

The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

SYNOPSIS: Colin Hewitt, disguised as Charlie Lunn, a crook, suddenly finds the trail of the Mask, New York underworld ruler who has threatened Colin's life, when two of the Mask's minions call Colin to their table in Spaulding's night club. Colin has been watching Captain Dollaire, Canadian rum runner, who is drinking with a loose baron called Eddie Schuerm. Now he is invited by the two men to join them and accept, just in time to help defend them against two unknown assassins. Colin and the two crooks, Benny Malone and Harry the Lynx, escape.

Chapter 38
COLIN'S VICTIM

"YOU remember what I told you?" Benny Malone went on.

"That's what I've been thinking about all along," confessed Colin insistently.

"Well then listen," confided Benny. "I'll let you in a little way on this so you'll be able to watch your step, even if your back was turned until the lights went out and he didn't get a look at you anyhow."

"Who didn't?" Colin inquired.

"The guy you plucked. His name's Mulvey—Detective Sergeant Tim Mulvey of the Homicide Squad."

Tim Mulvey! A prickly sensation ran up and down Colin's spine. Tim Mulvey! Out of the night from somewhere a burst of ironic laughter seemed to be ringing in his ears.

Tim Mulvey's gun was in his pocket—and a man wanted for murder, for the Homicide Squad never wanted anyone for anything else, had got away! He dragged deeply on the cigarette he had just lighted.

"That's okay by me," he said, as he exhaled the smoke complacently through his nostrils. "But that Homicide bunch never show up anywhere except for one thing. It looks like Harry had made the scam all right, but what about you? This Mulvey bird isn't going to laugh about his pinch being queer, and he saw you, didn't he?"

Benny Malone laughed contemptuously.

"Maybe yes, maybe no; but it was Harry he was after. He's got nothing on me. If he makes a crack I'll be a joke. Mistaken identity—got me? He doesn't know me. I was over in Philly tonight—with the other boys who were at the party there to prove it. See?"

"Sure!" agreed Colin. "That's easy."

"It'll be in the papers tomorrow," said Benny Malone, "but I'll wise you up now. Mulvey was after the Lynx and a fellow called Conk Eagan for a little shooting up at Nigger Joey's about a year ago when a guy named French Pete was bumped off. The cops got Conk Eagan tonight, and he's down at headquarters now getting the works."

Outwardly calm, Colin's brain was in a riot. French Pete! Reddy had said their turn would come, but they were still useful, that it was the big noise he was after. And now Detective Sergeant Mulvey was on the track. . . . How far had Tim Mulvey got? . . . Was it still only a case of the lesser breed? . . . Or what?

"That's tough!" he deplored. "Who squealed?"

Benny Malone's smile was unpleasant.

"An old geezer that saw the shooting and had it on his conscience, but didn't dare make a spiel," he said. "He got run over or something this afternoon, and just before he croaked in the hospital told he got it off his chest. Named the Lynx and Conk Eagan. See?"

"THAT'S the way we got the story when the tip was slipped to Harry that Mulvey had a dragnet out for him. Conk was pulled before anyone could put him wise, and Harry only got the tip a minute or two before he gave you the high sign."

"There's no better place for a get-away than Spaulding's if you know the tricks and Spaulding knows you, so we sat tight because we didn't want to leave Spaulding's unless we had to—never mind why—and, besides, Mulvey might miss that bet; but if he showed up it would be safer if I didn't have to play a lone hand. That's why you got a chance to ante. Understand?"

"I got you," said Charlie Lunn with a crooked smile. "I'm natural on that. But where do I go from here?"

Benny Malone halted on a corner. "Don't you worry about that after tonight, kiddo. Got a telephone number?"

Colin gave it to him.

"Alright," said Benny Malone. "You stick around tomorrow where you can listen to his merry chimes. I got to talk to someone first, and he's got to talk to someone else, but you'll hear from me. That okay?"

