and without a name. That brings us to tonight. I haven't said anything so far about Lazarre; but I have reason to hope that I can get him to help me pick up the Mask's trail. That's why I asked for your promise."

"You have my promise," she said simply.

And somehow in the darkness their hands met. She did not draw hers away. And for a moment they sat thus in silence. He was not tongue-tied now—he was fighting to hold back the rush of words that were on his lips. He could not bring her intimately into his life as matters stood. It would not be fair to her—if he found that she cared. It would only be inviting her into danger of the ugliest kind.

His hand tightened warmly over hers and then released it.

"That's ripping of you!" he said. "I don't need to tell you that the club, in its own parlance, will be taken for a ride in its course—and the road won't be any the smoother because of the delay."

"What do you think they are doing there?" she asked.

"I haven't the faintest idea," he said.

"But Lazarre?" she questioned. "I don't understand about Lazarre. You

haven't told me who he is, or how you know he was down here."

"No," he said frankly; "I haven't. And I am afraid that is one of the things that I am not at liberty to tell you. Personally, I do not see any reason now why you should not know, but I gave my word and I have no choice other than to keep it. I'm not throwing cold water, am I?"

"Oh, no!" she declared emphatically. "Of course you're not! I can quite understand. But there is one question I do want to ask. You said you hoped to get Lazarre to help you to pick up the Mask's trail. You remember that one of those two men just said something about W. P.? That was what was on the card you found in the pocket of the man you fought with in Reddy Turner's old room, wasn't it?"

"You go up head," he applauded.

"Well, that pretty definitely proves that the club here is one of the Mask's enterprises, doesn't it?" she demanded. "And therefore that Lazarre is one of the Mask's men! How can you expect help from him?"

"That's the only other thing I can't explain to you," he said, "except to say that I am armed with an approach to Lazarre which may mean everything—or nothing. I do not know any more than you do what it's worth until I have talked with him."

"This whole thing is terrible!" she exclaimed. "It is almost impossible to believe that a fiend such as you have pictured the Mask to be exists as a human being."

Colin laughed shortly.

"He exists all right. Witness Mr. Howard. But let's not talk about him for a moment. There's a question or two I'd like to ask you. Tell me all you can about the club itself."

"I can't tell you very much," she said. "I've seen it, of course, but only from a distance when I've been out in my boat. It looks very nice, and father says it is very comfortably fitted up inside with electric light and—"

"Electric light!" Colin interrupted quickly. "That's interesting! That means they've got a power plant of some sort. I suppose they've harnessed up the river a bit."

"I suppose so," she said, "though I don't know very much about such things. But there are some falls right beside the clubhouse, and I don't imagine it would be a very difficult thing to do."

"You mean it's what one would expect? All the creature comforts. Mr. Walidrow Kenniston wouldn't be without them, of course. Well, is there anything else you can tell me?"

"No," she replied thoughtfully. "I don't think so. I have already told you that no one from the club ever comes near Cap & Orange, so I have no personal knowledge of them."

"I see," he said—and fell silent for a moment. How best to make contact with Lazarre? "Look here," he said abruptly. "I know there are no roads out of Cap & Orange, but there is nothing to prevent one from going overland to the club is there?"

"Not if you have the agility of a mountain goat and are an expert woodsman," she answered laughingly. "You would cut the time to half to, for I don't suppose, as the crow flies, it would be more than three and a half miles from the village to the club."

"That's also interesting," he said. "As far as agility is concerned, I think I would be prepared to take a chance; but as for the other qualification—well, perhaps you know someone who could supply it?"

She hesitated for an instant.

"The best man in the village at that sort of thing," she said, "is an old timber cruiser named Anatole Bouchard. He speaks very good English too, but—"

"Bouchard?" he broke in. "What sort of a man is he? Is he to be trusted?"

"If you paid him enough to make it worth his while."

Her hand reached out. He felt her fingers close tensely on his arm.

"Why all these questions about going overland to the club?" she asked. "You heard what those two men said. I—I am afraid. What do you intend to do?"

"Not a thing," he laughed disarmingly. "except to arrange a little private interview with Monsieur Joe Lazarre."

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Colin stumbles into a new plot and a new danger, tomorrow.

APPLE GROWERS PAY CROP LOANS

SPOKANE, Wash., Aug. 16.—(AP)—Pacific Northwest fruitgrowers who

borrowed \$2,162,821 to finance production of the 1932 apple crop have repaid every cent borrowed, Joel Ferris, chairman of the loan agency of the R. F. C. here, said today.

