

The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

SYNOPSIS: The writer, disguised as a crook and using the name Clarkie Lunn, has been trailing the Mask. The Mask is a power in New York's underworld; he also has threatened Colin's life. By a lucky break which involved knocking out his friend, Detective Sergeant Mulvey, in Epitaph's night club, Colin has managed to win acceptance by one of the Mask's numerous gangs. Benny Malone is giving him the "low down" in the back room of an obscure tobacco shop on the East Side.

Chapter 26 THE MASK AGAIN

THE Mask! The name had dropped offhandedly, unexpectedly, from Benny Malone's lips. Colin had talked to the man once before on a certain night about the Mask—but, on that occasion, on not what could be exactly described as confidential terms. How far was the trail to be blazed now so that even Clarkie Lunn could follow it? He shook his head.

"Maybe I'm dumb," he admitted. "Who's the Mask?" Benny Malone reared himself upright on the sofa and leaned toward Colin.

"Listen!" he said. "There's something doing tonight; but, before that, there's a lot of things you've got to know. You've got to know the rules and regulations, and I'm here ahead of the others to give you the low-down. You got the okay today. You said you wanted it."

"Well, you're in. You're on the payroll now, and you get a bunch of kale every month besides a cut on every job that's pulled—so long as you don't hurt the feelings of any of the big boys. Which wouldn't be so good! I'd hate to see Clarkie Lunn come riding back from the country in a morgue wagon like I've seen some."

"I should worry about that!" declared Clarkie Lunn confidently. "Go on and spill."

"All right," responded Benny Malone cheerfully. "Just keep your fingers crossed, that's all. What was I saying? Oh, yes. You wanted to know who the Mask is? Well, you'll have to ask me another. I don't know."

"None of us knows—except the big shots that he gives his orders to. And they ain't telling! I've never seen him, but he's always jake with the coin. All I know is that he runs a lot of mobs from this hangout, and that each mob has its own big shot, and—Benny Malone grinned suddenly—"here's one of them now."

Colin swung around in his chair. A man stood there in the doorway—a familiar figure. Colin, simulating mild interest while mentally he seemed to be suddenly upside down, reached nonchalantly into his pocket for a cigarette. It was Helmie Schwarm, the booze baron.

"Hello, Helmie," said Benny Malone. "Meet Clarkie Lunn. He's traveling with Buck from now on." Helmie Schwarm came forward into the room as Colin lunged up from his chair.

"Saw him with you last night, Benny," said Helmie Schwarm gallantly; then, extending his hand to Colin: "Good boy! Too bad Harry got the bracelets after all."

"What's that?" rasped Benny Malone as he jumped up suddenly from the sofa. "When did you hear that?" "About an hour ago."

"Hell!" snarled Benny Malone. "Where did they make the pinch?" "Pulled him off a train this afternoon just before he got to the border," Helmie Schwarm answered unexcitedly. "He was making for somewhere up in Canada. I haven't got the details yet. But don't break your face scowling, Benny. It'll cost something, but both Conk and Harry'll be taken care of all right."

"Maybe," admitted Benny Malone sourly.

HELMIE SCHWARM laughed. "You've seen it done before, haven't you? You ought to know! Forget it! Has Buck come in yet? He said he'd be here."

"I haven't seen him. Maybe he's upstairs."

"He's not there," stated Helmie Schwarm. "I've just come down."

"Well, then, he hasn't come in yet."

Helmie Schwarm pulled a sealed envelope from his pocket and handed it to Benny Malone.

"All right," he said. "There's too much doing tonight, and I can't wait. Give him that. Tell him it's the dope he wanted, and that I'll have everything ready for him. Understand?"

"Sure," said Benny Malone. "Leave it to me. So long, Helmie."

"So long," returned Helmie Schwarm—and, with a nod to Colin, he left the room.

"That's tough about Harry!" said Benny Malone morosely as he dropped back on the sofa.

Colin sat down again. "It sure is," he agreed; "but I guess from what this fellow Helmie said, it'll be fixed up without much trouble. And speaking of Harry, has Detective Sergeant Mulvey been noising around for you today?"

Benny Malone permitted a grin to drive away his morose expression. "Nothing doing!" he answered. "So it's a cinch he didn't get my number last night."