Colin nodded. He remembered what Reddy had said. The Mask, personally unknown to the numbers

of his various mobs, worked through trusted lieutenants. The "someone" was a lieutenant, the "someone else" was almost certainly the Mask.

"You won't have to call me twice," he jerked out with an engaging grin. "I'll be listening in for you."

Benny Malone thrust out his hand. "Take the air, then, before we get the once-over from the flat-foot on the beat," he said, as his grip tightened. "So long, Charlie—till tomorrow."

Benny Malone strode away. Colin watched the other for an instant, then started to make his way back to his room. Swift as only thought is swift, theories and possibilities stabbed at his brain.

But only one thing stood out clearly in his mind. Tim Mulvey, except for the fact that he now knew, through a death-bed statement, two of the lesser breed, was no nearer the Mask than he had ever been. And those two, even granting that Harry the Lynx was also caught, would take the rap.

The code again. It ended there. None knew that better than Tim Mulvey himself. Colin, therefore, had in no way wrecked the big issue in blocking Detective Sergeant Mulvey's efforts to make an arrest.

On the contrary, the crime he had unwittingly committed of impeding justice plus an assault upon a personal friend, had, as quietly as possible, it would be only a miracle if his face were to have been remembered by a possible third member of Mulvey's party, and if that man were to pass him on the street. Nevertheless, miracles do happen, and Colin had no intention of being in jail when his telephone rang next day.

What would the next day bring?

It was unbearably hot and muggy. Men and women, a heterogeneous hodgepodge of nationalities, seeking refuge from the furnace temperature of crowded, airless rooms, sat on the doorsteps of tenements and houses in scarcely less hot discomfort, mopping at their faces; the men coatless with bared necks and chests, the women in flimsy dishabille.

Only the younger children seemingly had the energy to move—scantly clad, some frankly nude, they played in the gutters. The day had been one of blistering heat, and even now in the waning light the pavement still seemed to shimmer.

The street, typical of so many another on the lower East Side, was gasping for its breath—listening eagerly to the low, but still far distant, rumbling of thunder that promised, if the storm did not fight shy of the city, at least some measure of relief.

Colin, as he made his way along the street, walked slowly—not wholly on account of the heat. He was looking for a tobacco store that, according to the directions Benny Malone had given him, should be somewhere in this block.

He flicked the ash from his cigarette jauntily—to help camouflage his own emotions. Could his mind never work in any but one groove? Could he never think except in the terms of one of his own thrillers? Well, all right! Why fight against it?

If he ever wrote again, he should, if he but availed himself of it, be able to profit vastly by virtue of personal experience! Suppose he were writing this scene in which he was not only actually taking part, but in role he was even playing the leading role and holding center stage at this precise moment? Here was a situation.

Would Charlie Lunn walk along the street steel-nerved, icy cold in determination, unmoved, immune from even a flutter of emotion, contemptuous of the risk that was sometimes run incident to thrusting one's head into the lion's mouth; or would Charlie Lunn experience a slightly hollow feeling in the pit of his stomach and a noticeably quicker tempo in his heart pound—as Colin Hewitt, none too courageously, was doing now?

Benny Malone had kept his word and had telephoned that morning. Colin had been instructed to go to a certain uptown restaurant, Mariotte's, to be exact, take lunch there alone at a table that he would find had been reserved for him, and then return to his room.

Colin, tomorrow, buys a package of "W. P. N."

GOVERNOR ROLPH'S CONDITION SAME

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 4.—(AP)—Governor James Rolph Jr., of California, who is "seriously though not dangerously ill" at St. Francis hospital with a lung congestion, slept during the early hours today. Hospital attendants reported his condition unchanged.

Dr. John Galloway, who said the governor's condition "has given us concern," revealed his temperature had run as high as 105½. The last reading at 1:30 a. m. was reported at 103.

Dr. Galloway said complete rest was "absolutely essential" and that he could not say how long it may be before Governor Rolph can leave the hospital.

