

The HIDDEN DOOR

BY FRANK L. PACKARD

SYNOPSIS: For weeks Colin Hunt, the writer, has been frequenting the New York underworld, disguised as Charlie Jones, a crook. His life is in danger from the mysterious Mask, underworld ruler, and Colin hopes to stumble upon his trail. By luck he is admitted to membership in one of the Mask's many gangs. He is initiated into the mysteries of the "Wine Press," the Mask's headquarters, and sent out almost at once with Buck O'Mara's gang to dispose of a Canadian rum runner named Dolaire who has hit the Mask's Lt. Laurence Riser counterfeiting plant.

Chapter 35 MURDER SQUAD

BUT then, sooner or later, Colin mused, his life was forfeit anyway unless he could uncover the Mask's identity and force out into the open this little-less-than fiend, who more and more continued, it appeared, to grow and acquire the stature of what might well be the most ruthless, versatile, and powerful criminal of his time.

The stakes were heavy. Thoughts of Germaine came to him. He was fighting not only for his own life but for Germaine's happiness as well. His all was on the table. He shrugged his shoulders fatalistically. There was no turning back now. It was the toss of a coin.

But he had come a long way on the road. Helmie Schwarm and Buck O'Mara, it was certain, were both at times in direct contact with the Mask—and he, Colin, was now in Buck O'Mara's mob. Helmie Schwarm was remote; it was Buck O'Mara's confidence that he had to win, and Buck O'Mara that he had to watch. That was why he was here.

He smiled without mirth. Misgivings and fears were the human lot and came unbidden, but why subject himself to this mental torment? It was useless, purposeless—even if it was human to do so. He had chosen his course deliberately, there had seemed to be no other way, and, whatever happened to-night, he must perforce go through with it—to the end.

He drove his mind afield. More had been said about Lazarre and the "members" of the club who had taken flight on the night of Dolaire's attack. They were still in hiding, still under cover, and New York knew them not! The identification of Kenniston, their rone millionaire leader, had been awkward—Kenniston's life was still being subjected to a searching investigation, as were the lives of all those who, so far as the police could discover, had ever been associated with him.

And since the uttering of counterfeit money was a matter that automatically involved the federal authorities, the Secret Service was in the forefront of the picture. Lazarre's name had not actually been mentioned, but through inference, a reference to the man who had got a "hide full of lead," it was apparent that Lazarre had entirely recovered, and like the others, was still in hiding.

Colin smiled queerly. So, after all, he had saved Lazarre's life. He was glad in a purely humanitarian sense that his efforts had not been in vain; but in a material sense it mattered little now whether Lazarre was dead or alive. Instead of Lazarre there was now Buck O'Mara.

PROBABLY from the start, Lazarre, even if Lazarre had been willing, could have helped but little. He rated Lazarre as being perhaps of the same status and on the same plane amongst the Mask's tools as Benny Malone—quite a different status from that of Buck O'Mara or Helmie Schwarm.

And yet Reddy's letter, though still undelivered, had proved to be by a strange twist of fate the "open sesame" to the Mask's operating headquarters at the Wine Press, and to whatever measure of Buck O'Mara's confidence he already possessed. If it had not been for that letter he would never have gone to Cap & O'Orange; if he had not gone to Cap & O'Orange he would never have heard of Dolaire.

And, if he had never heard of Dolaire, he would not have gone to Spinelli's last night, and—The trail led on, blazed by that letter, to where he stood at this moment, an initiate into one of the Mask's mobs. Nevertheless, though it had now outlined its usefulness so far as he was concerned, he wondered, as he always had, what was in that letter.

Some day perhaps he would meet Lazarre again and deliver the letter—and perhaps not. And perhaps Lazarre would explain the nature of his liaison with Reddy—and perhaps not. It mattered little now. La-

zarre was no longer needed, and could no longer be of any help.

Again his mental scene shifted. Buck O'Mara and Benny Malone had talked about Spinelli. Spinelli was on the payroll, too. Detective Sergeant Mulvey might prove to be altogether too curious as to the way in which Harry the Lynx had left the night club whose obvious exits might well have been closely guarded—to say nothing of the fact that the lights had so fortuitously gone out almost instantly at the sound of those shots!

The subject had been introduced casually, dismissed casually. A possibility, that was all. No SOS had come from Spinelli, so everything was apparently jake so far. Why worry about it? Spinelli would be given "protection" if necessary. Colin cupped his hands over a match and lighted a cigarette. A side issue that concerned him little—no bearing on the main issue.

He stepped out from behind the wheelhouse and moved over to the boat's rail. Someone was leaving the wheelhouse. Benny Malone. Buck O'Mara was still in there with Smudge Kilrea at the wheel.

"Oh, hello, Clarkie!" said Benny Malone as he stepped over to Colin's side. "I was just going to turn you up. Buck wants a couple of us to go aboard with him and have a little social visit with Dolaire before the boys get busy—get the idea?—so's Dolaire won't turn his toes up without knowing what it's all about. That would be just too bad! I said I'd pick you to help play the hand, seeing that you didn't miss any tricks last night, and Buck said that was okay by him."

"Sure!" agreed Colin enthusiastically.

"You just look innocent," cautioned Benny Malone, "until Buck gives us the high sign to flash our rods. Dolaire's schooner ain't showing any lights, but Smudge has just picked her up out there. We'll be alongside in a few minutes. You just hang around here, and then trail along with Buck and me. Understand?"

"Sure!" said Colin enthusiastically again. "Thanks a lot, Benny, for a ringside seat."

OUT of the darkness Benny Malone's features grinned in friendly fashion. "It was coming to you, Clarkie," he said. "You made good. Now I got to check up with the boys down in the cabin and hear 'em recite their lessons the way Buck doped it out for them. I won't be long."