"That's good," said Colin heartily. He paused for a drag on his cigarette; then, apologetically: "Look here, I guess there's a lot I've got to be wised up on. Who's this Helmie—and what's his other name? You didn't mention it."

"Schwarm," said Benny Malone. "Helmie Schwarm. He's a foam car. Every bootlegger in town knows him. He runs the suds and hard-stuff racket for the Mask."

Colin dragged again on his cigarette. His mind was probing swiftly, striving to bring order out of confusion. Last night at Spinnell's—Dollaire and Helmie Schwarm together—Helmie Schwarm one of the Mask's big shots—what was the Mask's game? No answer—but not nice for Dollaire, whatever it was!

"I see," he nodded. "And who's Buck? You said something about me traveling with him from now on."

"Buck O'Mara," explained Benny Malone. "He's the big shot of our mob—and a damned square shooter. You'll like him."

"I hope that'll go double," said Colin earnestly. "What's our mob's particular racket?"

IT WAS growing dark. Benny Malone got up and switched on an electric light.

"Anything—everything," he replied with a short laugh. "Wherever we're needed. You'll see. And you'll get your first work-out tonight."

"Well, then," asked Colin complacently, "what's doing tonight?" Benny Malone shook his head.

"I don't know—yet. We'll get our orders from Buck. But never mind about that. I've got to finish giving you the low-down in this dump before he comes in. It used to be a pretty hot joint that was named the Wine Press—we call it W. P., get me? And it was all fixed up with passages and half a dozen ways to get in and out—playing the boobs for suckers, you understand?"

"The boobs being the slumming parties that blew down from Fifth Avenue way looking for shivers and thrills and thinking they were naughty. That cobbler's shop, which maybe you saw when you came along, used to be a grotto all got up fancy with low lights and a secret way out and a way into here—both of which same are still useful! Solly down there was one of the bunch that was giving you the once-over at lunch, and he'll pass you in that way any time it's necessary. He cobbles all right—see?—but that ain't the way he makes his money."

"It sounds swell!" Colin exclaimed eagerly. "Go on, Benny. Keep on shooting. It looks like the place had been made to order. How did the Mask get onto it?"

"Know about it, I suppose, when it was running full blast back in the old days," Benny Malone answered with a shrug of his shoulders. "That's a long time ago—before the war, and before the booze law started making money for us. I guess there aren't many even around here that remember the name it went by then."

"When the law came in against it, the people who were running the place kept on selling booze just the same until they got pinched enough times to make them quit cold. Then somebody else tried to run it on the level as a restaurant and it was a flop. It wasn't good for anything the way it was. It was put up for sale, and I guess it went cheap—or else old Keppelstein would never have bought it!"

"He made two houses out of it, but he didn't spend any more on alterations than he had to, so he left this part a good deal like it was, except that he put in a store front at this end. He moved into the other part himself."

"I saw an old bird sitting on the porch as I came along," observed Colin. "Was that him?"

(Copyright, 1933, Frank L. Packard)

Colin hears, tomorrow, more about the Mask and Dollaire.

ASHLAND SCHOOLS OPEN, 1028 ATTEND

ASHLAND, Sept. 6.—(Sp.)—Ashland's public schools opened Labor day, with an enrollment that compared favorably with that of last year, according to Supt. George A. Briscoe, who reported the enrollment as follows at the various schools this morning:

Senior high, 230.
Junior high, 290.
Washington, 235.
Lincoln, 283.
This makes a total of 1028 today. The enrollment last year was slightly higher, but this is probably explained by the fact that some students are still on vacation trips with their parents. Eventually the enrollment will no doubt equal that of last year as in the Senior and Junior high schools the enrollment today was more than on the second day last year, while in the Washington and Lincoln schools the enrollment was less.

SELMA CCC WINS DOUBLE HEADER

The 1746 company Selma again crashed out two wins over the week-

nd. Gaquet camp was defeated Sunday 7-2 and the Taklima town team was defeated Monday 8-6. This is the second straight defeat handed Gaquet and the third straight for Taklima.