Governor Rolph entered the hospital Saturday after coming here by automobile from Sacramento.

ROOSEVELT YACHT NEARING CAPITAL

WASHINGTON, Sept. 4.—(AP)—The yacht Nourmahal with President

Roosevelt aboard reached the protected waters between Cape Charles on the north and Cape Henry on the south at the mouth of Chesapeake bay early today, and headed toward the Potomac river for a slow cruise to the capital.

Arrangements were made for an airplane from Washington to take newspapers and official dispatches to the president.

A message to the navy from the destroyer escort said:

"Before leaving ocean waters the president again tried out his luck as a fisherman. He hooked a turtle weighing in excess of one hundred pounds."

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S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE

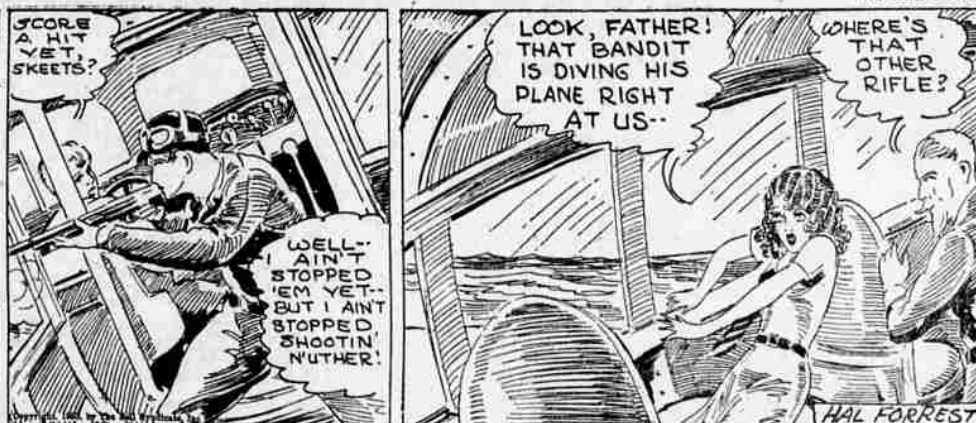
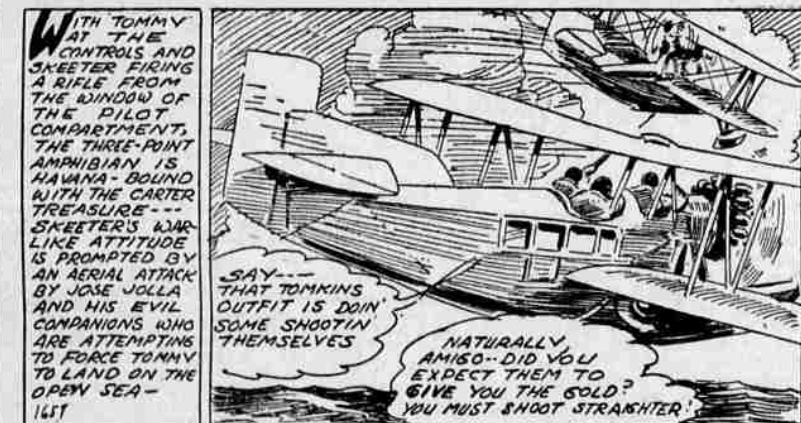


SNAPSHOTS OF A SMALL BOY CARRYING A BAG

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPI NTOMMY—That's The Spirit, Ferdinand



BOUND TO WIN—Another Person Missing



THE NEBBS—Old Dignity



BRINGING UP FATHER



LINDBERGH ARRIVE IN SWEDISH CAPITAL

STOCKHOLM, Sept. 4.—(AP)—Colonel and Mrs. Charles A. Lindbergh arrived here shortly after 3 o'clock this afternoon after a flight from Copenhagen.

Oregon Weather.

Fair tonight and Tuesday; overcast in west portion tonight; not much change in temperature; moderate northwest wind offshore.

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