He moved away—heading aft at a half-run.

Colin frowned hard. Bad as it had looked before—this was worse. Dolaire's executioner! Or co-executioner with Benny Malone! He stared out into the blackness ahead. Something out there was taking shape. He felt the boat's speed slacken, the vibration cease as the engine was shut off. A hall came across the water. Buck O'Mara stepped out of the wheelhouse and answered it, using his hands as a megaphone.

"That you, Dolaire!" he bawled. "This is Helmie Schwarm's outfit." "Sure it's me, by crapes!" the voice answered. "Come alongside. The Good Lord could not have given us a better night, eh?"

"Attaboy!" Buck O'Mara called back heartily. The boat maneuvered—bumped against the schooner's hull and was made fast. Colin brushed his hand across his eyes. His mental processes burned his vision. It was all strangely indistinct—and yet it was all horribly real.

He found himself mounting a short rope ladder on the heels of Buck O'Mara and Benny Malone. There were no lights showing anywhere; but, his eyes grown accustomed to the darkness, he could see, as he reached the deck, a dozen or more forms leaning over the schooner's rail—while a chatter of voices, as bantered greetings were exchanged between the crew on the deck and the boats below, resounded discordantly in his ears.

Boats always seemed to take him to slaughter, Colin thought with a grimace as he carefully placed his feet on the rungs of the swinging ladder. There had been the night when Germaine's boat had taken him to the "club" on the St. Lawrence, and when he had had to see men shot down while he was helplessly tied to a tree.

Then the slaughterers were Dolaire's men. Tonight, in a boat belonging to the man who had threatened him with death, Colin was to see Dolaire's men shot to bits in equally cruel fashion.

Tomorrow, Dolaire surprises his murderous guests.

was learned today. His physician said he will be in the hospital probably a week or ten days longer.

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MONKEYS SHOW GERMS WORKING

WASHINGTON, Sept. 9.—(AP) The first encouraging results in the attempt to induce sleeping sickness in monkeys for research purposes were reported from St. Louis today to Surgeon General Hugh E. Cumming of the public health service.

Dr. J. P. Leake, senior surgeon in charge at St. Louis, telephoned Dr. Cumming that six monkeys had shown symptoms similar to encephalitis in humans after being inoculated with material from dying patients. A total of 95 persons have fallen victims to the disease in the St. Louis area alone.

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POISON CAUSED DEATH OF BIGAMOUS OSTRICH

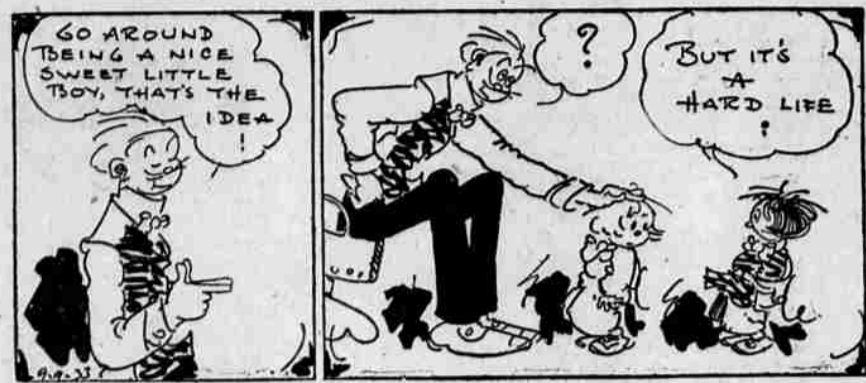
DENVER, Colo.—(UP)—Sheik, the docile male ostrich at the City Park zoo that tried to hatch out a half dozen eggs after the females of the flock became remiss, died at the hands of poisoners, attendants believe.

Sheik was a bigamist. But he was conscious about it enough that after his mate, Sudan and Sahara, laid 14 eggs and then refused to sit, he took over the job himself. Zoo attendants relieved him of part of the responsibility by putting half the eggs in an incubator but neither Sheik nor the incubator was successful.

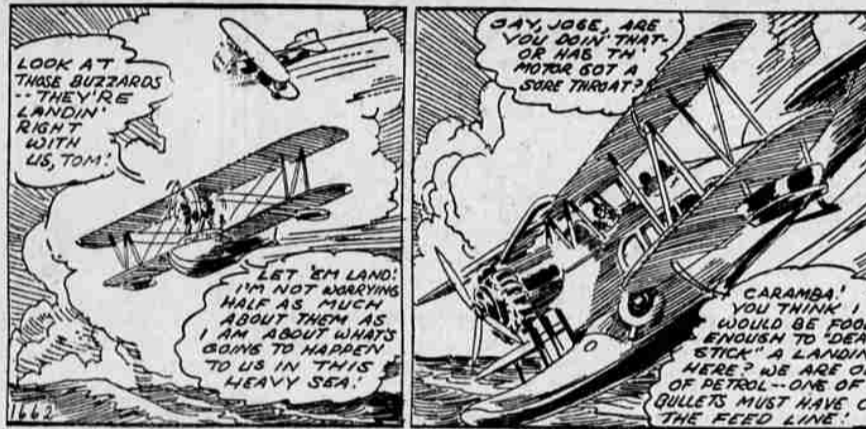
Shortly after his unsuccessful attempt to hatch the eggs, Sheik died of a strange sickness. Caretakers believed someone fed him poison. Phone 512. We'll haul away your refuse. City Sanitary Service.

S'MATTER POP—

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Novelist Kyne Undergoes Knife
SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 9.—(AP)—Peter B. Kyne, novelist and magazine writer, is convalescing in a hospital here following a major operation, it

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