Due to La Mear's absence Stappleton and Kincart pitched the first game and Tynan and Kincart again trotted in the second game Monday. A stiff wind interfered with both games and made good playing impossible and consequently many errors were made. This is in all probability the last game of the season for Camp Kerby.

A few REAL BARGAINS in PIANOS at present low prices which can not be guaranteed after September first. BALDWIN PIANO SHOPPE, 26 So. Grape. Lilla M. Purucker.

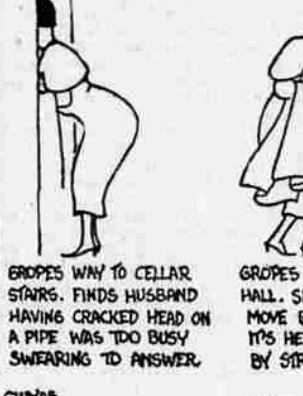
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



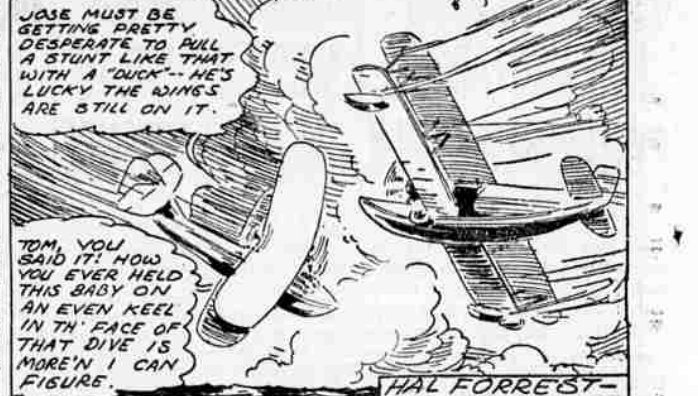
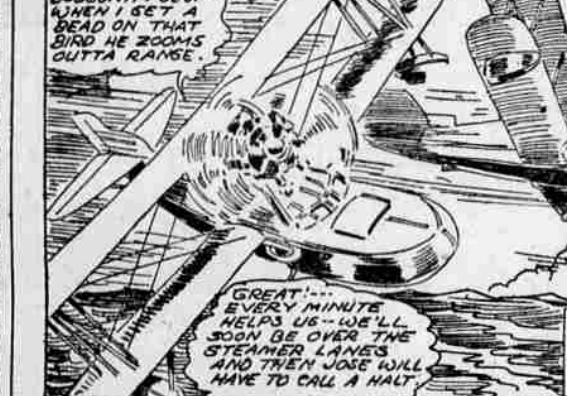
ARRIVAL HOME

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS



TAILSPIN TOMMY—Desperate Flying!

By GLENN CHAFFIN and HAL FOREST



BOUND TO WIN—Nothing's Too Good For Lotta!

By EDWIN ALGER



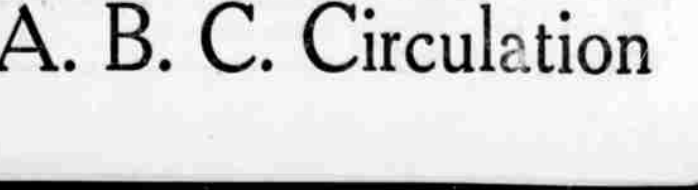
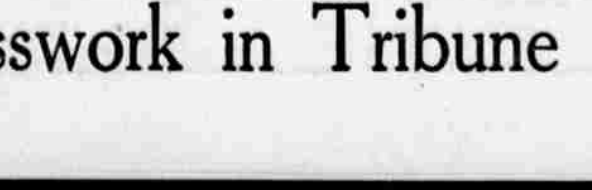
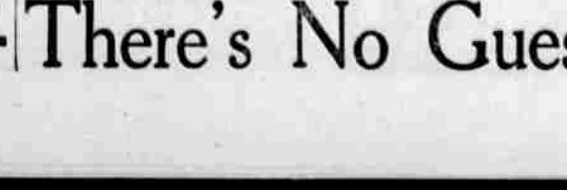
THE NEBBS—Enter Upton Strats

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



WRIGHT'S SPEARMINT
THE PERFECT TOBACCO
LET'S PULL TOGETHER!
NRA
WE DO OUR PART

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