The repayment of the 1932 loans, Ferris said, brings to about \$5,500,000 the repayments of \$9,500,000 advanced by the R. F. C. in this district.

The 1932 apple loans were made through six local credit corporations:

at Wenatchee, Yakima, Hood River and Payette to finance 608 growers who produced 5,432,530 boxes of fruit.

The repayment announcement was made on the eve of the retirement of John I. Tuttle as manager of the agency here. He will be succeeded tomorrow by Walter Ferguson of Rockford, Wash.

CAPONE TO FACE TRIAL ON RACKET

CHICAGO, Aug. 16.—(AP)—A writ directing the federal government to

produce Al Capone in criminal court here August 29 for trial on charges of racketeering was issued today by Chief Justice John J. Frydlaak.

Federal authorities have indicated they would abide by the writ. Capone is serving an 11 year sentence in the federal penitentiary at Atlanta for income tax fraud.

Capone had been indicted with 24 co-defendants, an alderman, attorney,

union chiefs, trade association organizers, and gangsters, on charges they collected tribute from legitimate business through "terroristic" tactics maintained by their associations, unions and thugs.

Reid, Murdock & Co., canners of the Monarch brand Bartlett pears, will be represented at Medford this season by Myron Root.

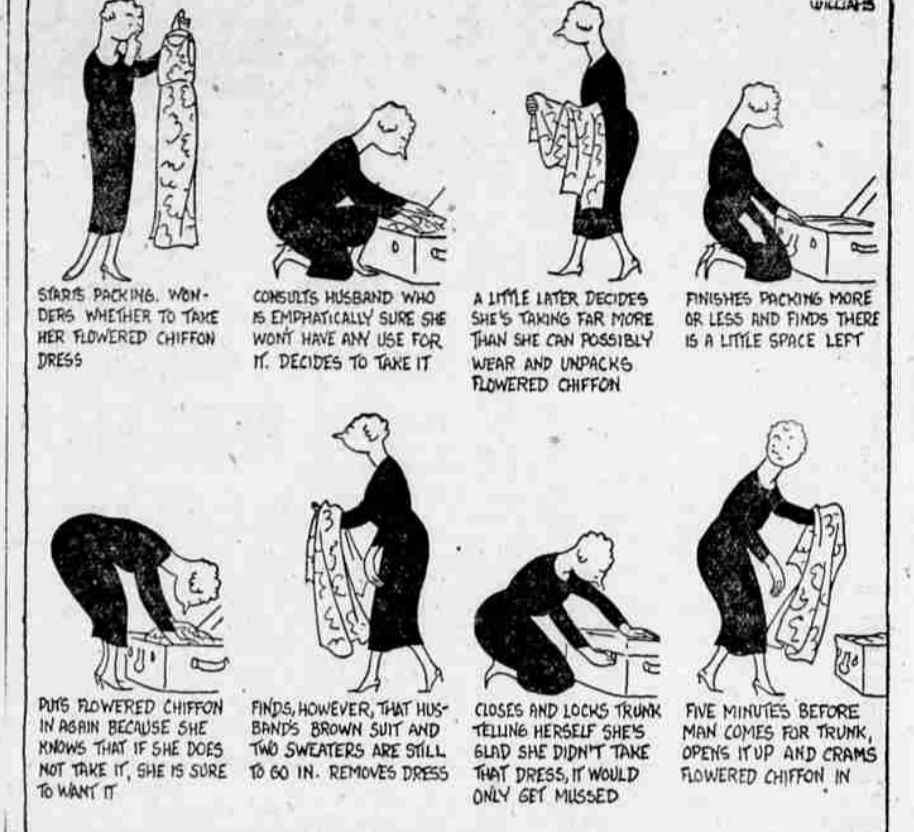
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



SNAPSHOTS OF A WOMAN PACKING

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—When Gold Sinks It "Stays Sunk"

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FORREST



BOUND TO WIN—Lotta's Elation!

By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—A Fish Story

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



DEER IN DEATH LEAP TO ESCAPE COUGAR
HOOD RIVER, Aug. 16.—(AP)—Believed to have been pursued by a cougar, a four-point, 170-pound deer leaped to its death over a 200-foot precipice near Mitchell Point tunnel on the Columbia River highway.

WIFE ACQUITTED OF POISONING HUSBAND
SALEM, Mass., Aug. 16.—(AP)—Jessie B. Costello today was acquitted of the poison slaying of her husband, Fire Captain William J. Costello of Peabody.

WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT GUM THE PERFECT GUM

IN STEP WITH THE NATION

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